

Legion lich 221

Chapter 221 Determination of a leader

“But even if we identify the enemy, how do you plan to reach him amid so many skeletons?” The orc spirit questioned. “We cannot move away from our real bodies or transmit our spells beyond this forest.”

“Our allies don’t have these limitations, but they don’t have enough power to pierce through tens of thousands of enemies and still manage to kill the unknown leader.” He concluded, but the troll spirit had no response.

“What if we used teleportation crystals to bypass the army and reach the enemy leader as soon as we identified him?” A slime spirit raised a gelatinous tentacle and spoke, drawing the attention of everyone else. The spirits had their own teleportation crystals, but they never had a reason to use them, as they couldn’t get away from the tree that was their original body.

“We can’t use these things. We’d be severed from our original body and bleed out the energy we’ve accumulated over a century.” The orc denied the idea, but the slime spirit shook in denial.

“I didn’t tell us to do this. We have strong allies on our side who can do this.” The slime spirit pointed at the ogre and the two demihumans who were attending the meeting as representatives of the allied clans, although they were mostly watching the meeting until now.

“That would be suicidal. Even if they are able to teleport and assassinate the enemy leader, the army will not magically disappear. They would be trapped between enemies and cannot teleport back, as it takes time to charge a crystal with mana. .” The goblin spirit spoke, but the ogre who had been silent until now raised his hand and spoke.

“Me and my clan are willing to try your plan.” The ogre Patriarch spoke, startling all the spirits. “This is war, spirits. Our enemies plan not only to conquer us, but to annihilate us all.”

“If it weren’t for your warning and request for an alliance, my clan would be fighting alone and we’d probably be dead by now. My best warriors and I are willing to lay down our lives if it means our people can live.” The proud ogre patriarch spoke and the demihumans beside him nodded in agreement.

The spirits’ expressions lit up with hope and were moved by his sacrifice, but the ogre continued to speak.

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“But I have a request to make. In exchange for our sacrifice, we would like you to accept that our people live here and enjoy the blessings of the forest just as your own demi-humans do.” The ogre patriarch made the request he had been waiting for since he was summoned here.

The spirits looked at one another, confirming that their kin were on board with the idea of accepting more demihumans. Currently, the forest was incapable of supporting so many demihumans at once, and the only reason his own people never starved is that the trees could bear fruit year round,

They purposely kept the size of the forest small to avoid conflict with other territories, but with their neighbors dead or becoming their allies, they could expand beyond their current borders.

“We agree. We will accept your people and care for them as our own people.” The orc spirit spoke as their representative, making the demihumans smile widely.

They were more than willing to die if it ensured their people would never starve again.

All the spirits suddenly looked in one direction, interrupting the gathering and causing the demihumans to stop laughing and draw their weapons. They knew that the spirits could sense everything within the forest and something that caught everyone’s attention would not be a good sign.

“Have the enemies arrived yet?” The ogre patriarch asked while using gigantification, growing up to 10 meters and absorbing the element of light and abundant earth thanks to the presence of the spirits.

He was an experienced warrior and was aware of the fatal weakness of his racial ability, so he activated it before the enemy approached them.

“No, that’s not it. The lookouts we put in the way between us and the skeleton army just came back to report and said they’re less than an hour away from here.” The orc spirit explained, focusing its attention on the watcher’s report.

According to the goblin standing watch, two wyvern skeletons were flying ahead of the army, followed by countless black insects. The flying monsters separated from the rest of the army and would arrive in less than 10 minutes.

“A vanguard force to attack us and test our might?” The patriarch guessed as he returned to normal, but the spirits weren’t able to respond right away. Gigantification couldn’t be maintained forever, and the cooldown increased the longer he spent transformed.

“It’s not impossible. None of us have an affinity for air or can cast spells that high in the sky, so we could only defend ourselves without fighting back if they attacked us from the sky.” The slime spirit spoke worriedly.

“Speculating like this is pointless. Get ready to fight and shelter as many non-combatants as you can underground!” The orc took the lead and the spirits disappeared to help with the evacuation.

Beneath the forest of spirits, there was a small underground city where demihumans lived. There wasn’t enough space at the top of the forest without cutting down trees, so the spirits created this place for them to inhabit.

“Please allow our people to also shelter underground as well.” The ogre patriarch pleaded and the spirits easily agreed.

“Just hurry them along. Wyverns are extremely fast creatures, so they could be on us in a few minutes.” The orc spoke with concern for the lives of the innocents and the ogre nodded, before running away to his own camp accompanied by his guards.

Just as the spirits had surmised, the wyverns arrived in less than five minutes and the wasps a little later, but they didn’t attack right away. Despite their fears, the flying skeletons just hovered in the sky above the forest, completely blotting out the sun and obscuring the entire sky above the forest.

The sight of thousands of black hornets flying overhead and the sound of thousands of wings beating was enough to send shivers down the spines of the bravest demihumans and the most cowardly of them pissing themselves in fear.

The occasional splash of acid that fell like drips only added to her panic. They had no way to defend themselves against something as unpredictable as small drops randomly falling from the sky, so they could only hope they didn't get hit.

The only ones who could defend them would be the spirits conjuring a magic shield, but something big enough to cover the entire forest would take a lot of energy and they needed to save as much of their strength as possible for when the army arrived or the bugs started raining acid really.

They knew that these splashes were just a drizzle compared to the oncoming storm.

The undead army became visible half an hour after the wyverns, much to the demihumans' surprise. The undead ran all the way here, cutting travel time by almost half.

Sounds of gulping were heard throughout the camp as the demihumans realized how numerically disadvantaged they were. The ogre king ordered them into position, but that only made the difference between them seem even greater.

The demihumans didn't have an adequate strategic formation, they just gathered according to their kind at the edge of the forest. Trolls and ogres took up the front lines, orcs and minotaurs covered the sides while goblins and kobolds took the back lines.

All ogres had already activated gigantification by the time the skeletons became visible, to avoid attacks during transformation.

The leaders of all the clans were scattered throughout the army, holding teleportation crystals provided by the spirits in their pants or chest pockets to teleport the moment the spirits identified the enemy leader.

The spirits, on the other hand, were divided, half of them at the edge of the forest as they watched the skeletons and the other half focused on dealing with the acid rain once it started.

They were impatiently waiting for the undead to start attacking, but the undead did nothing after approaching, just waited in the distance.

'What are they waiting for?' The spirits thought in unison, sharing a mental link to communicate despite being in distant places. The skeletons were too far away for their mystical senses, so they could only wait for the skeletons to get closer before fighting.

"So this is the spirit forest? It's almost the same size as the Faltra forest, but the trees are different." Athos spoke as he watched the acacia forest in the distance, ordering the army to stop marching.

"It's strange that the forest has such a small size with this number of spirits. Perhaps they avoided expanding too much to avoid conflicts with neighbors?" Treevor asked at his side, guessing why the forest was small despite the numbers of spirits that inhabited it.

Neither of them seemed the least bit nervous about the battle to come and they kept a close eye on their enemies, scouring the edge of the forest in search of spirits.

Chapter 222 Acid rain

"There, I can see a spirit there." Treevor pointed to the orc spirit, who was at the edge of the forest without entering. He had green skin like the other orcs, but it was a light green more like tree leaves, rather than the dark green of the orcs.

"Why is his skin green? Shouldn't it be translucent like his spirit was before?" Athos asked curiously.

"I don't know. Maybe it's a characteristic of all spirits and I'm the only one that's translucent, or maybe this spirit is different for some reason. I have no way of knowing and it doesn't make much difference in the end." Treevor responded with a disinterested shrug.

'Hey, is that a slime spirit? Why would a spirit assume the form of a slime?' Emilia who was also scouring the enemy army asked for the mental link, catching the attention of Athos and Treevor.

Treevor shrugged, thinking they all had their quirks and oddities.

'How much longer will we have to wait?' She asked, noticing that the enemies were looking more and more anxious and looking impatient. Emilia knew of the plan they had previously discussed, but standing so close to her enemies went against her instincts.

'The more time we give enemies, the more impatient they become and the more likely they are to make a hasty decision. We are beyond the reach of spirits' magic or mystical senses, so we can safely wait here. Athos spoke, but he was the most impatient here and did not know how long he would hold out.

'Besides, ogres can't maintain gigantification for a long time, so we can buy time here until they get back to normal.' Treevor added, looking at the 10 meter tall ogres that appeared to be made of white stone.

He knew how the skill worked and that the element of light plus earth would make them incredibly troublesome for the undead. Treevor also knew that the enemies would grow impatient the more time passed and the ogres would try to attack before the gigantification effect wears off, forcing the enemies to split up or leave them for dead.

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'Even so, it's boring just standing here. Let's put some pressure on them.' Athos thought, ordering the wasps to start their attack. The wasps in the sky were out of range, but they could communicate thanks to the few skeleton birds flying among them relaying their orders.

