

Supreme M 541

Chapter 541 Evil Eye Part 2

Lith unleashed a barrage of Plague Arrows, against which Trou'Bleskamuz had no choice but to tank them.

The mana imbued inside his ice armor lessened the damage, but the residual darkness was still enough to make the Balor stumble and lose most of his momentum. The creature refused to yield and lunged at Lith with a conjured ice great sword.

Lith switched to a two handed grip while infusing the Gatekeeper with fire and darkness magic. He sidestepped the incoming attack and performed a horizontal slash to the neck.

Only then did Trou'Bleskamuz reveal that his moment of weakness was actually a ruse. He turned his tumble into a roll, dodging the Gatekeeper and regaining his footing while his opponent was still off balance.

The Balor lunged at Lith again, who pivoted on his feet by using the momentum from his failed attack. The resulting spin wasn't enough to completely avoid the incoming strike, but it allowed him to adjust his stance and intercept the incoming blade.

Lith aimed the Gatekeeper at the great sword's tip, to push it away with minimum effort and create the opening he needed to win that fight. He almost couldn't believe his own eyes when the ice sword shattered on contact with the Gatekeeper, revealing a flaming blade blooming underneath its surface.

The ethereal fire blade ignored the bastard sword, keeping its trajectory unchanged.

Despite their brutish appearance and berserk fighting style, Balors weren't stupid. They were just so powerful that they usually didn't need clever strategies or tricks to dominate their opponents.

Resorting to one wounded Trou'Bleskamuz's pride, but it was much better than the alternative. The fire sword crackled as it pierced the Skinwalker Amor's enchanted defenses, producing the sizzling sound of roasted meat when it bit Lith's flesh.

Thanks to Lith's earlier small sidestep, the Balor had been unable to strike at the heart and had to settle for the shoulder. Not even earth fusion was enough to prevent the mystical flames from burning everything on their path.

Lith felt his left arm suddenly go limp. Even shutting down his pain receptors didn't help against his now labored breathing. Trou'Bleskamuz's blade had cooked his flesh, his bones, and part of his left lung in one fell swoop.

'By my maker, do you need my help?' Solus asked while assessing the gravity of his injuries.

'Thanks, but no. Your energy is limited, so it's better to save it for opponents in their reverted state. According to Ratpack, Yozmogh is a Balor too and he has access to his race's ancient powers. Trou'Bleskamuz is like a training ground for me.

'If I can't defeat him on my own, then it's better to call for reinforcements. Don't step in unless it's absolutely necessary.' Lith's reply made Solus curse her weakness and wish for a way to improve her usefulness in battle.

The lack of screams disappointed the Balor, but his mood worsened when he saw the Ranger Blink away as a healing aura enveloped his body. Trou'Bleskamuz envied Lith for it and hoped that Yozmogh would keep his word.

The only reason Trou'Bleskamuz was still there was the promise of having his full might restored.

'Even if the abuse of my black eye and ramming against the door has weakened me somewhat, how did the human manage to avoid my strike like that?'

The answer to the Balor's question was revealed when he attempted to give chase and finish Lith off before the light magic spell could take effect. Trou'Bleskamuz stumbled instead of sprinting as blinding pain spread through his body.

Lith's previous failed attack hadn't been a complete failure after all. Trou'Bleskamuz's roll had saved his head but left his back and his giant wings exposed. Just like the Balor, Lith had settled for a nonvital yet significant target.

Part of his right wing was gone, putting him off balance and allowing Lith to survive.

Even though the Balor could regenerate his wing, it would take him days, whereas the fight was likely to last less than one more minute. Lith's Checkmate Spears surrounded Trou'Bleskamuz, striking at him from every side.

The Balor was done blindly charging ahead and recognized immediately the trap lying ahead of him. With his wounded wing his mobility had been crippled, he wasn't able to move fast enough to dodge them anymore.

He could only use his flaming eye to destroy them at the risk of running out of fire mana, or conjure a defense made of ice that would act as a shield but also as a cage. It would further restrict his movements and leave him exposed to lightning spells.

Trou'Bleskamuz snarled and opened his red eye, sprinting forward on all four. His envy toward Lith turned into unbridled rage, boosting the flames' temperature and destructive power.

A pillar of blue fire cleared his path toward the Ranger as the Balor dodged the remaining ice spears. Lith saw trickles of blood streaming down the flaming eye and unleashed the tier five spell Dark Ages.

