

Legion lich 211

Chapter 211 Supreme elder

"Has anyone arrived for the trial or am I the first?" Eirin asked in a disinterested voice as she sat down on the couch and grabbed one of the goblets, the mage quickly getting to his feet and pouring wine. She was really desperate to have been the first to arrive and speak privately with some of the elders to secure support, but she had to maintain the image of a respectable elder.

'Pfft...!' Canan laughed at his performance, but Eirin ignored it.

"Yes, supreme elder. The elder of light, air and fire has already arrived and is in other rooms awaiting the start of the trial." The mage informed, pouring the wine and asking if she needed anything else.

'The light elder is an ally of the dark elder and the new leader of the faction after he was arrested, so he is a guaranteed ally. The elders of fire and air are neutral and avoid getting involved in political discussions, but they must not oppose the dark elder paying for his crimes on the front lines.' Eirin thought, glad that her adversaries were not yet present.

'Having all your opponents gone is not a good sign, Eirin. It means they're together and planning something big.' Canan warned her, throwing cold water on Eirin's excitement.

'I know, that's why I need to meet with the neutral elders and secure their cooperation. They may not be the dark elder's allies, but I hope they are my allies.' Eirin answered. She had tried to gain the elders' support, but their responses had been lukewarm at best.

Both said that they would not oppose the other elders' decision and did not intend to intervene in the trial, participating only because they had to.

"Tell them both to come here, I'm requesting their presence." Eirin spoke, realizing she had been silent too long and the mage was starting to sweat with nervousness.

"Understood, supreme elder. I will notify them of your request immediately." The mage bowed and left the room, leaving Eirin alone.

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'So, any ideas on how to turn those two elders over to my side?' Eirin asked her brother, as all her previous attempts had been in vain.

'Try to get a deal. You've tried to provide resources and financial support for your magic researches before, but any mage who rises to the rank of elder already has his own sources of magic resources.' Canan criticized her previous methods.

'Offer knowledge, a way to overcome the growth bottleneck they're stuck in, or something that only you can offer and they can't refuse. That's the basics of negotiation.' Canan was exasperated by his sister's lack of negotiating skills.

'You know I already tried that, you were there to laugh at my attempts.' Eirin growled. 'The only one who is in a growth bottleneck is the fire elder, but that woman is stubborn and insists on overcoming her limitations alone.'

'Your research is also something unique that I don't have knowledge of, so I don't have useful knowledge to share. She would need to share her secrets and research with me so I can understand and then help her, but we both know that's impossible.'

'And the elder of the air? I'm sure he wouldn't refuse your help or knowledge, even if it's not your area of expertise.' Canan suggested, realizing that it would be useless to try to convince the Fire Elder to do anything. That woman was too stubborn to be talked into doing something she didn't want to.

'He is the one I intend to convince today, even if I have to make some disadvantageous concessions here. The air elder is a weather mage, runesmith and a golemancer, so we have knowledge we can trade.'

'Just avoid sounding desperate and revealing too much. That mysterious bastard is as cunning as a snake and his intentions are unknown to us. The only thing that matters to him is the magic research itself.' Canan warned her.

'I know and that's why I want your help, brother.' Eirin asked, making puppy dog eyes as she ruffled her hair, the same gesture she used whenever she wanted to ask a favor. It was a mania he'd had since he was a child, over a millennium ago, but Canan always gave in.

He was about to answer, but a knock on the door interrupted the telepathic conversation.

"Supreme Elder, both elders have agreed to meet with you and are waiting here." The mage spoke from outside and only entered when Eirin gave permission.

The mage entered, followed by a woman wearing a red cloak and a metal bird on her shoulder.

The woman wore a red cloak that covered her from head to toe and her face was scarred as if she had just woken up, yawning lazily. The woman appeared to be in her mid-40s, with long black hair streaked with age-gray streaks. His name was Valk Seit, the fire elder.

The metallic bird was approximately 50 centimeters long and had silvery feathers. He looked exactly like a silver hawk, except for the magic stones for eyes. The bird was a golem created by the air elder, remotely controlled by magic.

Eirin just nodded at the strange pair and offered them a seat. The woman and the bird bowed their heads slightly in respect and the woman sat down, while the bird just stood on the arm of the couch.

The assistant mage bowed and left the room when he received a glare from Eirin, leaving the elders alone in the room. He knew a secret deal was going on here, just as he knew he should pretend he didn't know anything and erase from the records that the elders had met before the trial.

Similar things had already happened in the past and all jailers who tried to say something mysteriously disappeared, while those who kept silent received a promotion and a huge salary bonus.

It was the reason why he applied to serve the supreme elder, as it was the fastest way to a promotion.

"I thank you for granting my request and for meeting with me today. I believe you already know why I have called the two of you here, but let me repeat myself. It is strictly necessary for the dark elder to participate in the war that is to come, and I want your support to ensure he's there on the front lines." Eirin spoke in a serious tone, but both elders knew that and had already given their answer.

“With all due respect, supreme elder, both the fire elder and I are aware of the situation we find ourselves in and have already given our opinion on the matter.” The metal hawk spoke, its voice fully human despite the fact that it was speaking through a golem.

“As the bird said, I have no intention of getting involved in stupid power struggles. Besides, that stupid old man has committed countless crimes and is now paying for it.” The fire elder spoke as she tried and failed to hide how uninterested she was about the trial.

She grabbed a bottle of wine and downed it in one gulp before continuing. “The destruction of the portal tower was an accident and not a terrorist attack as the water elder tried to make it out to be, but that wasn’t his only crime.”

“Elder Louis possessed a list of crimes longer than a giant’s arm, some heinous crimes that even someone callous as I abhor, and others that go against all laws of the order. Countless careers of talented mages have been destroyed at their hands.”

“Personally, I believe he should be imprisoned for eternity, but I know that’s impossible. I also know that the opposition is no better than he is and I’m sure they have a list of crimes almost as long, so I remain impartial in judgment.” The fire elder honestly spoke her opinion and the bird nodded in agreement.

The air elder was the dark elder’s longtime business partner, but that was the extent of their relationship. He would never risk opposing the Water Elder’s faction for someone else.

“I know this and I agree that the dark elder deserves the worst of fates, but his power is still needed, so I suggest he pay for his crimes on the front lines rather than uselessly rotting in a cell.” Eirin understood their position, but she couldn’t give up here.

“That would be doable, if Louis weren’t a cunning, traitorous bastard. The same power that makes him so indispensable to war also makes him a dangerous variable. If we’re really going to put him on the battlefield as a prisoner, who will watch him and make sure he doesn’t run away?” The golem bird spoke.

“He is a powerful mage and an even better necromancer. Only another elder could restrain him, then it would be necessary for another elder to keep watch over him. Or does the supreme elder intend to watch over him personally?” Valk questioned her about something that bothered not only her, but the entire upper echelon of the order as a whole.

For some reason unknown to them, Eirin had declared that she would not participate in the war against Doravon.

Chapter 212 Pre-trial settlements

The elders knew about the gods’ non-intervention agreement, but they didn’t know that Eirin and Canan were one. Eirin didn’t trust any of them to share such an important, intimate secret, so they were oblivious to her unique status.

To the elders of the Order of Magic, Canan was the Emperor and God of the Makima Empire, while Eirin was his younger sister and demigoddess, as well as the founder of the Order of Magic.

It made no sense to them that she should not participate in the war, as the non-intervention agreement was not supposed to stop her. They were assuming she would be busy fighting Setlan and the Fae alliance's attempt to retake their territories from the Makima empire, but she has yet to be seen on the battlefield.

"A couple of masters of magic should be enough to keep an eye on him, though not enough to defeat him in battle. We could also use energy signature tracking spells to ensure he can't run away." Eirin suggested.

Two masters of magic wouldn't be able to defeat an elder, but they would be enough to hold him back for a while while they called for reinforcements.

The two elders began to think about her words, wondering if it would be enough to arrest an elder. They both had power to deal with at least six masters of magic, but that would take a lot of time and require them to be at their peak.

A pair of magic masters wouldn't last long against either of them, but it would buy time while they called for reinforcements. The order stipulated that during the war against Doravon at least two elders should always be on hand to offer reinforcements at any time, so the chances of him escaping greatly diminished.

Furthermore, the dark elder's strategic value also needed to be taken into account. Unlike other elders, he had an army of his own, in addition to undead generals. If his own magic was taken into account, he would be one of the strongest elders in the order of magic.

'Now is the time to make the offer.' Canan spoke in his mind, noticing that the elders looked hesitant.

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"Furthermore, I have an offer for you, should you decide to help me. I am willing to share some of my runsmith knowledge with you, air Elder. And as for you, fire Elder, I can teach you how to overcome your growth bottleneck, or even help her in her research." Eirin said in a silvery voice, hoping that would be enough to convince at least the air Elder.

