

Legion lich 161

Chapter 161 Dragon hunt

He attacked before the skeletons could begin to fall, sending a blast of darkness in the back. The dragon zombie preferred to conjure them up and spit them out like a breath, but could still release them from any part of the body.

Treavor acted quickly, using earth magic to transform the piece of earth that teleported along with them into a floating platform, before all the skeletons kicked the platform to deflect the breath of darkness.

As the only one able to move in the air, Athos was naturally the first to attack. He did a somersault in the air and conjured an air platform while upside down, before kicking it and diving with his sword aimed at the dragon's weak spot.

Athos even used lightning impulse with his body and mind, both abilities enhancing his speed. The distance between him and the dragon was just over 10 meters and Athos crossed it in a second, looking like a silver flash to everyone watching from the outside.

The dragon zombie on the other hand managed to react in time to the attack. He flexed his back muscles the moment Athos' sword touched his back, the same movement he would make to flap his wings, making the bones of the wings almost touch and blocking Athos' sword.

"Which?" Athos was shocked that the dragon zombie managed to block his attack that way. One of the dragon zombie's wings was missing, but it looked like the bones inside were still in place.

Athos wasted no time and activated both of his sword's enchantments, improving its sharpness and resistance while using a mana blade to increase his sword's length, but nothing worked. His sword blade was only able to sink four inches into the flesh of the dragon zombie before coming to a stop.

Perhaps it was the dragon's absurd physical strength, or perhaps Athos had flown too much mana to activate the enchantments, but cracks appeared across the sword's surface.

Athos clucked his tongue in frustration before a shiver ran down his spine and he threw himself back on pure instinct, narrowly saving his life.

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The dragon zombie found the insect bite on its back irritating and conjured a sphere of darkness at close range.

The sphere pursued Athos, but the latter was incredibly fast thanks to the two lightning impulses, so he managed to avoid the attack.

Vanilla landed on the ground a little while later and rolled to soften the impact before jumping again on the dragon's back. She precisely hit Athos's sword with the flat of her axe, as if she were hammering a nail.

She even used the heavy strike skill, sending out a shock wave that pushed the blade even deeper. Vanilla wanted to hammer the sword again, but the dragon zombie managed to break the chains around her neck and tried to bite her.

Vanilla quickly reacted and tried to cut off the right side of the dragon's head with her best skill, but the dragon simply bit down on the ax and shook its head, throwing Vanilla to the ground.

The impact was so strong that it broke several of her bones into pieces, despite the hardness of demihuman bones, but she refused to let go of her weapon.

With her only remaining arm, Vanilla thrust her ax as far as she could until the head of the ax touched the dragon's throat and used the weapon break ability.

His ax shattered into pieces inside the dragon's throat, turning its throat into a bloody mess. Unlike its hard bones or its powerful muscles, the throat meat was soft and would hardly resist enchanted wood.

The dragon zombie swung its neck again and threw Vanilla into the air, who this time couldn't resist. He spat out a mouthful of blood before roaring in rage, his roar knocking down all nearby skeletons.

The racial ability of dragons roar influx, allowed dragons to charge their roars with mana and could destabilize skills or spell. The mana-charged sound would cause vibrations that would seep into the victims' bodies and scatter the dragon's mana, preventing the mana from exiting the core while also poisoning them with the foreign energy signature.

Against living beings, it prevented them from using abilities momentarily and caused them to lose control of whatever spell they were casting.

Against undead like the Black Skeletons, it cut off the flow of darkness that replaced all the lost parts of their bodies, leaving them helpless on the ground. Skeletons were currently unable to move or use any of their senses. Even his thoughts disappeared as there was no darkness to replace his brain.

The black chains that restrained the dragon zombie disappeared as the hive hawks fell to the ground one by one. The dragon zombie stood up in surprise at the effect of its roar. It was the first time he had roared since becoming undead and he had no idea what his body was capable of.

Like magic, dragon breath was a natural instinct for any dragon, but all other abilities would need to be discovered.

Despite your surprise. he didn't think about it anymore as he went back to destroying the black skeletons, starting with the one that managed to hurt him.

Or at least he tried.

"I knew this plan would backfire!" Treevor screamed, hurling all of his vines at the zombie dragon's head and preventing it from attacking Athos. Treevor was the only one able to move, as the dark amber energy coursing through the corrupted willow protected him from the effect of the roar influx.

Avatars were immune to roar influx as they had one energy body and there was no place for the dragon's mana to infiltrate. The corrupted willow was also unaffected, as Treevor controlled it using soul rather than energy and could simply draw amber energy to clear the dragon's mana.

The dragon zombie pulled its head in an attempt to free itself and Treevor did not resist, jumping at the same time to propel himself further, landing on the dragon zombie's back. He grabbed Athos's sword and yanked it out with brute force, before piercing the gaping wound with his own claw, but the dragon zombie flexed its wing bones again to block.

Unfortunately for the dragon zombie, Treevor was much stronger than Athos and his claws went through the dragon's wings, only to be blocked by his spine. His claws were trapped between two vertebrae and no matter how hard he tried to move forward, the bones here were unnaturally hard.

'How the hell is that a weakness??' Treevor thought irritably, releasing his parasitic venom in a liquid form into the wound, to at least weaken it.

The dragon zombie was irritated by another creature jumping on its back and rolled over to try to get rid of the nuisance.

Treevor was unable to free himself in time and was almost crushed by the dragon, only the timely use of earth and water magic saved him. He turned the stone floor into a liquid slush and dove as he was pressed against the ground, falling into the sewers below.

Dragon zombie didn't let him escape, releasing a breath of darkness where he felt Treevor was.

Treevor lifted the earth in a wave of black mud and sent it crashing into the dragon, blocking its breath even as it blocked its vision. The darkness was intangible, but the undead's corrupted mana could touch it and the dragon's spell could not destroy it immediately.

But your claws do. With a single sweep of its paw, the dragon tore through the wave of black mud and charged at Treevor.

"Try to cut it, lizard!" Treevor screamed as he shone like a second sun, all darkness around him disappearing. The black flower buds on its shoulders were absorbing the darkness around it, while its vines were curled in front of it in of body a spiral pattern, similar to the cannon of its former form.

What he needed now was raw power to break through the dragon's defense, rather than multiple attacks.

Dragon zombie responded in kind, accumulating a large amount of world energy in its lungs. He didn't wait for its lungs to be fully charged and moved the world energy to its throat, where a magical organ should have ignited the world energy with a spark of darkness, but nothing happened.

Vanilla had destroyed the magic organ along with much of her throat.

The world's energy was fired without change, only to disperse into the air. The dragon zombie coughed a few times, spitting blood in its throat and Treevor took advantage of the gap to attack.

'I have Vanilla to thank for that if it survives.' Treevor thought, firing the cannon of darkness. Treevor even empowered the darkness with his own mana and dark amber energy, giving the laser an orange glow.

The amber darkness laser traveled in a straight line and hit the dragon zombie's chest, who never thought to dodge the attack.

The zombie dragon was lifted dozens of meters, the scales and muscles on its chest rotting away as the black pillar ripped into its chest. The zombie dragon continued to be hurled through the air until it was outside the wall and the laser strayed too far from Treevor and began to scatter. The zombie dragon still flew for a few meters before gravity did its work and it began to fall, kicking up a cloud of dust.

Treevor dropped to his knees as soon as the darkness cannon ran out, the corrupted willow lethargic from the lack of darkness.

Chapter 162 Dragon core

“Was that enough?” Treevor asked in a slurred voice, feeling physically tired for the first time since becoming undead. It should have been impossible, but the lack of darkness gave him the closest feeling to physical exhaustion his body was capable of feeling.

“Hey, wake up boss! How long are you going to stay asleep?” Treevor climbed out of the corrupted willow tree and ran to Athos’ fallen body. The corrupted willow was creaking every time he tried to move it, so he was forced to leave it behind or risk taking permanent damage.

He had abused the willow too much, using the darkness cannons twice in a short amount of time.

Athos was passed out on the ground just like the other skeletons, although the dragon’s mana was dispersing much faster than the others. Dragon mana was extremely dense compared to humans, so even a mana body user like Athos would take time to recover.

His body was expending the mana stored in it to try to expel the dragon’s mana, but it would still take a few minutes for him to recover. Minutes they didn’t have.

“ROARRR!” A mighty roar echoed from outside the fortress, showing that the dragon was still alive and likely running back here now.

“I have no choice.” Treevor placed his right hand on Athos’ chest and circulated the amber energy through his body. He would have avoided doing that if he could have, but the situation was urgent and he needed all the help he could get.

The dark amber energy quickly spread through Athos’ body, the mana core’s teamwork, Athos’ body and the dark amber energy quickly eliminating the dragon’s mana.

Athos leaped quickly, casting a spell in each hand as he looked around for the dragon. From his perspective, his entire surroundings had blacked out when the dragon roared and the next thing he saw was Treevor’s ugly face in front of him.

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It wasn’t the first thing he wanted to see after waking up.

“Boss, the situation is critical. I tried to attack between the wings as you suggested, but the dragon’s column prevented me from advancing. I managed to blast the dragon away from the fortress, but he is already on his way back here and my willow is inactive. I need one of your crazy ideas to get me through this situation.” Treevor spoke quickly to get Athos’ attention.

Athos shook his head a few times to regain focus and quickly thought of what to do.

