

## Legion lich 51

### Chapter 51:

Athos basked in the feeling of superiority in killing. A feeling of euphoria spread through his bones as Athos stared at the destruction around him.

"I killed them. I don't know how, but I killed them!" Athos spoke, his voice much deeper and guttural. He had no vocal cords or any organs, but he was able to speak without any problems.

Athos continued laughing for a while, before calming down. He stopped and looked down at his bony hands in confusion. He had put his own situation aside because of the urgency of the situation and the enemies that appeared one after another, but now that things had temporarily calmed down, he began to question himself.

"Have I... become an undead?" It was the only conclusion he came to. He knew the undead only by name and what Khali had taught him.

Undead. Beings created from corpses through necromancy. They were tireless and didn't need to eat, becoming immortal soldiers for the necromancers who raised them. Undead created by necromancy were lesser races that only served as mindless puppets of their masters, but there were superior species capable of thinking, such as vampires and liches. The higher species had the ability to think on the same level as a human, but they were creatures of hatred, killing every living creature they came across.

Khali didn't know all the details about the undead, but that information was enough for Athos.

"If what Khali taught me is true, then I must be some kind of superior undead. But which one? I've never heard of black skeletons. Maybe I'm some kind of mutated skeleton or a new species?" Athos wondered, his scientific curiosity piqued. Strangely, he didn't feel any fear or revulsion with his new skeletal body, on the contrary, he felt that he had freed himself from a weight that had chained him.

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...He wasn't wrong, as his pure skeleton weighed less than 20 kilos.

"Well, it doesn't matter. I don't have any knowledge of the undead and my species name doesn't really matter. What matters is my fighting power." Athos thought, testing his senses and abilities.

He'd only noticed it now, but it was the middle of the night and he was seeing like it was midday. Smell and hearing were the same, while his touch was somewhat dull and his taste was non-existent.

Athos wondered how he was able to hear and speak when he was just a skeleton, but he had no way of finding out, so he just ignored the matter.

His abilities have undergone some changes. He tried to use the sensory field to sense his surroundings and the dark mana flowed to the ends of the bones and the skill worked with a slightly shorter range but that was about it.

As for magic-

“As expected, I cannot use non-elemental magic and even fire and wind magic are mixed with darkness.” Athos sighed, trying and failing to use non-elemental magic. The dark mana that made up its core turned its spells into corrupted versions.

Non-elemental magic has become a strange type of dark magic. Its core contained 5 elements with the exception of light, but the effect of darkness overshadowed the other elements, making them similar to dark magic. Unlike dark magic, it was solid, not ethereal, but he would need to make more tests to notice other differences.

He had never practiced dark magic before, so he would have to learn everything from scratch, but there was a problem.

“I don’t remember having an affinity for the dark. So how did this happen?” Athos wondered, remembering the moment he had awakened the darkness. He thought for a while and remembered the ring of light that Khali had forced him to wear all along. He had the mental clarity effect so Athos gladly accepted, although he found it strange that someone as petty as Khali would give a magic item for free.

“Now that I stop and look back, it’s really weird. Maybe the mental clarity is just a side effect of the ring? I didn’t wake up to the darkness until after Ricley took the ring from me, after all.” Athos muttered, feeling his anger rise at the mere mention of Ricley’s name. He also felt his left rib tighten at the memory of Khali, but he didn’t stop to think about it.

“The last test is the most important: my mana body.” Athos thought. His passive mana regeneration was useless now. He could absorb the energy the same way he did when he was alive, but the light in the energy world would damage his body while the darkness would heal him, making the process a waste of time.

Active mana regeneration was still useful as he could focus and exclude light before absorbing it, but it required even more concentration. The bottom line is that the only skill that remains the same is accessing world energy without needing a wand.

“Being an undead has more downsides than I expected. Now that I’ve tested almost everything I need to know, there’s only one thing left. How do I destroy Faltra?” Athos wondered. Not for a second did he wonder what to do, or where he should go now. His desire has always been to bring death and destruction to the city of Faltra and his desire to destroy it has only increased after becoming an undead.

“Maybe I can use magic powders again? I could get hides from forest monsters to store them, but the problem is how to spread them. I don’t have the Falco anymore, but maybe I can use an undead bird and -” He was planning his plan of attack, when a sudden realization hit him.

What were the greatest characteristic of the undead and the reason they were so feared? Was it their infinite stamina, which allowed them to fight almost endlessly? Was it his hatred of all living creatures that made him kill all life forms that got in his way?

Not. The greatest trait of the undead and the reason they are so feared is their ability to increase their own numbers the more they kill. The Undead had the ability to transform corpses into other undead, making them a threat wherever they went.

"I'm also an undead, so I should also be able to create undead, right? Conveniently, there are excellent materials to practice around here." If Athos still had a face, he would be grinning evilly right now, as he looked at the surrounding corpses.

He gathered all seven corpses and lined them up in front of him, after removing all of their magic items, of course. They would become useless after a single use, but they were still useful.

"Now, who do I start with?" Athos wondered, looking at the corpses. He immediately discarded the blond mage, as he was too damaged. If he failed using his corpse, he wouldn't be able to tell if he failed through his fault, or because the corpse was destroyed. Athos touched the corpse, draining its world energy until its core was full again. He stopped in front of Ricley's corpse, deciding he would be the most expendable.

"Even if you become an undead, I would still destroy you again, so it's perfect." Athos placed his hand on his chest releasing small pulses of darkness, but to no avail. The only thing the darkness did was slightly rot the skin where it touched. Then he tried to send a tendril of darkness where the core should be, but it was also useless.

"Hmm...it's harder than it looks. Why don't the skills come with instructions? I know it's necessary to recreate the core, but how do I create the life force necessary for that?" Athos complained, trying different ways but failing all of them. He got a little annoyed, until he realized something very simple.

"Zombies create zombies, vampires create vampires, black skeletons must create black skeletons too, right?" Athos spoke, placing his hand on Khali's chest again. He spread the darkness all over his body except the bones draining all his vitality. The darkness expelled the light and corrupted it, before injecting the corrupted energy back where the core should have been.

The corrupted life force drained the world's energy except for light, forming a black core. A pulse of darkness flowed from the core to the body, but the skeleton remained white even after becoming undead. The skeleton began to squirm, before scrambling to its feet.

"What...I'm not dead...I...I...." He muttered incoherently, staring off into space. He looked around hesitantly, until he caught sight of Athos.

"Yo." Athos waved his hand awkwardly, not knowing how to react to him.

"You you!!!!" The skeleton suddenly screamed, attacking Athos. He pointed his hand at Athos and when nothing happened, he tried to attack him with his fists. Athos responded by launching a simple blade of wind at his exposed neck, decapitating him.

"I'll consider that a half success. It's useful that I've learned to create undead, but if they're going to remember me killing them and want revenge it's useless. I need them to recognize me as their master or see mindless undead." Athos spoke, oblivious to how incredible it is to create an undead capable of thinking on the first try.

Athos tried the same thing with another body, but this time he tried to focus his own will on the mana while forming the core. The result was even worse. The skeleton struggled while screaming incoherently, until Athos finished him off.

“Useful bodies are running low.” Athos complained looking at the four remaining corpses. He decided to try something a little more dangerous this time. He tried again on a new corpse, but unlike the other times, he mixed a spark from the death layer itself during core formation. The amount he used was negligible and even if he used large amounts, he would only need to drain a little from the surrounding corpses.

That’s when he instinctively felt he’d made it. The black core formed and sent a pulse of darkness throughout his body, his bones turning black as a dark void radiated from his empty sockets. The skeleton rose without difficulty and stood, staring at Athos.

Athos felt a connection with Skeletor, similar to the connection he had with Falco. The difference was that the skeleton had its own mana core, and Athos felt a weak will in the skeleton. It didn’t seem to resist it, but it still existed. Intrigued, Athos decided to test the control he had over the skeleton.

‘Get down on your knees.’ He mentally ordered, ready to destroy him if he disobeyed.

“That changes everything.” Athos clenched his fists, watching the skeleton kneel. He looked up at the night sky, thinking of the infinite possibilities now that he was undead. At that moment, he set a goal for himself.

“I will destroy this world.”

...without him realizing it, a pair of eyes, one green and the other amber, watched him.

## Chapter 52: Elbon

The world of Elbon is divided into 5 continents: Adula, Caprio, Doravon, Nytrer and Setlan. The continents varied in size and population, but each continent had a dominant race, as well as its own history and civilizations. The continents were constantly at war with each other, with Adula and Nytrer constantly invading the other continents.