"I appreciate the offer, supreme elder, but I must overcome my limitations alone. As for my research, it is something I intend to keep for myself and my disciples. But I can still see the logic behind your argument." Valk spoke and Eirin's expression brightened for an instant, but she quickly controlled herself.

"Instead of helping me with my research, I'd like to propose a different deal." Valk suddenly looked anxious, but masked it almost perfectly, only Canan's trained eyes picking up on her intentions.

"What kind of deal?" Eirin asked as her eyes narrowed.

"I want you to give me control of Dune Volcano and the region surrounding it. The region belongs to the empire, but I'm sure Supreme Elder can easily achieve that. If you promise me control of the volcano, I will support your decision at trial, whatever it may be."

Eirin racked her brain as she tried to remember where the volcano was and if it held any resources important to the order of magic or the Makima empire, but the name was unfamiliar to her.

'It is an active volcano that is close to the coast of the empire, in the extreme south of the continent. The volcano erupts every 4~5 years, so there are no towns nearby. The volcano also spews obsidian, so miners travel to the region a few months after the eruptions are over and collect the stuff.' Canan explained, vaguely remembering the region.

Obsidian was a magic metal rich in fire element and a rare resource, but it wasn't something that essential. They had dozens of other mines of the same metal, so giving up a single one wouldn't be such a big loss.

'Is the region important to the empire?' Eirin asked quickly, as she drummed her fingers and pretended to be doing mental calculations.

'No, we can give it away easily. The amount of obsidian it produces is minimal and the value of the region itself is low, so feel free to cede the volcano.' Kanan replied.

"Okay, I'll negotiate with the emperor for the Dune volcano." Eirin said and offered her hand, which Valk readily accepted.

"What about you? Do you accept my offer or do you have something different in mind?" She turned to the golem next and asked.

"What kind of knowledge are we talking about? There's no point negotiating just to have you teach me something I already know." the golem spoke, scratching its beak with its left wing in a thoughtful pose.

"I will teach you the method of mixing different magical metals without their different natures conflicting with each other." Eirin spoke, causing the magic stones in the golem's eyes to glow, the equivalent of eyes widening in surprise.

'Are you sure you want to do this? This is an important secret worth more than the ass of a bastard like Louis.' Canan spoke doubtfully, but Eirin was firm in her decision.

'I wouldn't have made that offer either, if it weren't for that golem in front of us. It is made of mithril mixed with golden copper.' Eirin spoke, surprising Canan.

She had been sneakily investigating the small golem since he entered the room, much to Canan's surprise. At the level they were at, mana vision was no longer necessary and they could see mana normally and with a depth that mana vision was unable to match.

They spent most of their time suppressing this ability, as it would be a nuisance to see mana in everything they looked at. Identifying a magical metal and its quality by the amount of world energy and elemental energy was simple for them.

'Air Elder is already starting to learn to mix different magic metals. He still hasn't figured out how to combine them perfectly, but it's just a matter of time. We'd better sell the secret of how to do it while it's still worth something.' Eirin explained, barely resisting the urge to puff out her chest with pride.

Just like she said, the golem was made of mithril and its interior coated with golden copper, a magical metal rich in the element of air. The metals weren't perfectly connected and the mithril was rejecting the excess air element in the gilded copper, but they were definitely connected.

“Are you sure you want to share this?” The golem asked in a clearly anxious voice, as the light from the magic stones narrowed. It was what he had been working on for the last few months and the only piece he needed to finish his masterpiece, but the elder suspected that the offer was too big for something so simple.

“Yes, I have. Do you accept the offer?” Eirin offered her hand and the air elder touched it lightly with his metallic wing.

‘I don’t know why she is so interested in protecting the dark elder, but I won’t look the gift horse in the teeth.’ The air Elder thought as he accepted Eirin’s offer.

‘To our surprise, the two agreed to help her. Shouldn’t you try to contact the light Elder to organize a defense?’ Canan spoke in her mind, but Eirin denied it.

‘I don’t mean to defend him. I’ll let the opposition slaughter him all they want and then offer Elder Louis to fight and offer knowledge as compensation for his crimes. The more crimes that are revealed, the more we can demand of him.’ Eirin explained.

‘The elders are only here to make sure he won’t be accused as a traitor and executed.’ Canan nodded in understanding.

“Supreme Elder, the other elders have just arrived and the trial will start in 10 minutes.” The same assistant mage knocked on the door a few times and spoke.

“Our time for discussion is over. Go back to your rooms and we’ll meet at the trial.” Eirin ordered and both elders stood up and nodded, leaving the room and separating afterward.

Eirin spent the next few minutes drinking and trying to predict what kind of tricks her opponents would use, until there was a second knock on the door and the mage announced that the trial was about to begin.

The mage guided Eirin to the judgment seat and she took the opportunity to take a look around, as it had been a long time since she had been here.

‘Nothing seems to have changed since I built this place.’ Eirin thought, looking up at the walls and ceilings made of steel. The entire prison was made of metal, so it was impossible to use earth magic to escape.

There were magic lights in the ceilings, but no windows, giving any claustrophobic a panic attack. They were currently in the guards’ area, so the place was being well taken care of, but Eirin knew the same couldn’t be said for the prisoners’ area.

The dungeon of the forgotten was the place where they brought the worst beings of different races that could not be killed for some reason. Either because they have important information or because they had value as a hostage.

Chapter 213 Criminal list

It was a brutal place where torture was a daily occurrence and prisoners were kept isolated from each other in tiny cells while being given the bare minimum of food so they wouldn’t die of starvation, guaranteed that their minds would torture them when the jailers were too bored for that.

Between starvation, constant darkness and isolation, prisoners almost begged their jailers to torture them, just to have company.

"I'm not seeing many guards today. Doesn't security seem too lax?" Eirin asked suddenly, noticing how silent and empty the halls were.

"No, quite the contrary, security is at its maximum to ensure the elders' safety, but we kept the VIP area empty to ensure the trial went smoothly." The wizard answered and cleared his doubts.

They walked in silence for some time, their footsteps echoing through the empty halls until they reached the end of the hall, where a magical steel door was. with the symbol of the order painted. Two guards wearing enchanted adamant armor stood beside the door and bowed in awe as they saw Eirin approach.

They opened the door and announced Eirin's arrival, though the room was practically empty. The jailers made a point of calling Eirin and the elders she had summoned to speak in secret first, so the only ones who had arrived were the fire and air elders.

The room was a perfect octagon of approximately 15 meters square and paintings on the walls, each wall with the color of a different element. In the center of the room was a table made of magic wood in an octagon like room.

Seven chairs were arranged on each side of the table, while a luxurious throne was on the opposite side of the room, the seat reserved for Eirin. The colors of his seat and the wall behind him were silver, although none of the elders knew why.

The truth was, it was just her favorite color, and since there were no other element colors available, Eirin allowed herself the freedom to choose whatever she wanted.

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Eirin passed the elders present in the room without saying a single word and sat on her throne, waiting for the other elders to arrive.

The next to arrive was the light elder, but his expression didn't look good. He hurriedly walked and looked anxious while sweating profusely. The light elder slightly widened his eyes when he saw that Eirin had already arrived and forced a smile, ignoring his seat and the two elders present and walking towards her.

'This is going to be annoying.' Eirin thought and Canan nodded.

"It's a pleasure to see you in such good health, Lady Eirin. It's a shame that we're meeting again after so long in such an unfair situation, but I'm glad I can at least see you in the midst of such misfortune." The light elder started fawning over her as soon as he opened his mouth, making Eirin purse her lips and Canan memorizes the man's face to get rid of him later.

'Calm down and stop trying to stealthily cast a tracking spell to hunt him down later, or at least wait for the war to end.' Eirin spoke and stopped Canan from completing the spell.

"ELDER Yami, go to your seat, the meeting will start any minute. Also, please refrain from calling me anything other than my title. Titles exist so I don't have to hear my name from people I don't like." Eirin spoke with a cold tone, making the light elder's expression twitch involuntarily.

“Pfft...” The fire elder Valk was unable to control himself and laughed, further increasing Elder Yami’s embarrassment.

‘You really are a master of ice magic.’ Canan didn’t have to hold back and laughed heartily in her mind.

“SUPREME elder, I think your words were a little harsh, don’t you? We’ve known each other for so long that-” The light elder Yami felt his pride wounded by her words and tried to protest, but Eirin silenced him.

“I said go back to your seat.” Eirin repeated, releasing her aura to silence him. This time, she only released her aura without synchronizing with her brother, so the only colors in her aura were black, blue, and yellow, the natural elemental affinities Eirin possessed.

Alone, his aura was at the same level as a demigod, but he was still much stronger than any of the elders.

Valk suddenly found herself unable to breathe and covered in cold sweat, her body completely frozen in fear. The golem just fell onto the table, as the air elder was far away and not suffering from the effects of Eirin’s aura.