‘I still believe that attacking his back is his weak point. Bones wouldn’t be unnaturally hard if they weren’t there to protect something. But if not even Treevor is able to cross it, how can I destroy it?’ Athos thought as he ran towards the gates along with Treevor.

A sudden flash crossed his mind and he turned to Treevor. "Hey, how much energy do you have left? I mean the amber energy."

"I saved as much energy as possible so far, so I have enough energy. Why?" Treevor asked back.

"I want you to seal the dragon's movements one more time. I know even you can't cast something on par with a large-scale spell, but I just need you to hold the dragon down for a moment." Athos spoke confidently, but Treevor hesitated to follow blindly.

"How about explaining a little more?" Treevor asked, despite the little time they had.

"I think I can get through the tough zombie dragon bones, but I need him to stay still to hit him. Don't worry too much, we'll have backup." Athos spoke, although it did not explain anything.

The abominations appeared in good time, surrounding Athos and Treevor before picking them up and placing them inside its ribcage, where the mass of bones that hid the main body was.

'Let's use the abominations as a distraction and heavy weights to attack the zombie dragon. You yourself have seen how strong they can be when using mana.' Athos spoke through mind link, as they were in different bone abominations.

The zombie dragon broke through the gates before Treevor could say anything. His chest was completely destroyed with the rib bones exposed and cracked. Also, maybe it was because of the fall, several of the scales on its back were broken and its last wing was missing.

'Advance.' Athos ordered and the bone abomination ran furiously against the zombie dragon.

The zombie dragon reacted quickly, conjuring a breath of darkness as it shook its head in a fan. The bone abominations hit by the breath of darkness took serious damage, but never stopped advancing, protecting the abominations behind.

Wounded bone abominations threw themselves at the zombie dragon, trying to knock it down with their weight, but to no avail. The zombie dragon only swung its claw, crushing fragile human bones.

Though abominations could fortify their bones with mana, human bones were brittle compared to the dragon's body, shattering into pieces even when they managed to land attacks.

Luckily, Athos wasn't expecting the bone abominations to damage the zombie dragon, just to seal its movements.

One after another, the abominations threw themselves at the zombie dragon and knocked it to the ground. The zombie dragon writhed furiously, indignant at having its body trapped once more.

He tried to roar to knock the skeletons down like the first time, but a black-orange chain clamped his jaw shut while a second one sealed his hind paws, knocking him to the ground.

Treevor had only conjured two chains, focusing his energy to make them more resistant.

The zombie dragon realized that the bone abominations couldn't damage it, so it focused on the abomination that seemed to have conjured the chains and released a sphere of darkness.

Treavor slipped between the abomination's ribs and fell to the ground, leaving the abomination to die. 'Boss, if you're going to do something, do it soon!'

'Working on it!' Athos responded, retracting his body as he disassembled his skeleton. Dragon senses were incredibly keen, so Athos would be discovered if he tried to run to him. But black bones sliding into a bone abomination would go unnoticed.

'This is uncomfortable.' Athos thought as he gathered his body just above the dragon's weak spot. Treavor had left a gaping hole in the wound and Athos could see the hard vertebrae just below. Treavor's venom had barely spread for a few inches, the dragon's natural resistance plus the darkness that coursed through its body protecting the dragon.

Athos released his body again and placed his hands on top of the dragon's bones, releasing tendrils of corrupted mana that sank into the dragon's body. Athos' corruption fought the dragon's darkness and lost by a large margin, forcing Athos to spend a large amount of mana to compensate.

Athos accompanied the tendril with the vision of death, realizing that there was a heart just below the bones.

Unlike most creatures, a dragon's heart was closer to its back instead of its chest and had hard bones to protect it. A dragon's heart was its most important magical organ and was responsible for keeping all other magical organs working, the dragon core.

A dragon's heart possessed life force and functioned like a mana core, even forming layers of life to match the actual mana core as it developed.

It pumped mana along with the dragon's blood, constantly reinforcing the dragon's body and turning most of the organs into a magical organ, although many of the organs had passive effects or were difficult to notice at first glance.

The dark elder had ensured that his heart would continue beating even after he died, or all the abilities that made dragons so feared would be lost. It was also the reason why Athos could see shadows on the dragon despite him being undead. For the death vision, his body wasn't completely dead, so it still revealed his weaknesses.

'I knew it! Abnormally hard bones usually mean important organs to protect.' Athos thought happily, feeding the tendrils even more mana and tangling the magic organ below.

The zombie dragon began to shake its body violently, almost breaking Athos' focus. He was still completely focused on Treavor, considering him the biggest threat while Athos was just a nuisance. Whatever the skeleton on its back was doing, it barely managed to scratch it.

'Treavor, get me a few more seconds, I'm almost done here.' Athos asked.

'You asked for a second and it's been more than ten. I'm burning my amber energy while you're standing there!' Treavor yelled angrily. He couldn't see the tendrils of corrupted mana because of the dragon's powerful mana, so it looked like Athos was just standing on the dragon's back.

He was having a hard time dodging the orbs and breath of darkness conjured by the dragon, while also boosting the chains' mana whenever the zombie dragon tried to break free.

The bone abominations had taken most of the damage, with nearly eight killed in less than 10 seconds of fighting.

‘No problem, the fight ends here.’ Athos spoke after completely trapping the dragon’s heart and changing the nature of the vines from corrupted mana to flames and exploding the dragon’s heart.

The zombie dragon widened its eyes and let out a muffled cry of pain, feeling pain for the first time since the fight began. The pain of having its core destroyed was something no creature could resist, so the dragon began to writhe in pain despite its undead nature.

Chapter 163 Skeleton dragon

The dragon’s body visibly weakened, the energy coursing through it fading quickly. Without the heart to constantly pump mana through his body, his body rapidly weakened.

With only its core to power, the dragon was a powerful being, but it didn’t pose half the danger it once did. Even his magic wasn’t that powerful anymore, as the zombie dragon drew energy from the dragon core to empower his spells.

“You don’t need to hold him anymore, Treevor. I don’t know why destroying the dragon’s heart weakened him so much, but he won’t be able to fight in his current state.’ Athos spoke and Treevor obeyed, not wanting to waste any more of his amber energy.

The dragon wasn’t resisting anymore, too busy with its own pain to care about anything.

‘Boss, if destroying your heart doesn’t work, we need to destroy your brain.’ Treevor informed Athos, but it was too late.

The bone abominations realized that the dragon had weakened and that they now had enough strength to hurt it, so they decided to kill it themselves. It was the first time a bone abomination had been killed and his brothers were furious.

They pinned the zombified dragon’s body against the ground and grabbed its limbs and neck, before twisting until its bones broke and ripping it off with sheer brute force.

“...” Treevor and Athos were shocked by the brutality of the bone abominations. Not in their wildest dreams did they expect to dismember a dragon like that.

“Is it over? Really? We beat a dragon?” Treevor asked in quick succession, as if confirming he wasn’t dreaming. He even tried to pinch his own arm, only to be reminded that it had no skin.

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When reality finally hit him, he started jumping and screaming as loud as he could, celebrating his victory.

Athos on the other hand, was angered by the bone abominations for spoiling such a precious material.

“You know what you just did? Why did you destroy the corpse like that? You don’t know that I can turn corpses into new allies, so why do that?” Athos asked angrily, making the bone abominations grunt sadly.

“Hey, wait. What do you mean turn him into an ally? That dragon is already an undead, how the hell would you turn him into another?” Treevor stopped his celebration to ask confused.

“Well, I thought that just like the white skeletons, I could inject a spark of life force into the dragon’s corpse and turn it into a black skeleton. It worked before, it might work now.” Athos spoke with a shrug and Treevor was forced to admit that it might work.

“We can heal the dragon’s corpse using darkness magic, as long as we have enough food to feed a dragon.” Treevor spoke with a wry smile, wondering how much food it would take to feed something that size.

“We still have the winter rations from the stronghold in addition to the rations the human army brought, so it won’t be a problem.” Athos silenced his worries before a voice sounded in his head.

‘My king, are you alright?? Are you safe??’ Astrus asked after recovering from the roar influx and finding no traces of Athos or the dragon.

‘We’re done here. The dragon is dead.’ Athos spoke as if it was no big deal.

The elite skeletons woke up one by one and were shocked to learn that the dragon was killed while they were passed out, with the exception of Vanilla, who watched the battle. Fortunately, she stayed far enough away from the gates to not get involved in the battle but close enough to watch.

She still had several broken bones and needed her subordinates to carry her, but she was laughing with excitement.

“You should have seen that...the dragon was completely...dismembered. It was hilarious...it’s my little girl dream...killing a dragon like that.” Vanilla spoke while laughing hysterically.

“Damn, I wish I’d seen that.” Emilia complained as she approached Athos and bowed in apology. “I apologize for falling without even a fight. It’s a disgrace to me and all skeletons.”

“It doesn’t matter. But we have even more work to do now. Astrus, I want you to make a count of how many undead were destroyed during the battle. Emilia, gather workers and scavenge the rubble of the enemy base for anything useful. Caio, use your unit to collect the broken bones and scales torn from the dragon. They are valuable materials after all.” Athos ordered the skeletons, eliciting more than a few exasperated sighs.

“You really are going to work us to the bone.” Treevor complained, but Athos pretended not to hear.

“Besides, let’s start preparations to leave the fortress. There’s nothing left for us here.” Athos added and this time it was Emilia who jumped with joy.