They could hear the demihumans panicking as the flapping sound grew faster, quickly followed by the acid rain. The wasps did not release all of their acid at once, but released it gradually and in groups, to prevent all of them from running out of acid at once.

'Now!' The spirits left behind thought in unison, watching the drops of acid begin to fall under the forest. Together they conjured a giant umbrella-shaped barrier of light, a cold aura covering its entire surface.

The spirits used both their core energy and the energy they accumulated over time to strengthen the barrier, but it was still thin as a sheet. In order to cover the entire forest, the spirits needed to lower the power of the barrier and spread the energy as much as possible.

The acid corroded upon touching the barrier, but the icy aura lessened its effects to a bearable level. Not all spirits had an affinity for water, but the few that did covered the barrier with a layer of cold air that was effective against acids.

‘Hooh. A smart decision. The barrier is thin, but it can withstand long enough for the acid to wear off thanks to the ice aura,’ Treavor spoke into the skeletons’ mind link, watching in amusement as the spirits struggled to defend themselves.

‘It doesn’t seem very useful to me. The barrier is only lasting because we’re saving on acid and just waiting. If we press a little more like this...’ Athos also spoke and ordered the wasps to increase the intensity of the acid rain.

Even from a distance, the skeletons could see the annoyed expressions on the demihumans’ faces as the acid built. The cold aura increased in intensity to match the acid, but they weren’t fast enough.

Holes began to appear in the barrier and the acid hit the trees below, belching black smoke as it corroded everything it touched. One of the trees that was hit was the actual body of one of the spirits, causing it to scream in pain and run to the side of its body to heal.

“We can’t just stand here and watch. Remember the spirits are fighting to protect our families, so let’s step up and do the same!” The ogre patriarch shouted and charged forward, all the demihumans quickly following suit.

‘You are crazy? Far from our forest, we won’t be able to support you with magic and we won’t be able to identify the enemy leaders you should attack.’ The orc spirit spoke in the ogre king’s mind. He had given one of his sheets to the patriarch so that they could communicate at a distance and coordinate their movements.

‘As it stands, the barrier won’t last long and the acid is far from over. Although you spirits have powerful magic, there are only twelve of you while there are thousands of insects.’ The ogre patriarch spoke solemnly as he led the charge.

‘Furthermore, the youngest among my ogres will soon reach their limit and will return to normal. We need to seize our advantage while we still have it.’ He concluded and the orc was forced to nod.

Ogres were heavy thanks to the earth element that formed their bodies and trolls were naturally slow thanks to their short legs compared to the rest of their bodies, so the first to catch up with the undead were the orcs and minotaurs.

The minotaurs run in the right, pointing their horns forward like beasts, their bodies naturally adapted to powerful charges. The orcs weren’t able to run that fast, but their battle spirit skill made up the difference with brute force.

They reached the undead army in less than thirty seconds, but the skeletons activated the shared curse barriers, blocking the demihumans’ advance.

'More than half of the kinetic energy store was filled at once? Damn, we're going to lose those shields even faster than the previous battles.' Athos thought angrily, but the thin smile on his face said he was finding the situation amusing.

'Wizards and monsters capable of attacking from a distance, blast the orcs to pieces. Physically powerful monsters and demi-humans, get ready to attack the injured orcs as soon as the barrier broken.' Athos began to issue orders and the skeletons moved to obey.

The mages who were already preparing their spells used the standard tactic with the hive hawks, casting more than five large-scale spells on the orcs at once. His spells were simple, just spreading zones of darkness over as wide an area as possible, covering all the orcs perfectly.

They sacrificed power in exchange for increased area, but with five at once it did more than enough damage. The orcs' skin rotted as their strength faded faster than the battle spirit could strengthen them.

Skeletons like sun lions and echoing bats appeared right behind the barrier ones and attacked from a safe position. The bats screamed, releasing a sonic wave that knocked the orcs back and burst their eardrums.

The sun lion skeletons, on the other hand, unleashed cannons of darkness from their jaws, piercing the ranks of the stunned orcs. Sun lions were able to absorb sunlight and store it in mane to fire lasers of light, making them shine like a second sun when fired.

After becoming skeletons, they could absorb the darkness of the night and shoot darkness lasers.

"Back off! We need to back off now." The orc leader shouted, urging the orcs to move away from the zone of darkness. Everyone was injured and weakened in the darkness zone, but hundreds were killed by the skeleton monsters' attacks and it didn't look like the darkness lasers weren't going to end anytime soon.

The orcs were forced to retreat and despite the mages and sun lions trying to follow them with their attacks, the giant ogres appeared and blocked the lasers. Their bodies made of stone and light withstood the homes of darkness and only let other ogres take up the onslaught when they were no longer able to bear it.

Thousands of stone fists hit the barrier at once and the trolls attacked soon after, pushing the kinetic energy absorption enchantments to the limit.

'Blow them up.' Athos ordered with a smile.

The shock wave blasted the newly arrived demihumans away, the weaker ones being torn to pieces. It didn't matter if they were ogres, trolls or minotaurs, they were all blown away, leaving the area within a hundred meters of the barrier clear of any living thing.

'Now, advance!' Athos ordered and the army began to advance, its barrier still intact and scaring the demihumans who still hadn't recovered from the shock.

Trolls could naturally regenerate and thanks to the light element of gigantification, ogres were also healing quickly, but not enough to fully regenerate in seconds.

Chapter 223 Invading spirit

‘They’re going to be slaughtered at this rate.’ The spirit orc thought in frustration, realizing that despite the demihumans’ best efforts, they had already lost thousands and even more were wounded, while their enemies still hadn’t lost a single soldier.

As if to force the spirits not to interfere, the acid rain increased in intensity again and now the spirits barely had leeway to pay attention to the fight.

The entire barrier was being eroded away and it required the undead’s concerted effort to prevent the ton of acid above their heads from destroying the entire forest. The acid dissolved after a while, eroding the barrier, but more was being poured out by the wasps every second.

He noted that despite the demi-humans quickly getting back on their feet and fighting back, the black barrier would not break so easily without the orcs, the greatest damage dealers among the demi-humans.

The skeletons returned to cast magic on the demi-humans, further increasing the damage and the number of deaths.

‘If we do nothing, we will be crushed without fighting back.’ The orc spirit thought as it hardened its resolve. ‘Brothers, I’m going forward to try to find the enemy leader. Continuing like this will only lead to our death.’

The other spirits said nothing, knowing that someone needed to do something to reverse the situation.

The orc spirit returned all the energy it had accumulated back to its body and fed its avatar only the bare minimum necessary to move. He would lose any extra energy he tried to take with him, and he wanted to reduce his losses as much as possible.

He left the edge of the forest and ran as fast as he could, trusting that his brothers who stayed behind would be able to hold the barrier on their own. He began to feel pain throughout his spirit as he was drawn back into his original body, but he just gritted his teeth and continued forward.

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Cracks appeared across his body as he felt a headache that felt like his head would split in half, but he managed. The front ranks of the undead came within range of his mystical senses and he was able to see into the tormented souls of the undead.

The orc spirit felt a tightness in his chest when he saw the souls chained in suffering, but he concentrated on his task. Thanks to the chains, he only had to follow the chains to find Athos, feeling goosebumps at the sight of his soul. He also found Treevor next to him and found its appearance odd, but just assumed it was a plant monster or something.

‘I found! It is a humanoid skeleton wearing full armor and a helmet with four horns. He’s next to the plant monster that’s probably his bodyguard, so be careful!’ The orc spirit spoke through the mind link with the demihuman spirits and leaders, describing Athos as best it could.

He began to retreat after finishing his work, wanting to reduce his damage as much as possible.

‘We need to break through the barrier first to get a glimpse of the enemy. Start charging the crystals and give the last charge the moment the barrier drops.’ The orc patriarch responded and roared, hurling

himself against the barrier despite the wizards' spells bearing down on them. The recovered demihumans also attacked again, using various elemental abilities against the barrier.

The barrier trembled under the combined efforts of the demi-humans, and before long it would give way. Athos noticed that the attacks intensified and confirmed the progress of the plan with the skeletons.

'The barrier will break soon, bearers of shared curses prepare to retreat. Wyverns, are you ready?' Athos asked, confirming that all skeletons were in position to attack.

'We are ready, master.' Malic responded from the sky, ordering the wasps that still had some acid to release everything in one last attack before moving away.

'I'm also ready, although I'm still not sure about that plan.' Treevor replied somewhat uncomfortably, but it was too late to back down now. He picked up a teleportation crystal and began charging it quickly.

'Bearers of shared curses, prepare to deactivate the forced teleportation the instant the barrier breaks.' He ordered and the skeletons nodded in the affirmative.

The barrier was unable to withstand any more damage and began to collapse, but the mages cast spells to provide cover for the shared curse bearers to retreat.

'Now!' Athos commanded as soon as the barrier collapsed and Treevor did as he was told, disappearing in a purplish-black orb. He reappeared with a gust of wind at the edge of the forest, startling the orc spirit that was retreating a few meters from him.