The light elder, on the other hand, was hit by the aura with all of his strength and knocked to the ground without being able to resist. He slammed his face against the ground and broke his nose, fighting with all his might and releasing his own aura to try to resist, but it was useless.

The difference between a fifteenth layer mage and a demigoddess was like heaven and earth. His bones began to crack under the constant pressure and blood seeped from every orifice in his face and he quickly gave in, realizing he would die otherwise.

“I surrender, supreme elder. Please suppress your aura.” Yami pleaded in a nasal voice and stopped resisting.

Eirin still left him on the ground for a few seconds before suppressing his aura and releasing him.

The light elder got up with some difficulty and easily healed his wounds, the only remnant of what had happened was the bloodstain on his robe and the slight smell of blood on his clothes, but Yami quickly cleaned himself up and sat on his seat.

An awkward silence ensued as Yami cursed Eirin internally and the others tried not to laugh at him, at least not out loud.

The door opened again a few seconds later and the guard announced the entrance of the missing elders, making everyone look towards the door.

The elders arrogantly entered as if they owned the place and chatted in good spirits. They greeted each of the elders before taking their seats, their smiles particularly wide as they greeted the light elder.

Yami just huffed irritably at this cheap tease and shooed them back to their seats so the trial could begin. The elders were surprised that the arrogant yami kept his composure, but they didn’t care too much and returned to their seats.

Eirin looked into the faces of each of the elders present and sighed wearily. She stood up as she resisted the urge to leave, quickly followed by the other elders.

"Everyone's time here is extremely valuable, so let's get straight to the point. Let's start the trial of dark elder Louis Zahara, for having destroyed the portal tower and all the crimes that our investigations have revealed." Eirin said and tried to start the trial, but light elder stopped her.

"With all due respect, supreme elder, but I believe you are mistaken. It has already been revealed that the destruction of the portal tower was caused by the new species of undead that emerged on Mirkor and interfered with the portal, causing the anomaly that destroyed the portal." Yami stood up and spoke in defense of Louis, but the water elder laughed at his words.

"Don't lie to us, light. Dozens of witnesses confirmed that the anomaly only got out of control after the zombie dragon controlled by the dark entered inside the portal. If not for that, the anomaly would have naturally disappeared and the portal tower preserved with minimal damage." The water elder countered.

He appeared to be in his late 60s, with thinning hair and gray with age. His face had numerous wrinkles caused by time and black eyes with a thin nose. His name was Thersec Ripha, the ancestor and founder of House Ripha.

"Save the discussions for when the trial starts and refrain from interrupting me again." Eirin clucked her tongue and the two Elders fell silent again.

"In addition to deciding whether the tower's destruction was accidental or a crime, we will also be reviewing all crimes that have been revealed." Eirin went on and touched the wooden table, activating the enchantment on it.

A hologram appeared in the empty space in front of each elder with a list of all the crimes the dark elder was being accused of and containing evidence that pointed to Louis.

'Oh God.' Yami thought, looking at the bottom corner of the file, where it showed the number of pages the file contained. 'Page 1 of 279.'

'This will take time.' Eirin thought dejectedly.

Just like she said, the trial was incredibly long and tiring. Each crime was evaluated separately and the elders of each faction vehemently discussed each crime to try to prove the dark elder's guilt or innocence.

Their arguments more than once nearly erupted into fights, and after fourteen hours of non-stop arguing, Eirin was tempted to allow them to kill each other just to end the torture.

She looked at the two neutral faction elders who weren't involved in the discussion with envy, as they didn't need to be attentive or debate in the discussion, just agree with everything she said.

Chapter 214 War slave

Valk didn't care about appearances and grabbed a pillow, an eye mask and an earplug, sleeping in a corner of the room while letting the others argue.

The air elder's golem was still standing on top of the table as if it were a statue, but it was just repeating noises of agreement every 10 minutes, the elder had probably left and left the golem on auto mode.

'I swear that if this torture doesn't end soon, I will kill all four of them.' Eirin thought and strangled at the lack of a sarcastic response. 'Brother?'

'Oh, sorry, I was sleeping. I couldn't stand this useless discussion and deleted it. What I lose?' Canan spoke while mentally yawning. They were able to sleep whenever the other took over.

'You left me alone in the middle of this torture? And you still call yourself a good brother?' Eirin said indignantly, but Canan just laughed at her grief.

'It's too early to start complaining. Take a look at the number of pages.' Canan spoke in a sleepy voice, before going back to sleep.

Eirin nearly wept with despair as she realized they were still on page 146 and this torture would go on for another half day.

She saw that the discussion had temporarily stopped as the elders moved on to the next case and realized that this would be her chance to get a little break.

Eirin clapped her hands to draw attention to herself and prevent them from moving on to the next crime. "We're going to take a little break now so everyone can get something to eat and drink and maybe even take a shower."

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She spoke the last part looking specifically at the light elder, who was sweating profusely after hours of non-stop arguing.

Everyone was mentally tired as their bodies were strong enough to withstand fighting for a whole day without rest.

They took a break for an hour, before resuming their discussion for nearly 12 hours, spending more than an entire day just reviewing all the crimes the dark elder had committed. Or at least every case the water elder could gather, as everyone was sure he had committed even more crimes than was revealed.

In the end, over 1000 heinous crimes had been revealed and the dark elder was found guilty of nearly 800 crimes. The 200 crimes he was cleared of were due to lack of evidence or crimes that some of the elders in the water elder faction had committed and they were trying to frame the dark elder.

"Assassinations, kidnappings, inhumane experiments, terrorist attacks against all three kingdoms, mass genocide, massacre of villages to gather undead and subjects for experiments..." Eirin started to read some of the worst crimes from the extensive list, realizing that the dark elder had done more harm to humanity than dozens of demihuman tribes over the centuries.

'Are you sure you still want to let this guy pay for his crimes on the battlefield? This guy deserves to spend the rest of his days inside the dungeon of the forgotten being tortured to death like the monster he is.' Canan spoke furiously, seeing the abominable crimes that Louis had committed.

'I hate this bastard as much as you do, but we need him. But let's make sure that bastard dies after he outlives his usefulness.' Eirin spoke, her anger matching Canan's.

"With so many crimes, he should be sentenced to life imprisonment and tortured until he dies naturally, with all his belongings being confiscated by the order and shared among the elders." Eirin passed her sentence and the water elder faction cheered while Yami bit his lip in frustration.

He had done everything possible to cover his ally and prevent him from losing his political support, but in vain.

"Or so I would say in any situation, but we are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis." Eirin continued, causing a light of hope to shine in Yami's eyes and the enemy faction to frown in displeasure.

"The Caria empire, the empire's longtime ally, is under attack by the filthy undead of the Nytrer continent, while the territory we conquered on the Setlan continent by sacrificing thousands of mages is under attack by the Fae alliance." Eirin spoke and the elders of the water elder faction didn't like the direction the speech was going.

"As if that weren't enough, evolved Demihumans come from Doravon and attack the human kingdoms on the Caprio continent. We're in an emergency and need all the help we can get. I suggest that instead of just arresting him and torturing him, it's best to put it to good use on the front lines when the battle starts."

"Wait a moment, supreme elder! A criminal with such an extensive list cannot be let loose. He is a danger to all of humanity and must be held captive or executed to ensure that no one else has to die in his madness!" Thersec rose from his chair and shouted indignantly.

'I didn't spend years silently collecting evidence and waiting for my golden opportunity to get rid of Louis only to have him get away with it right in front of me!' Thersec thought angrily and similar thoughts were in the minds of the earth and mana elders.

"He won't be free and he won't get away just by fighting, water elder. All of your laboratories will be thoroughly investigated and all of your resources will be taken by order. Furthermore, the dark elder will be forced to share his knowledge with us." Eirin spoke conditions that made everyone gasp.

"In addition, tracking spells will be placed on the dark wyrm and each of his undead generals and we will have two masters of magic constantly watching over them. The equipment he will use in combat will be provided by the order and will also have tracking spells."

"Finally, the white fangs, the assassins who joined the order and work under the dark elder's command will be disbanded and its members worked for the order, far from his jurisdiction." Eirin continued to impose conditions until Yami was unable to accept any more.

"Wait a minute, supreme elder! Aren't these conditions a little too unfair? Louis won't be more than a war slave at this rate." Yami cried out in concern as he got to his feet, but Eirin just gave him a cold smile.

“That’s exactly what he will be from now on. We are not covering his crimes, just using a resource that cannot be wasted. He remains a criminal, but he will be able to reduce his sentence or obtain minimal rights as long as he continues to fight on the lines of front.” Eirin said in a cold voice, making Yami cringe internally.

He weighed the options, thinking of the best way to lessen the damage for his faction.