The skeletons spent the next few hours working non-stop.

Athos’ priority was to restore the dragon’s corpse, consuming most of the rations he had. He connected all the limbs back into place, including the crushed tail and wings among the wreckage and after falling outside the walls.

Broken tusks and scales scattered around the fortress and in the wreckage were also recovered, although Athos had not used them to restore the dragon. He restored the scales and fangs using darkness, but saved them for later use as crafting materials.

After finishing restoring the dragon's corpse to a perfect state, Athos fed it a spark of his life force, finding that like Treevor, it wasn't enough. The dragon core required a spark of your life force, just like an ordinary mana core.

Athos didn't hesitate and shared a second spark, anticipating that something similar to what happened to him when he raised Treevor would occur again, but there was no noticeable change, except that he was given back twice the life force of an ordinary undead.

He was a little disappointed, but the changes to the dragon's corpse quickly made him forget.

All of the dragon's flesh was swallowed as its bones blackened, but things got weird from there. The dragon core was not swallowed by the bones, but turned into a pulsing black mass and released a dark mist that surrounded all of its bones, making the dragon look more like a shadow dragon than a bone dragon.

Athos didn't understand why the dragon was so different from the other skeletons, but the dark mist seemed to serve to replicate all of the skeleton dragon's magic organs, so he didn't complain.

The skeleton dragon raised slowly, the empty sockets in its skull looking around curiously, until it landed on Athos.

Athos feared that the dragon would be enraged by the memory of being killed, but it turned out to be an unnecessary concern. The black chain had an easy time taking over the dragon's mind, as the ancient had destroyed all of its memories and personality.

He bowed his head until it touched Athos, showing his submission and asking for attention.

"Good boy." Athos patted what he thought was the nose, discovering that the mist surrounding the dragon was not ethereal but physical. It seemed the organs were made using corrupted mana, rather than pure darkness, giving physical substance to the mist.

Athos was excited to test his newest subordinate's limits, but reports from the skeletons arrived to interrupt his fun.

'My king, I have already finished assessing our losses. A total of 5466 skeletons were destroyed, in addition to 10 bone abominations. Many buildings were also destroyed and large-scale spells are useless at the moment.' Astrus reported.

'I see, good job. Take a count of how many skeletons we currently have and start removing the mithril plates all over the fortress.' Athos ordered. He tried to turn his attention back to the dragon, but Emilia stopped him this time.

'Master, this is a gold mine! Every stone in the rubble is laced with divine mithril, an alloy of magical metals superior to mithril. In addition, we found several pieces of mithril among the rubble, some of them with teleportation crystals embedded.' Emilia spoke excitedly, her greed obvious in her voice, despite the fact that she knew that whatever they found would be Athos'.

'We've yet to finish evaluating everything we've found, but it looks like there were other shipments being transported at the time of the accident, so there's other stuff besides the mithril.'

'Any alchemical items or reagents? I could create some interesting alchemical items with the right items.' Athos asked interested.

'Master, anything fragile or ingredient has been destroyed beyond recognition within the anomaly. The only reason the dragon survived was its undead nature and the innate physical strength of dragons. Even enchanted weapons would have been destroyed beyond recognition, we're only looking for the value of the metal rather than looking for undamaged weapons.'

'I understand, it's a shame, but all profit is profit. Send me a report when you're done searching.' Athos tried to end the conversation, but Emília was not finished.

'Wait, we still have a problem. How are we going to transport tons of stone mixed with mithril? The carriages we have won't be enough and even if we send the skeletons to carry the stones, each one will only be able to carry a few kilos at most'. Emilia asked dubiously.

'Can't we just build more wagons? There are no trees near here, but with a few hours of walking, we can find trees and build as many carriages as we want.' Athos suggested something simple, I don't understand why she didn't suggest it herself.

'I wanted to avoid that, as it would delay our departure from the fortress.' She explained Athos' silent question.

'It's still going to be a few days before we can leave the fortress, so don't bother and get as many carriages as you can. I won't leave anything useful behind.' Athos ordered and ended the communication.

Chapter 164 Simogo

Finally left alone, Athos can attend to the drago-

'Boss, I just remembered a subject that we left aside.' Treevor spoke this time, making Athos nearly burst a vein of irritation, if he had any left.

'What is it, Treevor?' Athos asked almost growling.

'Remember what the queen of the hive hawks told us when she arrived with the storm, a few days before the start of the battle?' Treevor pretended not to notice the anger in Athos' voice and asked.

'I vaguely remember that. Something about a small man who sank into the earth and disappeared, right? We dismissed it as just a monster with earth affinity and the queen seeing poorly because of the distance. Why bring up the subject now?'

'It's because I believe she might be right. I had forgotten because it wasn't relevant, but I remember encountering something similar when crossing borders.' Treevor spoke.

'And what exactly did you see?' Athos was curious about where he wanted to go.

'At the time, I was weak and bleeding amber energy, so I ran as fast as possible after making sure I was away from the fortress and human eyes. I vaguely remember visa a dwarf, but he quickly fled and I had no time or reason to pursue him. At least not at the time.' Treevor vaguely remembered what happened, as the pain and rush nearly blinded him.

'What are dwarves?' Athos asked confused. Khali had never mentioned species other than demihumans, as it wasn't his job to investigate them and there shouldn't be any other species thousands of miles away.

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'Dwarves are one of the intelligent species in this world, just like elves and humans. They look like small human beings, measuring a maximum of 1.20 meters in height. Dwarves are beings attuned to the earth and prefer to live underground or in large mountains.' Treevor explained the greatest characteristics of the species to the ignorant Athos.

'It doesn't seem worth going out of our way to hunt them. It would be different if they were excellent warriors, but with such small bodies, I doubt they would be very useful in battle.

They would be good builders or useful for building underpasses, but it's not what we need right now.' Athos didn't show much interest in them, at least not until he heard Treevor's next words.

'They are also the fathers of runesmithing. Dwarves are not only attuned to the earth, but also to metals and can forge weapons like no other species can. My grandfather taught me that dwarves have metal-related racial abilities, though he didn't know what it was.' Treevor explained excitedly.

'Is it just me or are you inciting me to hunt these dwarves? I thought between the two of us I was psycho.' Athos asked in confusion, but a bloodthirsty glow began to spread through his eye sockets, so it was obvious that he was already thinking about how to hunt them down.

'I, I don't... I don't know.' Treevor suddenly began to wonder. He was just making repairs to the corrupted willow, when a sudden bloodlust hit him and he started looking for anything to kill.

He started to think about going out hunting just to calm down, when he remembered what the queen had said. Now that Treevor thought about it, this sudden bloodlust was really strange and it wasn't the first time it had happened.

'It's nothing, boss. I just remembered these dwarves and thought they would be a great addition to our army.' Treevor lied through his teeth, already knowing what the problem was and avoiding thinking about it.

Athos did not believe his lie, but he did not pursue the matter.

'Emília, I have a job for you.'

'Master, is something wrong?' She asked, not expecting Athos to get in touch so soon.

Athos summarized his conversation with Treevor and quickly explained his idea. 'If Treevor's guess is right, there might be a dwarven village or town a few hours away. I want you to lead the two teams of mage slayers and investigate whether it's true or not.'

'Understood, master.' Emília replied, disguising her disappointment at knowing that her departure would be delayed.

'I'll send the queen with you so she can guide she to the place where you saw the dwarf disappear. It should make searching a bit easier. If possible, try to kill one of them to get information.' Athos commanded and Emília nodded, feeling the chains of the three teams gathering in her.

'Does anyone else have any other business to discuss with me?' Athos asked through the general link, his voice sounding more like a threat than a question.

Even those who wanted to speak with him fell silent upon hearing his tone of voice. After a few seconds of pure silence, Athos finally turned his attention to the skeleton dragon, which lay on the ground in front of him, tired of waiting.

"I've already finished everything I had to solve boy, we can test what you can do now." Athos spoke and climbed onto the dragon's back, which quickly rose and stretched its wings to fly.

"Shall we start with a test flight?" Athos spoke and immediately regretted his words. The skeleton dragon flapped its wings as hard as it could, rising tens of meters in less than a second.

The problem is that Athos was not able to keep up with his speed and stupidly fell for tens of meters. He quickly conjured an air cushion to cushion the impact and looked around, making sure no one had seen his embarrassing performance.

'You will never tell anyone what you saw here.' Athos ordered the few nearby skeletons, considering the possibility of killing them just to ensure they wouldn't say anything.

He shook his head to get the idea out of his head and jumped, conjuring platforms of air under his feet until he reached the dragon and climbed onto its back again. The skeleton dragon turned its head back and nuzzled Athos in apology.

"No problem kid, just accelerate gradually ok?" Athos spoke to calm the worried dragon.

The skeleton dragon began to fly again, this time at a more moderate speed. It accelerated little by little, giving Athos time to get used to it.

"This is amazing." Athos spoke as he looked down at the dwindling fortress below. They continued soaring until they broke through the clouds and the dragon slowed down its flight speed.

Only now did Athos realize that it was the middle of the night, seeing the gigantic full moon overhead. He could see perfectly, whether it was day or night, so it didn't make much difference to him.

"I've always wanted to fly on a dragon's back like this. I have to remember to thank the necromancer who sent you to kill me before I rip his throat out with my bare hands." Athos spoke happily, before realizing that he had forgotten something important.