Adula was known as the sacred continent and the only race was humans. All other races had been expelled, exterminated or enslaved. The continent was divided into two great nations that occupied the north and south. The sacred Empire of Caria occupied the North, while the South was occupied by the sorcerer Empire of Makima.

Both countries had a strong alliance with each other despite having very different cultures. The Caria empire preached about human supremacy and they were the founders of the church of Eishin. The Makima empire, on the other hand, taught about the incessant search for knowledge and the study of magic, being the founders of the order of magic. Together, they formed a united front that constantly launched attacks against the Setlan continent and the races they considered inferior.

The continent Setlan was ruled by the Fae alliance, formed by several races, with the elves at the center. Originally, they were several small clans, but they banded together and formed an alliance to face human encroachments. Elves, dark elves, fairies, spirits, dwarves, and various species of beast-people.

The continents together were shaped like a u, with each continent occupying one half and with the entire north separated by the ocean. Battles between them took place mainly at sea, or land invasions from the Makima empire, which lay at the lower end of the u.

Nytrer was the dark continent, ruled by the undead. It is not known how many species of undead there are, but what they did know was that all the undead served a single identity, the death lord. A black fog covered the entire continent like a dome, so there was not much information. The one thing that was widely known is that anyone who tried to get in never came back.

They constantly attacked the Adula continent, more specifically, the Sacred empire of Caria. It is said that the only reason the Fae alliance is able to defend against the Adula continent is because of them.

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Doravon was the continent of the demihuman races, the descendants of the extinct giants. Trolls, Ogres, orcs, goblins and minotaurs were some of the species that lived on this continent. They were warrior races, who constantly warred with each other. Among all the continents, they were the least technologically developed, but they were exceptional warriors. They were divided into hundreds of different clans, but recently, a king had appeared, unifying several tribes.

They worshiped strength and their leaders were chosen from sacred duels.

And finally, the continent Caprio was a mixture of several species. Humans, Elves, demihumans, beast people and undead all lived on this continent and fought for supremacy. There were 3 human countries 1 elven country, 1 beast people country, 1 undead country and 2 demihuman countries.

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Caprio Continent, country of Mirkor, near the border with the demi-human empire.

An alpha gray wolf and his brethren were fast asleep after their successful hunt during the day. Thanks to the alpha's commands and the wolves' coordination, they'd hunted a rock bear this morning and gotten enough food to feed the entire pack. The weather was cold and most of the prey hid to sleep, so it was a blessing they got so much food.

His pack had occupied the cave created by the rock bear and he was sleeping in the deepest part. As alpha, it was his duty to make sure the entire pack had food. He was sleeping comfortably with his females around him when his ears twitched, catching a loud sound coming from somewhere. He decided to ignore it at first, thinking it was just his brothers fighting over food, but the howling and barking quickly escalated, alerting the entire pack.

He awoke immediately, prepared for combat. The alpha began to run quickly towards the exit, pushing those who were too slow out of the way. When he reached the exit... there was no more exit. In its place, a black mud wall was erected, blocking the way.

His brothers tried to dig a way out, but their paws squeaked as they came into contact with the black mud and they backed away whimpering. Suddenly, small holes appeared in the ceiling and a black mist began to pour in, quickly spreading through the cave.

Sensing a putrid smell coming from the fog and a sense of danger, they backed away slowly, while barking at the black fog, not knowing what to do. The alpha reinforced his body with mana before jumping into the holes and forcibly opening a path, but as soon as he came into contact with the fog, his body began to weaken, so he quickly retreated. With no choice, he ordered his brothers to retreat deeper into the cave, keeping the females further away.

They quickly found themselves cornered at the end of the tunnel. The males huddled on top of the females in an attempt to protect them with their own bodies. The mist hit them, searing their skin as they howled in pain. The fog first scorched his skin, then rotted his eyes, blinding them. Then they entered through their snouts, preventing them from breathing.

The alpha watched his brothers die one by one, unable to do anything. The alpha circulated mana through his body to protect himself, but that only prolonged his suffering. He fell to the ground without strength, feeling his consciousness slip away. In your last seconds of life. he saw the fog disappear and a black skeleton in a cloak appear through it.

But that was it. He didn't even have the strength to growl, and just died. His consciousness faded, his senses faded, and the alpha felt like he was dreaming. He felt angry momentarily, but his mind was simple and incapable of deep thought, so he quickly forgot about it.

In the midst of that darkness, as his mind wandered, the alpha felt as if a black chain came out of somewhere and chained his mind, dragging him out of the dream, his consciousness quickly returning to his body. The black chain coiled tightly around his mind, limiting his thoughts.

The alpha immediately stood up, feeling lighter, and looked around. A black skeleton was in front of him, his hand stretched out on his chest. Normally he would have freaked out and tried to bite his hand out of reflex, but the black chain tightened and he was unable to move.

The alpha panicked internally and tried to get up and attack the black skeleton, boost his body with mana or bark for help, but the only order his body obeyed was to get up. The black chain tightened every time he tried to do something harmful to the skeleton. Sensing this instinctively, the alpha understood one thing. his body was no longer his.

"You know, I liked dogs when I was a kid, but my parents never let me have one. Try rolling." The black skeleton spoke to him and the body of alpha promptly complied. He didn't understand what the black skeleton was talking about, but he understood its intentions. The alpha tried to resist, but the chain tightened again and his body shifted against his will and began to roll from side to side.

Not only were their movements restricted, but he could also control their body on their own. To add insult to injury, every time the chain tightened, the alpha felt what little control he had over his own body slip away and his consciousness waver. The black current not only kept him from resisting, it also slowly corroded his mind.

"Good boy, good boy. I'm glad I was able to successfully turn you into an undead. Let's turn the other wolves too, so you'll have company even after you die." The skeleton spoke, releasing a black wave with a wave of its hand towards the wolves huddled at the end of the tunnel.

The alpha watched in horror as his brothers mutated into black wolf skeletons and realized that he too had become a skeleton.

He began to shake involuntarily and decided to stop resisting, fearing for his very existence.

Chapter 53: Lifting an exercise

Athos nodded, satisfied seeing the wolf's skeleton rolling on the ground. He wanted to test whether monsters with different physiologies could become undead. As far as he knew, undead like vampires

could only turn humans into other vampires, so this was an important test for his future plans. He had already tested with other monsters, but each species of monster was unique, so it was important to test with as many monsters as possible.

After succeeding in turning the alpha into a skeleton he cast the spell to raise undead en masse on the other wolves. A great mass of darkness gathered in his palm before spreading out like a wave lifting all the wolves at once. The spell used not only mana, it also used a large amount of life force corrupted, but that wasn't a problem for Athos.

The spark of life force consumed when raising an undead mingled with the undead's core, making their energy signature similar to his and forming a bond between the two. After the undead was successfully created, a part of the life force that forms its core would naturally flow to Athos, recovering spent life force and strengthening it further.

It was as if he spent 1% of his total life force and got 2% back. The amount of life force received was fixed and did not increase regardless of the strength of the raised skeleton, but it was certain that Athos would grow stronger the more undead he created.

Athos had created the spell to raise undead en masse with ease, despite having no experience with dark magic. Using corrupted non-elemental magic was easy for Athos, as he could use his experience with non-elemental magic as a crutch. Although they had different effects, the base of the spells was the same, so it was just a matter of getting used to the effects.

When Athos confirmed that the last of the wolves had turned into an undead, he nodded in satisfaction and stood up. "Let's go. I'll introduce you to the rest of the gang." Athos spoke, patting the alpha on the head as he exited the tunnels.

"Open it." Athos ordered and the wall of mud opened revealing the night sky and dozens of black skeletons of beasts.

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"Sorry for the delay. Did you wait too long?" Athos asked, looking at the 4 human skeletons in front of the horde. They were the mages that Athos had successfully turned into the undead and were using the same equipment they had in life. Athos was a little worried that they would be able to use magic now that they were undead, but luckily, the wands that mages use don't need to be mana powered, quite the contrary, they draw the energy of the world to mages, feeding your spells.

Behind them, black skeletons of rock bears, two-faced monkeys, bladed birds, raging wild boars, and the newly added gray wolves, all monsters common to the forest of Faltra, were gathered here.

It had only been a day since Athos became undead and he made the most of his infinite stamina to hunt monsters, quickly amassing a small army. Athos was gathering his strength with a certain urgency, because he knew he didn't have much time. Things should have calmed down in Faltra by now, and messengers would be sent to nearby major cities such as Clastro and Shiima, so reinforcements from the country would be sent to Faltra, making it difficult for Athos to attack it.