‘On the one hand, executing him would brand him as a traitor and destroy one of the pillars of our faction. On the other hand, having him as a war slave, maybe even serving our enemies might be an even worse blow, but at least it gives me the time I need to figure out a way to get him out of this situation.’ Yami thought and relented, realizing that his only hope was to find a way to restore Louis’ position in the meantime.

Thersec was thinking along similar lines and came to the same conclusion as Yami, frowning in annoyance.

‘Although the idea of making that bastard Louis my slave is tempting, I don’t want to risk him regaining his position, despite the slim chance of that happening.’ Thersec thought and the elders of his faction thought similarly.

They objected to her request, saying it would be too risky to let someone as powerful and crazy as Louis go free, even partially.

But the two elders who only slept until now supported her idea, much to Thersec’s chagrin.

“If Louis joins the war, I will need to spend less time on the battlefield and more time in my laboratory, so I support the supreme elder’s decision.” It was Air Elder’s final word.

“I agree. We can use that bastard as a weapon and discard him when he becomes useless.” Valk responded aggressively, sealing Louis’s fate.

Yami naturally supported the decision and between three elders and the supreme elder, there was nothing Thersec’s faction could do. Even if they tried to vote, all they could do is humiliate themselves.

“Then it is decided. Louis has lost his position as a dark elder along with all his rights and will become a war slave until he pays for all his crimes or dies in war.” Eirin announced and everyone nodded, though some reluctantly.

Eirin called to the guards stationed outside the room and ordered them to bring prisoner Louis Zahara into the room.

The guards found the order strange, but did not let it show and passed the orders through their communicators.

Louis was brought in in less than five minutes, surrounded by six guards in adamant armor and chained with enchanted steel chains that prevented mana from escaping the core, preventing the use of abilities and magic.

Louis looked haggard, his thin body from lack of food looking even older.

Chapter 215 Tracking spell

He was wearing a gray prisoner jumpsuit that looked brand new, contrasting with the former elder's grimy appearance. His face was smeared with snot and tears and his prodigious beard smeared with dried blood and saliva.

Louis walked unsteadily and his hands shook uncontrollably, his unfocused eyes looking slowly around the room, but his mind was confused and didn't register anything his eyes were seeing.

'Is this really the dark elder?' Canan thought in disbelief. The old man in front of them looked like a sick old who could die at any moment, rather than a ruthless necromancer and terrorist.

'It must be the result of drugs and continued torture. Or perhaps because he is a necromancer who fights with the support of several undead, he is not used to pain and easily gave in to torture.' Eirin considered the different possibilities and decided to investigate what was done with Louis.

Everything that happened inside the dungeon of the forgotten was recorded, so all the torture done to Louis would be in the records and Eirin could access it through the magic table, which was connected to the prison's database.

The records of everything that happened inside the dungeons of the forgotten could be accessed through the magical wooden table in front of it and the office of the head jailer, as the information was stored magically and not physically.

Eirin accessed the information as the guards led Louis to the empty space in the middle of the table and forced him to his knees.

'Wow, it looks like they took it hard on him. Check this out.' Eirin thought as she read through the files, marveling at how creative jailers could be.

They burned it, froze it, drowned it, electrocuted it, buried it alive, just for warmth. The jailers skinned Louis as if he were an animal with a surgical precision that impressed even Canan.

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They managed to reach all the nerve endings while avoiding the veins and arteries, causing maximum pain with minimum risks. After ripping off all the skin and leaving his muscles exposed, the jailers poured boiling water over the elder's body, causing him to scream like a wounded animal.

The jailers healed him, only to move on to the next torture. They made a point of always changing the pattern of torture so that Louis would never get used to the pain.

'It looks like they also administered different drugs into his body and tortured him under the effects.' Canan spoke in Eirin's mind while ignoring the tortures, as he wasn't much of a fan of torture, though he understood that it was necessary.

'Let's formally put the tracking spells to end it soon and we can go back home.' Eirin thought and got to her feet, before walking over to Louis. As if recognizing her now that she approached, Louis' eyes began to focus again.

He looked around the room until his eyes landed on Thersec and turned red with rage.

“Y-YOU!” Louis screamed in rage as he recognized the man who captured him and the one responsible for all his pain, jumping on him. He tried to use magic or abilities, but without a staff and with the chains sealing his core, there wasn’t much he could do now.

The guards beside Louis grabbed his arms and knocked him to the ground, but he didn’t stop screaming.

“You! You are to blame for this!” His face turned red with anger as he raged, but Thersec just glared at him with cold eyes, irritating him even more.

“Enough of this yelling.” Eirin grabbed Louis by the neck and lifted him off the ground, before casting the tracking spell under him.

Louis tried to struggle to get rid of her, feeling Eirin’s mana creep under his body and the signature foreign mana burn his body, but the feeling quickly faded.

The tracking spell surrounded Louis’s core as if it were a new layer and Eirin forcibly removed the chains that sealed his core, causing the same to release mana to try to expel the invading mana.

Eirin took the moment to flow extra world energy into the spell, the different energy signatures blending together, much like a binding spell. The biggest difference was that there was no tug of war for control, as Louis couldn’t affect the spell.

The spell stopped accepting Louis’s mana as soon as it balanced with Eirin’s mana, which took almost all of his mana. Despite the small amount of mana Eirin used, her core was at the level of a demigod and Louis barely had enough mana to match the quality of a single Eirin spell.

As long as the spell not was undone, Eirin could detect him, even if he went to the other side of the planet. The spell’s effect would only cover a few dozen kilometers for an ordinary mage, but Eirin had no such limitations.

“What did you do to me??” Louis shouted as he recognized the tracking spell. He tried to scream, but Eirin was grabbing his neck, barely leaving him room to breathe.

“You’ve been judged by the elders as a terrorist and normally I’d leave you here to rot to death, but your usefulness outweighs my willingness to see you suffer, so feel lucky, you’ll live another day.” Eirin spoke in a cold tone, needing sheer willpower not to kill Louis then and there.

From so close and with him so weakened, a flick of the wrist would snap his neck.

“You can’t do this to me!! I’m an elder and I demand respect! You’ll pay for treating me like this!” Louis began to scream wildly, his face getting even redder from the strangulation.

Eirin was disgusted by the depressing sight and threw Louis against the wall so she wouldn’t have to touch him anymore.

She controlled her strength not to turn him into a pool of blood, but between the impact and his weakened state, the impact against the wall was still enough to knock him out, a pool of blood quickly forming around his head.

“Light Elder, heal him just enough to prevent him from dying and return him to the guards. He will spend his days in the Dungeon of the forgotten until the day before the invasion starts, so he has time to recover.” Eirin sneered at Louis’s despicable sight.

“I don’t want him to spend a second more at liberty than necessary.”

Yami ran to his side and did only first aid, feeling Eirin’s gaze on his back and a silent promise of pain if he healed him one centimeter more than was strictly necessary.

The jailers grabbed the dying body of Louis and carried him away, maniacal smiles on their faces under their visors. The overwhelming majority of the jailers in the dungeon of the forgotten were crazy about torture and considered Louis their new toy, so they were glad he wasn’t leaving yet.

“Well, we’re done with everything we had to do now, so let’s end the trial here. We all need a shower and decent meals.” Eirin clapped her hands to get everyone’s attention and left without even hearing a response.

Eirin was tired and hungry, so she teleported back to the empire as soon as she entered the VIP room.

In the demi-human wasteland, a week later.

The army of Athos destroyed the hydra’s territory with an ease that surprised even the skeletons. Unlike orcs, who could increase their physical power beyond limits, kobolds, desert lizardmen and minotaurs were not powerful and took much longer to break through barriers.

His camp was on a plain, while the hydra’s nest was in a cave built by himself.

The army mages had a lot of time to release offensive spells and since there would be no aerial battle, all of their firepower was unleashed on the demihumans. When the shockwave was finally released, almost all of the demihumans were destroyed.

The hydra also tried to fight to defend its territory, but Simogo and Treevor faced it together, their combined skill was more than enough to defeat it with ease.

Hydras were capable of casting magic with all over heads and had dragon breath as well, but it was useless against Treevor and Simogo, who could unleash even more powerful attacks or easily dodge the hydra’s attacks.

The battle was over in less than half an hour and after just a day of quick weapon repairs, collecting the useful resources in the camp and turning the corpses into new undead, the army marched back towards the basilisk’s territory.

The hydra’s hoard was even smaller than the hyverns, as the hydra was a lazy creature that rarely left its territory, so its hoard was just magic herbs and a few pounds of mithril, which the skeletons already had in abundance.

Malic and Wylver joined them as they marched against the Basilisk and brought back whatever information they could gather from the sky without being discovered. According to them, the camp had

changed since the last time the wylver attacked them and was now on the border between the desert and the savannah.

Chapter 216 Split exercise

The only demihumans who lived under his rule were trolls and ogres, their numbers barely reaching 5000 individuals. The basilisk didn't like too many beings roaming its territory, so it forced the demihumans to keep their numbers low.