"Come to think of it, I still haven't named you, have I? You're definitely my strongest undead, I can't keep calling you a boy forever. I don't even know if you're a boy." Athos while looking thoughtfully at the dragon. It was useless trying to find out now, as his friend was missing in the dark mist.

Athos thought for some time as he enjoyed the cool night breeze on his face, but he couldn't think of anything, so he just said the first thing that came to mind. "How about Simogo?"

The skeleton dragon looked at him with a strange look, as if he didn't like the name.

"It's your name from today, Simogo. Mine is Athos, but most call me by different respectful names." Unfortunately for the dragon, Athos took that look as not understanding what a name was.

"Wait, we should be testing your skills, not enjoying the breeze, Simogo." Athos had been so entertained that he almost forgot why he was flying on the dragon's back.

"But there isn't a good place to practice. Your attacks are too powerful to practice near the fortress and just casting spells against the ground is pointless. We need a good target to practice on." Athos spoke and began to think.

'No monsters near the fortress and even if they did, a scratch from Simogo would kill them. If I want to test your powers, I'll need at least an army and it's still doubtful if they would be a good challenge.' It was Athos' honest assessment of the skeleton dragon's capabilities.

That's when he realized. If Athos wanted to face an enemy army, there was a fortress a few days' journey away. It took the human army 10 days to cover the distance, but flying at full dragon speed and non-stop, Simogo could arrive in a day or less.

"I planned to run away after destroying a single fortress, but one or two doesn't make much difference, does it? It will be a good way to test your powers as well as accumulate a little more life force." Athos spoke as he checked his own core.

Despite the several thousand corpses turning into the undead in the last few hours, its core showed no signs of further progression. Athos had gotten used to an evolution after every major battle and he didn't intend to change that now.

'Hey you. Find Treevor and inform him that I am going away for a few days and will take Simogo with me.' Athos spoke to one of the hive hawks that was within range of the link.

He intended to leave immediately, before Emilia found out about it and rushed to stop him. Athos was grateful for her concern, but at times it was suffocating and irritated him.

"Let's go. I know a good place to test your power." Athos spoke and left with Simogo towards the fortress of the golden bow.

In the fortress below, Treevor had just been informed of Athos' departure and was full of questions in his mind, but the biggest one was:

'Who the hell is Simogo?'

Chapter 165 Throne room

The throne room at the same time.

The kingdom's nobles were in chaos and spent the last few hours discussing the outcome of the battle. Commander Ragnar and Cardinal Nicholas are insisting that they should organize a new expedition and

attack the undead again before they become an even bigger threat, while the nobles insisted on reinforcing their own territories.

For some reason, the magic master representing the order had to withdraw in the middle of the session, despite the importance of the meeting.

All the nobles were angered thinking that the order was abandoning the realm in a time of crisis, but a different representative returned a few minutes later with devastating news that paled over two defeats at the hands of the undead.

The order's portal network had been destroyed and the dark elder Louis Zahara had been arrested, accused of terrorism against the order, sabotage and murder. All his assets had been frozen and his apprentices investigated for collaborating with him in sabotage.

This took all the nobles in the throne room by surprise, for many different reasons. Knowing that the order's portal network had been destroyed at the hands of one of the elders, the highest authority within the order, came as a surprise to all of them.

It also meant that until the order's portal network was rebuilt, all military operations that depended on them would be temporarily suspended. The Mirkor kingdom relied on the order's support to speed up its military operations, so it would be impossible to send troops in cases of emergency.

But what surprised them most was the order to divulge this information so easily. One of its leaders had sabotaged one of its most important resources and that would damage the order's image. In place of order, the nobles would cover up the incident with all their might and pretend that everything was fine.

The way the order was handling the situation it seemed that they wanted to spread the attack as much as possible and ensure that the dark wrym took the blame for all the trouble that would be caused by the destruction of the portal network.

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For nobles experienced in political intrigue and warfare, they could almost smell a scheme but say nothing. Whatever political war was going on within the order, none of them were involved and, more importantly, nothing to be gained by getting involved.

And they really were right. What Elder Louis didn't expect was that Water Elder and Magic Master Lukas Ripha, his greatest political enemies within the order, had secretly met with Earth Elder and Mana Elder.

Master magic Lukas Ripha had proven his genius once again by developing a more efficient and safer way to maintain portals than the tower they currently used. He intended to pitch the idea to his allies first to secure their support before requesting an audience of all the elders and pitching the idea.

Lukas had arranged the meeting at the order's headquarters to ensure neutral ground between them. Despite being allies, they all had their own political agendas and avoided meeting on each other's turf where their rivals would have a clear advantage.

The water elder quickly understood the situation after questioning the dark elder, who had no choice but to mix truths with lies to at least lessen his mistake. The order had a record of his call requesting a portal, so trying to clear his guilt would be futile.

In his version of the story, he intended to test the power of a new undead while solving the undead problem of Mirkor's borders. Perhaps by coincidence or already expecting enemy reinforcements, the undead broke through the portal and used a teleportation crystal to teleport after touching the mithril arc.

This destabilized the portal and teleportation of the undead using miasma interfered with the portals and caused the anomaly that destroyed the tower.

The changes to the story were minimal, but placed the blame for the accident on the undead rather than his incompetence. The anomaly only got out of control after your zombie dragon stupidly entered the anomaly after all.

Water Elder didn't let him off so easily, however. Using his authority and that of the elders with him, the water elder trapped Louis until investigations were done and the dark elder did not resist, knowing that things would only get worse if he tried to resist.

He was shackled with manacles that prevented the circulation of mana through his body and stripped of all his current magic items, including his current clothes. The dark elder had never felt so humiliated in his entire life, but without mana, any of the mages around him could easily kill him.

Half naked and surrounded by heavily armed guards, the dark wyrm was taken and teleported to the order's maximum security prison, the Dungeons of the Forgotten. The elder was confident that he would be released soon, but his situation only got worse.

Despite the elder's best efforts to silence anyone who was present during the incident, more than a few dozen mages survived the anomaly. They were mages who were near an open portal when the zombie dragon came through the anomaly and were smart enough to flee without looking back.

The investigators took their statement and they all stated that the anomaly only got out of control after the zombie dragon entered the anomaly on the elder's orders. None of them directly heard the dark elder order the dragon, but they all knew that an undead would only move on the necromancer's orders.

Additionally, dead bodies and pools of acid were found in the wreckage of the tower's upper floors, as well as the half-melted mithril arc. The acid the elder used to erase his tracks failed to destroy all of the corpses, as the tower collapsed before the acid corroded everything.

Most of the corpses crushed in the fall, but the ones found in the wreckage on the fifth floor were different. They all had a hole in their chest and rock fragments inside, so investigators concluded they were murdered rather than killed in the crash.

The stone shards also bore the elder's energy signature, so his killer was obvious. When the water elder found out about it, a smile naturally spread across his face and he immediately ordered that his assets be frozen and his disciples investigated.

His disciples would hardly have anything to do with this mess, but no one could stop him from making a thorough investigation and that would further shake the dark elder's faction.

Furthermore, the Water Elder had a lot of incriminating evidence about Elder Louis, many of the cases of abuse of power and talented mages who had their careers destroyed by Elder pettiness.

Normally, such trials would be useless as the other elders weren't much better, but this was different. Such evidence would only add to the dark elder's already extensive accusations.

The nobles in the throne room had no idea of the intrigues going on in the order, but there was one thing they all knew. It would be impossible to move troops quickly to deal with the threat of the undead, whether to reinforce nearby towns or organize another expedition.

"Fuck..." was all Commander Ragnar could say, trying and failing to find a way to reverse the situation. There was no way to gather troops quickly to face the threat of the undead, so all they could hope for was that the undead would take as long to organize as they did.

An awkward silence settled in the throne room, no one daring to say a single word. Well, almost nobody.

"Why is everyone looking at their feet as if the answer is coming from them? Have portals made them so complacent that you forgot how to walk on their own feet? Or have you forgotten that even a few decades ago there were no portals?" Cardinal Nicholas asked sarcastically in quick succession, causing the nobles to look at him in surprise.

"The portals have really made troop transport easier, but that doesn't mean our soldiers can't march on foot. It's going to take a little longer to organize defenses, but that doesn't mean we're defenseless." The cardinal concluded.

"He's right, we should start organizing our defenses. I'm sorry Ragnar, but without the portals, it's impossible to gather troops quickly to launch a new offensive, so we'll have to focus on saving those who are alive, rather than avenging our fallen soldiers." Alexander, the head of the court of mages spoke and the commander was forced to agree.

Now that they had a direction to take, the meeting progressed quickly and the nobles collaborated as best they could, much to the surprise of the commander and head of the court mages. Nobles weren't stupid, and for all their political intrigue and pettiness, they knew how to stick together when they felt threatened.

And what better than an undead threat to unite the nobility. They knew it was impossible to negotiate with the undead, it was kill or be killed and become an eternal slave.

Even those with distant territories collaborated. The more they collaborated and sent troops to the front lines, the less chance the undead would have of approaching their territory.

They managed to organize which cities would receive reinforcements, the supply lines and planned to start food rationing as soon as they returned to their respective territories.

The meeting was almost over when a person who had been silent since the beginning suddenly raised his voice, bringing up a topic that most of the nobles had forgotten about.

Chapter 166 Investigating the mountains

"And then? When are we going to make House Mifar honor its bloodline oath?" Guildmaster Florence asked.

