

Legion lich 181

Chapter 181 Death lord

Nytrrer continent at the same time.

An earthquake was plaguing one of the major cities across the continent. The earthquake seemed concentrated on the dark castle in the middle of the city, its walls threatening to collapse at any moment, though defensive enchantments should have made them nearly indestructible.

“So that bastard was involved in the attack? Did this son of a bitch forget about our deal already??” A booming voice resounded throughout the castle, causing most of the windows to burst and the walls to crack, before repairing themselves.

The voice came from the main hall, where an angry woman was sitting on a throne of bones, while her undead servants turned pale with fear and tried to calm her down in every possible way.

The woman was 1.68 meters tall, with long white hair that almost touched her knees and olive skin. She had black scales that looked like tattoos across her forearms, shoulders, neck and above her breasts.

His eyes were golden and slit like a lizard’s, causing primordial fear in all the undead around him, despite his inability to feel fear. Curved black horns rose from her temples, giving the woman a cruel and inhuman appearance.

An icy breath left her lips with each word she said, dropping the temperature by several degrees. Whenever she opened her mouth, the undead could catch a glimpse of her sharp fangs, as well as a snake’s forked tongue.

She was tapping her foot in stress, causing earthquakes all over the city.

She was the supreme being of the entire continent Sytrrer, the death lord, the first and only dragonlich in the world.

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“My queen, please calm down! The troops retreated the moment the enemy God appeared, so our losses were only a few tens of thousands.” An elderly man wearing butlers’ clothes tried to calm her down, his red eyes and protruding fangs betraying his vampire nature.

“But that bastard! He, he, argh!” The woman seemed unable to form a coherent sentence, a seething rage taking over her mind while a bloodthirsty aura threatening to overwhelm all surrounding servants. She was normally calm and composed, but she always lost her cool when Eishin was involved.

Her servants didn’t know what else to do and were forced to get away from her to avoid being killed from the sheer pressure they were feeling.

“What’s going on here?” A man burst into the castle and grabbed the nearest servant by the collar, indifferent to the pressure the death lord was emitting.

He was 1.90 meters tall, with green hair and amber eyes. His brown skin was as dark as bark and his ears were pointed like an elf’s. His identity was obvious, he was an avatar of the world tree.

The avatar was wearing a dark green suit and appeared to be made of leaves with amber embroidery, although it was only part of the avatar.

“Lord Illum! Please help us, you are the only one who can stop our queen when she is in this state.” The vampire butler approached the man quickly and knelt down, begging for help.

“Haah...” Illum sighed in exasperation before walking to the front of the death lord, conjuring a mana barrier and surrounding the two to stop the earthquakes and allow the servants to breathe again, despite the fact that many of them had not more lungs.

“Stop throwing a tantrum, you brat!” He screamed and slapped her face with all his might.

The servants who watched this scene froze in fear, their hearts starting to beat again from sheer shock. Never in their long lives would they have imagined that the world tree avatar would slap their master.

Before they could recover from the shock, Illum gave it a second slap and finally looked satisfied.

“Feeling better, Kalesi?” Illum asked once Kalesi calmed down. The inhuman parts of her body began to retract until they almost disappeared, her calm allowing the shapeshifting spell to take effect and make her perfectly human.

“Still feeling awful, but I’ve regained my composure. Thank you, Illum.” Kalesi took a few deep breaths and stood up, suppressing his murderous aura. “But I still wanted to get revenge on that bastard somehow.”

Her draconic features began to show again, so Illum sighed and offered a suggestion for her not to rage again.

“Attacking Eishin directly would violate the non-intervention pact and risk bringing back the age of chaos, but a small attack on his servants won’t be a problem. He started the attack, so he can’t complain if you fight back. Just make sure not to cross the borders between continents.” Illum suggested, making Kalesi smile brightly.

“That’s it! Illum, you truly are the wisest being in the world.” She said as she ran out of the castle, her servants hurriedly following her.

“That’s a fact. I am the oldest being in this world after all.” Illum shrugged as he followed her without difficulty.

After leaving the castle, they could have a good view of the city. The town around the castle was nothing like expected.

Undead calmly walked around the city, going about their normal lives. Skeletons, zombies, banshees, vampires, liches, ghouls, dullahan and various other species of the undead lived full lives in the city, as real citizens and not slaves.

Not just undead, but even living beings could be seen. Humans, demihumans, elves, dwarves, beast people, most living races live in harmony with the undead.

The town was vivid and full of bright colors, the only morbid part being the castle, but only because Kalesi had a bit of a gothic taste and liked things dark and morbid.

On the horizon, everyone could see the gigantic yggdrasil. Its roots spread for tens of kilometers underground, while its branches almost reached beyond the fog that surrounded the continent.

Its leaves were multicolored, having all the colors of the elements and resembling a rainbow. Each of its leaves was the size of a house, while each of its branches was miles long.

That was the colossal size of the fully grown world tree. Illum was the one and only one who had reached full maturity. All of their descendants scattered around the world were either still growing or had been killed during the era of chaos.

Unlike the image of a continent destroyed and infested with the bloodthirsty undead, the continent of Sytrer was at peace, with the living and dead living together in harmony.

The fog that surrounded the entire continent was not only to prevent enemies from gaining information about them, but also to filter out the excess light element coming from sunlight and allowing undead sensitive to excess light such as vampires to walk freely during the day.

Kalesi and Illum flew high enough and broke through the thick curtains of fog, quickly reaching one of the last layers of the atmosphere.

“One flash of lightning should be enough.” Kalesi thought and began to accumulate electricity in his right hand. The rays formed a black spear which she gripped in her right hand and Kalesi continued to power the spear and increase its size.

Once the spear grew to a size she deemed appropriate, Kalesi hurled the spear with all her might towards the Caria empire.

The lightning spear cut the distance between continents in a few minutes, reaching the port city where the undead had tried and failed to invade.

The angels were still surrounding the city, keeping watch in case the undead tried to attack again after their god was gone. They had caused thousands of casualties among the undead in the few minutes since Eishin left, but they still weren’t satisfied.

“Hmm?” One of the angels looked up, noticing the approaching spear, but the spear reached him before he could understand what was happening.

The lightning spear reached the sky over the port city, before splitting into dozens of smaller spears and bombarding the city. Bursts of lightning took place all over the place as thousands were evaporated at once.

Tremors spread across the city as the strike caused a magnitude 9 earthquake.

“That slut!” The angels began to curse seeing the city’s destruction and death toll, but the worst part was yet to come.

A burst of lightning shot through the middle of the angels’ defensive formation, pushing them away and breaking their formation. Not all of the spears hit the city, some hit the sea while one hit an unlucky angel, disintegrating his body.

His body disintegrated, giving his racial abilities no chance to heal and killing him instantly. The angels gnashed their teeth at the death of their mate, but all they could do was descend to the ground to save as many lives as possible.

“Satisfied?” Illum asked as he watched the city being destroyed. He was the guardian of life for the entire planet, but he had already seen so much death and destruction that it didn’t even blink an entire city to be destroyed.

“A lot. That son of a bitch got involved and killed thousands of mine, so I killed thousands of his too. It’s a fair trade.” Kalesi smiled brightly at him, before remembering something important. “By the way, why did you come to my castle? You don’t usually visit me.”

“A new undead has appeared on the Caprio continent. It’s a new species, so I thought you should know about it,” Kalesi’s smile faded at those words, his expression turning extremely serious.

“Are you sure about that?” Kalesi asked rhetorically, knowing Illum wouldn’t joke about such a serious matter for her. “We must ensure his safety then. We will send someone to bring him to us quickly.”

Chapter 182 Doravon continent

“I have a better idea. He appears to be some sort of lich and has a small army, so he’s not all that powerless. From the information my spies gathered, he even did some damage to the order of magic, destroying their network of portals.” Illum spoke with a light chuckle.

Illum found it hilarious that a newborn undead could wreak havoc on a gigantic organization backed by a being on a par with a god.

“Won’t that make him an even bigger target?” Kalesi asked worried about the safety of the new species.

“I’ll send one of my spies to get in touch with him. I don’t think simply showing up and kidnapping him will make a good first impression.” Illum suggested contacting him discreetly, rather than sending a small army as he knew Kalesi was planning.

“We’ll try it your way, but if anything happens to this newborn, it’ll be your fault.” Kalesi reluctantly accepted his suggestion. “Speaking of the Caprio continent, how is that girl? We found her in a deplorable state after all.”

“She is growing rapidly and building strength in the southeast of the continent. Her mind is still chaotic and she has an obsession that borders on madness to find her lost son, but all undead are a little crazy, so I still have hope that in time she can recover.” Illum spoke with regret.

This case was a bit of a sensitive one for Illum, as he felt partially responsible for what happened to her.

“Poor Selena. I hope one day she can get over the loss of her son.” Kalesi shed a tear of compassion and returned to the castle.

Illum followed her silently, contacting the spies closest to Athos’ last known position and ordering them to rendezvous with him.

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“Shall I invite you to join us? You know how newborn undead can be vigilant and disturbed.” Illum inquired about the contents of the message.