'The enemy has teleported-' He tried to warn his brothers, but one of the vines on the back of Treevor's head reached out and pierced him between the eyes, destroying the spirit and cutting off communication.

Normally a simple blow like that wouldn't be able to destroy a seventh layer spirit, but the orc spirit had purposely lowered its own amount of energy and its body was already starting to crack, so Treevor just gave the final push.

'I don't have time for this.' Treevor thought as he looked away from the disappearing spirit and touched the tree in front of him, spreading his senses throughout the forest. It was a skill he hadn't used in a while, but he never forgot how to use it.

Treevor felt the forest reject his intrusion as filthy, but he forced his will anyway.

'Who are you?' The spirits that sensed Treevor's invasion spoke in his mind in unison and struggled to try to expel him. They were able to communicate with each other through the forest even without magic, so they immediately felt the foreign will.

'Your death.' Treevor responded with a mockery, angering all the spirits at once. They joined together to expel him, but a searing pain took over their bodies.

The land around Treevor quickly withered and died, while the tree he was touching withered, quickly spreading throughout the forest. The spirits that lived here forbade demihumans to interfere with the forest, so the trees grew freely and were all connected.

The effects of plundering the world caused all the trees to wither, and the land the spirits had nurtured for so long became dead and sandy, unable to support itself. Tremors began as sand collapsed into the empty space where the demi-humans were.

Earth magic had been used to harden the ground and make the subsoil sustainable, but Treevor destroyed it all, burying the noncombatant demihumans alive.

Amidst all the desolate land, only the spirit trees remained, but their state was precarious. They were able to partially resist the effects of world pillage thanks to their spirit nature, but they were still slowly withering.

“Arghh...! What the hell is this creature?!” The slime spirit screamed in panic and pain, feeling its real body weaken more with each passing second. He split the energy that had accumulated over time between his body and spirit to lessen the effects, but it only partially worked.

The energy actually formed a shield that protected him from the draining effect, but his energy was being drained in place of his body.

‘How amazing.’ Treevor thought, feeling all the amber energy he absorbed. The forest and nearby lands generated a great deal of energy, but it was the spirits that were the main course.

The energy they stored was of a quality superior to itself, so it was diluted by seeping into its amber eye, greatly increasing in quantity.

‘I want more.’ He thought greedily, his legs turning into roots and sinking into the earth to remain connected to the spirits. With the trees dead, it was the only way to maintain the effect of world pillage.

‘We have to kill him quickly!’ The spirits sensed danger and began to charge at Treevor, casting their best spells against him.

‘Right choice, but predictable.’ Treevor responded, the activating field of the dead and darkening everything within 100 meters around his body. The enchantment only covered 50 meters normally, but Treevor forcibly expanded the area of effect using corrupted amber energy.

‘What is it now?’ The spirits thought in shock, unable to complete the spells they started casting. They felt the corrupted world energy burn their avatars and no matter how hard they tried, they couldn’t access the world energy.

“Do you really think you can stand there dumbfounded? Come at once!” Treevor sneered, snapping them out of their stupor.

The spirits mistook his words for the arrogance of someone confident of victory, but Treevor’s words weren’t meant for them.

“I apologize Mr. Treevor, but we didn’t think you had enough power to turn miles of land into wasteland in seconds.” The wyverns appeared from the sky and apologized to Treevor, before charging the spirits.

The spirits had momentarily forgotten about the wyverns in the sky and racked their brains to think of a force to overcome the current situation, but their despair only increased.

His mystical senses revealed that on the backs of the wyverns, there were several black souls bound by equally dark chains. They were mage slayers, who had been dismantling their bones and clinging to the wyverns' bodies all this time.

Chapter 224 One a one

In their desperation, the spirits tried to blast Treevor with their incomplete spells, increasing its power by force using its core's mana and accumulated energy.

Dozens of corrupted element spells attacked them in response, blocking most of their attacks. Wizard and wyvern slayers did not have the same limitations as spirits and could cast spells with even more power within the field of the dead.

Few spells got through and hit Treevor, but a barrier of dark amber stone easily blocked it. Treevor was weaker than the spirits, but between the incomplete spells and the constant supply of amber energy he received, the balance of power tipped for Treevor.

The wyverns flew over the spirits and breathed the dragon's breath over them, before the mage-slayers leapt from their backs and engaged them in hand-to-hand combat.

They were weaker physically, even with the spirits only having half the energy they had accumulated, but the mage slayers fought without care for each other, using area damage spells to hit them off guard.

Spirits weren't used to fighting and didn't have any fighting skills, so they were easy targets for combat-experienced mage slayers.

"Let's get this over with." Treevor thought, its vines spreading like whips and cutting the weakened spirits to pieces, casting spells of darkness at close range. Treevor didn't let the spirits recover and coiled his vines under the dying pieces, absorbing until the last bit of energy.

'Unlike avatars, it will take some time to drain their real bodies and then turn them into undead. I'm going to be here for a while.' Treevor thought, realizing there was still a lot of energy to absorb. After being destroyed and forced back into the tree, it would take some time for their minds to recover and they could release their avatars again, but it would be too late.

Treevor noticed movement underground and realized that the demihumans were struggling to break free, so he injected corrupted mana into the earth, causing it to darken and ceasing the demi-humans' resistance.

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'Is the battle over already?' Treevor turned to check curiously. only to gasp in shock. 'How did this happen in such a short time?'

The undead line of defense was broken and the demihumans were struggling to get deeper into the undead army. Thousands of demihuman skeletons were on the ground releasing white smoke on the ground and the demihumans were running over them to kill them.

At the same moment that Treevor teleported.

'Everyone, teleport now!' The ogre patriarch screamed as soon as he spotted Athos among the undead. He fed the crystal what it needed while disabling gigantification and shrinking himself down so he could fit inside the purple orb.

Athos was retreating with Emilia at his side when the purple orb suddenly appeared on his back.

Before he could react, a fist wrapped in whitish-brown energy hit him in the back, forcing him to the ground and creating a crater. The armor's enchantments completely absorbed the impact, but the earth element in the ogre's fists still forced Athos to the ground and the light left a burn on the armor, albeit a shallow one.

'How did this ogre manage to hit me so fast and so hard even after his strength was drained?' Athos thought as he rolled away and dodged a second punch. He internally cursed the enemy's luck to teleport at the exact moment they disabled the forced teleport.

'How did this runt survive my surprise attack without suffering any damage and where is the plant bodyguard?' The ogre patriarch thought, chasing Athos. He teleported at the same time as Treevor, so he didn't see the latter disappear.

"Protect the master!" Emilia screamed at the surrounding undead, rushing at the patriarch and taking aim at his exposed ankles.

'He has no armor and only relies on his own body to protect himself, so I should be able to cut deeply even using daggers and buy time for the master to escape.' It was Emilia's thought.

She tried to slash his right ankle, but the patriarch just jumped, his movement lifting him thirty feet in the air and landing right on top of Athos, trying to crush him under his weight.

"Without the element of surprise it's easy to dodge you!" Athos wasn't taken by surprise this time and activated the lightning impulse, easily dodging the patriarch's footfall.

The surrounding monsters surrounded them and Emilia sneaked up to attempt an assassination, but several more purple spheres appeared, cutting the undead in half.

Orcs, ogres, and minotaurs appeared and immediately began attacking the surrounding undead, preventing the other undead from interfering.

'Kill the demi-humans around and leave this ogre to me. He also seems to want to take things one by one.' Athos spoke through the mind link and soon the demihumans formed a makeshift arena for the two.

Athos was already casting his best spells with his mind and magic organ while looking for a gap to attack, but the ogre patriarch was an experienced fighter and knew how to fight smaller enemies.

The demi-humans intensified the attack when they saw their leaders in the middle of the enemy formation and Athos ordered them to prevent it at all costs.

The demi-human undead who were waiting just behind the shields rushed forward at that moment and engaged them head-on, using their abilities to the fullest. The living were already weak and injured so the undead should have an easy victory against them, but the unthinkable happened.

Skeleton ogres tried to activate gigantification to match enemy ogres, making a mistake. The light element abundant in the region seeped into their bodies, the light burning them from the inside out.

The ogre skeletons felt the light burn their bones and only grew to 5 meters before they fell to the ground, white smoke billowing from their bodies. The darkness replacing their body was almost completely purged, so they were unable to move a single finger.

“Hoooo!” The demihumans applauded the enemy’s stupidity and rushed through the newly created breach, wanting to cause as much damage as possible while they could. Their own ogres would be back to normal soon, so they had to hurry.

Their generals, including the bone abominations, stepped forward to block them and the battle quickly became confused.

The ogre patriarch also glanced quickly at his subordinates fighting for their lives and reaffirmed his determination to kill Athos quickly. He roared and charged at him, his entire body empowered by mana and the element of earth and light.

He tried to crush Athos with both fists, but Athos blocked the attacks with bonesaw, before unleashing the meteor impact at close range.