It was likely that the order of magic and the adventurer's guild would get involved, adding to the difficulty even more. The mercantile town of Shiima was the closest and was a two-week carriage ride

away. It would take at most a week to gather troops and resources to help the city, and another two weeks before they returned. In short, Athos had just over a month to muster enough strength to destroy Faltra and its neighboring villages, then cross the border and flee.

Athos knew that the country would not allow the existence of an undead like him and would muster all its resources to eliminate him while he was still weak, just as he knew he wouldn't stand a chance against an entire nation. He would need time, resources and especially soldiers if he was to have a chance.

There was also the option of simply running away without attacking Faltra, but Athos didn't even consider that possibility. The city's main forces were probably dead and order in the city in tatters, and the idea of leaving the city without finishing destroying it left a bitter taste on his tongue, even though he didn't have any.

"Um...most of the monsters are either hibernating or migrating at this time of year, so even after killing for one full day, I was barely able to gather seventy beast skeletons. I'll need to speed up from now on. It's better to attack villages. and gather as many soldiers as possible quickly and then attack the city." Athos talked to himself, deciding to change his plan. Although beast skeletons are strong individually, human villages would give him more than enough numbers to make up for it.

There were 5 villages close to Faltra and all were to the east of the city, the smallest of them having about two hundred people, while the largest four hundred. Even at a low estimate, he could get at least a thousand undead, apart from cattle and whatever else he could hunt between villages.

Encouraged by this thought, Athos mentally ordered the skeletons to move towards the nearest village. "Come on guys, it's time to spill some human blood!" Athos yelled, jumping on top of a rock bear skeleton and leaving with his small army.

A few minutes after Athos left, a nearby tree began to shake and bark split to reveal a wooden face. The left eye was green, while the right had an amber glow. He looked with disgust and revulsion in the direction Athos had fled before saying, "Did that filthy undead go away? He dared to contaminate my forest with his miasma and even killed many of the monsters that dwell there.

I intended to destroy him if he kept destroying my forest, but as long as he leaves in peace, he's the humans' problem, not mine. Those other white-suited humans are a lot more troublesome than he is. Their attempts to enter the forest are irritating and it takes a lot of mana to stop them." The wooden face spoke in a voice that sounded like a creak, before sinking back into the tree. The bark of the tree grew again, the grass that withered because of the undead regained its vitality and all traces of it were erased.

"But if he dares to go back to my forest, I will definitely kill him." The wooden face whispered before disappearing completely.

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On the outskirts of the rock village, a day ago.

After trying and failing to contact the leader of the mage team, Finn had to make a difficult decision. He couldn't leave the unit alone to go after the mages, but even if he told Emilia the truth, it wasn't clear if



she would listen. He had broken her trust in a horrible way and it was quite possible that she would kill him, even if he explained that he had no choice.

He agonized for some time over what to do, until the decision was taken out of his hands. Emilia made a few sounds before slowly opening her eyes and looking around. Finn quickly rushed to her side to explain himself, but that was a serious mistake. Emilia had hidden a universal antidote in her lower molar and exploded it when she fell from the watchtower, but because it was a universal antidote, it took a while to take effect. Emilia had been awake for a few minutes, but continued to pretend she was unconscious until the numb feeling had completely passed.

With an agile movement of her hands, she hurled a dagger right between his eyes, before abruptly standing up and running towards him. Despite their close proximity, Finn managed to move his head to the side at the last second, but it proved to be a futile effort. The dagger was imbued with the weapon break ability, as well as a telekinesis enchantment, allowing its wielder to remotely control it.

The dagger swung around just as it passed Finn and exploded against his back. Finn was able to activate the enchantment on the magic-resistant suit, but the metal shards still hit his back, knocking him forward.

“Wait Emilia, listen to me!” Finn screamed desperately feeling the pain in his back and the bloodlust emanating from Emilia, but she didn’t hear. Emilia conjured two daggers of light in both hands and activated the lightning step boots enchantment, disappearing from Finn’s sight.

Finn knew this attack all too well and raised his guard, ready to fend off the telegraphed attacks. Unfortunately for him, Emilia was much more powerful than he was and could react even at such speed, changing the direction of her attacks and catching Finn off guard. An X-shaped gash appeared on his throat, causing Finn to drop to his knees, choking on his own blood.

#### Chapter 54: A matter of trust

“Don’t worry, I won’t kill him. It would be a very easy end for you.” Emilia spoke behind her back and a white light enveloped her neck and back, healing the wound quickly while draining her strength. He tried to explain himself as soon as the wound healed, but a kick to the back of the head knocked him out.

Before passing out, he felt like something was dripping onto his back, but it was probably just his imagination.

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Finn woke up some time later, in an unfamiliar place. His vision was blurry and his head throbbed, but a right hook quickly brought him back to his senses.

“GAH!” Finn groaned in pain, his head was thrown back hard and his nose was broken. He collapsed without strength only to realize that his arms were trapped. The handcuffs that bound his arms were magic items that blocked the circulation of mana through the body, preventing the use of abilities. The same kind they used to trap the captured guardians.

Finn was sitting on the floor with both hands cuffed against the wall. His white fangs uniform was nowhere to be seen and he was only in the normal clothes he wore underneath.

"Where... where am I?" Finn asked in a confused, pained voice. His vision gradually returned to normal, and he recognized the man in front of him. "#5?"

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#5 responded with a left punch, followed by a right punch and a knee to the chin.

"Okay, you sure are #5." Finn joked, after spitting out a mixture of saliva, blood and teeth. "Where is Captain Emilia? I need to explain myself to her, explain that it was all a misunderstanding-"

"No need to yell #1, I've been here from the start." Emilia revealed herself, looking coldly at Finn. She was wearing the white fang uniform and mask, so Finn couldn't see her expression, but he knew she was feeling angry, extremely hurt, and mostly betrayed.

"Emilia, I found a body of mana while I was in town, but he died. I needed to speak to an elder or else-" Finn wasted no time in apologies and tried to explain the situation, but Emilia cut him off again.

"I contacted the elder as soon as I defeated you. He's already updated me on the situation, so you don't have to explain yourself. I understand what you did and why. You had no choice, did you? You had no one to trust, so your only chance was to steal the communicator. And the only method you found was to use the captain's feelings and make her let her guard down." The more Emilia talked, the colder her tone became.

'Shit, Emilia only uses sarcasm when she's really angry. He/I is screwed.' Finn and #5 thought at the same time.

"#5, please leave us. I want to speak with #1 alone." Emilia spoke to #5, conjuring a dagger of light in her right hand.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay alone, Emilia?" #5 asked worried not as a unit colleague, but as a friend.

"Yes, I'll be fine, Gaius." Emilia removed her mask, looking at him confidently.

Seeing that look, Gaius knew he couldn't convince her to stay and sighed, silently leaving the room. He walked over to the wall and waved his hand, causing the wall to crumble and sunlight in, before redoing himself after he left. Emilia turned to Finn the moment he left and walked to stand in front of him. Finn quickly tried to open his mouth to apologize, but she was faster, swinging the dagger of light.

Finn closed his eyes tightly, but the blow never came. A sound of metal being cut echoed and Finn felt the shackles that bound him torn apart. He looked at Emilia in astonishment, thinking that maybe he still had a chance to explain herself.

"I'm not angry, Finn. I'm disappointed. If you had told me instead of lying to me, I would have spoken to the elder on your behalf. If you had trusted me, I could have used my family name to help you." Emilia looked into his eyes as she spoke, showing how serious she was and how betrayed she felt. "And if you hadn't used me, we could have been together." She added, before turning around.

"Wait, I know I faltered badly, but the elder didn't tell you everything! He ordered me to kill you, but I defended you in front of him, even though our deal was already complete!" Finn screamed desperately, trying to explain himself.

"The elder did tell me about it, as well as saying that I owed him a lot for sparing me and that he expected a lot from me. Not only will I be demoted, but I will also be forced to get involved in the order's power games." Emilia frowned, remembering the power struggles that took place behind the scenes of the order. She had run from her own family to avoid this, but now she would be forced to become a hostage or a spy against the Ripha.