“Invite him, and even if he refuses, give him a way to contact us in case of an emergency. We’re always willing to save a brother. Also, make sure it’s an undead that will deliver the message. Newborns are unable to resist their killer instinct, so sending one alive will end in a bloodbath.”

“I know, it would be a problem if my spies accidentally killed him.” Illum agreed with her.

Continent Doravon at the same time.

On a plain with no hills or mountains in sight, two massive armies were furiously clashing, neither side taking a step back in a battle to the death.

The eastern armies were attackers and invaders, while the western armies were defenders made up of dozens of different clans.

The invaders belonged to the army of the conquering king, the demi-human who was conquering all the tribes of the continent to become the king, while the coalition of clans were the last free clans left on the continent and had joined in a last resistance to stop the advance of the conquering king.

They had been driven to a corner of the continent and could no longer retreat. All that was left of their families and clans were after them, so this was a desperate battle for the coalition army.

Both armies were composed of demi-humans such as goblins, orcs, minotaurs, ogres, trolls, and other species of demihumans that only exist on this continent.

Their numbers were more or less equal, but their actual power couldn’t be more different.

The conquering king’s army was well equipped, several of them using enchanted weapons, the strongest even wearing full armor. The Western army, on the other hand, did not possess any enchanted weapons, although some of them possessed magic metal weapons.

There were no mages on the Doravon continent, except for the rare occasions when a baby was born with a mana body, so the concept of a runesmith did not exist here.

Even so, the conquering king’s army somehow managed to overcome these limitations and runesmithing weapons for his soldiers.

But the biggest difference was the demihumans themselves. The demihumans of the conquering army were different from the ordinary.

Orcs that should have been 3 meters tall were almost 5 meters, goblins were almost the same height as humans, and ogres had grown extra arms and heads. Other demihumans also had similar changes, but they all had one thing in common.

His power soared after the changes, reaching new power and surpassing his peers. One of the biggest reasons the conquering king gained so many followers and dominated almost an entire continent in a few decades was his ability to purify the blood of demihumans.

No one but the conquering King himself and his confidants knew how he could do this, but he had figured out some way to purify the impure blood of demihumans and strengthen his bloodline of giants.

The battle was tilted heavily in the direction of the conquering king's army. His soldiers fought like berserks, heedless of their fallen comrades or the injuries to their own bodies.

As their giant blood grew stronger and their powers grew, so did their thirst for battle. Their inhibitions and self-control were decreasing more and more, making the evolved demi-humans become more and more out of control and impulsive.

They fought with unbridled fury, killing everything within reach. For every evolved demihuman killed, 20 coalition demihumans were lost.

Coalition numbers continued to drop, until the coalition army was forced to retreat or die. Horns began to sound as the coalition army retreated, but the conquerors did not let them get away easily.

The conquering army pursued them for more than a day, killing anyone too slow to flee. The coalition continued to flee, until they reached a beach where what was left of their clan was encamped.

There were only a few tens of thousands, their numbers far too low for a gathering of so many clans. The only members left in the camp were women and children who couldn't fight back, everyone else had moved to try and stop the invaders.

What followed was not a battle, but a slaughter. There was no negotiation, surrender or anything of the sort. Even the idea of enslaving them did not cross the mind of the general of the conquering army.

He was a 7 meter tall orc, a giant even among the evolved orcs around him. A pair of short, red horns rose from its forehead. Their skin was red, unlike normal orcs' green skin.

His only objective here was to wipe out the resistance and he wouldn't stop until the last enemy was killed. The truth was, his orders were to kill all enemies and enslave women and children, but the general wasn't sane enough to remember that.

A long, deeper horn sounded from behind the conquering army, ceasing all fighting. All the demihumans recognized that horn, but as the conquering army raised their weapons and roared in enthusiasm, the resistance fell into despair, all their hopes of even lost.

The horn that sounded belonged to the personal army of the conquering king and they moved only when the king moved.

A new army can be seen approaching on the horizon, their footsteps causing tremors that reach the resistance camp. The king's personal army was not very large, having less than 10,000 members, but its power overshadowed the conquering army.

They were composed of the most powerful demihumans with the purest bloodlines, all of them even more powerful than the general of the invading army.

The conquering king was marching at the head of the army, looking down on everyone arrogantly. He was 29 meters tall, with bulging muscles all over his body and so many battle scars it would be impossible to count them all.

He was a balding man with a long black beard, his expression a mixture of arrogance and a contempt for the survivors of the resistance.

His race was unknown, as well as his origins, the only thing the demihumans were sure about him was his power.

His only magical equipment was a gigantic sword made of divine adamant on his back, confident that his body was stronger than any armor.

“My king, I salute you! The mission you gave me was a success! If you wait a little longer I will finish killing everyone-” The orc general knelt down in front of the king as he approached and declared happily, but his speech was interrupted.

The conquering king unsheathed his sword and cut the general in half without ever stopping to walk, considering him only a nuisance. His blow did not cause shockwaves or pressure, its energy finely controlled to cut the general in half and not affect the sand beneath him.

It was an absurd level of energy control, but the conquering king made it as if it were nothing.

He had killed the general for disobeying his orders, even though he was clear about his mission being to kill the soldiers and enslave the women.

The evolved demihumans split left and right as the king passed, creating a direct path to the women and children of the resistance. All the other soldiers had already been killed and a few thousand were all that remained.

“Death or Surrender.” The conquering king spoke in a calm tone, but his voice carried such a powerful aura that it forced everyone to their knees, be it his soldiers or the survivors.

The women naturally chose to surrender, not because they feared for their lives, but for the few children who were still alive.

“OOOOHHHHHHH!” The evolved demi-humans screamed once more, their voices even louder this time. These tribes were the last ones to stand against them in the entire continent and with their defeat, the entire continent belonged to them.

The king, on the other hand, was looking at the sea, more precisely, at the continent that he knew was beyond the ocean.

‘With this, the entire continent belongs to me. Caprio will be next. And after that I’ll come after you, Eishin. You will pay for what you did to my people.’ He thought as he gripped the hilt of his sword, his mind burning with rage.

End Volume 3

Chapter 183 Big losses

Continent Caprio, in the southwestern savannas.

On a plain of tall grass, a pack of saber-toothed tigers were resting after a successful hunt, lying in the shade of rocks. There were 20 tigers in the pack, with an alpha leading the pack.

Saber-toothed tigers were nearly eight feet long, with orange fur and black stripes all over their bodies. A pair of 30 cm long serrated fangs protrude from its upper jaw.

They were greedily eating a pair of desert wildebeest that they had managed to separate from the rest of the herd before slaughtering.

“?” One of the saber-toothed tigers pricked up its ears suddenly, hearing a rustling in the tall grass around it. He turned his head and started looking for any potential enemies, but found nothing.

Deciding it was just the wind ruffling the grass, the saber-toothed tiger stopped paying attention and lay back down, only for an arrow of darkness to hit him in the snout. The arrow of darkness was slow but made no sound and the saber-toothed tiger had no heightened magical senses, failing to detect the attack until it hit.

“Grr!” The saber-toothed tiger began to thrash around as it pawed at its snout, its eyes brimming with tears from the pain it felt. This alerted all the surrounding tigers, who stopped eating or resting and went on alert.

They dragged the wounded tiger to the rock and surrounded it protectively, looking closely for the enemy hiding in the tall grass.

A second arrow of darkness flew at them, but the saber-toothed tigers were alert and easily dodged the spell. The alpha roared right away, ordering the tigers to charge in the direction the arrow came from.

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Half of the saber-toothed tigers broke away from the group and charged into the tall grass, only for a mist of darkness to appear and surround the entire group, engulfing the tigers and sapping their strength.

They groaned painfully and retreated back to the rest of the group. The monsters began to feel threatened and looked for a way out, but the fog was high and perfectly surrounded them, cutting off their escape route.

Arrows of black lightning flew towards them, these ones much faster than the previous ones. Spears of lightning and fire also came from different directions, causing deep wounds to the monsters.

The saber-toothed tigers started to panic and roared against the fog, but there wasn't much normal monsters could do.

“ROAR!” the alpha roared in defiance, refusing to die like that, and charged into the haze of darkness. He felt the darkness corrode his skin on contact and sap his strength, but he just clenched his fangs and ran even faster.

The fog wasn't that thick, despite its density, so the alpha broke through the fog without too much trouble, only for a black spiked shield to hit him in the face, stopping his run.

A knockback skill pushed him back into the mist and two black fire spears impaled his brain and heart, killing him instantly. The rest of the saber-toothed tigers quickly died as well, before the fog dispersed.

“Good job, guys. I think we’re finally getting used to the savannahs.” Athos spoke as he wiped the blood off the shield, using death vision to make sure they were all dead.

Malti, Emília and Caio joined him, the only skeletons that were currently with him.

“We’ll talk after we’re safe.” Astrus spoke as he cast the mass raise undead spell and hurried them out. All skeletons seemed tense and aware of their surroundings.