The point-blank explosion forced the ogre patriarch back a few meters with deep burns on his forearms, but he was able to resist without being thrown into the air. Athos, on the other hand, would have been forced to kneel if the equipment hadn’t absorbed the impacts.

Athos seized the opportunity to advance, using lightning boost double to accelerate even more.

The ogre patriarch used an acceleration skill to try to keep up with Athos’ speed, but he could barely keep up with his eyes. His eyes followed Athos’ movements, but his body didn’t, making his movements clumsy.

Athos circled the ogre’s legs, striking swiftly before stepping back to avoid the ogre’s blows. His slashes shouldn’t have been more than scratches, but they sliced through the ogre’s flesh like butter.

The only reason the ogre patriarch was able to hold his own against him was the light element in his body regenerating his wounds the moment they were made.

‘How the hell does this thing move so fast?’ The ogre patriarch thought in frustration, receiving his tenth thigh slash and once again missing the counterattack. ‘I need to break your rhythm, even if it’s just for a moment.’

The ogre waited for Athos’ next attack and the moment he felt the adamant cold cut into his calf, he released his whitish brown aura like a shock wave to catch Athos off guard.

The equipment absorbed the impact of the aura, but not the elemental energy contained within it. The light element in the aura stung his skin as the element slowed his movement, just as the patriarch intended.

“Roar!” The ogre roared, taking advantage of that moment of slowness to punch him in the face, but was blocked once again by the bonesaw. The patriarch even used skill to strengthen his fist, but it had no effect.

“Sorry, but you can’t break adamant with just your bare fists.” Athos smiled at him despite not being able to speak the same language, the ogre smiled too.

“Got you.” He grabbed the shield by the edge and his fingers bled as the curved blades sliced through him, but the ogre didn’t care. With a sweep of his arm, he lifted Athos off the ground and knocked him back, making a small crater before raining punches on his exposed side.

‘Damn it, I let my guard down and let myself get caught. If it weren’t for the equipment, I would have already been ripped to pieces.’ Athos thought, using the dragontusk to count the ogre’s pulse and break try free. His blade slashed through the ogre’s wrist like butter and the ogre was unable to put any strength into the grip but refused to get off him.

Chapter 225 A victory and a discovery

He climbed on top of Athos and grabbed Athos’s free arm to stop him from using his sword and slammed his injured arm against him. His severed wrist was still healing, but he strengthened his arm with a skill and the earth element hardened his arm like a club.

‘Why is this bastard’s armor so strong? Without a weapon I-’ The ogre patriarch was frustrated at not doing any damage despite his best efforts. His wrist finished healing and he grabbed bonesaw and tried to pull it off Athos’ arm to use as a blunt weapon, but it was too late.

‘Finally it’s full.’ Athos thought and released all the kinetic energy that his equipment had accumulated. A shock wave spread from its body and hurled the shocked ogre into the air, where it would be an easy target for Athos.

Athos had purposely let the ogre capture him to accumulate kinetic energy and finish casting his spells. A meteor spear flew straight into Ogre’s chest, but the latter punched the air with his right hand, releasing a fist of aura to propel himself away from the spell.

The meteor spear passed inches from his body and for an instant he thought he had successfully dodged it, at least until the spell detonated at close range and drowned him in black flames.

The ogre patriarch screamed in pain as his body flew even further thanks to the shock wave, but Athos gave chase, conjuring platforms of air underfoot to catch up.

“Fall.” Athos smashed bonesaw at the face of the ogre who was still struggling to breathe. The curved blades cut his face deeply and blinded him in the right eye.

The ogre fell to the ground creating a crater and Athos landed on top of him, impaling him with the dragontusk in the chest, missing his heart by inches.

“You will die with me!” The ogre roared and grabbed Athos’ head with both hands and tried to crush him like a can, but the armor’s barrier expanded from the inside out and pushed his hands away.

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Athos’s visor opened and he spat a breath of black fire, charring the ogre’s face. The patriarch was unable to cry out in pain and his lungs burned with flames, suffering an agonizing death.

“Having the right equipment really makes the difference in a fight. I still can’t believe I defeated an ogre patriarch suffering only light scratches.” Athos muttered as he analyzed his armor and realized that despite the efforts of the ogre patriarch, there was only a slight dent on the side of his helmet that was barely noticeable.

The demihumans who were fighting with their lives around to stop the undead from interfering roared in rage at the sight of the slain patriarch and abandoned their positions to attempt a desperate last attack on Athos.

‘I would love to have fun killing them all, but with so many at once it would be difficult, Let’s reduce their numbers a bit.’ Athos thought and started releasing aura blades without stopping.

The demihumans blocked with their own weapons or crossed their arms in front of their bodies to defend, making a huge mistake. The aura blades sliced through enchanted equipment like paper and caused deep gashes on the demihumans’ bodies, those who tried to block with their own bodies being cut in half.

Unbeknownst to the demi-humans, tiny threads of corrupted mana were connecting the sword to the aura blades, sharing the sword’s effects with each aura blade at the moment it was fired. It was the effect of their shared blessing spell, which allowed Athos to share the effect of a skill, potion or enchantment with his equipment or his own body.

Athos used the spell to share the high-speed vibration enchantment with his aura blades, increasing their sharpness several times over.

‘I think I could have killed the ogre using that same method, but it seemed too impersonal to me.’ Athos thought, but the truth was that he wanted to prolong the fight as long as possible to have fun.

The undead who lost their enemies for a moment attacked again and easily killed the heavily injured demi-humans.

‘How is the fighting on the front line?’ Athos asked through mind link.

‘We’re almost done here, master.’ It was Malti who responded, her position as an archer allowing her more breathing room than the others. ‘We lost a lot of ogre skeletons, but luckily the time for enemy giganticization was over, and the bone abominations made their way among the demihuman forces.’

‘The bone abominations turned into balls of bones and rolled over the demihumans. It was a really funny sight.’ Malti explained while laughing and Athos laughed too.

‘It seems they learned by imitating Hecatonchires. Their learning ability seems to be quite high.’ Athos thought and jumped high into the air to observe the end of the battle.

Just like Malti said, the bone abominations were rolling all over the demihuman army, while the demihuman skeletons massacred the survivors.

The hive hawks were constantly casting spells to raise the corpses as undead, further increasing the survivors’ despair. The demihumans had already given up the fight and were trying to flee, but the bone abominations surrounded them, blocking any escape route with their speed.

The abominations pumped mana full force through their bodies and their speed was something even Athos had a hard time keeping up with.

'The forest was destroyed, so Treevor must have won too. There's not much I can do here, so I'll see how things are on his side.' Athos thought and called Simogo, who appeared beside him in a few seconds.

Simogo had been kept hidden as a secret weapon in case something unforeseen happened, but it wasn't necessary.

Athos flew on Simogo's back to Treevor, who was still busy draining the spirits.

"My plan was perfect, wasn't it?" Athos boasted as soon as he got off the dragon, a condescending expression on his face.

"Almost. We lost many more skeletons than necessary. It was a command error on our part not to think that the enemies wouldn't think to teleport as well. We were lucky they didn't target the mages or the chariots, or we would have taken much more damage." Treevor spoke with a sneer and Athos' expression sank.

"It was a stroke of luck from the enemy. They teleported in at the exact moment we lowered the defenses, so there was nothing we could do." Athos spoke in self-defense. "But what about the spirits? Was it easy to defeat them?"

"To the point of being boring." Treevor crossed his arms and Athos could have sworn the wooden skull was smiling. "The fighting experience of these spirits is almost equal to zero. They act like amateurs, taking rash actions and easily panicking."

"I'm pretty sure they've never had to fight for their lives before." Treevor spoke with a mixture of contempt and envy for the spirits.

"Got it. It seems we've overestimated spirits too much and underestimated demihumans. It'll be valuable experience for the future." Athos nodded his head a few times. "And why aren't the spirits dead yet? I'm curious to know if I can turn ordinary spirits into undead or if you are an exception."

"Wait a little longer. I discovered that I can also absorb energy accumulated by other spirits and add to my own, so I want to absorb everything before transforming them." Treevor answered, but suddenly choked.

His body started to tremble involuntarily and a burning spread through his real body, more precisely in his right eye. Her spirit was forced back into her body against her will and the corrupted willow tree split open, her body bouncing to its knees as it screamed in pain.

"Argh!" He rolled across the floor as he held the eye that wouldn't stop burning. Treevor began to scratch at his face in desperation and tried to poke his own eye out to make the pain stop, so Athos was forced to intervene.

"Treevor, stop it." Athos grabbed him by the arms to stop him from hurting himself and ordered him to stay still. Up close, Athos could see that its amber eye was pulsing and contracting with energy, reminding Athos of a heart, or the contractions of an energy-saturated core forming a new layer.

'But that doesn't make sense. Despite the amber eye being similar to a core and even possessing life force, the energy density is on the same level as the mana core, according to Treevor himself. He never mentioned that he could develop independently of the core.' Athos thought in confusion, as understanding finally dawned on him.