"I'm not allowed to punish him so I won't attack him. I told #5 only because I trust him so don't get him wrong, he just got mad at me. The rest of the unit doesn't know what you did either. They believe you are unconscious after being beaten up for trying to advance on me, and I want them to continue to believe that." Emilia spoke up, remembering the scene when she returned with an unconscious Finn and the unit members asking how he had passed out, before giving the bet money to the person who got it right.

"After we get out of here, you're just going to be the idiot who wanted sex and got spanked for it, and I'm going to be the ice-hearted captain who doesn't let anyone near. servants of the elder and you won't be punished for it. After the quest is over, I'll be demoted and reverted back to being a unit member instead of captain and used in power plays until I'm likely dismissed as a nuisance, or forced to a political marriage to some old mage from the elder's faction. Anyway, we'll never see each other again. Goodbye #1." Emilia turned around after saying goodbye, not being able to stand there any longer.

Finn had been silent most of the time, unable to answer her, guilt weighing on his mind. He felt disgusted with himself, but something clicked in his head when he heard Emilia mention mages.

"Wait! We have a problem. I can't get in touch with the mages who have the corpse. They said they were going to hide in the woods, but they didn't respond on the communicator. I think something happened to them." Finn said hastily, before she left.

"And what does that have to do with me? Even if you don't keep your end of the bargain, you will be the one to pay for it. So why should I care?" Emilia turned to him, giving off a slight aura to keep him away.

"Because the elder is crazy and if the corpse doesn't reach Clastro in two weeks, it won't just be my head that will roll. The elder will demand answers and when he reads our minds and sees you refusing to look for the body, you'll be as guilty as I am. Now, do you understand why this is your problem?" Realizing he couldn't appeal to her feelings, Finn decided to make her his accomplice and force her to help him, even if it made their relationship worse.

'I feel bad for Emilia, but I've reached the point of no return. It's hard, but I can find another girl as nice as Emilia, but my life is one. I won't waste it here.' That's what Finn thought. He liked Emilia, but not to the point of sacrificing himself. He would rather live with the guilt of hurting her than die with a clear conscience.

"Tsk, you shit!" Emilia clicked her tongue, realizing she was already involved. She cursed for a few seconds before taking a deep breath and saying, "Alright. I'll have the team investigate the forest until we find these mages. I'll come up with something and force them to help us find the rookie mage unit in the forest.

Luckily, the elder of darkness is famous for ordering his teams to carry out side quests to benefit him, so no one will find it strange. When this is over, you'll have to request that the entire team's mind read be done by him." Emilia formulated a plan before hitting the stone wall three times for Caio on the other side to open it.

#### Chapter 55: The start of the search

"How was the conversation? Did he try anything?" Gaius asked as they left, looking accusingly at Finn. They were no longer in the rock village, but in a small artificial cave on the side of a hill on the outskirts of the forest, far from all the villages and the city of Faltra.

"It was the worst possible outcome, but this is not the time for it. Gather the team here, we have a new mission before we leave this region." Emilia frowned angrily as she spoke, before turning to Finn as if remembering something. "And return his uniform."

"OK." Caio was not happy with this new "mission" or the lack of details, but he obeyed anyway. He grabbed the uniform from a nearby stone table and held out his arms for Finn to take.

"Thanks, #5." Finn grinned as he reached for the suit, but #5 let go before he could, dropping the suit in the mud. Finn was sure the floor was solid rock a moment ago, but he didn't point it out.

"Sorry, my hand slipped." Gaius said in a monotone voice, not even trying to hide his hostility. He turned around before Finn could say anything and left to call the rest of the team.

"Don't worry #5, people make mistakes." Finn spoke to Gaius' back, in a louder tone than usual. He took his uniform out of the mud and activated a self-cleaning enchantment on it, removing all the mud before getting dressed. In fact, the enchantment was used to erase evidence such as blood or fingerprints left in a location, but it could also be used to clean.

"Look, if you're not our hero! Thanks to you, I've earned some money, so let me buy you a drink after this mission is over." #3 yelled in high spirits after entering the room, oblivious to the tense atmosphere in the room. The team was on hold in a room adjacent to this one.

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"Why haven't we left yet? #1 is already recovered, we have no more reason to stay here." #2 asked annoyed. He's lost a lot of money to #3 and he's dying to get home and relax a little.

"I have some bad news folks. There was a problem near the border. A team of mages was transporting an extremely important cargo for the dark elder, but they lost contact with them after they entered the forest of Faltra. We are the most nearby and we've been ordered to find the lost mages, or at least the cargo." Emilia spoke the first lie that came to mind.

"What do we have to retrieve?" #4 asked.

"A human corpse. And before you ask, I don't know why he's special." Emilia replied.

"How long has it been since contact was lost? And any idea what might have happened to them?" #3 asked this time. He found all this effort over a dead body strange, but he didn't question it, certain that the dark elder was eccentric enough to order them to comb an entire town just because he'd lost a handkerchief somewhere.

“One day and 14 hours since last contact. Unfortunately, we don’t have any information as to why the contact was lost.” Emilia lied through her teeth, but the unit members didn’t see her expression because of the mask.

“Any ideas on where to start looking?” #4 asked, fatigue building up at the thought of having to search the entire forest.

“I have no idea so let’s split up to look for them. From #1 to #4 they will search the east of the forest. Me and #5 to #8 will search the west side of the forest while #9 goes to the city and waits for the mages there. It’s unlikely, but chances are, the team will make it out of the forest and into the city.

The forest isn’t big, so it shouldn’t take more than a day to search half of it. The forest is apparently inhabited by spirits, so stay alert. Get in touch if you find anything, we’re leaving in 10 minutes.” With that, everyone started getting ready to leave.

‘That should be enough. Everyone here is on the same level as me, while captain Emilia is way above me. There must be nothing in this forest capable of defeating them.’ Finn thought, jinxing the entire mission.

They spent the next day investigating the forest. The first hours of the search passed without problems. They found nothing but weak monsters and boredom, but there were no problems. They used their magical senses regularly to investigate their surroundings, but nothing was found.

The problem started about four hours after the search began. Suddenly, one of Emilia’s team members stopped and looked around suspiciously.

“What’s up #7?” Emilia asked, using her mana vision to look around, just in case.

“I think we’re going in circles, Captain. It’s the third time I’ve seen this tree.” #7 spoke looking at a twisted tree. He had memorized the position of the tree and those around it to use as a reference and it was then that he noticed something strange.

“...Are you sure?” Emilia looked at the tree too, but didn’t notice anything wrong. ‘#7 could be imagining things, or it could be that the spirits of this forest are preventing us from moving forward. If the same thing happened to the mages, it is possible that they fell into some trap and died.’ Emilia thought, deciding to test her theory.

“Let’s stop here for a while. If we’re really going around in circles, it’s useless to continue.” She spoke aloud.

“Wait, stop to rest? Not investigate the surroundings?” #7 asked confused.

“Yes, let’s take a break. We were alert until now and still haven’t noticed anything with our magical senses. Instead of wasting time looking around, let’s use the other team to investigate.” Emilia decided to stop explaining and pressed the button on the collar of her cloak.

A light of understanding flashed in his eyes and the others quickly copied it, pressing buttons on the robe and checking the other team’s position. They walked in a straight line for some time, before starting to turn slightly south. They kept curving every few minutes, until in half an hour, they had made a complete turn.

“Shit, we really are going in circles!” #9 yelled, seeing the other team return to the starting point.

“Yeah, and we’re just as lost. The spirit is just playing with us.” Emilia spoke, lost in thought. ‘It took less than half an hour for them to make a complete turn and the same should apply to us. I need to know if the spirits are doing this just to prevent us from approaching him, or if he wants to trap us here for some other reason. ‘

“What should we do, captain? If the forest is surrounded by a disorientation spell, it might be a good idea to split up. Contrary to what most mages think, disorientation spells affect a certain area and by separating, we can force the spirits to cast multiple times to keep us trapped, draining his mana and focus.” #8 suggested.

“That’s a great idea if you want to kill us. If we split up like you suggested, we’ll be an easy target for them and we’ll be killed one by one. What we should do instead is have a view from above the forest, beyond to destroy the trees in our path, so that we have a clear path ahead.” Emilia spoke, casting a spell of light.

She reached out her blade-like hand and swung quickly, releasing an arc of light that cut through all the trees ahead within a 10 meter radius. She also summoned her familiar, a dream sparrow. It was a four-inch-long sparrow with gray feathers and a short tail. He had the ability to release a sleep mist when he flapped his wings, hence the name.