“Yes, let’s go. The base is only half an hour away and it’s about to get dark.” Athos agreed to back down, showing how precarious the current situation for the undead was. Although they all saw perfectly in the dark, not a single skeleton dared to go out at night.

Night was the time when the strongest monsters came out to hunt and the undead were far from the top of the savannahs strength scale.

The skeletons moved stealthily with the new saber-toothed tiger skeletons, using the tall grass that was spread all over the place as cover and taking care not to be seen by other predators.

“We’re here.” Athos sighed in relief when he saw an area without grass and a rough stone wall in the distance. The land in front of the walls was dead, its nutrients completely drained.

Black skeletons could be seen working all around the wall, digging pits with wooden spears at the bottom and building wooden stakes into the ground.

There were a few dozen monsters killed in previously prepared traps, but the amount of black bones on the ground was even greater, showing that their losses were even greater than their gains.

The earthen wall was small, only 5 meters high, and did not look very reliable, something clearly created by hasty magic without proper work.

It was something that the earth mages among the skeletons and the dwarves created as an emergency to have a safe base, even if it was something temporary.

Athos and the high ranking skeletons entered through a passage in the wall guarded by skeletons, before heading towards the center of the camp.

There were few buildings in the camp, as the skeletons did not need any basic needs and Athos forced them to work non-stop.

The few buildings built were warehouses for the important items they brought along, as well as forges to melt the metals they had in weapons, and a single building for important meetings.

Athos moved straight to the meeting building, ordering the tiger skeletons to assemble with the rest of the beast unit. As soon as he entered, the first thing he saw was a long stone table, with a makeshift map on top.

The map was something they got from the fortress of the golden bow and Malti brought it as he found it useful for them. Unlike the platinum fist fortress that had access to the mountains and functioned as a mine, they had the duty to act as scouts and explore the Demihuman empire.

They were only able to scout less than 100 kilometers accurately, but were able to investigate the terrain even further away using observation magic items.

Treevor was on the other side of the table, making notes in a small notebook about some empty areas of the map. Vanilla was next to him, adding things based on her own memories.

Unlike Treevor who had lived most of her life in the far south, Vanilla led a small clan very close to where they were now camping, so her knowledge would be much more useful.

What they were noting down was geographical information, rather than the territory of monsters and other tribes. It had been decades since the last time they both came to the savannahs and while some monster territories may be the same, most clans would be long gone.

There were some skeletons around them, using the notes and adding them to the map after doing some calculations. They were some of the cartographer skeletons that came along with Malti.

It was an imprecise method based on ancient memories, but it was the best they currently had.

"Welcome back boss. How was the raid?" Treevor asked without taking his eyes off the map.

"Twenty saber-toothed tigers, one alpha included. All in the second layer, except the alpha which was in the third." Athos said with a shrug before asking back. "And how was it over here?"

"We suffered 7 attacks since morning, all from monsters that had habitats close to here and felt threatened by our intrusion. The traps managed to kill some of them, but we still lost hundreds of human skeletons and beasts."

"In the end, I needed to get involved every time to lessen the damage." Treevor said with a weary sigh, even though he didn't feel tired or have lungs.

"Our numbers are decreasing more and more and even though we go out hunting every day, we can't cover our losses. The good news is that our overall power is increasing, even with the loss of so many skeletons. The monsters around here are really another thing compared to skeleton soldiers." Athos spoke of the only good thing that had happened to them since they came to the empire.

"That's a fact, but we still need to reduce our losses. Human skeletons are useful not only as soldiers, but also for complex jobs as you can see." Treevor pointed to the skeletons busy drawing slowly on the map.

"Also, once trained, they all have the potential to become dark affinity mages, so we can't waste them like that."

"We're already doing everything we can to reduce the skeletons destroyed. It's no use dwelling on things beyond our control." Athos shrugged once more and this time Treevor had to agree.

"I know boss, I'm just feeling weird coming back after so long. This place is even more violent than I remembered and moving with so many numbers isn't helping. The monsters see us as a threat and attack us several times a day and to make matters worse, we still haven't found any demi-human clans." Treevor suddenly started to vent, but Athos couldn't blame him.

Since leaving the fortress, they had suffered heavy losses thanks to misfortune and powerful monsters.

Chapter 184 Stormy beginning

It's been a month since they left the fortress. In the beginning, the terrain hadn't changed much and the monsters they encountered weren't very strong, so the skeletons were hopeful that they wouldn't face too many problems at the beginning of their journey.

They couldn't be more wrong.

After marching for almost a week without stopping, the terrain began to change from dry grass hills to tall grass savannas. But the biggest change has been in the world's energy density.

Most skeletons didn't notice the change right away, but more sensitive ones like Athos and Treevor noticed the difference. Treevor didn't mind as he was used to it, but Athos was shocked.

With the world's energy so dense, it would be much easier to develop the core by training in the desert. This also means that the monsters would be much more powerful than those outside, but Athos only realized their real danger after the first wave of monsters attacked them.

Individual monsters would flee when they saw the army, but large groups would try to fight back to defend their territory.

One such group was sand pythons. It was a lesser basilisk species, which lacked the racial ability petrifying gaze characteristic of the species, but they were still dangerous creatures alone and deadly in groups.

They were nearly 20 meters long, with scales the same color as sand.

The skeleton army invaded these pythons' nest while they were hibernating by accident and the monsters furiously attacked them. All 200.

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They crushed the army's vanguard without the skeletons being able to fight back, killing nearly 500 skeletons before they could properly organize themselves. All the sand pythons had to do to crush the skeletons was crawl over them and their heavy bodies would crush them to death.

The corpse explosions that followed forced the serpents back and bought the undead a few precious seconds.

Athos and Treevor immediately mounted Simogo and flew to the vanguard. They managed to kill all the serpents thanks to roar influx and dragon breath, in addition to their spells.

The serpents were slain and turned into the undead, but the undead army encountered other nests of powerful monsters as they advanced, losing hundreds to thousands of skeletons with each encounter.

The monsters weren't mindless either and would attack their formation where they were weakest, avoiding more powerful undead like bone abominations or generals. The only thing that stopped the monsters from attacking was ordering Simogo to fly above the army while releasing his aura.

Even the bravest monsters would cower when they sensed a dragon's aura. Athos wanted to avoid revealing Simogo's existence, but this became irrelevant with the amount of times Simogo had to reveal himself to face monsters.

The skeletons finally sighed in relief when the monsters started to run away instead of attacking them, but the disasters kept coming.

An elemental storm was brewing near them and they only escaped thanks to Athos and Treevor's sensitivity.

Elemental storms happened when there was an excess of a single element in an environment, breaking the world's energy balance.

The effects of the storm varied depending on the element in excess, in this case, it was an earth element storm and generated a strong earthquake, opening a huge crater and swallowing everything that was too slow to escape.

Athos was relieved that they were able to get away from the magical storm, but they became unable to advance any further. The storm's area was too large, and they were forced to take a long detour to avoid being hit by the elemental storm.

That's when the skeletons decided they couldn't go on like this. They had greatly underestimated the dangers of the demihuman empire and had already lost over 10,000 skeletons in the battle, so they needed to revise their plans.

Athos never planned to be a nomad like most tribes, but he intended to get as far away from human borders as possible before starting to set up camp, away from the effects of the elemental storm. He wanted to at least cross the savannahs and reach the deserts in the far south, but it didn't seem possible.

Left with no choice, Athos sent the bird skeletons ahead to find a suitable place to form a temporary base. More than half of the bird skeletons were destroyed by flying monsters, but the ones that returned found a spot that seemed suitable.

The site was less than 20 kilometers from their position. a giant anthill almost 20 meters high. It was the nest of a race of fire ants, a species of ant 50 centimeters long, with a red carapace and jaws larger than its head.

Fire ants bit their enemies and latched onto them whenever they detected enemies, before setting their carapaces on fire. They would be burned along with the enemy, but the ants didn't care about their own lives, only the colony's survival.

Athos found them perfect not only because they would be easy to kill thanks to their small size, but because he could test whether he could turn insects into undead. Insects only have one exoskeleton, so it would be the perfect time to test it out.

They didn't need a lot of planning to destroy the anthill. It was enough to send the hawks to the hive and rain lightning on the anthill. The ants had no means of attacking the skeletons in the sky, so the queen was free to burn them as she pleased.

There were almost two thousand ants in the anthill. plus a queen that was three times the size of common ants. After everyone was killed, the skeletons marched to the anthill, before Athos tested it by turning ants into the undead.

Athos succeeded after a few tries. All he had to do was drain all the ants' insides and preserve the carapace to succeed. The ants' appearance remained almost unchanged, only the red carapace turned black while its interior was filled with darkness.

The earth element mages and dwarves quickly got to work, building a makeshift wall and constructing the camp's buildings.

They hoped that between the walls and traps they planned to create, they would be able to buy enough time for the skeletons to safely deal with the weaker monsters and at least buy time against the more powerful ones.

It was a total failure. Monsters with nearby nests considered them invaders and attacked them several times a day, further increasing their casualties. They had already lost 15,000 skeleton soldiers and the losses were only increasing.