It was lucky for the skeletons, as it made the attack much easier. Between their low numbers and the mages' firepower, the battle was over shortly after the basilisk joined the fray.

The mindless ogres tried to activate gigantification as soon as they saw the undead attack the camp, but the hive hawks transferred the spells cast by the mages mid-transformation, killing most of them in one blow.

The few survivors were forced back to normal with horrific wounds, rendering them useless in battle. Alone, trolls could not break the barriers of shared curses or defend themselves from enemy magic, so they were powerless.

"Who are the insects that dare to attack my territory??" The basilisk screamed as it joined the battle and saw the trolls being slaughtered. He activated his petrifying gaze skill and fired an orange-brown laser at the skeletons, but the ground in front of the skeletons darkened and rose up like a barrier, blocking the attack.

"That laser is powerful, but it's useless against a simple earth barrier. How laughable." Treevor muttered as he appeared in front of the army.

"Are you the one invading my territory, freak?" The basilisk screamed in the half-human language and quickly crawled towards Treevor, but the wyverns appeared and attacked it with all their might.

"This is revenge for our pups, you crawling worm!" Wylver roared in fury as he fell on the basilisk, unleashing his dragon breath. Malic followed shortly after and did the same, both of them using spells to seal off the basilisk's escape routes.

The basilisk sensed the danger and tried to escape across the land, but Treevor blocked the spell. With nowhere to escape, the basilisk can only hastily cast light shields and fortify its body to resist.

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Athos was watching the battle from a distance but quickly lost interest. It was more than obvious that the skeletons were going to win and as much fun as it was to watch the basilisk get beaten up, he had bigger concerns at the moment.

'I was a little worried when I finished turning all the demihumans in the hydra territory into undead and I still couldn't gather enough life force to form the fifth layer, but it looks like I'm going to get everything I need here.' Athos thought, ordering the skeletons bearing shared curses to activate the field of the dead.

The skeletons advanced until the corpses were covered by the field of the dead and Athos spread life force to transform them into the undead.

He closed his eyes as he felt the life force build up, waiting for the feeling of being on the verge of realizing something he felt whenever he was about to form a new layer.

‘Come on, come on, just a little more...!’ He thought as he felt the life force build up in his core and he hoped it was enough, but it was in vain. Even after all the undead were transformed, its core showed no signs of being ready to form yet another layer.

‘Damn it. I feel like I could get enough energy from a few hundred more undead or maybe one good fight to push me beyond my limits.’ Athos thought and turned to where the battle against the basilisk was taking place, but the fight was almost over.

Between Treevor interfering with earth magic and the wyverns attacking from above, the basilisk had no way to defend itself other than light magic. The petrifying gaze had a cooldown between attacks almost as long as dragon breath, so he was helpless at the moment.

Several of its scales had already been destroyed by dragon breaths and a part of its tail had been cut off. Wounds and burn marks were scattered across its serpentine body and its movements seemed strangely rigid, Malic’s yellow flames spewing electricity through its body and causing paralysis.

Athos just sighed when Wilver fell on top of the basilisk and bit his neck, spreading black flames at close range. The basilisk retaliated by firing cannons of light and trying to wrap its body around the wyvern skeleton.

Wilver separated his bones and slipped between the basilisk’s body as the cannon burned into his skull, but he refused to let go. Its fangs sank even deeper into the basilisk’s flesh until they pierced the heart just below the neck, killing the basilisk.

The basilisk’s heart was just below the neck and Wylver’s fangs hit it with precision.

‘Haah... let’s just stop to camp and hunt the monsters around to gather the missing energy.’ Athos thought and ordered the undead to break into the small semi-human camp.

He did a rough count of the undead, finding that they had finally reached 100,000 skeletons, and he smiled at the good news.

As usual, Athos met with the high ranking undead in the center of the camp to decide their future plans. Basilisk and hydra had joined them today as generals, but even with their addition there was still a general vacancy that needed to be filled.

3 maps had been placed on a table in the middle of the skeletons and they were analyzing the information to decide their next course of action. The first was the one they got with the wyverns and the other two in hydra and basilisk territory, although the last map was crudely done and it was barely possible to make out anything on it.

Ogres and trolls weren’t particularly intelligent demihumans and didn’t have the skills needed to create maps, so it looked more like a squiggly drawing than anything else.

Treavor was beside him and translated everything on the map for him and the human skeletons who didn't know the demihuman language. According to Treavor, the regions beyond the nearest territories were just monster territories.

There would be no more intelligent creatures, only violent monsters and nomadic demi-humans that were impossible to predict. To make matters worse, even the stupid monsters were starting to flee at the sight of his army, their sheer numbers causing such strong fear that the monsters overcame their instinctual revulsion.

The undead were now forced to move to hunt them and were no longer receiving attacks, heavily slowing their growth rate. It only increased the need to split the army, but the undead didn't want to admit it.

"I think we have no choice but to move our plans forward." Athos muttered to himself, but all skeletons shuddered slightly at these words.

"What does master mean?" Emília asked apprehensively.

"Remember what I said about forming a line and stopping the advance of the unknown undead? I wanted to wait until we were in the middle of the desert before forming a line of impediment, but maybe we'd better start now." Athos explained.

"We're on the border between the savannahs and the desert. So it's a good place to stake out territory. Also, according to Treavor and the undead, the desert doesn't seem to have as many fixed territories as the savannahs, so we'll have to spread out enough to be able to expand efficiently."

Treavor nodded, remembering how all creatures in the desert were forced to keep migrating to avoid more powerful monsters or go in search of water sources like oases.

"So are we going to split up here?" Treavor crossed his arms as he asked and Athos nodded.

"More or less. We're almost at the top of the desert, so we'll be heading down to the coast mostly. I'm going to send a few dozen demihumans with three generals max to conquer the territory between us and the mountains." Athos spoke and pointed to Ruy, Astrus and the basilisk, who nodded in response.

"If possible, also try to raid the mountains and get more dwarven skeletons. More runesmiths is never a bad thing. If you find a suitable location or a source of magical resources, try to build a temporary base to secure the resources." Athos ordered.

"As for the rest of us, let's keep conquering the territories as we make our way down to the mainland's coast. Let's ignore the stray monsters and focus only on the rulers for greater efficiency." Athos pointed at the small wooden statues as he took down the hydra and the basilisk.

"We will continue down to the coast of the mainland after conquering the nearby territories and building bases in places where we find magical resources." Unlike the living beings of the desert, skeletons didn't need any resources to survive, so Athos planned to build bases only where there were important resources to be collected.

It was the advice of his generals and Athos agreed with their idea.

"We only needed two days to finish the repairs and equipment corruption before we set out again. We were starting to run out of base metals with everything we consumed lately, but luckily there was plenty of raw metal in hydra territory." Astrus reported, confirming real-time needs with Dwarvin.

The dwarf was the busiest one lately, but he still found time to answer Astrus' questions. Lucky for him, many of the skeletons in the army were monsters that could fight without equipment, so the only ones who would need weapons were the demihumans.

Chapter 217 Mind web

Ogres didn't use weapons, as they would become too small after using gigantization, so they were busy transforming mostly the weapons of the skeletons in the hydra camp.

The skeletons had fought the last battle with their common weapons, but luckily, the trolls couldn't break through the barriers and didn't have to waste their weapons.

"A few days, huh..." Athos muttered while scratching his chin. He wanted to resume the march in a few hours at most to minimize the chances of being discovered, but it was better to be prepared.

"I have a question. How are we going to communicate with the skeletons we've left behind? There's a very limited range for the mind link and we don't have communication cubes. Also, I'd like to take some dwarves with me, to find entrances to the hidden villages." Ruy asked, unsure of how he should communicate with Athos after they separated.

"I don't mind if you take some dwarves with you. The problem is how we're going to communicate over distance. We don't know how to create communication cubes and the few we could get our hands on were destroyed during the battle, so we couldn't get our hands on them." Athos muttered sadly.

The humans had recorded all the battles against Athos, but the first communication cube was destroyed by a minotaur and the second was crushed by the hecatonchires. The communication cube in Malti's possession had also been destroyed by Malti in a fit of rage.

"We could use letters and skeleton birds could deliver them. There would be a delay in communication, but we would still be able to communicate. Our darkness leaves a trail of dead earth where we pass, so it's impossible for them to get lost." Treevor suggested it and the generals agreed with him, but Athos had a different idea.

"Your plan isn't bad, but I have another idea. Why don't we use skeletons to form a communication web? We can bury them deep in the ground to prevent them from being discovered by the monsters on the surface." Athos explained how he used this method to invade the city of Faltra and coordinate his movements with the army.

The undead could relay their thoughts to other skeletons or via the general link, so they would be an excellent form of communication and hard detectable to other creatures. There would still be a communication delay, but it would be much less than using carrier pigeons.