“Keep an eye on us from the sky, and report anything strange.” Emilia ordered and the familiar obeyed. She turned to the others and said, “Let’s go ahead and make sure you destroy the surrounding trees, we need to have a wide line of sight. #8, get in touch with the other team and let them know to do so the same.”

“Yes ma’am.” #8 spoke, a little shocked at Captain Emilia’s power. He could cast spells as strong as that or even better, but not as easily.

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## Chapter 56: A new enemy

In the middle of Faltra forest at the same time.

A huge willow tree lay in the center of the forest of Faltra, and in the middle of its trunk, a wooden face glared in the direction of Emilia’s team.

“Cursed humans! They weren’t satisfied with releasing a filthy undead in my forest, they also started to destroy all vegetation!” The wooden face screamed in rage. His senses were scattered throughout the forest, so he became anxious when Emilia’s team began cutting down trees as they went, temporarily blinding him.

The disorientation spell also depended on the surrounding trees and plants, so it would only be a matter of time before they got to him.

“Why did the humans decide to attack me now of all time?! A few more months and I would have gathered all the energy I need! Did they notice my presence? No, it doesn’t make any sense. I acted like

a common spirit, no there's reason to suspect me. So maybe it's just coincidence?" The wooden face spoke nervously, as it felt the other team of invaders start cutting down the trees as well.

The wooden face slid down the tree trunk to the opposite side, looking at Finn's team. Both teams were advancing in a straight line, closing in on him.. The wooden face twisted into a grimace of hatred, watching the invaders destroy his forest.

"They're an organized unit and they're communicating! There's no way, I'm going to have to fight them. I'm going to need a few hours to noon to wake up my body, so I'm going to need to forcefully regenerate the trees and keep them busy. Some of the stored energy will be spent and that will delay my recovery, but it's better than saving up and getting killed." The wooden face spoke, sending some of the stored energy underground, between the willow roots, where its true body rested.

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'And about the undead...he's not a threat. He's hunting and turning other monsters into undead, but it's not a problem. Compared to two groups in the fourth layer, a few dozen undead are nothing.' He thought, dismissing Athos as a small fry and focusing on the immediate threat. The willow leaves glowed with mana, and then spread to its roots, before spreading underground, using the tree roots as conduits, until it reached the trees destroyed by the teams.

The newly destroyed trees quickly regenerated, releasing parasitic spores as they grew. In a matter of seconds both teams found themselves surrounded by trees twice their size and a cloud of parasitic spores.

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"What is it?" #8 yelled, watching the cut trees regenerate, releasing a cloud of spores in their direction.

"#6, fire on them!" Emilia screamed, conjuring a barrier of light around them, stopping the spore cloud's advance. Unfortunately for her, the parasitic spores fed on the element of light and greedily devoured the barrier, increasing the cloud's size even further.

"Damn it!" #6 spoke, releasing a flamethrower from each hand, slowing the advance. The flames burned the spores, but they advanced faster than the fire could burn them. The team was made up of mage assassins so there were several skilled fighters, but when it came to firepower, they fell short of other mages of the same level.

But it doesn't mean they were helpless. #6 advanced until he was inches from the spores and activated a magic ring on his hand. A wave of fire spread around him, quickly forming a dome of fire. Most mages of the order carried a magic item capable of creating barriers of their respective element and #6 was no exception.

The wave of flames not only burned the spores but also pushed them away before disappearing, blowing a hole in the spore cloud for an instant. The magekillers activated the boots' enchantment and leapt without hesitation, arriving outside the spore cloud in an instant, the spore cloud closing in behind them.

They used the branches of the trees as platforms and quickly moved away from the scene. The spore cloud followed behind them, but they were faster and ran to the edge of the forest and fled. The spore cloud stopped chasing them after they left the forest and retreated, quickly disappearing like a mirage.

"#8, get in touch with the others and see if they need help. Although I believe they are fine." Emilia spoke, feeling that the other team would have a much easier time escaping than they would. Both teams exchanged communicators and receivers so they could communicate and coordinate their movements.

On the other side of the forest, Finn's team was easily dealing with the spore cloud. Finn and #3 created a wall of darkness on either side of the team by devouring the spores before they got close. They backed away calmly, but Finn was hesitant to simply run away after getting here.

'I'm sure those mages died for the spirit. If the spirit didn't destroy the corpse, it must have taken it, probably in the center of the forest. We have to go there.' Finn thought, slightly panicking at the possibility that the corpse had been destroyed.

He saw that all the monster corpses were left behind, but he couldn't be sure it would be the same for humans. Furthermore, even if the corpse was left intact, it would still rot if left exposed for too long. Finn was in a race against time and needed to hurry.

"Hey, I think we should-" He was about to argue that they should move forward, but Gaius cut him off.

"I received orders from captain Emilia to retreat and regroup with she." Gaius spoke, with a penetrating look at Finn.

Finn stared at him for a while before nodding "...ok, I'll clear the way." The team began to retreat following Finn's lead, with #3 covering the rear.

Outside the forest, the teams regrouped for a strategic meeting.

"Captain, we need to advance! If #3 and I lead, we can break through the spirit's defenses easily!" Finn said as soon as he saw Emilia. He tried to approach her, but she released her aura, stopping her halfway.

"I know we need to move forward, but we have no idea what other defenses the spirit has and it would be unwise to just invade. We must use our flight-capable familiars to gather information, and if we're lucky, the spirit might have ignored the corpse and left it behind, so we can get it back without having to face the spirit." Emilia suggested, hesitant to face a spirit in person.

Spirits were incredibly powerful beings, with the lowest class being in the fifth layer of life. They could use magic as easily as they breathe and could absorb energy from the environment to strengthen their spells, nearly doubling their power. They had two bodies, one physical and one ethereal. Their ethereal bodies were nearly immortal, but they could be killed if their physical bodies were completely destroyed. They could also accumulate mana in their ethereal bodies over time and use it when they felt threatened, so they were incredibly dangerous beings.

Emilia had no way of knowing how strong the spirit in this forest was, but it must have been powerful to regenerate so many trees at once and control the spore cloud. Finn wasn't particularly interested in facing a spirit either, so he grudgingly agreed.



“Fine. Now everyone who has flying familiars should summon them and make sure you keep them above the forest. My familiar has already started looking.” Emilia spoke, pointing to a small sparrow that could be seen flying in the distance.

Half of the unit’s members had family members capable of flying and began an aerial investigation of the forest. The aerial investigation took several hours, as the disorientation magic was still effective above the forest, despite its effect being reduced. It was already dark and Emilia was about to end the day, when one of the family members returned after finding something.

The familiar was an echoing bat, a bat species capable of mixing the earth element into its sonar and making it roam underground or through objects. Apparently, he detected a human body under a willow tree in the middle of the forest. The body was that of an adult male and he was tangled up in the tree’s roots. The body was not intact and had some parts missing, but it was unmistakably humanoid.

Emilia sighed at the news, knowing that it was likely that the spirit had taken the corpse for itself. She didn’t know why he wanted the corpse, but there was only one alternative now.

“Guys, rest for today. Tomorrow we’re going to invade the spirit home.” She said it out loud, causing a shower of curses at the elder and his unreasonable requests. His family members continued the investigation, but now they were focused on the center of the forest, so they missed the undead leaving the forest, marching towards the villages.

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## Chapter 57: Attack the village

In the green village, just before midnight.

The village was silent, with most villagers sleeping after a busy day. A messenger had arrived in the morning, bringing terrible news from the city. An attack by a mad wizard had caused severe damage to the city and killed over two thousand people, including the city’s power figures such as the baron and the priest.

The villagers were terrified when they discovered that the mage had used magic to drive people mad, making them kill themselves. They didn’t know what was going to happen to the city now, and the only order they were given was to stay alert. The village chief tried to calm the villagers by saying that there was no reason for them to be attacked, but that they should send the village men to guard the village gates, just in case.

“...It’s cold.” One of the men assigned to guard the gate complained as he hugged himself for warmth. He was dressed in warm clothes, but standing in the middle of winter in front of the gate was challenging. He carried a single makeshift spear, so it was uncertain if it would make any difference if a mad mage actually showed up.

“Yeah, it sucks being out in the cold winter air, and it’s even worse with you complaining in my ear.” Another guard spoke up, warming himself by a torch. The village chief had placed torches on either side of the gate and the men had gathered around the flames to keep warm like moths.

“You’re complaining about a full stomach. My brother-in-law is patrolling inside the walls and must be freezing right now.” A third guard yelled, silencing them both and ending the argument.