She had just watched the proceedings so far without getting involved, just waiting for the parts relevant to her, but seeing that the meeting was winding down and no one had brought up the subject, Florence felt compelled to intervene.

Florence was a woman of approximately 1.70 meters, with red hair and green eyes. She appeared to be in her 40s, although her actual age is unknown. Florence was known by the nobles as a troublesome political opponent, despite the guild's neutrality.

Throughout her career, she had won several laws that protected adventurers' rights and favored their interests.

The nobles had almost forgotten about the bloodline oath amidst all the chaos, but they were forced to turn back after hearing his words. Those most interested were their neighbors as they would certainly be able to claim some of their land, although the majority still ended up belonging to the crown.

"And why would that interest you? Wasn't it against guild rule to get involved in kingdom affairs?" Commander Ragnar asked through gritted teeth. He hadn't forgotten about the bloodline oath, but had purposely left it out.

The nobles were proactively collaborating and he wanted to keep it that way. But if a territory as large as House Mifar's was suddenly freed, greed would take over and the nobles would fight tooth and nail to secure a piece of it for themselves.

Even those without adjacent territories interfered with the division of territory, to ensure that their rivals did not outrun them. This would divide the kingdom at a time when they should unite.

"I'm not interfering, just reminding you of promises that seemed to have been forgotten. House Mifar's territory is close to the borders where the undead are, so I believe it's dangerous to leave this territory without a proper ruler." Florence spoke with a perfect poker face.

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The surrounding nobles agreed with her and Ragnar could see more than one noble glowing with greed.

"This is a time of war, so partitioning the territory can wait until the situation is resolved. The crown can retain control of the region until then." Ragnar tried to offer a solution, but none of the nobles supported him.

"Territory sharing should take precedence. It's not like the undead are moving to attack us and without the portals, it's going to take a minimum of a month to organize things in the closest territories and even longer to move the troops from the most distant territories." One of the dukes present spoke and the surrounding nobles nodded in agreement.

'Looks like I don't need to get involved anymore.' Florence thought with a mysterious smile on her face.

The meeting ended quickly after they set a date for the withdrawal of the title of nobility from the remnants of House Mifar and this time no one raised their voice to stop them. They were scheduled to meet again in a week to discuss progress on countermeasures, but none of them expected to have another emergency meeting in less than a day.

Some hours later.

‘Stupid master! Why does he have to be so reckless and attack a fortress with just the skeleton dragon?? I know he’ll be safe with the dragon, but couldn’t he have at least taken a teleportation crystal in case things went wrong? Is it that hard to be careful with your own life?’ Emilia complained to the mage slayer skeletons that accompanied her.

Treevor had shared with all the skeletons that Athos had fled with the skeleton dragon to destroy the nearest fortress. Emilia panicked when she heard this and insisted that they should go after them, but it would be impossible to catch up with the dragon flying at full speed.

Besides, she already had her own orders and couldn’t disobey them. Emilia left for the mountains as soon as all her preparations were in place, forcing the mage slayers to listen to her complaints the entire way.

Despite Emilia’s casual complaints, they were moving quickly and silently, taking care not to be seen. None of the mage slayers were wearing their suits, wearing only dark overcoats to blend in with the night.

‘Hey, is it going to be long before we get there? One Kaa for yes, two Kaa for no.’ Emilia stopped complaining to confirm her position with the queen of the hive hawks flying high in the sky, almost at the limit of her communication range.

The queen did not immediately respond and started to check her position before replying: ‘Kaa!’

‘Still far, huh? Let me know when we’re getting there or if you see any dwarfs up there.’ Emilia warned and returned to pay attention to the surroundings.

The mountain terrain was steep and uneven, making their progress slower than anticipated. They also had encounters with monsters native to the mountain, such as rock bears and gray wolves, but they were all easily killed and turned into the undead, before being sent back to the stronghold.

Emilia and the mage slayer skeletons continued climbing for almost 3 hours, before the hive queen said they were close to where she saw the dwarf.

‘Stop. From now on we will move slowly and look around for clues. Take care not to be seen and avoid any monsters you encounter. Divide into teams of five and if you find any leads or our target, let me know before doing anything.’ Emilia ordered seriously and the skeletons split left and right to search the mountain.

They scoured the mountain silently for nearly half an hour, using death vision to look for anything useful. Death vision didn’t reveal mana the way mana vision did, but it would still give you a good clue where to look.

Unfortunately, no matter how hard they looked, they couldn’t find anything but rocks and plants all over the mountain. Even the animals and monsters they encountered while climbing the mountain were nowhere to be seen. The death vision didn’t reveal anything useful either, just shadows where there were dead plants.

‘There’s definitely something here. All the monsters are gone in that area alone, although I can still see some less than two hundred meters below us. Something is preventing the monsters from approaching.’ Emilia thought as she looked at the monsters below.

She tried to go down as far as she could see the monsters, scaring them all away, and went back to see if she felt any difference, but nothing changed.

‘Tch, still nothing. What’s going on here? I can’t feel anything, no matter how hard I try to scan the surroundings.’ She now started to get frustrated, not understanding how the damn dwarves were hiding.

Emilia knew they were hiding underground, but without finding an entry point, they would have to dig blindly hundreds of meters, risking being discovered by the dwarves.

Their objective was only to capture and kill a sentry, not to invade an enemy underground base.

That’s when Emilia realized her mistake. If there really was an underground base here, whether it was just an outpost or an entire village, they would have sentries and a way to keep an eye on the mountain’s surroundings. It was likely that the skeletons had already been discovered and so they could not find any traces of the enemy.

‘Skeletons, assemble at my station. We are retreating now. Queen, keep an eye on our rear. Emilia ordered all the skeletons to retreat except for the queen in the sky. If your guess is correct, no matter how hard they search the mountain, they would never find anything.

In fact, if they stayed too long, they risked being ambushed by the dwarves. The best choice was to stand back and let the queen watch any changes behind them.

The skeletons quickly regrouped and retreated, covering their tracks as they descended the mountain. They even killed all the monsters on the way, to make sure it wasn’t a wasted trip. The skeletons stopped at the base of the mountain, waiting for any news from the queen.

Less than twenty minutes passed before the queen alerted them of a change. Right where they were, a small hole opened and six armed dwarfs came out. They were armed with axes or hammers that seemed inappropriate for their size and all wore heavy metal armor.

‘They really knew about us! I very much doubt it was your own senses that detected us. It is likely to be the effect of a magic item that revealed our presence.’ Emilia spoke as she watched the dwarves through the queen’s eyes.

The dwarves were looking down the mountain, probably looking for them. Emilia wasn’t too worried about being seen, though. Their black bones were perfectly camouflaged in the dark and they were hiding under rocks in case the dwarves had magic items that allowed them to see in the dark.

‘Mage slayers, do any of you have earth affinity? If so, start casting something right now. Queen, prepare to ambush them. Let’s kill these dwarves.’ Emilia ordered and two of the mage slayers raised their hands. They still had their rings of conjuration, so they could each cast one spell each.

Emilia also took out her wand and prepared a spell of her own. When everyone confirmed they were ready, she ordered queen to attack. ‘Now!’

Chapter 167 Hidden kingdom

The queen wasted no time and immediately folded her wings, diving towards the dwarves. She even used wind magic to speed herself up even more and correct her falling trajectory whenever she strayed away from her target.

She accelerated more and more until her body began to cut through the wind, the air rushing past her bones and making an odd hiss.

The dwarves noticed the strange noise and looked up, only to see the queen swoop down on them. She was still hundreds of meters away, but they could see her, thanks to their helmets with vision-enhancing and night vision enchantments.

They panicked for a moment, but their instincts as soldiers spoke louder and immediately raised their weapons to defend themselves, certain that it would be impossible to run away from an enemy that fast.

There were no mages among such a small team of sentries, but they activated their weapons' enchantments, sending fireballs and rocks floating overhead. They intended to use them as projectiles when the queen came within range and as shields for her attacks.

What they didn't expect was for the attack to come from below.

'Now!' Emilia ordered and transmitted her spells to the queen, quickly followed by the mage slayers.

The queen came within range of the dwarves, but before any of them could react, she spread her wings with a gust of wind to slow her down and released a curtain of darkness, obscuring her surroundings and blinding the dwarves' vision.

Even night vision was blinded, as the curtain of darkness was magical in nature and night vision still needed a minimal amount of light.

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Completely blind, the dwarves just released the projectiles conjured by their weapons at the queen's last position, hoping that she was still close.

The queen could still see and conjured a barrier of wind to block the fireballs and simply dodged the rocks, before releasing the spells transferred by the mage slayers.

The first generated a focused earthquake that knocked the dwarves off balance, and the second conjured stone spikes that hit the dwarves from below and threw them into the air.

Their enchanted armor protected them from the spell's damage, but not the subsequent damage. The stone spikes threw the dwarves in the opposite direction of the mountain, making the fall that much greater.

The dwarves dropped more than 30 meters with the grace of a sack of potatoes and rolled down the mountain, their bodies slamming against the jagged rocks and breaking several bones.

“Cough, cough.” The dwarves coughed up blood as they rose to their feet, but the queen didn’t give them time to recover.

She cast her float spell on all the dwarves before they could recover from their fall. It wasn’t an offensive spell, it just made bodies light enough to float, but its effects were deadly to dwarves. If a fall of tens of meters didn’t kill them, a fall of hundreds of meters should do the trick.