He activated death vision and looked into Treevor's core, realizing it was resonating with the amber eye and pulsing in the same way. The amber eye had reached its maximum limit and unable to accumulate more energy, so it was trying to evolve and forcing the real core to do the same.

Treevor had been stuck in a growth bottleneck in the fifth layer for a few decades and was now breaking through thanks to this serendipitous discovery.

'I'm surprised. I would never have guessed that spirits would be able to forcefully break through layers like that. If I didn't have even better racial ability, I would have been jealous.' Athos thought as he immobilized Treevor so he wouldn't get hurt amidst the pain.

Chapter 226 Treevor development

Athos was right when he thought that spirits were capable of forcibly breaking through layers using accumulated energy, but it was information that not even the spirits themselves knew.

It was widely held information that spirits could accumulate energy over time and there was no known limit to the amount they could store, but only because no spirit had ever accumulated enough energy to do so.

Energy accumulate at an extremely slow rate and normal spirits could store dozens of times more energy than the mana core, so most normally form new layers before reach this limit.

Many used the accumulated energy to fight or create a suitable environment around it like a forest, so it was nearly impossible to accumulate enough energy to break through the force. Even if they encounter growth bottlenecks, it would take centuries to build up the necessary energy.

Yggdrasil spirits had an even higher energy limit and even though Treevor was not a pure spirit, his limit was above that of a normal spirit. It should have been impossible for him to break through the force, but the world pillage ability made it possible for Treevor.

Athos didn't pay much attention to Treevor after confirming that he was safe and was advancing forward, calling a skeleton that had already passed the fifth layer just to make sure he was safe.

"He is safe, master. Advancing to the sixth layer is different from the previous layers and the process is much longer and more painful. Mister Treevor has two cores and both are progressing at the same time, so the pain is even worse." The skeleton that answered his call was Malti.

"The fifth layer is the first wall of progression any warrior or mage faces and the easiest to break through, but many are stuck there for a long time." Malti informed him as soon as he checked Treevor's condition and confirmed that there was no danger.

"Even so, I still need a strong skeleton to hold him back and keep him from getting hurt. Unlike his ethereal mana core, his amber eye is physical and he could get hurt if he keeps thrashing like that." Athos refused to release Treevor until the progress was finished.

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"Are you worried about him?" Malti tilted his head and asked doubtfully, wondering at his master's sudden show of concern.

"Of course I'm worried! Treevor is a unique creature with the powers of a spirit and no limitations. He also has unique racial abilities and the lineage of Yggdrasil, the world tree! Where in the world would you find such a rare being?!" Athos was offended by Malti's question.

'Oh. Treevor is like a rare animal.' Malti noticed, feeling a little sorry for Treevor.

Nearly half an hour passed before the process was over and the pain subsided enough for Treevor to do more than scream in pain and try to struggle.

The sixth layer had successfully formed and Athos followed the whole process with the vision of death, but noticed an abnormality. The new layer formed around the nucleus, instead of being internal like the first ones.

Athos questioned Malti if this was normal and she stated that it was, leaving him wondering what that meant.

"What happened to me? I feel like I've been run over by a dragon." Treevor muttered still lying on the ground, scratching his temples with a headache.

"Congratulations. You discovered a new power and broke through to the sixth layer." Athos clapped his hands congratulating him while briefly explaining what happened.

"What the fuck are you saying?" Treevor cursed unconsciously, Athos' words making no sense to him. Then his brain processed Athos' words and his jaw dropped to the floor.

He stood up abruptly, all the signs of pain he was showing a second ago disappearing like a mirage as he looked down at his body with death vision.

Treevor confirmed that his core had reached the sixth layer while relocating the mandible into place.

"How...how is that possible? I've been stuck in this damn progression barrier for over 20 years and suddenly I break through?" Treevor muttered in disbelief, repeatedly checking his core to make sure he wasn't mistaken.

"I already explained, didn't I? You discovered a new ability and broke through to the sixth layer." Athos repeated the same thing.

"Okay, you're useless. Malti, did you see what happened to me?" Treevor gave up trying to get coherent answers from Athos and turned to Malti who was nearby.

Malti explained in detail what happened, causing Treevor's jaw to drop for the second time in a matter of seconds.

"Is that really possible? No, it must be true. It's impossible for you to lie to me and I can see that my core has really improved and the amber energy is more concentrated." Treevor accepted what had happened to him quickly, much to Athos' surprise.

"You calmed down faster than expected. I thought you'd be panicking for a while." Athos muttered to the side.

"I've resigned myself to the fact that as long as you're around, crazy things will keep happening. If I think about it too much, I'll go crazy." Treevor spoke in a wry tone, momentarily forgetting that he had already lost his mind as well.

"I'm glad you recovered, because there's still work to be done." Athos pointed with his thumb behind him, where the trees that were the real bodies of the spirits were.

Skeletons were busy digging up the half-human bodies that had died buried alive and were trying to move the trees closer to Treevor. The trees were heavy, weighing over a ton each, but it was nothing for physically powerful monsters.

The spirits were slowly withering, but that was to be expected. Spirits could not move from the place where they were born and any attempt would be deadly for them.

Until their bodies were buried and connected with the earth once more, they would bleed to death.

"I understood." Treevor sighed and returned to the corrupted willow, spreading its roots out to regain the world pillage ability. Luckily for him, there was no cooldown for using the skill, as it was originally a skill that constantly granted life to the earth, instead of stealing it.

'They don't have much energy left, but all energy is welcome, especially now that I know I can evolve by accumulating energy.' Treevor thought as he drained what was left of the energy accumulated by the spirits and stopped before he started draining the tree itself.

"Okay, master. Now all that's left is to kill them and test if you can transform spirits too." Treevor spoke and his vines began to whip the trees, releasing blades of black aura to cut them.

Their real bodies were robust and ordinary iron weapons would not be able to harm them. Treevor continued chopping up the trees like a lumberjack until he confirmed with the death vision that everyone was dead.

He cast the mass rise of the undead on the dead trees, expending twice as much life force on all of them and successfully transforming them all. There wasn't much difference in transforming a spirit or a human, just the amount of mana in the required spell was several times higher.

The spirit trees were either acacia or palm trees and they all blackened to ebony black. Their trunks twisted in a spiral like screws, their leaves darkening to a sickly green.

Treevor also used darkness to heal them back to perfect form, but they still continued to slowly wither just as they had when they were alive.

"Let's bury them for now. Turning undead hasn't changed their weaknesses and they will still die if they don't connect with the earth." Treevor spoke as soon as he confirmed the successful transformation of the spirits.

He used earth magic to dig twelve holes and the undead buried the corrupted trees, the spirits immediately began to recover.

“Why aren’t they coming out? Maybe they’re trapped inside their bodies like you were?” Athos cocked his head in confusion, using the death vision to check the condition of the spirits. There didn’t seem to be anything wrong and his black cores in the seventh layer were perfect, so no he didn’t understand what the problem was.

“That’s to be expected. Their spirits were destroyed and that kind of damage takes time to heal. Turning undead did nothing to heal them, quite the contrary, it may have delayed the spirits’ recovery even further.” Treevor explained, using his mystical senses to see into the souls of the spirits.

In his eyes, the spirits’ souls were covered in wounds and shattered, just as he left them when he destroyed the avatars. The black chains did not wrap around the souls as usual, but dug deep into the wounds, spreading their darkness into the deepest parts of the souls.

Treevor didn’t know why the currents were acting differently this time or what difference it would make, so he just explained what he saw to the others.

“I think the answer is simpler than you think.” Athos muttered after Treevor finished explaining, scratching his chin thoughtfully.

“Explain and do it right this time. You summarize too much when you explain something.” Treevor demanded in annoyance.

Chapter 227 Expedition army

“From what we know of my black chains, they corrupt souls similarly to poison, taking control of skeletons’ bodies and spreading murderous thoughts and servitude.” Athos chose his words, so that the two would understand his point. “So we can assume that like a poison, its effects will spread faster if injected from the inside out.”

“It is likely that spirit corruption will happen faster because of this, but it is just a hypothesis and only time can tell what will happen.” Athos concluded and the two skeletons nodded in understanding.

“We’ve spent a lot of time here talking, let’s go back to the others and organize the army. We have work to do and some decisions to make.” Treevor spoke and broke away from the ground, returning to the rest of the army.

Everyone knew that they would need to make a decision on how to proceed from now on, as all neighboring territories had been destroyed. Athos planned to send skeletons to the far south and form a defensive line, but expanding in this way was dangerous.

Stretching your forces too far would risk the bases in the middle being exposed and if destroyed, the undead would be cut off from each other. Treevor still believed that Athos’ plan could work, but some changes would need to be made to avoid being torn apart.

After the skeletons finished picking up the bodies of the demihumans who had died buried in the ground, the mages began to cast mass undead on top of the crowd of corpses.