To try to solve the problem, Athos ordered the high ranking skeletons to lead the new skeleton monsters and bone abominations and attack the monster nests. The attacks subsided for a few days, but Athos noticed that new monsters had migrated and taken over the now vacated territory, resuming attacks less than two days later.

They continued like this for another week and it was only the day before that the situation turned in favor of the skeletons. A flock of echo bats attacked them during the night, only to be taken down by Simogo's roar influx.

The dragon avoided using its racial abilities at camp, as these effects could still be harmful to other skeletons with reduced effects, but it was free to fight as it pleased in the sky.

Echo bats made the day's hunts much easier, attacking monsters from the sky without them being able to fight back. They could fire sonic attacks from a safe distance, so there were few monsters that could defend against them.

Very few savanna monsters had abilities that allowed ranged attacks, most monsters evolving to become physically stronger. Things were finally looking up for the skeletons and Athos wanted to keep it that way.

'Master, please come to the forge. We finally finished the job you gave us.' A hoarse dwarf's voice sounded in his head, snapping Athos and Treevor out of their reverie.

"You come?" Athos asked Treevor, who continued to stare at the map.

"Of course, I-" Before Treevor could finish speaking, skeletons guarding the north wall spotted a group of iron-tailed scorpions approaching them. It was a group of almost 500 and the traps were useless for them, so they would need the use of magic to eliminate them.

"Haah...go ahead, I'll handle it." Treevor sighed and left the room. He could have sent the skeleton mages, but most were already out of mana or went along with the skeletons to hunt monsters.

It was necessary to send skeleton mages along, as monsters couldn't use magic on their own and needed to turn corpses into undead.

Athos wasted no time and went to the forges, noting how most of the skeletons were standing around doing nothing. The only tasks the skeletons had were guarding the warehouses and walls, as well as building traps and fighting monsters when they attacked, so most just stood around doing nothing.

But Athos didn't bother to think of something to keep the skeletons busy. The longer they were idle, the more time they would have to think about their current condition and fall into despair, facilitating the corruption of their minds.

He had noticed that several skeletons had already given in to corruption and become truly loyal to him, despite having only the chain itself weighing on their minds.

Unlike skeletons that still resisted corruption, those truly loyal to him would have a bit more free will, not needing to follow his orders to the letter like most skeletons did.

Chapter 185 Dwarf knowledge

They would be much more useful when they worked for him willingly and Athos could finally begin his magical training.

'This is not the time to think about it.' Athos shook his head to clear his mind of random thoughts and entered the forge, being welcomed by absurdly hot winds on his face. Athos was forced to cover his face to avoid being burned.

The forges were exactly where the anthill had been, after the dwarves had adapted the place to be of use to them. The dwarves used earth magic to shape the underground tunnels, hardening the earth to create furnaces and boilers..

Athos had brought the blacksmith's equipment from the fortress, so all they needed to start work was adequate space.

"Hey, you shitty dwarves! How many times have I told you to be careful when separating concrete? Divine metals are very valuable and you need to take care of them like a son!" An angry dwarf's voice came from within the forge.

A dwarf skeleton holding a silver hammer and wearing a leather apron was yelling at the other dwarf skeletons, sometimes even hitting them in the head when they made stupid mistakes.

He was the best runesmith among the dwarves and Athos put him in charge of all other dwarven runesmiths. Athos had given him some tasks besides melting common metals into weapons and then enchanting them.

The dwarves discovered that son earth ability could inject corrupted mana into metals and keep them permanently corrupted, so most of the dwarves spent the last few days since they camped corrupting all of the army's weapons.

The number of runesmiths among the dwarves was just over two hundred, but everyone could use mana after becoming skeletons and using their racial abilities.

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Those with runesmith experience were tasked with undoing the enchantments on the mithril and dark mithril plates.

It was impossible to use the mithril plates they brought from the fortress, which were created using outdated techniques that could only be activated with a control room, so they would have to redo everything from scratch and in a size suitable for their small camp.

Instead, the dwarves would use their technology to create equipment that would remotely control large-scale spells.

The plan was for the dwarves to also slightly change the dark mithril plates so that they could be carried by a single skeleton and activated even when the undead marched again.

The dwarves were able to create magical connections between distant items, so the idea would not be impossible, but it would be something new for the dwarves and they needed a few days to create the blueprints for the project.

It would be a national-scale and revolutionary project for the human kingdoms, but it was a possibility for skilled dwarves. The only reason they hadn't created something like this until now was that they lived hidden in the mountains, so they had no reason to do something like this.

That's why they called Athos here. They had finished blueprints for the project and created the first prototype, so they needed his input to make design changes or continue production.

"If you're done scolding them, I'd like you to explain why you called me, Dwarvin." Athos crossed his arms and asked when he noticed that the dwarf did not stop shouting at the others.

"Oh, you're here master. I thought you were still out hunting. Come on, I'll show you what we've got ready." Dwarvin hadn't noticed Athos until now, but he wasted no time on pleasantries and dragged him deeper into the forges.

Athos saw several skeletons hammering weapons and melting metals, but most were focused on corrupting weapons. Strangely, he didn't see anyone working on the concrete mixed with divine mithril, even though he heard the chief shouting at the dwarves a moment ago.

"I heard you yelling at skeletons about separating the divine metal from the concrete, but I can't see the wreckage we brought up anywhere. Is it in other tunnels?" Athos did not keep his curiosity to himself and asked.

"Oh, about it. We only brought a few pounds to test if we could separate the two, but it was a headache to do that. I don't know what kind of technique humans used to mix two such different materials, but it was almost impossible to recover the metal." Dwarvin spoke with an irritated snort.

"If I'm not mistaken, they mixed the divine mithril powder while preparing the concrete." Athos spoke as he remembered Astrus' words. It was the method used in the fortress and probably the same as the order used.

"Anyway, we were able to separate the metal by melting the concrete and using air magic to collect the fragments." Dwarvin went on to explain.

“How did you use wind magic to separate metal? Wait, how did you use wind magic? Dwarves don’t have an affinity for wind.” Athos was even more confused by the explanation.

“We asked a skeleton mage with the affinity for help. Although we don’t have an affinity for wind, we dwarves have studied enough to know that it is possible to attract metals using electricity in the right measure. It’s a bit complicated to explain and requires a bit of prior knowledge, but I would be honored to teach you in the future, master.” Dwarvin spoke.

“I think I know what you’re talking about, but we can discuss this at a later time. Is this what you wanted to show me?” Athos asked as he looked at two dark mithril plates in front of him.

The plate was the size of a tower shield and nearly eight inches long, but mithril was a light metal, so even a child could lift the plate with no trouble.

It had a simple design, with slightly flattened edges and a skull with an open jaw in the middle. There was a leather handle and a stand on the back, so it really should have been used as a shield.

“Are already enchanted?” Athos asked as he lifted the shield with a single hand and fitted it to his right arm.

“Yes, but the enchantments are different from what originally used. We’ve kept the mana barrier, field of the dead and forced teleportation, but the detection spells will be useless when we’re marching.” Dwarvin spoke and began listing the shield’s enchantments.

“As we decreased the amount of metal, we also had to reduce the amount of enchantments, but we added a dwarven specialty. Kinetic Energy Absorption.” Dwarvin spoke in an excited tone, clearly proud of his work.

“Kinetic energy? What does it do?” Athos had never heard of the term before, so he didn’t understand what it was about.

“It’s the energy needed to move any object, but it’s easier said than done.” Dwarvin said and picked up the other shield, before activating the enchantment. “Attack me with all your might.”

Athos did not understand his words, but he asked no more questions and punched the shield with full force. He didn’t fortify his fist with mana, but his brute strength would be enough to dent iron armor.

But he wasn’t able to even scratch the shield. There wasn’t a hard impact as you’d expect, the feeling was more like punching a fluffy pillow.

“Did the enchantment mitigate my attack? Like an impact dispersion enchantment?” Athos questioned him, misunderstanding how the enchantment worked, but Dwarvin wasn’t done yet.

“Attack me again and you will understand, master.” Dwarvin continued speaking in the same excited tone, refusing to explain anything.

Athos punched the shield once more, but the moment his fist touched the shield, he received an impact that made his bones tremble. He looked down at his wrist in surprise, noticing that his knuckles were slightly darkened, the equivalent of redness for a human being.

"I think you already understand what the enchantment does." If Dwarvin still had a face, he'd be grinning from ear to ear right now.

"It absorbed my attack and then sent it back? How is that possible?" Athos asked in shock as a light of understanding flashed through his eyes.

"As I said before, kinetic energy is the energy used to move any object, and by absorbing it, I absorb the force behind the attacks. When I released the absorbed energy, you received the full force of your first punch and both blows canceled." Dwarvin puffed out his ribs proudly after he finished explaining.

"So you absorb attacks and then release them? That's amazing! How many attacks can the shield absorb before reaching the limit and how long can it keep energy stored?" Athos began to pepper him with questions as he realized how incredible was the enchantment before him.