With a light flutter of her wings, the queen conjured up winds that pushed the dwarves away from the mountain, making them struggle desperately like fish out of water.

To the dwarves’ despair, the queen continued pushing them until they were clear of the mountain, before undoing the float spell. Gravity did its work and the dwarves began to fall as they screamed in despair, but it did little to improve their situation.

They slammed into the rocks at the foot of the mountain, their organs exploding from the violence of the impact as their bones shattered horribly.

None of them were able to survive the fall, their disfigured corpses lying on the ground.

‘Good. Now come back queen, we’ve accomplished our goal here.’ Emilia said, as she ordered the skeleton mage slayers to retrieve the dwarf bodies for her. Emilia quickly turned them into skeletons, healing them enough to at least walk.

The queen quickly fled the scene and was reunited with Emilia, before fleeing the mountain with the new skeletons.

The interrogation could wait until they were safely in the fortress.

A few minutes after they left, a new hole appeared in the earth and a group of dwarves emerged from it, their numbers far greater and better equipped than the previous dwarves. One of the dwarves who appeared to be the leader looked down the mountain and muttered in frustration in an unknown language.

“Those damn undead tricked us. I thought we were safe since we didn’t do anything that would reveal our existence, but it looks like they knew about our presence on the mountain.” The leader of the dwarves spoke as he clenched his fists tightly.

“Should we chase them, sir?” One of his subordinates asked as he watched the sky vigilantly, fearing that there might be other undead across the sky.

“No, it’s useless to do that. This undead is agile, probably assassins when they were alive. We won’t be able to catch up with them and we risk being killed. Let’s go back and inform the elder that our presence here has been discovered. That’s a matter of extreme importance that involves not only our small village, but the lives of all our people.” The leader spoke seriously.

His subordinates nodded with grim expressions, before heading back to the underground village.

The trip back to the castle was much slower than the trip there, as they had to keep up with the speed of the dwarves. They were all mana users, but they couldn’t run very fast because of their short legs.

"The mission was a success, as far as I can see." Treevor spoke as soon as Emilia entered the fortress. He was in his real body, as the corrupted willow was still recovering.

"Successful, but there were complications. The dwarves discovered us and we almost failed in the mission, but we managed thanks to the queen. Let's gather the other generals, it's better to explain everything at once and we still need to interrogate the dwarves." Emilia suggested and called all high ranking skeletons.

They met in one of the stronghold's meeting rooms, before Emilia detailed the mission, making most of them sigh.

"So there really were dwarves so close to the realm and we never knew about it?" Astrus muttered in shock. He didn't believe that Emilia would succeed in finding anything relevant in the mountains, as he had been the general of that fortress for over 15 years and never suspected a thing.

"I didn't believe it either until I saw it with my own eyes, but they are here and we need to think about what to do now." Emilia spoke as she looked at the dwarf skeletons in the corner of the room.

"But how are we going to interrogate them? We could use paper and ink as we always do, but we want as detailed information as possible and I feel that will be difficult to get without their cooperation." Caio asked.

He knew that the information could be inaccurate if they used this method to extract information. The chains would force the dwarves to answer any questions honestly, but any further details would be lost.

If the skeletons asked ambiguous questions or weren't precise enough, the dwarves could end up tricking them without their realizing it. Caio doubted the dwarves would be able to deceive them that way, but it was preferable to turn them into allies and have them spit out information of their own free will.

"Just give one of them control of some mouse and rabbit skeletons. Hey, which one of you is your unit leader?" Treevor asked the dwarves and one of them raised a trembling hand, probably trying to resist the order.

Treevor put a few dozen rats under the dwarf's control and broke his mind, before starting to question him.

"What is your name?"

"Durui...my...lord." The dwarf answered with difficulty.

Treevor gave away a few dozen more unimportant undead so the dwarf could speak more eloquently before continuing. "First of all, I am not your lord. My chief is away on a reckless journey, but he should be back in a few days. For now, I am more interested in your people and where you come from, Durui."

"I am one of the sentinels... of the silver village. We are the only residents... of Keirasa Mountain." Durui spoke.

"And how long have you lived on the mountain? How many of you are there?" Astrus asked.

"Since forever, I think...All my ancestors...have always lived in the mountains...and our numbers are...approximately 600. We are a small village...so we don't have many members." Durui spoke, surprising everyone present.

They expected a few dozen members in a small community, not an entire village.

"How do you manage to feed so many mouths if you live underground? No, more importantly, are there other hidden villages like yours?" Emilia questioned.

"Thousands, not counting... the major cities... Our hidden kingdom of Dorvem... is extensive and encompasses all... the central range." Durui spoke with undisguised pride.

"That's impossible! Some villages I understand, but it's impossible that there's an entire kingdom and the order doesn't know about it!" Emilia screamed in shock, refusing to believe his words.

"It's true...we dwarves use magic...to keep our existence hidden...from the human realms. As for order and the church...our king has...a treaty of non-intervention...with them." Durui spoke, turning the skeletons' shock to disbelief.

None of them could believe that both the order of magic and the church of Eishin knew about the dwarven kingdom and just ignored its existence.

What none of them knew is that hundreds of years ago, when the human kingdoms were still forming, the church and order joined together in an expedition to attempt to invade the central mountain range, resulting in one of the greatest failures in human history.

Chapter 168 Planning

The dwarves didn't just use the mountain range as a refuge, but also as a weapon of mass destruction.

When the humans invaded the central mountain range, the dwarves retreated and let the humans invade as far as the third mountain, before releasing the weapon they kept hidden.

Without any warning, toxic fumes began to rise through the mountains as the temperature rose by several degrees. Earthquakes started before the mountains erupted, making humans belatedly realize that they were actually inactive volcanoes.

The dwarves redirected the magma flows to power the forges of the capital and major cities, but the dwarves could return the natural flow of magma whenever they wanted.

Needless to say, the expedition was completely annihilated. All ground troops were burned alive or intoxicated by toxic gases. Even mages capable of flight were unable to escape, as the dwarves used spells on a massive scale to separate the element of air and water from the world's energy.

At that time, there were no teleportation crystals yet, so the only way to escape was to escape by air or by land, and both escape routes were sealed off. Hundreds of thousands were killed on the expedition and many precious artifacts were lost.

No one survived the expedition and fearing retaliation, the order sent emissaries to negotiate peace. In the end, the dwarves agreed to make a non-aggression pact with the order and the church, after receiving compensation for being invaded for no reason, of course.

It was one of the biggest stains in the order's history and kept secret. The church was even sterner in keeping the expedition hidden, as its teachings were against any kind of interaction with inferior races.

Having a peace treaty with a nation of dwarves after trying and failing on an expedition would go against everything they taught and would make their believers doubt their teachings.

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It was a legend buried in history for humans, but it was just a story to scare children for dwarves.

"So the order of magic and the church had this kind of secret. It's unexpected, but we can talk about it another time. For now, we should think about how to deal with the dwarf village in the mountain."

Treevor spoke after Durui finished telling the story of the human invasion.

"Is there anything to be discussed? If half of that story is true, it's impossible for us to invade the mountains without getting killed. We have no means of defending ourselves against lava, or whatever large-scale spells the dwarves have hidden." Emília spoke, strongly denying the idea of attacking the dwarves.

"You don't have to be such a coward every time. Our master isn't here anyway, so he won't be hurt no matter what we decide here. Besides, we don't have to worry about the lava. It should take days, if not weeks, to redirect the lava flow to the farthest mountains." Treevor snorted at her dismissively.

"The real danger would be large-scale spells, but Durui can tell us what to expect." Astrus nodded at Treevor's opinion, before turning to the dwarven skeleton. "You were a sentry in your village, right? How are the mountain's defenses?"

"The only entrance to the village...it's close to where... we were ambushed...after entering...there's a labyrinth of underground tunnels...and only one entrance leads to the village...as for spells large-scale... there are three in total." Durui explained slowly.

"And what are they?" Treevor asked impatiently. The labyrinth wouldn't be a problem since they would have a guide, but their invasion plan would change depending on enemy defenses.

"The first is a...detection spell that...covers the entire mountain...and 20 meters above the ground...is active at all times...The second is an offensive spell...which mixes the element of fire and earth...creating a pool of magma in the tunnels." With those words, all skeletons sighed and glared at Treevor.

"Okay, I admit, I spoke too soon. I'm sorry, okay?" Treevor raised his arms apologetically and waved Durui on.

"The last spell is earth element...and it's self-destructive...causing an earthquake all over the mountain...and burying the village." Durui explained, but it raised questions.

"Wait, why cast a large-scale spell to destroy the village? Wouldn't it be better to add one more offensive spell or create a barrier to protect the village?" Emília asked confused, but it was Treevor who answered her question.

"Remember, this is a village, not a fortress. It is likely that in case of attacks, they will evacuate the dwarves while using the defenses just to buy time." Treevor spoke with conviction.

“Think about it. They can detect enemies as soon as they start climbing the mountains and are forced to waste time looking for the entrance to the village. After finding the entrance, they would have to waste time in the underground labyrinth and suddenly be bathed in boiling lava. .” Treevor explained, making the other skeletons realize the genius of the dwarves’ plan.

“Even if they somehow cooled the lava, it would turn to stone again and block the passage, forcing the invaders to waste even more time digging their way into the village. That would give more than enough time for all the dwarves to evacuate and take with them everything important.”