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“That might work. We can use skeletons useless to us like the fire ants or the few small animals that survived the battles. We usually send the strongest skeletons into the fight to avoid losing skeletons unnecessarily, so many of them have survived so far.” Emilia agreed with his idea.

“The mindlink range limit is just over 2 kilometers, so we can cover a lot of ground with a single skeleton and at the rate we’re developing, we can cover the small losses easily.” Athos began to drum his fingers as he thought.

‘The communication issue can be resolved easily, so there’s not much else we need to discuss. We just need to wait for the dwarves to finish corrupting the weapons. I think I’ll spend these days hunting and practicing magic.’ Athos thought.

‘I can get the energy needed to complete the fifth layer and create spells that would be impossible to create with my previous power. I’ve been using the same spells forever and I need to update my arsenal.’ Athos had advanced through the layers too quickly and his spells were still all simple, as if he was a first-layer mage.

With the creation of new layers, his understanding and sensitivity to magic increased, as did the amount of world energy that Athos could control with mana body. Athos could now create spells that would have been impossible before and he couldn’t wait to start practicing.

Two days wouldn’t be enough to create a complex spell, but it would be enough for him to understand his new limits.

Athos spent the next two days between hunting and practicing magic, gathering the life force needed to form the fifth layer. It took less than 100 undead to get the necessary energy, showing how little was left to complete.

He also practiced magic seriously, realizing how smoothly he could control magic now. Athos had ignored his magical training with everything that happened in the last few months and see the difference in power shocked him to the core.

Athos could now cast the Meteor Spear spell in a quarter of the original time and with much more power. The spear could be up to 30 meters long, but its power would become scattered and difficult to control, so Athos standardized the spell to use it at a maximum of 10 meters.

‘Now I understand why most high ranking skeletons don’t use spells with such a large area of effect, except when they are going to decimate groups of weak soldiers. Increasing the area of effect too much decreases not only the spell’s power, but also its speed and increases the difficulty of controlling them.’ It was the conclusion that Athos reached while practicing.

He felt that in a few more layers he could cast spells over a hundred meters, but it would be almost impossible to control such a spell and useless against powerful enemies.

Unlike his magic, his magic organ didn’t undergo such drastic changes this time. His body was already complete, so there was no change in his appearance. The amount of energy it could contain increased and the quality matched its core.

The magic organ's ability to hold spells or skills cast was also increased and Athos could now cast incomplete spells or skills that the magic organ would finish casting, saving time and energy.

Athos could feel that something else had changed in his body, but he couldn't say what it was. He went to Treevor to see if he could get any leads, but the only change Treevor was able to notice was in Athos' soul instead of his body.

His soul had changed again, the gray mask covering his entire body now. The face still didn't have any special features, just holes where the eyes and mouth should have been.

Treevor felt goosebumps at the sight of this and after briefly describing it to Athos, stopped talking about it. Knowing this didn't help matters and with no means of investigating his body, Athos was forced to drop the matter.

Ruy, Astrus and the basilisk took 30,000 skeletons with them towards the mountains, burying small skeletons of rats and rabbits as they went. They mostly took monsters with them, but they still took with them 100 wizards and a few thousand goblins and kobolds.

Every time they buried a skeleton, one of the generals would send a test message to Athos to confirm the method's functionality. Communication worked perfectly, but the farther away they were, the longer it took for the messages to travel.

Athos came to the conclusion that this method would not be viable in the long term and needed to find a way to replicate the communication cubes or create a similar technology. It was another item on her long to-do list for the future.

In the meantime, the wyverns and hive hawks were sent to investigate the manticores territories and used the same method to communicate with the army, but used birds in the sky to maintain communication.

It was a more dangerous method, as it ran the risk of a flying monster appearing and attacking a skeleton while it was alone, but skeleton flying monsters were ordered to flee as soon as they saw monsters and wait for them to leave before returning to their position.

The orders worked and a single blade-winged bird was destroyed in the process, lucky for them. The wyverns managed to reach the territory in less than a day, but all they found was an abandoned camp.

There were no signs of battle, so the manticores were not forced out, but left their territory of their own accord. Malic followed the tracks left by the marching demihumans and found them a few dozen kilometers into the desert.

They were not injured and marched steadily. Malic thought for a moment whether to attack them, but their numbers were too great and the manticores were capable of flight, so she could be in danger if she was careless.

His mission was only to investigate the manticores, and he didn't need to take unnecessary risks.

Athos received the news less than 5 minutes after Malic came back within range of the mind web and reported it, clicking his tongue in annoyance. Just as they expected, the smartest rulers kept their closest neighbors under surveillance and noticed the undead, presumably when the undead spread out to hunt.

It was a surprise that the manticores decided to flee rather than try to attack him or make a united front against the undead. It was a problem for the undead that the manticore decided to flee rather than fight since Athos hoped to add them to his undead.

Athos ordered the dwarves to finish the repairs and corruption quickly before resuming the march once more. He also ordered the wyverns to advance as far as possible without losing communication to investigate other territories.

Chapter 218 Creative plan

If they continued straight down, the next territories would be the terrain of violent monsters, so they didn't have the intelligence to investigate their enemies or know when to retreat or advance.

Thanks to the dwarf skeletons advancing their work, the army was able to resume the march sooner than expected and with the manticore territory empty, they headed straight for the territories of the violent monsters.

It took less than two days' travel to reach the territory when marching at full speed, as Athos forced the skeletons to run the entire way. Human skeletons were carried by monsters, while demihumans were fast enough to keep pace with monsters.

The wyverns who went ahead reported that the monsters they would encounter in the next territory were a pack of acid wasps, wasps a meter long each.

Wasps didn't have a stinger, but they were capable of squirting acid from their lower bodies, making them even deadlier. The wasps formed an underground nest and created something similar to an anthill as there was no slope or other suitable place for them to form their nest.

Malic and Wylver just watched them from afar and avoided approaching, although they suspected that there were at least a few tens of thousands of acid wasps and that the tunnels must spread hundreds of meters underground.

Possibly there was more than one entrance, but it should have been hidden and the wyverns weren't able to find it. The wyverns considered the idea of attacking the nest alone, but without knowing how many wasps they had or their strength, it was better to wait for the army to arrive and bombard the nest with magic.

They were confident of destroying them all or at least being quick enough to escape in an emergency, but many of the corpses would be destroyed and wasted by their destructive spells.

Athos didn't seem to mind small losses, but a few thousand would definitely be missed.

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When the skeletons arrived, Athos ordered the skeletons to stop at a safe distance instead of rushing as they usually did.

"Why did we stop?" Treevor asked as he approached.

"I'm not crazy trying to get close to a nest of tens of thousands of goblin-sized wasps. Let's finish this off from a distance." Athos looked at him with a disgusted face, imagining how annoying it would be to face a tide of thousands of giant insects flying at them.

"Magic bombardment, then? I'll order the mages to start casting and-" Treevor started to order the mages, but Athos had a different idea.

"No, let's be more practical here. We have no reason to face insects head on, so let's get creative here. But order the mages to prepare area spells, just in case." Athos smiled as he pointed to his temple. He thought of a good idea and ordered the army forward, without explaining anything to Treevor.

'Well, when the master smiles like that it's because he thought of a crazy plan, but it almost always works out, so I won't question it too much.' Treevor thought, trusting Athos and waiting for his command.

Such a large army would never go unnoticed and in less than a minute they began to hear an annoying hum of insect wing flapping. They could see giant hornets erupting from a hole in the distance like a geyser.

If Treevor had skin, he would be turning pale right now. He was stronger and confident of surviving against all those giant bugs, but the sight of all those squirming bugs and the deafening buzz of wings getting closer and closer was chilling.

Athos felt the same, but his gray skin just glowed a little brighter and the nearby skeletons thought it was the effect of him conjuring something with the magic organ and ignored it, saving him embarrassment.

'Hey, shouldn't we raise the barriers now?' Emilia asked apprehensively as she saw the giant wasps getting closer and closer. She began to cast spells as she prepared for combat, but Athos ordered her to wait.

'Wait for them to be on top of us before we start.' Athos responded and continued to watch the approaching insects, although he was also casting spells in case things went wrong.

The acid wasps continued to leave the nest as if they had no end and quickly approached the skeletons, which continued to advance without stopping. The insects did not attack immediately upon reaching them, but flew over the army.

With the exception of the pincers on their head, wasps had no close-range attack methods, so they tended to fight at medium range. Their greatest weapons were their acid and their overwhelming numbers.

The acid wasps squirted their acid as far as they could to try to cover as many enemies as possible and that was the moment that Athos was waiting for.

'Now! Activate the field of the dead!' Athos shouted and a curtain of darkness covered the army and began to rise. The corrupted world energy corrupted the grass the undead were stepping on, the flying acid wasps, and even the acid in mid-air.