He knew something so powerful had to have limitations, but it was still very useful.

"Make no mistake, master. This enchantment does not absorb attacks, only the force behind it. Whether it's a slash or an impact, even the kinetic energy behind spells that can physically touch objects like corrupted mana, earth magic or ice would be absorbed." Dwarvin quickly corrected Athos before he got the wrong idea.

"When I release the accumulated energy, it doesn't matter the nature of the attack absorbed, only the force behind the attack."

Chapter 186 Shared curse

"That just makes it all the more awesome. Enchantments like Impact Dispersion are vulnerable to slashing or piercing attacks, but this shield will parry any physical attack equally and even partially reduce some elements. I couldn't ask for more." Athos spoke with a greedy smile, inwardly wishing for such a shield.

He made a mental note to request that armor with these enchantments be custom-made for him before leaving camp.

"The power of this equipment is even greater than you might think. Each shield can absorb a limited amount of kinetic energy before being forced to release and temporarily go into cooldown, but that changes when used together."

"If we unite thousands of shields and connect them as the master intends, I am confident that it will be possible to withstand the attacks of a dragon like Simogo." Athos' jaw nearly dropped to the ground at Dwarvin's words.

In his mind, the power of dragons was something impossible to match, like a force of nature. Knowing that they could stop at least a dragon's physical blows made Athos' respect for the dwarven race reach new heights.

"If we produce these shields in large numbers, we can surround the entire army and block enemy attacks. If the skeletons use a formation like a phalanx, it should be possible to defend attacks from giant monsters as well." Athos was already thinking of a suitable strategy for when they resumed their march.

“Master, the kinetic energy absorption effect extends to the barrier, so the formation of the skeletons doesn’t matter as long as they surround the entire army.” Dwarvin explained and took the shields, activating the Corrupted Barrier and Kinetic Energy Absorption enchantment.

A 4 meter barrier of dark mana rose from both shields and overlapped each other, before merging together. A single barrier appeared and grew to 5 meters before Dwarvin quickly deactivated it.

They were in an underground forge with a 5 meter ceiling, so the growing barrier pressed down on the ceiling as it formed, almost causing the whole thing to collapse under their heads. The actual barrier size would be nearly 10 meters, larger than both previous barriers combined.

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“Phew. Sorry about that, master. As you can see, the dwarven bonding technique allows items to interact with each other, sharing the effects of enchantments and achieving effects greater than their individual parts.” Dwarvin explained as he scratched the back of his neck in embarrassment.

“Good. I didn’t see any problems with your work, so you’re allowed to start mass production. We’ll leave as soon as you finish your work, so keep me updated. Have you thought of a suitable name for your creation?” Athos asked.

“I called them a shared curse. A fitting name, I’d say.” Dwarvin spoke proudly.

“It really is an apt name. Keep me updated on the creation.” Athos spoke and was about to take leave of them, when Dwarvin interrupted him.

“Master, don’t you want to upgrade your equipment? Your armor is in tatters and your shield is only made of death iron. Your sword is your only decent equipment, but it’s made of magic wood and doesn’t even compare to real magic metals.” Dwarvin spoke irritated.

Dwarves had a strong affinity for metals and hated working with wood. Dwarves only used wood to create wands and staves, it was almost taboo to use wood to create weapons or armor.

“My personal gear can wait. I’m sending my armor in for repairs, but creating those shields is the priority. We need them to resume the march and even if I had full gear, it wouldn’t make much difference to the rest of the army.” Athos was wise and prioritized the creation of tower shields.

“Then allow me to make your equipment personally. I’ve already finished creating the blueprints and you’ve already approved them, so I can pass it on to the other runesmith dwarves who can create the shared curse without my help.” Dwarvin reassured him and this time Athos had no reason to refuse.

“In that case, I’ll leave it in your capable hands. But I have a question. Mithril seems too light to be used as a shield or armor and doesn’t seem to be very reliable. Are you sure you have enough material?” Athos asked as he lifted the tower shield easily.

“Mithril is excellent at conducting mana and has a strong resistance to magic, but you are right when you say that he is physically weak. The enemies we will face in the near future will all be powerful physical fighters, so physical resistance is a priority. That’s why I’m going to use something else to make your armor.” Dwarvin spoke and left the room.

He came back in a few seconds carrying a golden ingot with both hands. It was an ingot of uncorrupted adamant.

“Adamant?” Athos asked, recognizing the metal in one look. Emília had shown him the metal when she searched the wreckage and Athos remembered it easily due to its resemblance to gold.

“Exactly. Adamant has characteristics opposite to mithril, having incredible physical resistance, but being fragile to magic. The amount of enchantments it holds is less than other magical metals, but it makes up for it with its durability. It’s perfect for armor.” Dwarvin began to explain the properties of adamant.

“You’re the pro here, so I’ll trust your decision. But if I’m not mistaken, all we managed to regain was a few pounds, so I don’t think I have enough for a full suit of armor.” Athos spoke worriedly, but Dwarvin knew about this problem and already had a solution.

“I’ll use Simogo’s scales to make up for the lost metal and fangs to make a new sword for you. Dragon scales are an invaluable crafting material and can make up for the adamant’s poor mana conduction.” Dwarvin looked excited to get to work.

“Do you need any more materials or are the dragon parts enough?” Athos asked, starting to get excited. Dwarvin seemed to be planning a masterpiece for him, so Athos wanted to make sure it was the best it could be.

“The master’s affinities are fire, air, and darkness, but even after corrupting the metal and adding the scales, the only affinity adamant will have is darkness. I would need materials or reagents with the right affinities to create suitable enchantments for you. , but it seems difficult to find materials with an affinity for air in savannas and deserts.” Dwarvin spoke with regret.

Athos had collected several unknown plants with an affinity for earth and a few of the element of fire, but they found nothing with an affinity for water and air. Adding earth-element enchantments wouldn’t be helpful either.

Athos could activate enchantments of different elements without problem, but he himself preferred to avoid enchantments with different elements.

“I see. It’s a shame there aren’t any ingredients with an affinity for air or fire. We found some monsters with affinities other than earth and fire so I was hopeful about plants, but it was in vain.” Athos said in disappointment, but his words made Dwarvin realize his mistake.

“That’s it! Master, you are a genius! How did I not realize this before?” The dwarf started talking to himself, ignoring the confused Athos. “Even without magic ingredients, I can still use monster parts for elemental enchantments!”

“Really? Is that really possible? I thought monster parts would only be useful as a base material, like leather for armor or bones and fangs for making weapons.” Athos asked in surprise. He knew that monster parts would be used in alchemy as ingredients in the same way as plants, but he didn’t know that the same applied to the runesmith.

‘Looks like runesmith and alchemy have more in common than I thought. I must find a permanent base soon and begin my studies. I got an even better teacher to teach me, so it would be a waste not to learn.’ Athos thought.

“Master, I need a list of all the monster skeletons that exist in the fortress. I’m definitely going to create a masterpiece!” Dwarvin spoke with the same excitement as a child at an amusement park, and Athos ordered one of the high-ranking skeletons out to fulfill his request.

“I’ll let you work now. Just don’t forget to start production on the shared curses.” Athos emerged from the forge after Dwarvin turned and set to work, beginning to design his armor.

‘Um...what should I do now?’ Athos thought, realizing there wasn’t much he could do at the moment. Most of the skeletons had left to hunt and the few that remained were busy defending the base.

Athos had ignored the voices through the general link they all share, but it seems that a second group of monsters was approaching from the north, their power far greater than the last. It was a herd of rhinos with crystal horns and there were almost 300 of them.

‘Looks like Treevor is handling it well.’ Athos thought not too worried, looking through the eyes of a nearby hive hawk that Treevor was already fighting. He didn’t seem to be having any difficulties, so Athos didn’t interfere.

“I think I’ll make alchemical items and potions. Let’s see how much my skill has deteriorated after all this time without practicing.” Athos spoke while walking towards the warehouses.

Chapter 187 Vampires and Ghouls

“This should be the place.” A man wearing a black overcoat spoke, looking at a crumbling cairn in front of him. He was covering his entire body with the overcoat, ensuring that not an inch of his skin was exposed to sunlight.

It was still winter and the nights were longer than the days, but the man didn’t want to risk sunlight touching his skin.

He was a vampire, but his skin was olive and he had brown eyes, his fangs nowhere to be seen. He looked perfectly human despite his inhuman nature.

“Master, it looks like the undead destroyed everything before leaving for the Demi-human empire. They destroyed everything, even the surrounding land is completely dead.” A woman wearing an overcoat similar to his came forward and reported, but she had her hood down, not bothered by the light.

The woman was a ghoul, a lesser race of vampires. She was approximately 1.62 tall, with short, shoulder-length brown hair, and blue, slightly slanted eyes.

Ghouls were inferior relatives of vampires, but possessed monstrous characteristics, unlike their superior cousins. They were over 2 meters tall, with purple skin and bulging muscles all over their bodies, in addition to being completely bald.