This time, there was no waste or corpses being used as nutrients to heal other undead. Athos wanted as many undead as possible to start creating the defensive lines.

The battle was definitely profitable for the undead. Although they lost a few thousand skeletons, mostly ogres, they gained nearly 45,000 new undead and their current numbers nearly reached 140,000.

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The choice of generals was left for later, as Athos did not know enough about the new skeletons or the power level of the demihumans to choose generals based on core layers alone.

But the biggest gains were not soldiers. As the spirits showed no signs of recovering, Athos and the high-ranking skeletons interrogated some of the demihumans living underground, making a startling discovery.

Beneath the underground village where the demihumans lived, there was a mine of magic stones. It was a small mine, with only low-level magic stones according to demihumans themselves, but it was still a priceless treasure for someone like Athos, who didn't have any source of resources.

The skeletons immediately dug a tunnel to investigate, finding it to be true. There was a natural cave under all the lifeless sand that Treevor left after devouring the forest.

The cave entrance was buried under sand, but it was easily removed with magic. The first parts of the cave were empty, all the magic stones had already been excavated, but after going deeper, the skeletons started to find small magic stones on the walls.

They left the cave shortly after confirming the truth, taking only a magic stone as a souvenir. His objective here was just to find out if the magic stone mine was true, a mining operation could happen later.

Athos and Treevor, those most sensitive to world energy also noticed that the concentration of world energy in the tunnels was much higher than outside, even though the concentration of energy in the savannah was higher than normal.

After this discovery, Athos made his decision. He would build his army's first base right here, on top of the remains of the spirit forest. The magic stone mine was an adequate source of resources and fulfilled Athos' requirements for building a base.

Athos ordered the dwarven skeletons to begin creating a building plan to create a suitable base and defenses to protect their newfound source of resources. Dwarvin wasn't an expert when it came to engineering, but there were other dwarves with the necessary skills who could create the blueprints.

The high-ranking Skeletons, on the other hand, gathered again to decide who would stay at the base and who would continue to expand southwards. Treevor also planned to make any changes to the plan that he felt were necessary.

All the skeletons were nervous at the thought of being left behind when Athos left, but Athos' words betrayed all their expectations.

"As for our southern expedition, I don't plan on participating. I have a lot of experiments and work that I've been putting off since becoming an undead, so I'll take advantage of the fact that we've found a

suitable location and my settle down temporarily.” Athos spoke seriously once everyone was gathered, shocking all the skeletons present.

None of them expected that Athos, the maddest for blood and wars, would miss the opportunity to fight.

“Master, are you feeling well? Are you not sick or have a fever??” Emilia asked incredulously, momentarily forgetting that they were incapable of getting sick.

“I’m healthy so stop trying to check my temperature, you know my skin is cold to the touch from lack of blood.” Athos stopped her hands before they could touch his forehead.

“But I must say, I’m surprised by your decision. I understand that you want time to research and work, but it’s not like you to be left behind with the possibility of a fight ahead.” Treevor crossed his arms and narrowed his eyes, not convinced by Athos’ words.

“Haah...the truth is, battles aren’t as much fun as they used to be. With armies that big, my role as a leader is mostly to stand back and give orders, so there’s little chance of fighting directly.” Athos spoke with a despondent sigh.

“Furthermore, even the few battles I have are becoming dull. My skills and spells are stalled as a first tier mage and I’m not tapping into my full potential.”

“Use the fight against the ogre patriarch as an example. I just relied on my equipment for the fight and my spells only finished off the ogre. My spells are simple and easy to predict, so I intend to step out of the front line at least until I develop spells suited to my current level.” Athos explained his motives and the undead nodded in agreement this time.

The main reason for his nervousness was the idea of Athos continuing to advance and being in danger, but he himself decided to stay in a safe place, so his worries were gone.

Your objectives have now changed from going to the front lines to staying behind and defending the base with Athos. Everyone racked their brains to think of plausible reasons for staying behind and not joining the expedition.

“I believe I should stay behind. My close-range combat skills won’t be very useful in a war, so acting as a bodyguard and base lookout is a better way to use my skills.” Emilia was the first to speak. the other generals quickly began shouting reasons they should stay behind.

The argument grew more and more heated as the skeletons kept an eye on Athos’ expressions to check for any changes in his expressions, but his face was a mask of stone.

Athos was paying attention to his subordinates’ opinions as he thought who would be useful if he stayed behind and who could be sent. He easily noticed the skeletons’ intentions and partially undid the nerves in the face to prevent them from displaying any expression.

‘Who shall I send? Human generals are the weakest physically, but are far more cunning than beasts and demihumans. Their intelligence and decision making will be very useful when exploring unknown territory, as well as the experience of the demihumans in the savannas will be crucial.’ He thought.

'The division of the army is also important. Manpower needs to be left behind to build the base, but more still needs to be shipped on the expedition. They're going to need a lot of dwarves and earth mages to be able to form proper bases as they go.' Athos began to do some math in his head, counting how many dwarves he currently had and how many he could keep with him without disturbing the expedition.

'To make matters worse, just creating traps and earth walls is useless around here. A single tyrannical mammoth can bring such a thing down in one charge. In order to form a base and maintain it, large-scale spells would be needed or a large standing army at each location.' He started biting his nails as he thought, the stress nearly giving him a headache.

Large scale spells would need at least 10 runesmiths and large amounts of magic metal. Athos possessed both, but not enough to spread from its present position to the edge of the continent.

'Perhaps if we turn mithril into powder and mix it with the earth it will save us a lot of material, but it still won't be enough. We could melt shared curses for mithril, but they are needed to advance and minimize skeleton losses.'

'Hmm? Why is everyone silent all of a sudden?' Athos looked up and noticed that everyone was staring at him in silence.

Chapter 228 Ripha family

"You got lost in your thoughts, so they figured it would be pointless to argue further if it fell on deaf ears." Treevor spoke for all of them, completely nonchalant.

He knew that as commander and second-in-command, he would be the one to lead the troops when they left. Treevor had already resigned himself to the fact that they would part for the time being and was fine with that. The black currents in his mind injected thoughts of servitude into his mind, but he was able to resist to some extent, though not most of the time.

Athos explained all his concerns and all the planning he would need to do for the expedition, making more than one general laugh wryly.

"Master, what you are experiencing right now is the weight of decision making. We are flattered that you are thinking so much of us skeletons and not just ordering us forward without thinking, but would like you to share your thoughts with us." Emília spoke a little emotional.

"Our job is to ease your burden and help you make the right decisions so be sure to share your thoughts so we can advise you like your generals." Malti approached, and soon other generals offered words of encouragement.

"Well, now that you know my concerns, we can organize everything at this meeting and decide the proper time for the army to leave. It's not like you're going to leave right away." Athos spoke after the words of encouragement turned from being kind to irritating.

The skeletons just laughed at his irritability and began to give their honest opinions about who should leave and who should stay, instead of just staying close to Athos to make sure he was safe.

At the end of the meeting, it was decided that of the 140,000 skeletons in the army, 100,000 skeletons would go on the expedition. Among the skeletons that would be left behind would be the human skeletons that were not yet destroyed in battle, the bone abominations, half of the hive hawks, 300 dwarf skeletons including Dwarvin and demihumans of different races.

The skeletons wanted to leave more soldiers behind to ensure that Athos was safe, but the last one insisted that he already had enough security. Athos almost cried at the idea of parting with his pet dragon, but he did it anyway.

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The generals that would be left behind would be Emília, the hydra and Vanilla, all others would be sent on the expedition under the command of Treevor. Athos also gave Treevor permission to freely choose generals from among the skeletons to fill the vacancies open to generals.

Their magical resources also needed to be divided, but they left that question for a later time, as it would be more suitable to have Dwarvin present as the leader of the army's runesmith team.

The dwarf was busy runesmithing the enchanted magic wood weapons they obtained from the spirits, so it would be a few more hours before Dwarvin ran out of mana and had time to attend the meeting.

They held out hope that the dwarf could think of a way to solve the problem of low amounts of magic metals for runesmithing large-scale spells in their future bases.

After they finished discussing the division of the army, Treevor explained his concern about overstretching his forces and the danger this posed, but Athos had already thought of that.

The bases they would be creating would not just be a barrier to stop the advance of the unknown undead, but an advancing post for the skeletons to gather more soldiers.

The undead left in the bases would not stand still and exploit the natural resources in silence, but would hunt all monsters and demihumans around to get new soldiers and spread out to the east and west.

Thanks to the mind web, the skeletons could keep in touch with each other over long distances and if some base couldn't accumulate enough soldiers to expand, other bases might that had extra troops could send their own soldiers to help.

Athos was confident that they could prevent the troops from being isolated from each other that way and the skeletons had to agree that currently, it was the best plan they could think of.

Without access to communication cube or portals, there was no quick way to move large numbers of troops.

They adjourned the meeting temporarily, leaving only the problem of resources open until Dwarvin was available.