Minutes passed slowly as the guards wondered if they would die first to the mage, the cold, or the boredom. One of the men suddenly looked towards the forest with half-closed eyes, seeing a shadow move through the trees, but didn't see much detail because of the darkness of the night.

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"Hey, did you guys see this? I think I saw something in the woods." The man spoke, catching the attention of his colleagues as he tried to look for something in the forest.

"Must be just some monster, don't pay attention to it." The colleague next to him replied, not paying him any attention.

The man was about to agree and forget about it, when he saw another shadow moving, and then another, and another, until about 40 shadows appeared. They jumped out of the shadows of the trees and ran towards the men. Out of the shadows of the trees, man can see black skeletons of bears and wolves running towards them.

"Hi, what's that???" The man yelled, pointing his finger at the skeletons rushing towards him. He only knew undead from the stories he heard as a child, but they were always portrayed as bloodthirsty monsters. He walked backward until his back touched the wooden gate, but his companions weren't faring any better.

"Open the gates, quick! We must enter, or we will be eaten alive!" One of the men yelled, pulling him by the shoulder as he opened the gate and entered. The others followed quickly, before locking the gate behind them.

"Bring anything that can be used to block the gate, quick! Raise the alarm, order all women and children to flee through the back gate of the village! All of you, grab any weapons you find and buy time for the others to flee!" An elderly man shouted loudly, seeing the panic on the faces of the men around him.

As a young man, he was a soldier serving in the fortress that separated the realm of Mirkor from the demihuman empire, one of the few who lived long enough to retire. He was used to sudden attacks and knew that a dozen farmers armed with makeshift spears wouldn't stand a chance against the undead.

'The most we can do is buy time so that others can escape. The undead are stupid, so they won't chase villagers until they kill everyone here. If an old man like me has to die for those children to live, so be it.' That's what the old man thought, hardening his resolve. Once, an undead attack happened on one of the frontier fortresses, causing heavy casualties and nearly destroying the fortress. Since then, soldiers have been instructed on how to deal with the undead.

He pulled his steel sword from its scabbard, a sword he'd bought after amassing a year's salary as a young man, and it was gathering dust in his room.

A bell had been ringing for some time and he could hear the sound of people screaming behind him, but what startled him was the total silence coming from outside the gates. The undead were mindless beings and should have been roaring as they advanced, but there was only silence outside. There was only one situation where the undead didn't scream their hatred against the living.

‘Is there someone controlling these undead? If so, these men will be killed in vain-’ The old man realized the truth, but it was too late. The gate exploded, sending a shower of splinters towards the men as the undead stormed through.

The bear skeletons advanced forward, a dark orange light emanating from their bones, forming a layer of black stone over them like armor. They advanced on the men still wounded and in shock from the destruction of the gate and swung their front paws like blunt weapons, breaking bones and crushing flesh, rendering them incapacitated with one blow.

They did not stop to finish off the fallen men, but charged at the surrounding men carrying spears. The few that were not brought down immediately hurriedly raised their spears, but they shattered uselessly against the bears’ stone armor before being brought down by their paws.

The wolf skeletons charged right behind them, leaping at the fallen men and ripping their throats out with their fangs or claws. A particularly large skeleton led them, aiding any wolves that encountered resistance from fallen men.

The elderly soldier watched with regret as the men were slaughtered and charged at the nearest bear, trying to save at least one person. With an agile movement that would not have been expected of someone his age, he positioned himself in front of the young man about to be killed and steadied his stance, ready to fend off the bear skeleton’s onslaught.

The bear lunged at him before pausing for a moment and turning to attack someone else, as if it had lost interest. The old man looked at the bear strangely, until a human skeleton appeared in its place. He was wearing a ragged green robe, a mist of darkness forming on his left hand.

With a wave of his hand, the mist spread over the corpses, devouring their flesh until only bones remained. The white bones were smeared, as if black ink had been poured over them, before they rose to their feet and joined the kill.

‘A superior undead.’ That’s what the elderly soldier thought, racking his brains as he thought of a way to kill the thing in front of him. ‘He seems to be a mage, so if I get closer, maybe I have a chance.’ That’s what he thought, pointing his sword at the human skeleton.

“Take care of it grandpa, it’s a very precious item. It’s impossible to find weapons in the wild and you’re the only one with a decent weapon in every village.” The black skeleton spoke, surprising the elderly man.

“You can talk?” he asked gaping, almost lowering his sword in sheer amazement. He had heard that higher undead had the same intelligence they had when they were alive, but knowing about and witnessing are different things.

“I can do a lot more than that, but you can find out after you die and join them.” The black skeleton rushed at him, at a speed impossible to keep up with.

‘Wasn’t he a mage??’ The elderly thought in panic, seeing the skeleton appear in front of him in an instant. He tried to swing the sword against its exposed neck, but the skeleton easily dodged it, burying its hand inside its stomach and pulling hard, splattering its blood and viscera on the floor.

The elderly soldier dropped his sword and fell forward as he tried to cover his stomach hole with his hands, but Athos quickly caught the sword before it could fall to the ground. Athos didn't give the old man a second look, writhing in pain at his feet, as he inspected the sword.

"You... undead bastard...I pray that...the army...destroys you." The old man spoke, clinging to Athos' cloak. Athos lowered his gaze, looking at the dying old man.

"I hope they try." Those were the last words the elderly soldier heard in life, before Athos lifted his leg and crushed his neck.

## Chapter 58: Attack the village

Seeing that most of the nearby men were dead or on the verge of death, Athos cast the spell to raise undead en masse again, turning the few that remained into undead. With a satisfied smile at the sight of the new undead, Athos ordered the waiting skeletons around the village to attack and began the second phase of his plan.

Athos could destroy this village with sheer brute force, but he chose to use a complicated plan instead, to test his command ability, as well as the ability of his skeletons to follow his orders. Any brilliant plan he came up with would be useless if his skeletons didn't follow him, just as having brilliant soldiers would be useless with an incompetent commander.

Athos knew that in his future battles he would be leading armies, so it was something he needed to test. A screaming sound from the other side of the village informed Athos that the mage skeletons had begun their attack.

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Green Village, at the back gate, at the same time.

"What happened? Why are you sounding the alarm?" Random villager 1.

"Is it an attack by bandits or monsters?" Random villager 2.

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"How the hell am I supposed to know? Just run!" Random villager 3.

The villagers had not been informed of the undead and only knew that the village was under attack. They thought it was just an onslaught of hungry monsters that didn't find food for the winter, so they were slowly retreating while the few men guarding the back gates watched them. That's why they took so long to react.

Black skeletons of angry boars leapt out of the bushes and charged at the fleeing villagers, trying to run them over. Angry boars could accelerate their running speed up to 60 km/h while running in a straight line and bolster their skulls, charging hard enough to knock down trees.

Seeing the skeletons furiously rush towards them, the villagers ran back to the safety of the walls and hurriedly locked the gates. One of the village girls, an aspiring adventurer, peeked between the cracks in the wall to see the monsters and almost choked on what she saw.

A black skeleton wearing a cloak waved his wand towards the gate, causing the earth in front of the gate to rise like a ramp. The gate was only three meters high and the ramp equaled that, allowing the wild boars to break in.

“Get away from the gate, now-” The young woman tried to scream, but it was a second too late. The wild boars ran over the ramp and jumped, landing right on top of the fleeing people. Their hardened skulls slammed into people and partially crushed them into a paste of flesh.

The villagers screamed in panic, running as fast as they could while those closest to the children grabbed them by the arms, trying to get as far away as possible, but it was useless. The quickest to get away tried to round the corner of the nearest house and hide, but black fists hit them and sent them flying back into the middle of the street.

The two-faced monkeys were the first monsters to invade the village, using high mobility to climb the walls and wait for your orders. As soon as their master ordered the second phase to begin, they went into a rage and transformed, doubling in size. Of course, because they’re undead, no matter how angry they are, they won’t do anything outside of what they’re told.

“Shit, you bastards!!” The would-be adventurer screamed with tears in her eyes, looking down at one of the partially crushed bodies on the ground. It was his younger brother’s body. She glared at the undead as she placed an arrow in her trusty bow and fired, aiming for the boar skeleton that killed it.

The arrow hit the skull hard and broke harmlessly without leaving a scratch. The boar skeleton turned to her and ran furiously, trying to crush her. The young woman desperately shot arrows at the skeleton, but it was a futile effort. The boar arrived in front of her and advanced with her head down, trying to run her over. At the last second, the young woman jumped, before clinging to the bones of the boar’s back, straddling him.