Treevor burst out laughing as he spoke, imagining the frustrated faces of humans who had tried to invade in the past, only to remember that he was planning to do the same thing.

“All the invaders would find would be an empty village and after entering, everything would collapse on top of their heads, preventing the fleeing dwarves from being pursued. It’s simple but functional. How do you plan to invade?” Emília completed her explanation and turned to him.

“Is there a hidden spell that blocks teleportation?” Instead of answering her, Treevor turned to Durui and asked.

“Teleportation?” Unfortunately, the dwarf was unfamiliar with the term and didn’t understand what it meant.

“If you don’t know what it is, you’ve already answered my question. I wonder if there aren’t any inside the mountains or if their leaders keep them for themselves.” Treevor wondered, but his plan was already laid out.

“You know, I’ve noticed a pattern in our plans. We’ve always used teleportation crystals as our main weapon. I think we should try other strategies, or that dependency could come back and bite us back in the future.” Emilia commented on how simple Treevor’s plan was.

She was sure it would work, but she couldn’t deny that it felt repetitive.

“Keeping it simple isn’t a bad thing. But if you have a better idea, let me know.” Treevor waved her on.

“It’s not a better plan, but I think it would be a good idea to leave teleportation as a last measure, instead of using it as a foreground. We can enjoy and test strategies, as well as train against new enemies.” Emilia was serious.

“Makes sense. Let’s try it your way, but keep the crystal in case of emergency. It would be pointless to train against enemies if they just bury us alive after all.” Treevor agreed with the idea and changed his plan.

With Athos away from the fortress, he had almost absolute authority over the skeletons, the only way for the skeletons to disobey him was if they had prior orders from Athos.

“So, who are we going to take? Just our current group or do you want to add someone else to the invasion? I think we should invade with a small elite team, instead of using the whole army.” Treevor began to list skeletons that were powerful among the army but had yet to receive a promotion.

“Personally, I want to bring that small team of adventurers that faced me yesterday. They were powerful enough to face me at my peak in terms of physical strength, so I’m sure they’ll be useful.” Treevor recommended the brothers Roy and Ruy, as well as the mage Olivia.

“How about Colonel Orus? He’s my brother and even though he can’t use magic, his skill with weapons is superior to mine. I’m sure he won’t let you down.” Astrus chimed in and tried to further his brother’s.

“I guess that’s it then. I thought I’d call that bishop too, but I think he’s better off leading a unit of mages than an individual fighter.” Treevor said and summoned all the aforementioned skeletons to a meeting.

The skeletons appeared within minutes and Treevor wasted no time, giving the command of 1000 skeletons each and breaking their minds.

Treevor summarized their next quest and the skeletons were glad to have the chance to prove themselves.

“Now that we’ve decided on our team, let’s come up with a concrete plan to invade the dwarven village. We’ll leave as soon as my willow is recovered, which won’t be long.” Treevor spoke and began planning, but Astrus stopped him.

“Sorry to interrupt, but there’s something that’s been bothering me for a while. I ignored it until now, but how is that dwarf speaking our language? Aren’t dwarves supposed to have a language of their own?” Astrus was really confused by this.

“We dwarves are an... intellectual people, though humans... portray us as blacksmiths... who love to drink and feast... our basic education includes... the study of the language of other... species, beyond our own language.” Durui explained and resolved his confusion.

They spent the next half hour discussing the plan until they reached a consensus and then another full hour until the corrupted willow recovered enough to be able to fight, though most of its abilities were still unusable.

Treevor led the skeletons as soon as the willow recovered, not wanting to delay even a second longer. He feared that the dwarves had already started the evacuation and it would be impossible to pursue them. The sun was already high in the sky when they left.

‘Now that I think about it, the boss must still be halfway to the enemy stronghold. I wonder what kind of crazy plan he’s going to use to destroy the place,’ Treevor thought as he ran towards the mountains.

Chapter 169 Golden bow fortress

At the same time, a few kilometers away from the Golden bow fortress.

Athos had greatly underestimated the Simogo’s top speed. Reinforcing his body with dragon core and core at the same time resulted in an absurd speed that forced Athos to hide between the dragon’s ribs in order not to be thrown away.

The fortress had become visible in just over 12 hours, half the estimated travel time.

“Good job, Simogo. We’re almost at our testing ground.” Athos spoke as he looked at the distant silhouette of the fortress getting closer and closer. He couldn’t wait to see the astonished expressions of the soldiers on watch around the fortress.

It seemed that the soldiers had noticed them in the sky, as the mana barrier was slowly rising and Athos could see the soldiers moving back and forth inside the fortress.

The Golden bow fortress was almost the same as the Platinum Fist Fortress, only the position of some buildings changed. It seemed that the kingdom had used the same blueprint for all of the fortress, rather than spending the money necessary to make each stronghold unique.

The soldiers looked like ants because of the distance and Athos loved watching them from this height.

“Let’s circle the fortress for a while, Simogo. It wouldn’t be a real test if the targets aren’t ready.” Athos stroked the back of the dragon’s skull and Simogo slowed down, flapping his wings lazily as he watched the humans below in anticipation.

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In the fortress below, the soldiers were in full panic at the sudden appearance of what they thought was a shadow dragon. Emergency alarms were sounding throughout the fortress as soldiers rushed to their positions and readied siege weapons, but their morale was low.

Dragons were the symbol of strength and terror for humans. They were rare and most humans had never seen one in their lives, but everyone knew stories about the sheer power of dragons.

The soldiers were already tense after being informed that the expedition to the fortress of the platinum fist had failed and that they should be ready to defend themselves against a possible counterattack, but no one expected that a dragon would suddenly appear.

“Soldiers, everyone take your positions! Get the ballistae and catapults ready, I want all the archers ready when that thing goes down! Mages, get behind the inner wall and start casting a full-scale spell.” General Malti climbed to the top of the inner wall and began shouting orders while calling for reinforcements from the kingdom.

She was a woman in her late thirties with light brown hair and black, almond-shaped eyes. At approximately 1.62 meters tall and with a slim body, she looked even smaller than she actually was.

Malti was dressed in hunter clothing despite his military rank, wearing pants and a dark green shirt underneath brown leather armour. The armor was made from swamp crocodile leather and enchanted by court magicians.

She carried a magically enchanted wooden bow on her back, but no quiver or arrows.

A royal scribe answered the emergency call and the general quickly explained the situation, causing the scribe to turn pale in amazement. The scribe realized the seriousness of the situation and tried to request reinforcements for the fortress, receiving the news that the portals were inactive and it was impossible to move troops at the moment.

“Are you just going to abandon us and let that dragon exterminate us? If it’s impossible to send armies, send strong individuals with teleportation crystals! I’m sure powerful individuals will be much more useful than a bunch like meat shields!” Malti shouted at the scribe, but she didn’t take his eyes off the dragon.

She was using her hawk eye skill to observe every detail of the dragon, not that it was difficult to see with the dragon slowly flying around the fortress. Luckily, Athos wasn’t visible as he was on the dragon’s back.

“Let me see...” The scribe spoke and disappeared for a few seconds, before returning with a grim expression. “The only elite troops in the capital currently are the royal guard, but they cannot move without the king’s permission.”

“Then drag that fat ass over here and get the permit!” Malti shouted furiously, his words shocking all the soldiers who heard him. Malti was a commoner who rose through the ranks of the army thanks to her own efforts and facing many nobles who climbed positions using her family’s influence, so she had no respect for nobles or royalty.

The only reason she joined the army and not the adventurer’s guild was that Malti had a desire to protect people rather than for power, the reason why she willingly chose to join the border fortresses.

“Unfortunately that will not be possible, General. The King is currently unavailable and the Queen Consort, next in line, has said that they can only send a few royal guards and that number alone will be useless against a dragon. Her Majesty has recommended that they evacuate the fortress and save as many soldiers as possible.” The scribe spoke with regret.

“Why is the asshole unavailable? They finally fattened the pig enough to send it to the slaughterhouse?? And who does that bitch think she is to say it’s pointless to send reinforcements? She only says that because her ass isn’t in danger here!” In a few sentences, Malti managed to insult the royals and accuse them of neglecting their own soldiers.

She also broke several laws while doing so and would likely be tried for insulting royalty, if she survived the dragon attack of course.

“General Malti, please be careful with your language when referring to the royal family! I understand you are in a tense moment, but-” The scribe started to try to correct her in a panic, but Malti ended the call angrily.

“Useless motherfuckers! What are those fucking crystals for if they don’t use them when they’re needed?!” She hurled the cube off the wall while cursing furiously.

“General, the siege weapons are already ready and the archers in position. The mages will also finish the spell soon. We are just waiting for the dragon to descend.” A soldier came running over and saluted before reporting.

Malti closed her eyes and took a deep breath to calm herself, before opening her eyes and looking seriously at the dragon. “Then let’s wait. If I’m going to die, I’ll at least shoot an arrow into that dragon’s reverse scale.”

As if it had heard her words and taken offense, the shadow dragon stopped circling the fortress and descended towards the walls.

"I think we've given them enough time to prepare. Let's start the tests, Simogo." Athos spoke and Simogo began to fly towards the fortress.

The soldiers tensed as the dragon came closer and closer. They strained their bows to the limit as the siege weapons adjusted their sights to the dragon's position, but they all swallowed a lump of saliva as they wondered if their weapons would have any effect on a dragon.