Its hands ended in sharp claws and had two rows of fangs. Ghouls were not an actual race, but a temporary form for humans who died during the process of becoming a vampire.

Vampires could turn other species into new vampires in a blood ritual, where they would drain their victims of blood to near death before making them drink vampire blood.

If the ritual was successful, a new vampire would be born and join the community, but if it failed and the victim died during the process, the corpse would turn into a ghoul, a bloodthirsty beast that needed to feed constantly in order not to die, giving the species the nickname of corpse eaters.

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A ghoul's body was constantly decomposing and only constant feeding could stop the decomposition. Ghouls could evolve and complete their transformation into vampires after devouring enough corpses, but until the transformation was complete, they would be slaves to the vampires who raised them. The only advantage ghouls had over vampires was that they didn't share their weakness to sunlight until they evolved.

"Tch. they just made our job difficult." The vampire clicked his tongue in irritation before ordering his ghoul servant. "Let's search the ruins before deciding whether to continue the chase or give up and let another more suitable group continue."

"Even the collars of camouflage our master Illum gave us are unable to cover my weakness to sunlight and your need for food." The vampire fingered the mithril necklace around his neck as he spoke.

It was a magical item that camouflaged the cores of the undead and concealed their true strength, making them look like ordinary humans to anyone who saw them. The necklace even changed their shape as well, hiding all of their inhuman features and giving them the same appearance they had when they were humans.

But it would do nothing to cover the needs of the undead, so it would be nearly impossible for a vampire and a ghoul to follow the undead's trail across the desert.

Ghouls needed to eat flesh of their original species constantly and although vampires could feed on the blood of animals or monsters, it was only in emergencies and would weaken vampires with each feeding.

"Master, I found something." The ghoul didn't have to go far before she found something.

A small army of 100 black skeletons were standing a few hundred meters away, their bodies still as if they were statues. They were unarmed, so they couldn't be an army left behind to slow down enemies.

Neither understood why this small detachment had been left behind, but they still crept as close as they could without being detected, wanting to get whatever details they could about the new species.

They erased their presence and moved stealthily, using the rubble to avoid being seen, and got as far as a few dozen meters before stopping. There was no longer any debris big enough to cover them, so that was as far as they could go.

"What do we do now, master? Do we retreat or make contact?" The ghoul asked in a whisper, careful not to be overheard.

"Hum..." The vampire didn't respond right away, considering his options. 'On the one hand, we are all undead, so they shouldn't attack us at first sight, but on the other hand, these undead seem like slaves, like what happens to zombies or skeletons created by a lich.'

'If they were left behind with orders to attack anything that approached, we will be attacked regardless of our identity.' The vampire thought for a while before deciding to boldly step forward.

The death vision revealed to him that the skeletons were no big deal and even his servant could face them or at least escape alone. The only one slightly above average was a skeleton wearing a mage's cloak, but it wasn't a serious threat to him.

"We're going to talk to them. Remove the collar so they don't mistake us for living beings, but be prepared to fight if necessary." He ordered as he removed the necklace himself, his skin immediately turning pale and his eyes red, his canine teeth becoming three times longer.

"I hate doing this." The ghoul sighed and removed all her clothes before removing her necklace. His body grew to seven feet, his hair falling out while his skin turned purple. His ghoul form had no genitals, all ghouls had male structures, regardless of their original gender.

His face also changed, his jaw widening until it almost touched his ears while his nose sank into his face, leaving only two small nostrils.

"Let's get this over with, master." The ghoul spoke, her voice much deeper and sounding almost guttural in her true form.

The vampire walked first and stepped out of the rubble, the black skeletons immediately noticing his presence, but they didn't attack. His orders were to attack any approaching enemy and buy the mage time, but the approaching unknowns weren't attacking and they were also undead, so the skeletons hesitated on what to do.

"Who are you?" The skeleton mage stepped forward from the group of skeletons and asked, looking alternately between the vampire and the creature he didn't recognize using death vision.

Athos had put him in charge of the small army, so he became loyal and regained his ability to speak, although he was still not perfect.

In his eyes, the man possessed a red core in the fifth layer, while the monster behind him had a red and black core in the third layer.

"We come in peace. My name is Valko and the one behind me is my servant ghoul. We are undead sent here by the Death lord of the Nytrier continent to deliver a message for his master." Vampire Valko introduced himself with a polite wave.

He lied about who he works for, but saying he served the world tree wouldn't sit well with an undead."Nytrier continent?...You are...a little...far from home." The vampire's words only served to heighten the skeleton mage's distrust. An unknown organization from a different continent going after their master was not a good sign.

"Our network of influence extends even beyond the continental borders, as you can see. But enough about us. I already know that your master is not here and most likely went to the demihuman empire, but I would be happy if you would tell me if he has a destination in mind."

"I don't know about... my master's... plans... and even if... I did, why... would I tell... you?" The skeleton mage did not let his guard down and avoided revealing anything he could about his master.

“Why is your master in danger. You may consider yourself strong, but the world is vaster than you can even imagine and your power is nothing when compared to those truly strong. And by destroying the order’s portal network, your master angered one of these beings.” Valko tried to make the skeleton realize the danger, but the latter ignored him.

“The safety...of my master...does not concern you...vampire..and as I said...I was not informed...of the fate of...my master.” The skeleton mage crossed his arms, refusing to answer any more of the vampire’s questions.

Valko felt his pride hurt by the way a mere skeleton was treating him. Vampires were proud beings and did not take well to be looked down upon by others, easily falling for teasing.

“If your master has already left and you’re still here, that means you’ve been left behind, doesn’t it? I really feel sorry for you. Being abandoned by your master must be really sad.” Valko bowed to the skeleton in mock regret, her pride refusing to let the skeleton go without returning the insult.

“My master... gave me a... mission... I will... stay here... until I fulfill it... being abandoned... makes no difference... any.” The skeleton mage answered without hesitation, surprising the vampire.

Chapter 188 Blood magic

‘If this guy is so loyal to his master, why leave him behind like that? It’s almost revolting to leave someone so loyal behind.’ Valko thought with regret. He didn’t imagine that Athos could make anyone loyal to him, nor that the mage was just a suicidal soldier.

No undead could force a slave to be truly loyal. They could force them to obey their orders, but the mind would remain free to think what it wanted.

Athos was the only one with the ability to corrupt souls and force the loyalty of others, but Valko had no way of knowing that.

“You seem like a good and loyal man. It’s a shame your master discarded you here. I know you can’t disobey the orders you’ve been given, but why not set aside loyalty to a master who doesn’t deserve it and join us? Even with your low power, we’ll treat you much better.” Valko spoke with her best professional smile.

His offer seemed fair in his head and although Valko knew that it would be impossible for the skeleton to disobey the orders received, if the skeleton still wished to live, he would contact his lord and ask to release him. The world tree would definitely be able to free him, so his words weren’t empty.

Unfortunately for Valko, his words were an insult to Athos and the skeleton would not allow it.

“Don’t you dare talk about my master like that, you leech!” The skeleton mage screamed, releasing the spell he had been casting all this time as he ordered the skeletons forward.

His rain of knives spell generated a shower of shards of black ice that hit a large area around the vampire and ghoul. Each shard was four inches long and sharp as a dagger and moved with the speed of an arrow.

The skeleton had spent almost half of its total mana on the spell, wanting to end the fight quickly.

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"Tch, you started it." A vein appeared on Valko's forehead as he felt insulted by the mage's words. He conjured a barrier of blood around himself and the servant, easily blocking the black ice daggers.

Vampires were unable to use corrupted magic like other undead species, but could use blood magic instead.

The blood barrier was liquid and only slowed the shards' momentum, causing them to fall to the ground around the vampire without doing any damage.

"Go and destroy them. They were the ones who started the attack, so don't hold back." Valko ordered the ghoul who was just watching until now.

She bolted as soon as she heard the order, leaping over the undead and taking aim at the mage in the back row. Ghouls couldn't use magic because their half-corrupted blood core was unstable, but their bodies circulated black red mana, increasing their physical capabilities beyond what an ordinary vampire could do.

The skeleton mage wasn't able to react to the ghoul's speed and knew he would be unable to dodge his attacks, so he didn't even try. He just snapped his fingers and detonated the ice shards.

The ghoul landed on him a second later, its claws piercing his skull like an eggshell. Its black core detonated and covered the ghoul in a cloud of darkness and its bones pierced its purple skin, making the undead scream in pain.

Ghouls were weak to darkness, the red-black mana that coursed through their bodies possessing a fine balance. The explosion of darkness drained some of the red energy coursing through his body, breaking the balance and letting the darkness eat away at his body.

The ghoul fell to the ground and began to thrash around, her body visibly rotting. She released mana as fast as she could to correct the balance in her body as she scrambled away from the cloud of darkness.

Corpse explosion created a cloud of darkness that wouldn't disperse immediately, so she would never stop suffering as long as she were in the middle of the cloud of darkness.

"Idiot! How did you fall for such an obvious trick?" Valko yelled at the fallen ghoul, but he couldn't get close easily.