The acid dissolved into the corrupted energy as what little fell on the skeletons quickly disappeared, leaving only a few small marks on the black bones. The wasps were the next to fall, unable to breathe or see anything.

The wasps writhed in pain as they hit the ground and the undead quickly killed them, giving them no chance to fight back. Some wasps tried to throw acid at random or bite the undead that attacked them with their pincers, but the acid disappeared as soon as it came into contact with the environment and the skeletons only abandoned one of their bones to free themselves.

Insect-type monsters took a long time to die, so the skeletons needed to hit several times to kill them. Athos and the high-ranking Skeletons continuously injected life force into the field of the dead and lifted the corpses of insects.

‘So that’s why you waited for the wasps to get so close. How did you know that acid would be affected too?’ Treevor asked in surprise as he looked outside the field of the dead.

Many acid wasps were taken aback and killed by the appearance of the field of the dead, but more were arriving and flying around the gigantic dome of corrupted mana, unable to enter.

The wasps tried shooting acid outside or circling the field of the dead, but it had no effect. Some broke in to try to attack the threat, but retreated almost immediately.

‘Everything in the world has energy and acid is no different. But it was a gamble whether the acid would be corrupted fast enough to take effect or whether a few skeletons would get hit.’ Athos responded and ordered the skeletons to continue advancing.

They were interrupted by the wasps, which began to panic and throw themselves into the field of the dead. The wasps burst out of the nest, crawling over each other to get out of the hole as soon as possible.

‘Why are they doing this?’ The wyverns asked in disbelief, watching the acid wasps willingly throw themselves against the field of the dead.

‘That’s why the underground nest is also being affected by the field of the dead. The spell affects the world’s energy in a perfect spherical barrier that also affects what’s below us. You haven’t noticed this until now because you can’t use earth magic or spread your senses underground.’ Treevor reported, using earth magic to detect vibrations underground.

He could feel thousands of insects crawling under one another in confusion, not knowing what was attacking them or where they were supposed to go. Treevor felt a chill through his bones and quickly stopped feeling underground.

‘We just need to stand here and they will kill themselves?’ Emilia asked doubtfully, watching the stupid wasps shoot acid at the field of the dead until they dried out and then invade the field of the dead only to fall to the ground.

The wasps writhed on the ground until a skeleton killed them and the life force within the field of the dead transformed them into new undead.

As if answering, the insects stopped their mindless invading and flew over the outside of the field of the dead and tapped their pincers menacingly.

'Why did they change their behavior?' Athos asked angrily. He was enjoying the free life force and didn't want it to end so quickly. He feared the bugs would scatter and begin to flee, but Wylver had a bird's-eye view and understood the situation.

He could see that a hole had opened up in the earth some distance from the skeletons and the wasps began to come out, quickly followed by a wasp twice the size of the rest. The queen was fleeing through a different tunnel, using the others as bait to escape.

'Master, the queen escaped through a different tunnel and is on the run. Should I intercept her?' Wylver asked.

'Are there many wasps following it?' Athos asked back.

'I can't count perfectly because of the distance and because they are very close to each other, but there must be a maximum of two hundred.' Wylver replied, I don't understand Athos' lack of motivation.

'Then let them get away. A few hundred is not a big loss. If we attack the queen, the wasps around the sacred field will ignore us and fly back to protect the queen.' Athos ordered and Wylver obeyed, though he was disappointed in the lack of action.

Chapter 219 Useless territories

Athos was irritated by the wasps just circling the field of the dead and spitting acid into the distance. The field of the dead would corrupt all the acid fired, but it would still consume energy and the shared curses were rapidly depleting.

'Change direction, let's march in the direction the queen is fleeing. That should be enough to send the wasps into a panic and abandon self-preservation.' Athos ordered through the mind link and the skeletons turned east and chased the queen.

The wasp queen realized that the army changed direction and despaired. Despite the wyverns' assumptions, the wasp queen was relatively intelligent, but it was extremely aggressive towards other species and would attack anything it perceived as a threat or prey.

She rubbed the antenna on her head against each other, generating an extremely high-pitched sound that she used to command the wasps and order the other wasps to attack the unknown threat so she could flee.

The wasps went into a frenzy when they saw the skeletons moving towards their queen and returned to invade without worrying about their lives.

'Wizards, fire a barrage of spells now. The field of the dead is starting to run out of energy.' Athos ordered and the mages obeyed. Spells of different elements covered the sky and exploded thousands of hornets at the same time.

'It will be over soon.' Treevor thought, realizing that the wasps had stopped leaving the nest and most that invaded were already dead or falling to the ground. The wasps were transforming into new undead

in real time, and he was awed once again by the power of shared curses and the dwarven technology that created them.

The energy of the shared curses ran out at that moment and the field of the dead disappeared a second later, but the barrier rose a second later and blocked the acid wasps.

‘Hey, Treevor. Go underground and transform the wasps that died there.’ Athos ordered and Treevor nodded, opening a hole in the ground and climbing down.

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Athos focused on the few insects in front of him, but it was unnecessary. The few who were still alive scattered and fled. Athos saw no reason to chase weaklings who wouldn’t be of much use, and ordered the mages to save their mana to cast a second field of the dead to raise the corpses.

‘Did we lose any skeletons?’ Athos asked and received a no from Emilia, confirming that they won a complete victory this time. Some had bones lost by the wasp’s pincers, but there were no deaths.

It was the first time that the army had won a battle without any loss and Athos was proud of that feat. In all previous battles, they always had losses, even if they were minimal, no matter how advantageous the battle was.

‘If we don’t suffer any damage, we will continue the march once all the corpses have been transformed. Will it take long down there, Treevor?’ Athos ordered the army forward while confirming the situation underground.

‘There are a few thousand here and I’m busy transforming them, but I finish everything in a few minutes.’ Treevor responded as he cast the raise undead en masse spell.

Athos nodded and waited for Treevor to finish his work before resuming his march. They used this time to fuel the shared curses and recharge the dead’s field enchantments.

Dwarven technology did not have the same limitations as realm technology and each shield could be recharged individually, rather than needing a suitable place to power them. The shields could also recharge over time if left alone, although it took longer.

The army resumed its march ten minutes later, when Treevor had finished transforming the corpses. The acid wasps were indeed numerous, their overwhelming numbers reaching nearly 18,000. The number of wasps in the nest was much higher, but among the wasps destroyed by the spells and those that fled, the number of usable corpses was much smaller.

Athos ordered the wyverns to fly ahead of the army again and investigate the territory, using the same method as before to maintain communication.

The next territory was a day or so away, but the journey seemed to take forever for the walking skeletons. The undead wasps soared over the army as they marched, the irritating hum of thousands of flapping insect wings nearly driving the skeletons mad.

The only reason Athos didn’t go crazy from the constant buzzing was that he was crazy to begin with.

Information from the wyverns arrived while they were in mid march, informing them that the next enemy was a group of thousands like acid wasps, but a single mighty monster.

A 20-meter tall king slime was sluggishly crawling, leaving a trail of destruction behind as it sluggishly advanced. The creature devoured everything that got in its way, be it plants, monsters or demi-humans.

The creature was slow, but whenever it detected prey, it moved like an avalanche to devour. The king slime was able to detect vibrations almost two hundred meters around and unlike ordinary slimes, it could control its body partially, instead of just crawling and rolling.

Wylver and Malic watched as a herd of desert wildebeest got too close to the king slime and were brutally slaughtered. The slime leapt more than 50 meters and landed in the middle of the wildebeest herd, crushing dozens under its weight.

The crushed wildebeest dissolved in a matter of seconds inside the king slime's body and the rest tried to run away, but the slime was faster. Tentacles made of acid appeared all over the slime's gelatinous surface and grabbed the wildebeests, before crushing them and throwing the rest to the gelatinous body to absorb.

After it finished absorbing all the wildebeests, small bubbles appeared on its body's surface before splitting and spreading away. The extra mass that the king slime gained from absorbing the wildebeest turned into new slimes.

Wylver and Malic observed the surroundings more closely and noticed that there were slimes of different sizes scattered around.

When Athos was told what the next enemy was, he frowned deeply. He had never heard of a slime that big before and it looked incredibly dangerous. Athos was confident that he could destroy the king slime, but there was a high risk of being seriously injured.

Using ranged magic to bombard them ran the risk of generating an acid cloud that could become a danger to the skeletons and close combat was simply a no. Athos also doubted that they could kill the king slime in a single shot, its body probably resistant to magic.

Athos had worked a lot with slimes while he was still alive and he knew how dangerous they could be if mishandled.

But the main reason for him hesitating whether to attack or not, was that there was almost nothing he could gain by killing the king slime. Slimes didn't have bones or anything he could use to create an undead, so it was useless after killing him.

His acid could be useful, but he had obtained thousands of sources of acid recently and they didn't need more at the moment. It was a big risk and little return, the worst kind of battle.