"Let's start the test with a dragon's breath." Athos ordered the tests to begin and Simogo complied, taking a deep breath as he filled his lungs with corrupted world energy.

Once his lungs were completely filled, he moved the energy to his throat where a spark of darkness ignited the world's energy and turned it into black flames.

The flames reached the barrier a second after Simogo spat it out, causing the entire barrier to shake. The black flames spread out after hitting the barrier, covering as much area as possible while eroding the barrier.

Simogo didn't spit out all the flames in a single puff, but controlled his breathing and released a continuous stream of flames.

The barrier began to crack under the pressure, but the dragon was the first to run out of gas, luckily for the humans.

"Seize the gap and shoot!" Malti screamed at the top of her lungs, being the first to recover from the shock. His voice spread throughout the fortress thanks to a skill and woke all the soldiers from their stupor, causing everyone to fire their weapons amid screams, as if to mask their fears.

Arrows, giant arrows and stones rained down on the dragon, but the latter didn't even bother to defend himself. The mist of corrupted mana that surrounded his bones condensed into a scaly pattern the moment the arrows touched him, resisting all attacks.

Dragon scales increased his physical and magical defense, so arrows and stones without mana couldn't even scratch him.

Simogo wasted no time and cast two breaths of darkness at the cracked barrier before it recovered, increasing the pressure under the barrier. The darkness not only attacked the barrier, but it also seeped through the cracks in the, preventing the barrier from closing its cracks.

Simogo continued to power both breaths with mana and began to strike the barrier with his body. He used all four paws to attack the barrier, his claws piercing the cracks in the barrier and ripping out entire chunks of mana, forcing his way into the fortress.

Chapter 170 Useless resistance

Unlike the fight against Treevor, Simogo was intact and could fight in the air and use all of his paws as weapons instead of just relying on his front paw and fangs to attack.

After feeling that he had damaged the barrier enough to be able to get through, Simogo started pushing his body through the hole.

“Fuck!” Malti cursed furiously, seeing the shadow dragon repelling all attacks without a care. Even the stones weren’t doing any damage, just making the shadow dragon angry. “Are the wizards ready yet??”

“They’re almost ready, general. Give them a few more seconds and they’ll be ready.” The nearest soldier reported.

Malti nodded and turned his attention to Simogo, who had forced half of his body into the barrier. “Heavy units, buy time for archers and catapults to retreat. Light units take this and deliver the catapults.”

With a wave of his hand, purple lights appeared around him before disappearing, dropping several sealed leather bags onto the floor. Malti was carrying her storage ring and several stored alchemical items.

The soldiers rushed to carry out his orders, but the dragon stopped everyone from moving.

Simogo roared with all his might and killed every soldier in range. The roar influx seeped into the soldiers’ bodies, spreading the dragon’s corrupted mana and sapping all its strength.

Those unable to use mana withered as their life drained from their bodies and those able to use mana managed to survive, but not for long. Their bodies were withering away at a slower rate, but they were still agonizing in pain from the corruption consuming their bodies.

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“Wow. That was more effective than expected.” Athos commented with admiration when he saw almost 3000 soldiers lying on the ground. It seemed that the roar’s influx had additional effects on the living, as the dragon was undead.

“Ignore the fallen and let’s keep moving forward. We can go back and collect the corpses later.” He spoke and Simogo quickly flew towards the inner wall.

The heavy infantry that had come out to try to intercept the dragon just stared blankly at the dragon passing over their heads, unable to reach it with just their weapons.

Simogo still fired a breath of darkness as he passed, killing nearly a hundred at once.

“General Malti, we are ready!” One of the mages behind the walls spoke and Malti gave the go-ahead for them to shoot.

A sphere of mana formed above the walls, before shooting a 3-meter-thick beam of pure mana at blinding speed at Simogo.

“Get down!” Athos quickly shouted, but it was a second too late. He was already expecting such an attack, but not this fast.

The mages had focused on increasing the spell's speed rather than its destructive power. They knew how good a dragon's reflexes could be, and all the destructive power in the world was useless if they didn't get it right.

Simogo tried to dodge at the last minute, but the beam still hit him in the side and made his body bend at <, before knocking him to the ground. The soldiers shouted in victory after taking down the dragon, at least until it fell under the heavy infantry and crushed them under its weight.

The beam continued to push Simogo back, but the latter steadied himself and conjured a sphere of darkness around him, reducing the beam's damage. In the end, the fog on his left side disappeared and several of his ribs were broken.

Athos was forced to jump to avoid being crushed, making the soldiers notice his presence for the first time. 'Shit. Simogo, start healing quickly. There are only a few organs protecting your heart and they are fragile.'

Too bad Simogo didn't know how to heal himself, causing Athos to curse internally. 'Just cover the wound with the wing for now. I will heal you quickly.'

"He's the leader, don't let the skeleton get close to the dragon again!" General Malti shouted and aimed his bow at Athos.

His enchanted bow was capable of forming magic arrows using his mana, or arrows of lightning, the element Malti had an affinity for.

She fired several arrows of lightning in quick succession thanks to her multi-shot ability, preventing Athos from regrouping with Simogo. The arrows weren't particularly powerful, but they were fast and exploded on impact.

Athos conjured a shield of corrupted mana and blocked the arrows, realizing that the soldiers were starting to surround him.

'That bastard... Simogo, join me, let's go on foot.' Athos called telepathically and Simogo approached, protecting him with his remaining wing.

"Tch! Throw the alchemical items at those bastards when they get close!" Malti screamed furiously, her arrows unable to penetrate the dragon's wings, despite that being the weakest part of a dragon.

The soldiers around him nodded and started grabbing the alchemical items. As the catapults were unable to retreat, the soldiers kept the alchemical items on the walls.

"Let's go for a walk while I heal you, Simogo. Athos spoke, thwarting the soldiers' plans. He climbed onto the dragon's back and began to heal him.

Athos wasn't crazy enough to order the dragon to fight with its heart exposed so he ordered Simogo to circle the fortress while he healed it.

Simogo ran quickly while Athos regenerated his ribs, his dragon core constantly pumping out corrupted mana and recovering lost mist.

He smashed any building or soldier that got in his way, while conjuring a sphere of darkness and holding it above him, protecting himself from enemy arrows. Its bones didn't suffer a scratch from ordinary arrows, but the archers inside the inner wall were mana users and were imbuing all arrows with weapon break.

The sphere of darkness rotted the wood of the arrows and slowed their momentum, causing the metal tips to fall harmlessly to the ground.

"You fucking cowards! You have a fucked dragon, why don't you face us head on??" Malti started screaming as she ran on top of the wall, firing arrows of lightning without stopping. Soldiers carrying alchemical items and archers also followed her, but none were able to keep up with her speed.

'As if I would risk losing a dragon, idiot.' Athos thought as he continued the healing. He regenerated one rib at a time, draining strength from unused bones like the tail so as not to compromise the rest.

They circled the fortress when Athos finished healing him and Simogo stopped stalling. It spread its wings now that it no longer needed to worry about defense and in a few seconds it was already under the fortress.

Simogo didn't use any strategy, he just charged the fortress with all his might. His body smashed into the fortress walls before Simogo began slamming into everything in sight, his blows sending debris raining everywhere.

He even randomly cast darkness breaths, killing anyone who got close.

There were many merchants and their servants inside the fortress, as they were civilians and could not fight. Simogo didn't care about them, crushing them all with his blows or through the debris, while devouring some to make up for the mass lost from healing.

He didn't understand that healing weakened the body, but he began to feel hungry after being healed, something he hadn't felt since becoming an undead so he fed almost instinctively.

Athos didn't mind the loss of potential skeletons, as these ordinary humans wouldn't be much use once transformed. They would at most become workers or infantry, the only loss would be the life force he would receive, but there were many others to make up for it.

"Shit, you fucked skeletons! Fight me, not them!" Malti screamed as he aimed his arrows at Athos, but he only dismantled his skeleton and hid among the dragon's bones, letting the arrows hit the misty scales.

The fog that surrounded his bones offered no resistance to Athos, as Simogo did not recognize him as an enemy.

The other archers and soldiers carrying alchemical items finally caught up with Malti and started shooting arrows at the dragon, but a 15-meter-long spear of black fire suddenly appeared on the dragon's back, before flying towards him.

Athos was not bothered by the enemy arrows, but he felt threatened when he saw those sealed leather bags. As an alchemist, Athos only needed one look to recognize explosive alchemical items sealed.

They had a high destructive power, but they were volatile and a scratch would be enough to make them explode. A destructive spell like the meteor spear was more than enough.

The meteor spear exploded against the top of the wall, hurling all the charred soldiers into the air and tearing the leather bags, scattering the alchemical powder and causing dozens of subsequent explosions.

Explosions of fire and lightning, as well as localized tremors, toppled the wall and created a fire that prevented the soldiers from approaching. They would be forced to turn around or take their chances against Simogo ravaging the fortress if they wanted to get through, not that any of them had the will to fight anymore.

The soldiers who had been in the outer area for a long time lost their will to fight. The only thing capable of hurting the dragon was the large-scale spell, but everyone knew that it would be impossible to cast them in quick succession.

Even with the use of potions, it would still take time for the mages to recover enough mana to cast another spell and the dragon wouldn't give them that time. One by one, the soldiers began to flee, though they doubted their ability to escape a dragon's rage.