The exploding ice shards generated a black ice mist and froze his blood magic, sealing his main weapon.

Valko only possessed an affinity for air, so he couldn't heat the temperature either. He released blades of wind that sliced the skeletons to pieces, taking care to stay away from the blast he knew was coming.

He jumped back quickly, holding his hood tightly to make sure the sun didn't hit him. The blasts of darkness from the destroyed skeletons generated a second mist of darkness, but the vampire was already far away.

'This suicide trick is good for catching enemies off guard, but any agile fighter can easily dodge these explosions.' Valko thought, always keeping a safe distance from the skeletons as she tried to circle them and reach the ghoul.

He quickly grabbed the ghoul by the scruff of the neck and dragged her away from the mist of darkness, before slashing his own wrist and pouring the blood into the ghoul's mouth. It was Valko's blood that created the ghoul, so her blood would serve to restore the body's balance, although it would not serve to feed her.

"Haah...sorry about that, master. I was impulsive." The ghoul apologized as she felt the darkness in her body calming down and her blood mana regained balance.

"Your punishment may come later. We have to think of a way to fix this mess." Valko thought as she massaged her temples. They came here as peaceful messengers and starting a fight was not part of their mission.

His master Illum would understand that it was the skeletons that started the aggressions, but Valko couldn't deny that he had provoked the enemies.

"Let's call the master and report what happened here. I'll apologize for provoking the skeletons, but they were the ones who started the attacks. For now, let's just find a suitable place and wait for the sun to go down." Valko spoke and covered her injured wrist, the wounds quickly healing.

They put the collars back on and returned to her human appearance, but while Valko looked exactly the same, the ghoul looked nearly 10 years older, with several strands of her hair turning white.

Drinking your master's blood restored balance in your body and stopped decay, but it would do nothing to make up for the lost red mana.

"Let's collect some of the broken bones, it might be useful to find out something about these skeletons. It should also reduce our punishment." The ghoul spoke as she lowered her head in shame.

She was a rookie recently turned into a ghoul and this was her second mission, so she still wasn't used to her body and got carried away by the power.

"Good idea." Valko agreed with her idea and began to collect the bone fragments, starting with the bones of the mage skeleton. He was leader and the only mage among them, so his bones were of higher quality.

"Hmm? What is it?" While rummaging through the mage's tattered cloak, Valko found the corrupted wooden wand, as well as the teleportation crystal. Both were valuable items, as corrupted wands were not something on the continent Caprio and teleportation crystals were rare and highly coveted no matter where they were.

'The order's portal tower was destroyed, so even if this crystal was from the humans, they would have no way of tracking it. I could make good money selling it on the black market or keep it for myself as an emergency measure.' Valko thought greedily, already considering the crystal as his own.

He stowed the crystal in the dimensional ring on his finger along with bones he could salvage, while removing a corpse, a few bottles of fresh blood, and a communication cube.

Valko drank all the blood and threw the corpse to the ghoul, before activating the cube. He selected his master's contact and waited for the other side to pick up.

Less than 10 seconds passed before Illum answered the call.

"Were you able to contact the undead?" Illum asked once the call was connected, eager for news. Kalesi was pestering him daily for news and Illum was on the verge of allowing her to send an army to Caprio, just so she would stop pestering him.

"I have bad news, master." Valko bowed in apologies as he recounted his failure, emphasizing the fact that he wasn't the one who started the assaults.

Illum listened in silence and spoke as soon as Valko finished reporting. "It was just a group left behind, wasn't it? So they weren't important and you don't have to worry about them. I don't understand why they would leave a small group like that behind, but it doesn't matter."

"Go back to the nearest town with one of our bases and deliver the bone fragments to the base superior. It will be impossible for the two of you alone to continue this mission, so you are dismissed." Illum didn't mind a small mistake like that, but he still dismissed them from the mission.

"Are we giving up contacting them?" Valko asked curiously, but Illum looked at him like he was crazy.

"What? If I did something like that, Kalesi would rip off every single one of my leaves and make me eat them. No, I just dismissed you because it would be impossible for a sun-sensitive species like you to continue the search across the desert." Illum spoke as a shiver ran down his spine, making Valko suspect that something similar had happened in the past.

Chapter 189 Negligence

"On the other side of the desert, there is a realm of the undead that are adapted to the desert. The black skeletons seem to be getting closer and closer to the desert, so I'll ask them to send search parties to go after them."

"But master, they would have to search the entire desert to find the skeletons. Don't you think it's a bit absurd to ask them to find the skeletons?" Valko asked doubtfully, but Illum just smiled mysteriously at him.

"I'll fix it. Just make sure you come back in one piece." Illum spoke mysteriously and by the look in his eyes, Valko knew he wouldn't take any more questions.

'I can't tell him that the undead realm already dominates the entire Southeast. It would be problematic if this information leaked out to the human realms and the order and church decided to act. It's geographically impossible for them to do anything, but I'd rather not take the risk.' Illum thought.

He trusted Valko, but he knew that humans developed mind-reading spells and the undead weren't immune to that.

'It is thanks to Selena that a new species of undead was born. She managed to build an entire kingdom and dominate a third of the southern deserts in just under 100 years. She's constantly sending out soldiers and search troops and has already explored nearly half of the deserts in search of her lost son, so it should be easy for her to add another target to the searches.'

"Anyway, you already have your orders and I have work to do, so I'm going to hang up." Illum didn't wait for an answer and hung up the call, making Valko cheer internally.

“The master didn’t care about small skeletons being destroyed, so there shouldn’t be any more questions and I’ll get to keep the teleportation crystal for myself.” Valko smiled as she played with the crystal in her right hand, before turning to her servant.

“If you’re done eating, let’s go.” Valko spoke to her, being careful of the corpse’s blood spatter. She had removed the pendant again so she could eat the corpse efficiently and was making a mess of it and spilling guts all over the place.

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“I’ll go ahead. Follow me when I’m done.” Valko lifted the corner of her lips in disgust and led the way.

The ghoul gave a thumbs-up, never stopping to eat.

At the base of the world tree.

Illum wasted no time and immediately called Selena, but it took almost half an hour to get a response.

“...What you want?” Selena asked dryly as soon as she answered the call. She was approximately 1.69 meters tall, with snow-white hair and her blue eyes looking at Illum with a coldness that could freeze the ocean that separated them.

Even though Illum was on the same level as a God and could actually freeze the ocean between continents, he flinched in embarrassment at her gaze, unable to meet her eyes.

Illum felt a deep shame and guilt for what happened to Selena, as it was one of his direct descendants who caused her such harm. Her son Kastil had committed unforgivable crimes to Selena, driving her into such deep despair that she became one of the undead.

“I’m sorry to interrupt you while you’re busy, but I need you to do me a favor. An undead has appeared in the west of the continent and gathered a small army before heading out into the desert. I would like you to contact him peacefully.” Illum asked calmly.

“One second in less than 100 years? For you to be here asking me this despite knowing I’m at war, it must be very important. A new species perhaps?” Selena asked with mild interest.

“Yes, black skeletons, possibly some kind of lich, as it was able to turn tens of thousands of corpses into undead in the short span of a few weeks. I don’t mean to ask anything absurd of you, just that you add the skeletons in the searches you already doing through the desert.”

“That... won’t be a problem. An army of black skeletons is hard to miss.” Selena spoke and tried to end the call, but Illum kept talking.

“Selena, how is the search for your son going? You know that if you need my help, I will do everything possible to help you. Just allow me to help you look for my grandson-” Illum tried to offer a sympathetic shoulder , but it was an error.

“Don’t you dare call him grandson! You are nothing to him! You are nothing to me! I don’t need your compassion and much less your help. I will find my son alone and reunite my family again .” Selena jumped to her feet, screaming furiously at him.

A dark aura leaked from her body as she shifted forms, her body shifting into something ghoulish to match her fury. His body began to stretch to nearly eight feet, looking unnaturally thin and disproportionate.

His previously snow-white hair darkened to pitch-black, growing until it nearly touched the ground. Selena’s face warped, her eyes, mouth and nostrils turning into empty holes, the darkness contrasting with her white skin.

It was Selena’s true form, the progenitor of all banshees. Selena was able to suppress her transformation and maintain the same appearance she had in life, but whenever she lost control of her emotions, her body would naturally revert to it form.

“...” Illum felt a tightness in his chest when he saw Selena’s form. He knew how much suffering she had gone through after hearing her story and he felt guilty for all the harm his son had caused her.

Illum felt even worse when he learned that his grandson had died in the desert. Unlike Selena, he had no hope that a 10 year old who had just awakened to her core would be able to survive the desert and all the monsters that inhabited it.

He wanted to help Selena come to terms with the loss of her son and move on, maybe even leave the mainland because of the bad memories that plague her, but things always ended up like this.

Illum wanted her to leave the Caprio continent and restarting the Nytrer life, but to no avail. The most he could do was convince Selena to allow a few dozen banshees who no longer wanted to live on the mainland to move to Nytrer.

They were the ones who feared Kastil and wanted to stay as far away from him as possible.