Kingdom of Belaster, Ripha Island, in the far north of the kingdom.

Ripha Island was approximately 15 kilometers long, with a forest of coconut trees, palm trees and other trees common in beach regions.

Despite its extensive size, the island was almost uninhabited. Its only inhabitants were the Ripha family, the rulers of the island and all nearby islands, in addition to the servants who maintained the island's few dwellings.

In the exact center of the island, there was a huge five-story U-shaped mansion, the Ripha mansion. Just the mansion itself was over 500 meters wide, its size absurd compared to the small amount of people who lived here.

In one of its numerous rooms, a meeting was in progress. The subject of the meeting was a sensitive one, and the master of the house had ordered all servants not to approach the hall or the surrounding areas.

The only people inside the room were the master of magic Lukas Ripha and The water elder Thersec Ripha, all other family members had been were on other tasks. Most of his sons held important positions in the order of magic or the nobility of Belaster, so it was rare for them to get together.

Lukas himself was an extremely busy man, and his schedule only became more crowded with the impending war, but he promptly canceled his appointments when he got a call from his father, saying they needed to talk in person.

His father was an extremely serious and practical man, for him to want to report something in person could only mean that it was a matter so important that it could not be discussed in a dubious way with a communication cube. They knew that it was possible to tamper with communication cubes and spy on conversations and calls, since it was Thersec himself who invented the communication cubes.

But after hearing what his father had to say, Lukas wished his father was kidding.

"You're kidding, aren't you? Emilia...is she dead?" Lukas muttered in disbelief, letting the wineglass he was holding fall and shatter against the floor. He stared at his father with a dazed gaze, feeling the world around him spin and it wasn't because of the wine.

"That's exactly what you heard, son. Emilia is dead. She was the captain of a unit of mage slayers on a mission to kidnap members of the word keepers on the border of Mirkor's kingdom, but they were caught by the new breed of undead, that appeared in the region and were all killed." Tharsec coldly related it as if he were speaking of a stranger, rather than his own granddaughter.

"But I... I had placed a bodyguard to protect her and organized everything so that she would have the necessary resources and not be trapped in progression walls. When she decided to join the mage slayers, I bribed Louis Zahara's apprentices not to reveal to the elder that she was my daughter lest he try to get his hands on her!" Lukas got to his feet and screamed, unable to accept reality.

He revealed secrets that Emilia herself was unaware of, but which explained how she was able to advance so quickly in a few decades and how Louis did not know about Emilia's existence until he personally checked her file.

"Don't blame yourself, son. None of us could have foreseen a new species of undead suddenly appearing in such a remote area, or that they would be powerful enough to slaughter an entire unit of

mage slayers.” Tharsec spoke words that seemed to sound consoling, but it was only a rebuke for his son losing his composure.

“But how did you come to know about it before I did? I thought you didn’t care about her after my daughter left the family.” Lukas looked suspiciously, hot tears starting to run down his face.

He had always watched over his daughter from the shadows and knowing that she was suddenly dead broke his heart.

“It was during the interrogation of that bastard Louis. We thoroughly investigated his lab and forced him to explain in detail what caused him to send a zombie dragon through teleportation.” Tharsec narrowed his eyes, offended by his son’s suspicion, but let it go as Lukas was clearly shaken.

“He ended up revealing a lot of things under the influence of drugs and a lot of things that until then didn’t make sense in this story of the undead. A young man with a body of mana who died and became an undead, somehow managed to gather power the enough to kill an entire city and a unit of mage slayers.” Tharsec narrated everything that Louis let slip during the interrogation/torture.

“Louis couldn’t stand the thought of losing his prized specimen and sent mage hunters to try to retrieve the undead boy’s bones in the midst of battle to reclaim the fortress of the platinum fist and when even that failed, he tried to send the dragon, resulting in the disaster we have witnessed.”

Chapter 229 Death news

Despite the important information Tharsec was sharing with him, Lukas’s mind was unable to register anything. All that was going through his head were thoughts of regret for not having stopped her when she decided to run away, or at least tried to bring her back to the family later.

Guilt, remorse, and regret clouded his mind as he clenched his fists so hard his hands bled. Then he remembered that his daughter didn’t die, but was murdered by an undead and was most likely a slave in agony.

Guilt gave way to anger, which quickly turned to burning hatred. Lukas leapt to his feet in a rage, thinking of a thousand ways to bring an undead an agonizing death, but Tharsec’s voice stopped him.

“Sit down, child. There’s nothing you can do and even if there was, there’s no reason for you to get involved.” Tharsec commanded in an authoritative tone, his voice carrying a fraction of his aura and forcing Lukas to sit down again, even if against his will.

It was only then that Lukas understood why his father had come to inform him personally, instead of speaking through the communication cube or sending a messenger to bring the news. Tharsec came personally to stop him from trying to get revenge.

“Why are you going to stop me?” Lukas felt betrayed by Tharsec’s attitude and tried to resist her authoritarian aura as much as possible, but to no avail. Lukas tried activating the mansion’s large-scale enchantments to gain the upper hand, but it didn’t work.

The manor glowed with mana as it answered his call, but Tharsec was unaffected. The mansion’s enchantments were created in such a way that they could not affect a Ripha, therefore both Tharsec and Lukas were immune to their effects.

“Why won’t I let you make a reckless decision because of the pain. I know that although you maintain a strong appearance to others, you are weak inside and soft on your family, even a bastard daughter who has turned her back on family.” Thersec’s lips curled in disgust at the mention of Emilia.

“She’s my daughter and your granddaughter! How can you act so nonchalant when talking about her death, as if you were talking about a stranger?” Lukas snapped, but Thersec only scoffed at what he considered sentimental stupidity.

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“Emilia is not my granddaughter. She ceased to be the day she turned her back on her family and left this house to join our enemy. She was just a stranger who happened to carry my blood, a bastard—” Thersec he started to curse at Emilia as if she were a traitor, but Lukas stopped him.

He broke free of the residual effects of the aura restraining him and shot out of his chair like a bullet, punching Thersec in the face. His movement was swift and precise, his fist reaching the elder’s face in an instant, timed perfectly in the moment when Thersec blinked so that he was unable to react.

“I’ll let that slide, considering you’re mourning the loss of the child, even after she turned her back on us. But I won’t tolerate another affront like that, so think carefully about your next actions.” Thersec didn’t bother opening his eyes, ignoring his son’s affront.

Lukas gritted his teeth, feeling like he’d punched an adamant wall. He noticed a thin layer of blue light blocking his fist millimeters from his father’s face and no matter how much force he put into the fist, it was unable to advance even a millimeter.

“Tch.” Lukas clicked his tongue in annoyance and walked away, tired of the futile effort. He had avoided activating any skills and punched using only his physical strength, wanting only to vent his anger and stop the water elder from slandering Emilia again.

He wasn’t yet strong enough to stand up to his father in a fight, so this was about as much defiance as he could do.

“As I was saying, this child was not a member of the Rlpha family, so you are prohibited from doing anything to try to avenge him.” Thersec continued talking as if nothing had happened as Lukas sat back in his chair.

“Even if you don’t want revenge, killing the undead is still a necessity. We can’t let creatures that thrive on death escape with their lives.” As it was pointless to appeal to the feelings of someone who had none, Lukas tried to reason using the danger the undead posed, but Thersec didn’t care.

“I didn’t come here to ask your opinion, but to order you to do nothing. There’s a lot at stake right now, your personal vendetta and the undead are insignificant compared to everything that’s going on. The political war within the order and the impending invasion of Doravon are far more important than a few tens of thousands of puny undead.” Thersec warned him once more not to do anything, but from Lukas’s furious expression, he didn’t look like he would comply.

“Your answer?” He questioned him just to be sure, but Lukas remained silent.

"Your answer, now." This time her tone wasn't a question but an order, forcing Lukas to give an answer even if his heart refused.

"I understand, Dad. I won't do anything." Lukas growled every word, but Thersec just nodded in understanding, not the least bit convinced by his words.

"You are a smart man, son, but your kind heart is a weakness you must kill. I'll leave some of my personal apprentices here to make sure you don't take any rash action." Thersec got up and left, ignoring Lukas's complaints.

"One last thing, son." Thersec stopped in front of the door and spoke without turning around. "Don't try to do something funny after I'm gone. The apprentices I'll leave behind may not be very famous, but they're powerful enough to stand up to you and I'll give them orders to beat you to an inch to death if you try something."

"How confident, Elder." Lukas responded sarcastically, refusing to call him father. Their relationship has always been bad because of their opposing personalities, but Lukas still hated him for treating Emilia in such a way.

"It's natural. Unlike you, who spent most of your career in a laboratory, they have over a century of experience in bloody battles, so don't even dream of being able to defeat them and run away for some idiotic revenge." Thersec turned and faced him once more.

"Even if you want revenge, which I really don't understand, there's no way to find the undead once they've left for the demi-human empire, so just give it up and focus your rage on the evolved demi-humans that will arrive in brief."