She pulled a hunting dagger from her waist and jabbed it into the skeleton’s spine before twisting. The skeleton fell to the ground without losing momentum, hurling the young woman through the air, before hitting the ground hard and rolling until it hit the wall of a hut.

“Urk! Shit...” She struggled to her feet, spitting dirt from her mouth. The young woman tried to get up, but lost her balance and fell to the ground again. Looking down, she noticed that her ankle was twisted at an unnatural angle, but didn’t notice it because of the adrenaline. She leaned her back against the wall, trusting all her weight to the wall, and picked up her bow again, determined to take at least the skeleton that had killed her brother with her.

The boar skeleton also tried to get up, but its hind legs didn’t respond and it crawled towards she, while other boar skeletons surrounded it as if to protect it. She tried to aim at the crawling skeleton, but a monkey skeleton jumped off the roof of the house she was standing on and grabbed her wrists before crushing them.

“ARGHHH!!” The young girl screamed as she fell to the ground, before the ape skeleton punched her in the chest, sinking her rib cage and crushing her internal organs. The killing had also ended all around, with all the villagers reduced to corpses. Skeletons also killed all the cattle, so corpses of cows, pigs and chickens were mixed in, but no skeleton paid any attention to it.

'Gather all the corpses at the main gate.' Realizing that the skeletons were finished, Athos sent a mental order to rejoin him. Athos was standing in front of the gate, lining up the newly acquired skeletons, or more accurately, those with either broken bones or missing limbs.

He was practicing dark magic on the corpses, trying to heal them. Athos had realized that dark magic could heal the undead, just as light magic could heal the living. Unfortunately, he had no experience in healing people nor in controlling dark magic, so he was struggling to heal bone cracks, he didn't even dare try with those with missing limbs.

He had no experience controlling dark magic, but the darkness was second nature to him now that he was undead. It was literally like moving a limb, as his body had no nerve endings and the darkness that moved his body. As Athos practiced, dark magic became more and more familiar and required less and less focus, allowing him to use a little more mana at a time.

By the time the last of the corpses was gathered around him, Athos was already healing whole bones with the same skill an apprentice priest would have. It was an incredible evolution that would make any necromancer green with envy, and it was only possible thanks to his undead nature, his mana body, and his innate talent. However, there was a problem.

"Lack of nutrients. It seems that just like light magic, dark magic still needs nutrients to heal." Athos said, looking at the human skeleton he had just healed. The bones were a little thin from lack of nutrients. The undead didn't need to eat because their bodies were powered by magic, but they would still need nutrients to heal.

"If I want to turn these crushed corpses into the undead, I'm going to need a power source." Athos thought for a while, before a simple idea crossed his mind. "Wait, we're in a village, aren't we? There must be more than enough food to feed all these people besides the livestock. If I gather all this together, can't I heal all the undead to a perfect state?"

Excited by the idea, Athos sent a mental order to all the undead to bring him anything that was edible, even hay for the cattle. After bringing all the reserve the village had prepared for the winter, Athos launched the mass undead raiser turning all the surrounding corpses into skeletons.

Athos felt a dizzy and weak feeling from expending so much corrupted life force to create so many undead at once, but the feeling quickly faded, replaced by euphoria and a sense of power like he had never felt before. There were approximately 150 corpses around it if he took into account the livestock and the corrupted life force received from all of them at the same time was immense.

"If it continues at this rate, I should be able to form a new layer of death before I attack the city." Athos nodded, satisfied with the improvement in his own power, before focusing on the task at hand.

## Chapter 59: Divide and kill

He called one of the skeletons that had already been healed and told him to soak up the nutrients in the hay until his body returned to its prime. The skeleton obeyed, picking up the hay in its hands and stuffing it into its mouth, the hay quickly wilting in its jaws to dust.

One of the things that Athos noticed about the skeletons is that they all gained the ability to manipulate their own core. He initially thought it was because they were monsters, but looking at the skeleton in

front of him, Athos can be sure. Even if they were ordinary villagers, mages, or monsters, all of their skeletons could handle mana to some degree.

This may have come as a shock to Athos, but it was obvious. As he himself had already realized, the black skeletons are created from a pulse of dark magic released by the core itself, stimulating it at the moment of creation of the undead.

‘It increases their potential. When things calm down, I should train them to the bone and see if any of them have the potential to become a mage.’ That’s what Athos thought after recovering from the shock. He watched intently as the skeleton devoured the hay until it reached its summit. His bones didn’t seem any thinner and had returned to normal, even seemed a little brighter, but it must have been all in his head.

“Very well, now go back to the others. All those who have already been healed, eat until you are full. Those who are injured, come to me and I will heal them. Also, the four of you should join me and assist in the healing. . You’re already mages and you’ve gained an affinity with the dark, it’s a good way to practice.” Athos spoke, looking at the four mage skeletons in the distance.

They obeyed him, but Athos sensed their hesitation, as if doubting whether they would really be able to use dark magic. They took out their wands and started trying to accumulate darkness, being shocked when they actually succeeded. Athos didn’t know how he managed to see all these expressions on a faceless skull, but he found it amusing to see what he assumed was an expression of astonishment.

Perhaps because they were more experienced than he was, the Skeleton Wizards had an easier time controlling dark magic, but they seemed to be struggling to separate the darkness from the world’s energy with their wands. Athos didn’t know this, but wands were made using branches of magic trees, mixed with magic stones from the elements that mages had an affinity for.

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Of course, none of this group’s mage had an affinity for darkness, so none of their wands could draw the darkness of the world’s energy. What they were doing instead was attracting the pure world energy and using pure willpower to extract only the darkness. This method was incredibly inefficient and gave skeleton wizards a terrible headache just for trying, but they persisted in the task nonetheless, unable to disobey.

Now with 4 mages healing the skeletons, the process is much faster. Even so, it took up to half an hour before dawn for the last skeleton to be fully healed. The undead crushed by the boar skeletons took a long time to heal as countless bones were crushed to dust. He had to ask the skeletons to collect the pieces or even the entire village reserve for the winter wouldn’t have been able to heal them all.

When Athos was finally finished, he breathed a sigh of relief before dropping to the ground, a terrible headache from overusing mana and focus. Despite having infinite physical stamina, the undead still seemed to suffer from mental attrition. The mage skeletons also appeared to be suffering, but Athos did not let them rest.

“Which of you is the former leader of the mages? I have a little experiment I want to do.” Athos asked.

One of the skeletons raised his hand. He was wearing the robe of one of the mages that Athos failed to turn into undead, as Athos was wearing his robe. Athos had taken most of the magic items for himself, but he saw no problem distributing the rest among the skeletons.

“Fine, now I need one of you to hunt something. It might just be a little mouse, it doesn’t matter. Just make sure you bring it to me alive.” Athos spoke, this time looking at the skeletons above him. They were the bladed bird skeletons, the only ones able to fly among their undead.

Despite being made only of bones like the others, there was a thin layer of darkness around theirs allowing them to fly and use their species’ characteristic ability, transform their own feathers into blades as hard as iron and shoot it. When he activated his ability, the thin layer of darkness on his wings would turn into several small blades before firing, and they could easily regenerate by consuming mana.

Athos had ordered them not to participate in the fight and to act as scouts, making sure that no villagers escaped. They were the fewest among their skeletons, having only eleven of them, including a leader. The bird skeletons whistled in agreement, before spreading throughout the village. They returned a few minutes later, carrying live rats on their talons.

The rats squeaked as Athos took them in his hand, jabbing their bellies with the tip of his bony finger so as not to damage the bones. He wanted the mice alive to ensure the skeletons were intact. There were seven mice in total, more than enough for his experiment.

“Turn him into an undead.” Athos handed the leader one of the dead rats, watching intently. Up until now, he had created each skeleton personally, but if other skeletons beside him could as well, he could split his efforts and attack more than one village at the same time.

The lead skeleton took the mouse in its hands and looked at it questioningly, not knowing what to do. It seemed that the knowledge of how to turn others into the undead was not instinctive.

“Use the darkness to absorb the corpse’s vitality, but don’t devour it. Instead, make the energy pool in the rat’s chest, where the core should be, and ignite it with a spark of your own life force.” Athos explained, before quickly adding. “Don’t worry, your life force will recover once the mouse turns into a skeleton.”

A light of understanding shone in his empty eye sockets and he did as instructed. The rat skeleton was successfully created, but there was a difference. The spark of life force spent by the mage leader was regained, but the extra life force flowed through the link between him and the leader, strengthening him. It seemed that even when another skeleton created an undead, he was strengthened.