Since becoming undead, Selena has not only expanded into the desert, but also into the Sea of Trees. She declared war on Kastil and against all odds, actually fought a battle, rather than just being defeated unilaterally.

“I apologize for that. I really have no right to call the child my grandson after everything you’ve been through without me knowing.” Illum agreed with her words and bowed in apology.

“It was my neglect to check on my children’s situation that caused your grief. I know my apologies will not sound hollow to you, but I am truly sorry for your loss.” He continued to bend over until he heard the strange sound coming from the other end of the call.

“Lift your head. You’re right, your excuses ring hollow to me. Even after knowing the harm Kastil did to me and my son, the harm he continued to do to all the elves left behind in the sea of trees, you stood still.” Selena took a deep breath and regained her calm, managing to return to her elven form.

“You say you regret not keeping an eye on that madman, but even after learning the truth, you just stood by and did nothing. You’re a hypocritical bastard and I don’t need help from someone like you.” Selena said grudgingly, almost losing control of her form again.

"I'll order my search units to search for your undead, but never contact me again. I don't want to look at your face or hear your voice ever again. If you need anything, ask Master Kalesi to get in touch." Selena said sharply and hung up, not giving him time to answer.

"Damn it." Illum muttered with regret. Selena's words really hurt him, mostly because it was true.

Illum couldn't explain that thanks to the non-intervention pact, he couldn't interfere with mortals. If he tried to act, Eishin would definitely interfere and use it as an excuse to start a fight, the way that bored God was.

He had already sent emissaries to the Sea of Trees and tried to reach his son, but contact with all emissaries was lost, so it was only likely that Kastil silenced them. Illum didn't know how his son was capable of committing such absurd crimes, but he knew that his son was a hopeless case that needed to be put down, he just didn't have the means to do so.

The same deal that prevented enemies from directly interfering and aiding the human realms also sealed his hands and prevented him from putting an end to his own son's madness.

"Haah...what to do?" Illum wondered with a weary sigh. None of his subordinates were powerful enough to kill a yggdrasil sprout, no matter how weak it is.

Chapter 190 Darkwood

Illum also considered the possibility of his servants joining forces with Selena and attacking Kastil as a united front, but there was a better chance that the sun would rise in the West than that Selena would accept his aid.

The only saving grace was that Kastil was still in the early stages of growth, so his avatar was unable to move away from his real body and the influence he could exert outside the sea of trees was limited by the host he could possess, so Selena would be safe as long as she didn't attack him personally.

In the southeast of the Caprio continent, in the darkwood forests.

"Huff...huff..." Selena was breathing heavily after destroying everything in her reach. She was in her office when she got the call from Illum and went into a rage as soon as the call ended.

Selena was able to stand her ground as she faced Illum, but as she looked into those amber eyes and listened to that voice so much like Kastil's it reopened wounds in her mind that had barely been closed.

"Feeling better, daughter?" Malena appeared behind her suddenly and started rubbing her back reassuringly. His body looked translucent like a ghost, as if it would disappear at any moment.

She was a phantom, a rare breed of undead without a physical body. Phantoms possessed bodies made of pure energy and were the only species that lacked a mana core, the life force spread throughout the entire body to keep the energy body stable.

"No, I still feel like crap and helpless. No matter what I do, that bastard's face keeps appearing in front of me. I know Illum isn't like that man, but I can't let go of associating the two with each other." Selena spoke as she struggled to keep her form in check.

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"We understand, daughter. You don't have to justify yourself to us." Trevor appeared at her side and hugged her to reassure her. Just like Malena, he was a phantom and was linked to Selena.

A banshee's scream was capable of conjuring the souls of fresh corpses, turning the souls into phantoms. A banshee's scream would affect all spiteful souls, without consuming a single drop of mana or life force from the banshee itself.

His voice would only shape the energy dispersed throughout the corpse, so there was no cost for the banshee who conjured them.

Trevor and Malena hugged her from both sides and let their daughter cry, just like they did when she was a child. They stayed like that for nearly half an hour before she calmed down enough to regain her composure.

"Sniff...thanks for helping me, I'm already better now. Staying here crying won't solve anything. While I'm here moaning uselessly, my baby is alone in this desert in danger and needs my help." Selena wiped her tears and spoke determinedly, but her parents looked at her with pity.

Since becoming a banshee, something had broken in Selena's mind. Treevor would be a young adult after 100 years, but she still thought of Treevor as a child who needed her protection.

Her mind was fragile and she went into a frenzy whenever Trevor or Malena tried to explain that Treevor was no longer a child or that the chances of him being alive were slim.

Trevor and Malena were realistic and had already accepted their grandson's death, but continued the search anyway, fearing that Selena would lose her sanity for good if they gave up.

A sudden knock on the office door interrupted them, making the three of them get up and Selena hastily pack her clothes, despite the precarious state of the office.

"Matriarch, I have news – what happened here?" A phantom orc bent to get through the door and was startled by the destruction of the environment.

"It doesn't matter. But you came at a good time, Gorok. I have a mission for you." Selena forcefully changed the subject, feeling ashamed of the destruction. She explained the meeting with the illum and the rise of the new undead.

"New undead, huh? I wonder if they're as strong as you, matriarch." Gorok asked with an excited smile.

"We won't know until we meet him in person, but I doubt that. My little girl is the best." Trevor spoke arrogantly, making Malena roll her eyes.

"Gorok, did you get any news to come here? You don't often come out of the desert." Selena asked hopefully for good news. She was always hopeful when someone came to report something and always ended up disappointed in the end, but things were different this time.

"I think we finally found a lead. A search party scouring the far south near the cliffs and beaches found a suspiciously dead forest and decided to investigate, finding a runesmith lab deep underground in the forest."

"A dead forest in the middle of the desert and a secret laboratory? Someone killed a spirit?" Trevor asked, not too surprised by the news.

The desert was an almost lifeless place and some of the oases that existed were artificially created by spirits. It was rare for spirits to be attacked, as both monsters and demihumans depended on oases for survival, so all living beings in the desert avoided conflict with spirits.

"That's what the investigation team thought when they decided to investigate the forest, but what they found was different. The laboratory was full of weapons made of magic wood, but some of them were different from the rest." Gorok spoke and drew a bastard sword from his back.

It felt like a short sword in his hands, but that wasn't what caught their attention. It was a small green branch resembling a finger on the hilt of the sword that attracted all their attention.

They immediately recognized a branch of yggdrasil, but what silenced the room was the shape of the branch. It was an adult-sized green finger and there was only one being in this world that had a yggdrasil branch in that shape.

The truth was, Treevor had lived on the coast for a while and had set up a workshop underground, just as he had in the forest of Faltra. Treevor had experimented to test whether he could improve the quality of weapons made from magical wood using fragments of his yggdrasil arm, and had failed miserably.

Treevor had no nerve endings in his arm, so other than a brief discomfort from losing a limb, he could rip parts of his arm off without any problems.

His yggdrasil arm possessed a quality far superior to ordinary magic wood, and instead of increasing the quality of ordinary wood, the quality of the yggdrasil dropped to suit the wood.

He was never able to solve the problem, so he just gave up on the experiment and left the coast a few years later when he got tired of the seascape and looked for another place to live.

"M-my baby..." Selena began to sob as she gripped the sword with trembling hands, her voice cracking as her knees gave out. She touched Yggdrasil's finger and wept profusely, her mind a chaotic mess between the joy of finally finding a clue about Treevor and the fear that it was all an illusion.

"This weapon design is identical to the one I taught Treevor when he was a kid." Malena joined in the tears as she noticed the weapon's simple pattern. She had only taught Treevor simple patterns because of her young age and had never had the opportunity to teach her anything else, so it only took one look to recognize her.

"..." The only one who stayed silent was Trevor, but why was he fighting the emotion. He quickly wiped away a single lone tear and asked after swallowing a lump of saliva, "Do they find anything else?"

The two weeping women lifted their heads in unison at these words and looked at Gorok hopefully, but their words were a cold water bath.

"The forest had been dead for a long time and any traces there were have been erased by time, but there's no need to panic. There were no signs of a struggle anywhere, the forest died naturally without the presence of a spirit and unable to survive with the lack of nutrients." Gorok spoke with mixed feelings.

He was relieved that Treevor was alive somewhere, but where was that place that was the problem. The desert was vast and hoping to find him, only to find he died in some random place would be too much for Selena's failing heart.

She was barely able to keep herself mildly sane in her current state, any more blows would drive her mad.

"If there are no signs of a struggle then my baby must have left of its own accord. My baby is intelligent and must travel like a nomad just like we used to." Selena dried her tears and started ordering.

"Send all search teams to investigate the cliffs and nearby areas before continuing the search along the mainland coast. We finally found something about my baby and I won't stop until I find him."

"And what do we do about Illum's request? If we divert our teams to shore, we're unlikely to meet up with them." Trevor asked, but Selena just huffed in annoyance.

"Illum and this new species can die for what I care. My baby is priority!" She yelled and grabbed a comm item to order all search parties.