"Our family's territory isn't exactly on the demi-humans' invasion line, but the battle could still come to us if the islands west of us fall." Thersec finished speaking and left, this time without looking back.

Left alone, Lukas collapsed into the chair, feeling all his strength leaving him. Memories of Emilia's childhood flashed through his mind and Lukas felt endless remorse wash over him.

He clenched his teeth in rage, feeling helpless. Lukas had thought that with all the support from the shadows he gave Emilia, in addition to Caio's presence to protect her in an emergency, she would be safe, but it was in vain.

He had even given her a teleportation crystal with the family crest so that she could save herself in an emergency, but it was in vain. Lukas knew it was pointless to blame himself for what happened and even the human gods couldn't have foreseen the emergence of a new species of undead, but he still blamed himself for not trying to bring her back to the family.

'...no. hang on. Emilia had a teleportation crystal and probably died with it. If the undead who murdered her weren't completely stupid, they would have taken the crystal for themselves as loot.' Lukas thought suddenly, the gears in his mind turning rapidly as he thought of a way to get revenge.

'If I can track down the teleportation crystal, maybe I can find the location of the undead and avenge my daughter. According to the information, the undead have a few tens of thousands, hundreds of mages, a corrupted spirit and somehow managed to transform the dark elder's zombie dragon into a shadow dragon.'

'I'll need to prepare myself if I want to take revenge on them, but first I need to get rid of the two nuisances that will come.' With perfect timing, the door to the room opened again and two wizards dressed in blue robes entered.

The blue cloak covered them from head to toe and the only thing that was visible was their exactly alike faces, revealing to Lukas that they were identical twins.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, master of magic Lukas Ripha. We've come here under orders from the Water Elder to be your bodyguards and watchmen for the time being, so we'll be in your care for the next few weeks." The twins spoke in unison and bowed, but Lukas only narrowed his eyes at the clearly practiced introduction.

Chapter 230 Family war

'That old man already knew how I would react and prepared watchmen for me in advance. It's the only explanation for why they got here so quickly. Probably the old man came with these two from the beginning and left them waiting in some room of the mansion.' Lukas thought.

"Do what you want, just don't get in my way, or I'll kill you." He actually responded, releasing his aura through his voice to test the two of them.

"As you wish, sir." They both smiled coldly at him and bowed slightly in acknowledgment, not at all shaken by his aura.

'They weren't affected by my aura, which means they're at least the same level as me, or maybe higher. It will be difficult to take them down, but not impossible. I'll need to prepare properly and not act rashly.' Lukas thought.

Killing them with the weapons Lukas kept in his arsenal would be easy, but Thersec would probably be warned if they died and the old man would consider it an act of treason, so killing his apprentices wasn't an option.

Knocking them out alive was much more difficult, but it would lessen the punishment that would come later when Thersec returned. But the important thing is that by then he would have had his revenge and was willing to accept any punishment.

'I need some weapon that can overcome the defenses of the cloak and the probable armor that is underneath, but that doesn't kill them. I think I have just the thing in my lab, but I need to get them there.' Lukas thought, remembering the weapons and equipment he kept inside the lab itself.

'The water elder is probably still at the manor finishing up the housework, so I'll have to wait a few hours to start my plan.' With nothing to do, Lukas began to drink in grief.

"I don't care what orders you've been given, but I've just learned of my daughter's death and I'm not in the mood to entertain visitors. If you're going to keep watch, stay outside the door. It's not like there's one way to escape in this closed room." Lukas ordered in a tired, pained voice, drinking the wine straight from the bottle without pouring it into a glass.

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Although the idea of revenge lit a flame of hatred in his heart, it did nothing to quell the sea of remorse in which his mind was. The drink clouded his thoughts and gave him temporary relief, only for his naturally enhanced body to recover and the pain returned again.

He seriously thought about buying a poison that lowered a target's resistance just so he could get drunk, but he resisted the temptation. He could mourn his daughter's death later, after she was resting in peace instead of being an undead slave. Until then, the temporary relief of booze is all he can afford.

"We'll be right outside the door, so let us know if you need anything." The twins looked at each other for a moment and answered, leaving the room and locking the door behind them.

Lukas spent the next few hours drowning in drinks and memories, only stopping when Water Elder left. He himself had created the mansion's teleportation portal and runesmithing so that it would notify him whenever it was active.

It was a secret Thersec didn't know and Lukas saw no reason to share it with him.

'Let's start.' Lukas thought, wiping the tears and snot down his face, at the same time using light magic to clear the drink from his system and restore the red eyes from crying.

He got up and left the room, finding the two guards standing outside.

"Are you going somewhere Master Lukas?" The twin on the right asked just out of courtesy, both following close behind him like shadows.

"There's no point in continuing to drink and moan. Instead, I'm going to do something more productive, like take my anger out on my work. It's good to clear my head." Lukas replied, his voice hoarse from crying.

"It's a good decision, sir. Allow us to escort you." The twin on the left nodded in understanding.

"I'm going to use secret runesmith techniques known only to the Ripha, so you're not allowed to follow me inside the lab." Lukas tried to argue to be left alone, but the guards obviously wouldn't let him.

"That won't be necessary, Master Lukas. The water elder had warned us that you would likely take your grievances out at the forge and that we were allowed to follow you no matter what you did. We swore on our lives that we will take your secrets with us to the grave." The twin on the left placed his hand on his chest and declared, quickly followed by the one on the right.

'The old man even prepared for this, huh? Let's see if he was able to foresee the weapons that I have stored then.' Lukas was frustrated with how well Thersec predicted his actions.

"If that's the case, there's nothing you can do. But be absolutely silent and just observe from a distance. Any kind of interference, no matter how small, can spoil what would be a masterpiece." Lukas actually spoke and both mages nodded.

They walked in silence down the long hallway to the stairs, and down the stairs to the first floor. His personal laboratory was in the underground of the mansion and the only way to access it was on the first floor.

After descending the stairs to the first floor, Lukas bit his fingertip and let a drop of his blood drip onto the floor, making the floor in front of his feet glow and open up, revealing that the stairs continued.

"Nice trick. I couldn't detect the secret passage until your blood activated." One of the twins whistled in admiration.

"That goes without saying. The enchantments only respond to my family's blood and remain hidden until then." Lukas answered as he walked down the stairs.

His laboratory was hundreds of meters underground, so that even if an experiment goes wrong, the explosion will not affect the mansion above. The stairs spiraled down and had magic lights on the wall to light the way, but the narrow hallways still felt bad for the twin watchmen.

'It's definitely a trap.' The twins realized Lukas' obvious trap and prepared to report the moment Lukas tried to do something.

Thersec knew that Lukas would seek revenge and watchmen were sent out with orders to prioritize alerting Thersec the moment Lukas tried anything

The water elder wanted to catch his son attacking his apprentices in order to have concrete evidence to limit him. Elder himself was waiting for the emergency call from the lookouts on one of the neighboring islands, just waiting for the right opportunity.

Lukas was gaining a lot of influence in the order in recent years and despite that increasing the prestige of the Ripha family, it was reaching the point of undermining Thersec's absolute authority, something inconceivable for the elder.

Thersec intended to use this opportunity to punish him and reaffirm his position. Lukas may be the current head of House Mifar, but that was just the noble title bestowed by the kingdom of Belaster and Thersec was still the leader behind it all and would not accept relinquishing control until his deathbed.

Both guards held magic items that would alert the elder under their cloak and were just waiting for the moment to activate them. They knew Lukas was luring them into a trap and they were on high alert, just waiting for Lukas to try something.

To her surprise, Lukas continued to walk in silence until the stairs ended in a magical steel door. The door didn't have a handle or anything distinctive, it just looked like a huge plate of magical steel.

Lukas once again spilled a drop of blood on the door to open it and entered. The guards arrived soon after, and despite all the training they'd received to remain stoic, they couldn't help but widen their eyes in surprise.

Lukas' laboratory was the size of a mansion and the floor, walls and ceiling were made of magical steel. Hundreds of kilograms of different magic metals and magic materials were placed on the right side of the lab, while the finished weapons were on the left side.

There were arches of incomplete portals at the back of the room and a few more pieces of equipment that the guards didn't recognize their functions, but they knew they were powerful due to the magical aura they radiated.

“Aren’t you going to come in?” Lukas asked after entering the lab and not hearing the footsteps behind him.

“No, we’re right here. We’re just here to watch and make sure you don’t run away.” One of the twins answered and they both took a step away from the door.

The twins were aware that the laboratories of powerful mages were magically isolated to prevent outside interference and this could interfere with the alarm. Their alarm had a teleportation crystal in case the normal signal didn’t work, and enchantments that forced normal teleportation wouldn’t block the signal, but the twins preferred to avoid the risk.

“You really aren’t going to make this easy, are you?” Lukas muttered to himself and walked to the left side of the room where the finished equipment was kept and began to rummage through the different chests to find a specific item.