After discussing this with his generals, Athos decided to ignore the slimes and move on, only killing the small slimes on the way. Wylver kept an eye on the king slime from the sky, taking care not to approach and informing the king slime's position in real time to avoid meeting each other.

Malic, on the other hand, went to investigate the territory controlled by the ogre clan, the next region they would invade.

'The next region is the demihuman clans and the most interesting for us after the spirits, so stay alert. If the manticores saw us and decided to flee, the demihumans must also be aware of our presence as well.' Athos spoke through the mind link looking forward to the battle to come, but the wyverns brought bad news.

'Master, the demihumans' camp is empty. We found tracks leading to the forest of spirits. What should we do?' Wylver spoke anxiously, what the skeletons feared most seemed to have come true.

The demihumans formed an alliance with the spirits to face them.

The truth was that the spirits were the first to discover the presence of the undead thanks to the lookouts they posted to watch over neighboring territories. They sent demihuman messengers to alert the neighboring demihuman clan and requested an alliance, feeling that the undead were a threat they could not handle alone.

Spirits were peaceful as long as they weren't attacked and many of their neighbors enjoyed their presence, as they fed the land and could create enchanted weapons, two very rare and valuable things in the desert.

The leader of the ogre clan had wanted to form an alliance with spirits for a long time, so he was really grateful for the appearance of the undead, even though he didn't know what an undead was.

'Tch, how annoying. I wanted to finish them off separately while they were at their weakest, but there's nothing I can do. Let's change direction and go straight to the spirit forest.' Athos ordered after some thought.

Chapter 220 Forest of spirits

'Are you sure you want to face them? We don't know how strong the spirits are or how many demihumans there are, so facing them is a big risk.' Treevor advised Athos to ignore them or at least think of a different plan, but Athos was determined to fight.

'We can't ignore them. We're forming a web mind and even though we've strayed off the path and need to backtrack a bit, I can't leave an enemy clan so close to our web mind and risk losing communication with the generals who marched north.' Athos snapped, silencing Treevor.

It was the first time he had shown anything resembling concern for the undead and the shock was enough to make Treevor shut up and listen to him.

'Besides, even if the spirits are powerful, they can't move so in the worst case, we can retreat by sacrificing a few thousand skeletons in corpse explosions.' Athos thought, but the army was already moving in a straight line towards the spirit forest, it was obvious that he was eager to fight and would not back down.

'Do you even have a plan to face them or are you just going to charge in head on?' Treevor asked as he sighed in surrender.

'Of course I have a plan! What do you think I am, a madman who just runs towards the enemy and improvises on the fly?' Athos asked in mock indignation, before starting to chuckle to himself.

‘Jokes aside, I plan to use a strategy similar to the one we employed to kill you. Using acid wasps to rain acid from the sky should eat away almost all of the forest and the demihumans in it.’ Athos smiled as he imagined thousands of demihumans being eaten alive by acid with no way to defend themselves.

‘The idea is good, but don’t forget that I managed to block the acid, although it was a much smaller amount. It’s better to have a plan B in case the acid isn’t enough.’ Treevor advised, frowning slightly at the memory of his own death.

Athos started to think of a plan B, but the only thing that came to his mind was to teleport among the enemies to ambush them, but that would be too risky.

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Teleporting in the middle of the forest would leave you isolated in the middle of the enemy formation, so it was a suicidal plan. He could attempt to teleport hive hawks and cast large-scale spells into the midst of enemy spirits, or perhaps even a large-scale field of the dead and seal away the enemy’s magic.

Spirits couldn’t stray too far from their main body, so they mainly used magic to fight. With their vision blocked and the main weapon sealed by the field of the dead, the spirits would be helpless.

Athos suggested this to Treevor, but the latter just shook his head in denial.

‘It will not work. Spirits can see souls, and this ability does not rely on natural or magical light. They will be able to see the position of the skeletons through their souls and the chains that bind our souls.’

‘The magic can be really sealed, but the field of the dead doesn’t last long. The spirits can release the energy they hold in the air to correct the world’s energy balance and then we’ll be trapped in the middle of enemies without our advantage.’ Treevor refused his plan completely.

‘Is it possible to do this with amber energy?’ Athos asked in shock.

‘Yes. The energy that the spirits accumulate can be used to balance the world’s energy.’

Athos whined irritably, but his expression quickly brightened. This talk about spirits reminded him of Treevor’s story about Kastil and he burst out laughing in amusement.

‘What did you thought?’ Treevor asked as he got a bad feeling from Athos’ smile, which proved true as he explained his plan.

‘This is madness and the plan depends on the spirits’ decision in the battle.’ Treevor answered, but Athos’ smile only widened.

‘Even if it doesn’t work on all of them, it should be enough to destroy at least half of them. The confusion it will generate should be enough for our generals or the monsters to invade.’

‘Aren’t you forgetting the demi-humans who joined the spirits? They are also a threat and cannot be ignored.’ Emilia joined in the conversation, but Athos and Treevor didn’t feel much of a threat from the demi-humans.

‘The shared curses should be enough to block the demi-humans for some time and the monstrous and demi-human skeletons should be more or less on the same level, so there’s no reason for our exercise to lose.’ Athos replied, not very worried.

‘Quite the contrary, between the strength of demi-humans and the unique abilities of monsters, our exercise must have an advantage over them. If the worst happens and the enemies are stronger than expected, the wasps that wait in the sky can constantly change targets and rain acid down on the demi-humans.’

‘There are many of them and not all of them are needed to cover the forest.’ Athos spoke mostly to reassure her, as he doesn’t believe it would be necessary.

A few hours later, in the forest of spirits.

The forest of spirits was a small place for the amount of spirits that guarded it, being more than 10 kilometers long. All the spirits that inhabited this place were in the seventh layer of life and were between 150~170 years old, considered young for the species.

There were twelve spirits inhabiting the forest and they were all gathered in a clearing in the center of the forest, talking to each other worriedly. There was an ogre among them as well, with an orc and a heavily armed minotaur on either side.

They were discussing defensive measures against Athos and his undead army. The spirits lost the tail of the army when they set out for the hydra’s territory, but the day before their lookouts reported that skeleton birds were seen in the sky from the east.

Demi-humans who lived under the dominion of the spirits were sent as lookouts to the direction the birds came from and found that the army was leaving the king slime’s territory and approaching them, ignoring the demihuman clan’s territory.

Their numbers were too great to be counted, but they were at least twice their own numbers.

The spirits were shocked when they learned of this and did not initially believe it, but after questioning the watchers personally, they were forced to face reality and think of countermeasures to deal with the oncoming danger.

Their numbers were approximately 20,000, and even when added to the ogre clan and its affiliated clans, they barely reached 50,000 individuals, not including non-combatants. The allied spirits and demi-humans were racking their brains for a way to survive the coming catastrophe.

“We’re going to temporarily distribute the weapons we keep in storage to our allies. It should help us close the power gap between us and our enemies.” A green orc-like avatar spoke.

Avatars were the souls of spirits and took on the form the spirits saw themselves, and away from the influence of humans or elves, these spirits took the form of different demihumans and monsters.

The demi-humans who served the spirits possessed weapons that were enchanted or at least made of magic wood, but those who served the ogre clans only possessed weapons of common metal or unenchanted magic.

“That alone won’t be enough. We need to set up defenses throughout the forest and in the ogres’ temporary camp, or we won’t have any chance of victory.” A second spirit with the appearance of a goblin spoke while nervously biting his nails.

It was impossible to find a place for all the demihumans within the forest, so they set up camp to the east, right in the direction that the Athos army planned to invade.

“And what exactly are we supposed to do?” a Troll spirit asked in a sarcastic tone. “Putting up walls with stone magic or digging holes with thorns at the bottom? What difference will that make against such a large army?”

“In that case, do you have any suggestions or are you just complaining?” A spirit with the appearance of a sun lion asked with an irritated growl.

“This army must have a leader, or creatures that control everyone else. If we kill such a leader, we can demoralize the army or maybe even force them to retreat.” The troll spirit suggested confidently, but the others just laughed at him.

“If doing this were so easy, we wouldn’t be here racking our brains over how to defend ourselves, you idiot!” The goblin spirit scolded him. “How the hell do you plan to identify the enemy leader in the middle of the army and go through tens of thousands of enemies to reach that leader?”

“Identifying the enemy shouldn’t be difficult.” The troll spirit responded with an irritated. “We can use our mystical senses to identify the leader. A creature capable of turning other beings into black skeletons and enslaving them must not be normal.”

The spirits didn’t know what an undead was, as they had never encountered one in their entire lives, but they heard the report from their subordinates that the skeletons were hunting monsters as they advanced and adding them to their ranks.

“Hmm...” The orc crossed his arms and closed his eyes thoughtfully. “There is some sense in your words. It should be possible to identify the enemy with our senses and even if it is impossible, we can follow those who stay behind and give the orders.”