Black ice made from both water and darkness magic covered the ground as well as the walls, leaving only the silver doors exposed. It sapped Trou'Bleskamuz's strength every time he touched it and forced him to slow down to not impale himself on the lances that randomly popped out of the ice from every direction.

The growing crystals were quickly forming a wall in front of the Balor, who had to slow down even further. The darkness infused in the ice not only made it more resistant to the flames by weakening them, but it was also released in the air as a noxious gas once the ice melted.

When Trou'Bleskamuz finally reached Lith, his flames had died out and so had his red eye. Lith then conjured several streams of lightning bolts, shooting them at random in front of him.

The Balor didn't even try to shield himself, just dodging whatever he could to cross the last few meters that separated them. Only then did he realize that Lith wasn't aiming because he had no need to.

The entire floor was covered in water and so was Trou'Bleskamuz. It was a perfect conductor which routed every bolt of lightning to its target, allowing Lith to focus on the power of his spell and to completely neglect controlling it.

The Balor gritted his teeth and used sheer willpower to resist the spasms that were ravaging his body.

'Prideless mutt! Fighting dirty is a game two can play.' Trou'Bleskamuz activated his last eye, using the water Lith had conjured against him. The area around them was instantly filled with sharp icicles, which drained the water from the floor.

They were both lightning rods which saved the Balor from the thunderstorm and obstacles that limited the Ranger's movements, allowing the creature to engage him hand to hand. Lith squinted his eyes from the surprise.

He didn't expect such a degree of finesse in water manipulation from his opponent. The situation wasn't good. The back of the corridor was still sealed by his Dark Ages spell, and Blink's range didn't reach past the ice wall.

The two of them were trapped inside a small cage filled with spikes that would harm only him. The Balor's mana couldn't hurt his master. Lith backstepped while quickly casting Plague Arrows and wind blades until he could feel the point of an icicle painfully stinging his back.

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Trou'Bleskamuz roared in triumph. He had endured all those painful spells to make sure that his enemy would end exactly in that corner of the room. Agility and cunning meant nothing inside such a confined space, only strength mattered and he still had enough to uproot trees with just one hand.

The Balor was done underestimating the human. He jumped forward while swinging his giant fists down like hammers on Lith's left and right to cut off his escape routes. At the same time, his blue eye glowed with mana, making the icicles extend further.

The trap was complete, the Ranger's only choice was how he wanted to die, by fist, bite, or skewering.

Lith switched them at the last second, making the ice spear that had been prickling his back pierce through Trou'Bleskamuz's blue eye, brain, and skull. The Balor's body spasmed several times, gurgling blood from the several puncture wounds the rest of the ice spears had caused.

'That was close.' Lith sighed while cutting Trou'Bleskamuz's head off with the Gatekeeper, just to be safe.

'The Balors are way too strong to face them head on and their eyes are weapons of mass destruction also capable of fine control over the elements. I almost fell for his mindless brute act, but unfortunately for him, I too like to be underestimated.'

'Using my own conjured water against me was a smart move, exactly what I would have done in his shoes. That's why I used a tier five spell that used both water and darkness magic.'

'Once the water was imbued with his mana it couldn't hurt him, but the darkness was still mine. His lack of understanding of how tier five spells work was the deciding factor in his defeat.'

The barrage of spells Lith had employed while backstepping wasn't meant to harm to the Balor so much as to keep him focused on Lith and not notice the black veins tainting his own spell.

Lith used Invigoration to return to his peak condition while waiting for Ratpack and studying Trou'Bleskamuz' corpse. It didn't turn into smoke, allowing Lith to store him inside his pocket dimension.

'Now let's hope this master is a reasonable guy, otherwise I'll call the army and I'll have them make this whole thing collapse.' Lith thought.

"I found him! I found master!" Ratpack's voice was brimming with joy. He was holding an old battered skull with several teeth missing and cracks along its surface.

"Oh great, another lich!" Lith said while rolling his eyes. The undead had a life force weaker than a regular human while his blood core despite being almost completely red was reduced to the size of a pea.

"Nice to meet you, my name is Scourge. Do you have the strength to explain to me what's going on?" Lith's magical beast name was his best alias available. Even in their evolved forms animals despised undead.

They would never sell out one of their own in case the lich attempted something funny.

"Of course, dear Scarge." Liches didn't have any brainpower to waste, so they would rarely care for names. Especially if they belonged to an existence as fleeting as a human.

"It's so good to hear a voice which isn't mine or Trouble's. Is he already dead or can I have the pleasure of inflicting him with some pain, Forge?" The red light of undeath animating the eyes stared in delight at the blood splattered on the walls.