“Fine, fine, now it’s your turn. Try to turn them into an undead.” Athos caught two mice, handing them over to the skeleton of a random villager and a rock bear. All skeletons were created the same and they all gained an affinity for darkness, so there’s no reason they’re unable to create undead either.

...Athos couldn’t be more wrong. The human skeleton was totally ignorant about mana and didn’t understand his explanation of life force even after he explained it in detail. He wasn’t able to release enough energy to consume the rat in one go and on a second try, he released too much energy and turned the rat to dust.



The rock bear fared a little better, as it instinctively knew how to manipulate mana. He was able to absorb all of the rats without destroying the skeleton, but he was unable to use life force to lift the rat.

"It's a shame it didn't work. It would be an amazing skill if all skeletons could create other skeletons while still fighting. My mana isn't infinite after all." Athos spoke, using dark vision to see the nearly empty core, the corrupted version of mana vision.

He had tried and failed to use death vision to see the core of living monsters, but it worked normally on undead. He was also able to see some kind of shadow on the monsters' bodies, but he didn't understand what it was. The shadow moved in certain patterns depending on the monster, but Athos didn't see any shadows when he killed the villagers.

Leaving the matter aside, Athos focused again on the present. "I've made a decision. We're going to split into two groups from now on. The first group will be led by me, the other by the mage leader here."

Chapter 60: Sevenus

"The monster skeletons will be led by him and will attack the two villages furthest from the city, the monkey village and the boar village, while I will lead the human and animal skeletons to attack the closest ones, the horn village and the village from the rock. You will probably finish before me, so come meet me in the rock village after you finish. Remember, kill all the people and animals that live in the villages. We will only have a chance against Faltra if they don't know that will be attacked." Athos spoke, looking at the leader in the eye sockets.

Suddenly, the leader's orbit gave a dark glow for a moment, before a change took place. The bond between Athos and the beast skeletons moved towards the leader, while the bond between the leader and Athos became stronger.

Athos was startled by this change, thinking for a moment that he had lost control over the undead, but soon realized that he could still feel them under his control. It seemed that the change had taken place because Athos had given command of the monsters to the leader, making him a sort of sub-commander.

"This was unexpected, but very welcome. I was a little apprehensive if the monster skeletons would obey him if I walked away, but I don't have to worry about that. In addition to the human skeletons and cattle, I'm also taking two of the mages with me, to make up for the lack of firepower. I'll take what has an affinity for fire and what has an affinity for ice." Athos said, pointing to two of the skeletons behind the leader. The last mage had an affinity for the wind and wouldn't be that necessary.

He turned to give orders to the other skeletons, but a voice from behind interrupted him.

"Ahh...ahh..." The leader's skeleton was slamming its jaw while making wobbly sounds, as if it was having trouble speaking. He continued babbling incoherently for a while, until coherent words finally came out.

"My...name is...Sevenus." The leader's skeleton spoke, looking Athos in the eye.

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"You can talk?" Athos asked in surprise, looking Sevenus up and down, as if seeing him for the first time.

'Shit, can he talk?' That's what Athos really thought. The idea that every enemy he killed in the future and turned into a black skeleton could speak was a headache. Even if Athos could still control them, it would be a headache to have to listen to the complaints and hateful words directed at him.

"Yes...my lord...I can...talk." Sevenus' words were inarticulate and difficult to speak, but Athos understood perfectly what he said. Sevenus did not speak with hatred or rancor, but service.

"Don't you hate me? I know you don't have a brain, but you know I killed you, don't you?" Athos asked surprised once more.

"How could I... could...hate the...my lord? You didn't...kill me...but you...freed me...from my prison...of flesh." Sevenus spoke, a light of fanaticism shining in his eyes. When Athos gave command of the monster skeletons to him, the dozens of chains that bound their minds and connected them to Athos moved towards him, crushing what little was left of his mind.

It destroyed her mind and rebuilt her. Now, he was no longer a slave against his will, but a servant willing to do anything for his master. Sevenus had been reborn as an undead in body and soul and soon so were the other skeletons.

'Given the timing, I can only assume that this change was caused by the bond between us getting stronger. If that means your loyalty has increased I won't complain, but I feel like I'm going to have a headache talking to this guy.' Athos thought, sighing mentally.

"My lord...there is something...you...must know. An enemy...mighty...may be...after...you." Sevenus spoke, catching Athos' attention. He slowly narrated the events before and after Athos died, explaining who the man in the white robe was and their motives, as well as the reason they kept Athos' corpse in the forest.

"So that motherfucker killed Khali, tried to capture me alive to turn me into a lab rat, and when he failed, tried to sell me to an old mage?" Athos asked furiously, a swirling black aura surrounding him.

"Yes...my lord. I believe...that he...must still be...looking for...you. And I fear that...in your...present state...you are. ...unable to...kill him...my lord." Sevenus spoke, his bones trembling in fear of Athos' wrath. Despite being a layer above him, the amount of mana Athos possessed was greater and the chains prevented him from making any kind of resistance, but what scared him the most was the idea of Athos' anger being directed at him.

"I don't need to fight alone. I can use the skeletons as cannon fodder and kill him using numbers. If he's an assassin like you say, he shouldn't be strong against numbers. I could also use wind magic to transform the air in toxic gas. He's still a living being, so he needs to breathe." Athos was already formulating plans to kill the mage slayer.

"My lord...the mage...slayer...move...in groups. If there is...one of them...in the city...there must be...more hidden...in somewhere." Said Sevenus.

"Tsk! Shit, shit, shit!" Athos kicked the gate in frustration, not knowing what to do. He wanted to run and dismember the bastard limb by limb, but he would be killed if he did. He could also follow his original plan and destroy the villages and then the city, quickly building up strength, but he ran the risk of being found by the mage-killers and destroyed.

Athos doubted they would recognize him as the corpse they seek, but they would destroy him anyway. An undead was a natural enemy of all living creatures and he would also be the perfect scapegoat to explain to the order why they didn't take his body. It would suffice to claim that he was among the reanimated skeletons and they not be refuted.

...They could read their minds and find out the whole lie, but Athos had no way of knowing that, so his paranoid mind made him imagine the worst cases.

The other option would be to abandon your current plans and flee beyond the human frontier, into the territory of the demihuman empire. His current forces were too small to survive in such hostile territory, but he could hunt monsters and demihumans and slowly gain strength, but he chose to carry on.

"There's no use running away. I don't know how things work in the demihuman empire, but I'm sure there are countless beings more powerful than me out there. I'm still weak after all. If I'm going to fight to the death, so be it against the man who killed me, not just any orc." Athos shrugged, pausing to worry unnecessarily.

Athos decided to continue, even if he risked facing the mage slayers. If Athos found them, he was determined to use everything in his power to kill them, but if he failed anyway, he would at least hang on to the motherfucker who killed Khali and detonate the core itself, killing the motherfucker along with it.

His sense of self-preservation was dulled even when he was alive and had totally disappeared after death, so he didn't think it was such a bad idea to kill himself to take the enemy with him. The only drawback is that he couldn't keep killing. Feeling lighter after coming up with this suicidal plan, Athos began sorting the villagers' skeletons.

"Human skeletons, grab anything you can use as a weapon. Makeshift spears, rakes, scythes, knives, even spades and hoes. Arm yourself with anything you can use to kill someone. It's daylight, but we're going to attack anyway. We leave as soon as everyone is armed. Go." Athos ordered, causing the skeletons to scatter.

"Are you sure...that this...is the best...choice...my lord?" Sevenus asked worriedly.

"I don't. But it's the choice that allows me to kill most people, so that's what I'm going to choose." Athos spoke.

"I would never...dare. My will...is your...will." Sevenus said, kneeling on his right knee.

"Then go and fulfill your mission. And in case you meet with the mage slayers, kill at least one of them, even if you have to blow yourself up with it. I am determined to do this, as my soldier, you must have the determination to do the same, n'ó é?" Athos spoke, looking inquiringly at Sevenus.

"As...you...order." Sevenus responded without hesitation, his empty eye sockets burning with the urge to kill. He got up and jumped on the back of a rock bear, mentally ordering the monster skeletons to march.

"...I forgot to mention that I wanted one of the bears to use as a mount, but I would feel bad if I sent him back after leaving so animated." Athos spoke, giving up the idea and ordering his army to march as well. He had gathered around 240 soldiers if cattle were added and was eager for more.