"Trouble is dead. Do you mind introducing yourself and telling me what happened?" Lith had a hard time not laughing. Between the lich's weakened state and his memory, Lith's real identity was airtight.

"Right, sorry, Sarge. I'm Zolgrish. As for what happened here it's a bit of an embarrassing story." He said.

Lith noticed that the cracks on the skull were disappearing and the missing teeth were popping up like mushrooms.

"As you surely know, being a lich isn't all fun and games. One of the most annoying things about it, is the need to keep your phylactery at hand." Zolgrish's words made no sense to him, but Lith just nodded and let him talk.

According to Kalla, young liches would sooner or later go mad due to their prolonged isolation or at least lose their common sense until time stabilized their mental condition.

Zolgrish seemed to be a textbook case. Either that, or he had lost it after becoming an undead.

"It holds half of our soul, so the farther we get from it, the weaker we become. I set up this lab at the fringes of my phylactery's range. I was at my full strength and at the same time far away enough to check on the progress of my work.

"This whole complex was supposed to work as a relay point for my phylactery. If my experiment succeeded, I would have been able to expand my area of activity to the entire Kellar region." Zolgrish sighed.

'Dammit! Even becoming a lich is out of the question now. I always wondered why they never disguised their phylactery as a pebble and threw it in the ocean or something. I knew it was too good to be true.' Lith thought.

"Everything was going fine. The mines provided me with all the silver I needed, the arrays amplified the signal, and my immortal minions provided me with an inexhaustible workforce." Zolgrish said.

"Wait a minute. Immortal minions?" Lith echoed.

"Well, yes. Lesser undead are too stupid, greater undead are too dangerous in the long run, while living beings are so annoying. You have to feed them train them, and once they die you need to find a replacement. Rinse and repeat.

"To avoid the issue, I bound their souls to my phylactery, so that whatever happened to me would happen to them. It was the perfect solution. It guaranteed their loyalty and provided for most of their living expenses.

"Whenever of them dies, he is reborn with his memories. Whenever they are hungry, kill a few and let the others feast on the corpse. From farm to table!" Zolgrish maniacal laugh gave Lith the creeps.

'That's why some corpses disappeared upon death while others remained. His device resurrects them only if the body is destroyed, or rather, stripped to the bone. This creature is raving mad. No wonder his minions revolted. The question is: how?' Lith thought.

"Sure, the procedure has a survival rate of 0.01%, but monsters spawn fast and nobody misses them. No harm no foul. Or so I thought. Over time, I took two of my most intelligent minions as lab assistants.

"Dann'Kah the orc and his mastery over magic crystals have proven invaluable for increasing the power of my creations. It took me a while to kill him into submission, but once the deed was done, the sky was the limit for my forgemastering.

"Yozmogh the Balor with his eyes was a perfect amplifier for my spells. Sure, they would explode from time to time, but nothing that a swift death couldn't fix.

"What I didn't take into account is that, since their souls are stored next to mine inside the phylactery, the repeated cycles of death and rebirth allowed them to feel the energy flow, until they became able to manipulate it!

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"Those ungrateful dogs bid their time and waited for the moment when I was about to complete the amplification device to enact their plan. Yozmogh attacked me while I was at my weakest, while Dann'Kah used his crystal to redirect the energy from my phylactery to their bodies instead of mine!

"You can imagine the rest." Zolgrish said. His skeletal body was now complete and he was standing on his own. The lich's blood core had returned to a normal size, but over half of it was black.

"So, after defeating you, they discovered they shared your limited freedom of movement." Lith said as Zolgrish nodded in approval.

"It explains why they didn't leave despite having opened so many exits, but not what they are fighting for nor why they attacked the nearby city alarming the residents."

"There was never any love between Dann'Kah and Yozmogh, the only thing uniting them was their common enemy: me. Once they discovered how to use my life force to undo the effects of their race's fall, they wanted to kill each other.

"The first one who dies will be resurrected again, but will lose his grip on my life force, leaving the other one in possession of most of my powers! As for the attacks on the city, the explanation is quite simple. I chose only males as my slaves, to keep their number in check."

'Decades of sausage fest! With the monsters' libido, it's no wonder they risked going so far despite their weakened state. They must have been looking for females.' Lith thought.

"Why didn't Trouble turn into smoke?"

"He wasn't one of my servants, but one of my lab rats. With three eyes, he was quite a rare specimen, since Balors usually have just one or two. I couldn't risk his life. I assume Yozmogh didn't restore his strength because he was one of the few that could leave for good." Zolgrish said.

"Only a few more questions." Lith said.

"What are you planning to do? And more importantly, are you willing to compensate me for my troubles?"

"Well, dear Marge, in my weakened state I can take on my minions, but not their generals. As long as the amplifier is active, all the energy coming and going from my phylactery is under their control, while I'm stuck in the condition I was when they overpowered me.

"My plan is to shut down the device, get my strength back, and kill those bastards for good. I just need to touch my phylactery to banish their souls and send them into oblivion! As for your reward..." Zolgrish walked to one of the opened silver doors.

A simple touch of his hand depowered it and another one took it off its hinges. Weakened or not, the lich was still quite powerful.

"Consider this an advance."

Lith stored the door inside his pocket dimension, nodding in agreement. Yet he had no intention of trusting such a deranged creature. There was no telling what the lich would do once he regained his full powers.

At the same time, turning down his help would have been foolish. Now that Lith knew about his opponents' limitations, worst case scenario he could always Warp to safety and wait for the army.

The two ringleaders would leave the complex and risk dying by his hand, while the weakened lich wasn't his match there, let alone if they fought near Jambel, away from the amplifier.

"Where is the device?" Lith asked.

"On the fourth floor, but we better get moving. Without Trouble constantly breaking me apart as a hobby, Dann'Kah and Yozmogh will have already noticed that I'm back at..." Zolgrish waved at himself.

"Let's call this humiliating, inferior form my peak condition." He sighed. "As I already told you, Bart, the three of us are linked. They are like dams that prevent the mana from my phylactery from flowing into me.

"I doubt they will come here in person, but their lieutenants are likely to be on their way."

Lith cursed as he took point, moving towards the stairs.

"Master, Ratpack so happy to see you. Ranger and his bright Lady scary." The little creature seemed to have gotten his spunk back. He looked at Lith with eyes full of disdain.

"Enough of your nonsense, Ratpack. First, stealth is our best ally. Second, I told you countless times: ghosts don't exist."

Lith didn't know whether to laugh or cry at an undead who didn't believe in supernatural.

"But master, she right here! She has very long hair, all dressed in gold and with many chains binding her." He said while pointing the air above Lith's right shoulder.

'Can he really see me?' Solus was astonished. Aside from the chains, the description fitted her.

"Sounds familiar. Can you describe her to me?" Lith never stopped moving, looking left and right with Life Vision to avoid the enemies patrolling the seventh floor.

"She very tall." Ratpack said.

'Good news, whatever he sees, it's not you. You're many things but tall is not one of them. He's just delirious.' Lith thought in relief.

'You jerk! I'm tall by his standards.' With her 1.54 meters (5'1"), Solus was way taller than Ratpack who was just 1.3 meters (4'3").

"Is she this big, with blonde floating hair, and a fat belly?" Lith's words made Solus swear like an angry truck driver.

'It's not my fault if you don't have any other relevant features!'

"Yes, yes, and Ratpack doesn't know. Dress cover her."

'Okay, now I'm positive he's delirious.'

'No, think about it.' Solus said. 'I'm in my ring form, so what he sees could be my soul, my real appearance! Ask him about my eyes, my face, everything.'

"Can you describe her to me?" Lith couldn't refuse her request, even though he found it ridiculous.

"She very ugly." Ratpack made Solus almost cry.

"She like you. Her brown eyes too big, ears too big, and her face creepy. She looks... kind." After a while Lith and Solus both realized that Ratpack used himself as a standard, making all humans ugly in his eyes.

When he found even Tista's hologram disgusting, Solus sighed in relief.

'This moron can't distinguish Kamila from the Queen, he's of no use.' Lith thought.

Then, he asked him about what kind of dress the bright Lady was wearing and if her chains had anything unusual. Both answers surprised Solus and Lith.

According to Ratpack, Solus was wearing a golden roman toga and sandals. It was an attire outdated for centuries, that Lith only knew about from the pictures in Mogar's history books.

"Chains all unusual." Ratpack said. "She bound by two kinds of them. One is big and bind Lady to you. Other one is thinner and restrain her. Two thin chains are broken and she keeps hammering a third. Chain makes sparks but hold, so Lady never stops."

"How many chains are left?" Lith's mind was spinning at top gear, but the only thing that came to him was the gemstones that appeared on her gauntlet form every time that Solus unlocked a new ability.

She had recently developed a second one of which he had yet to make sense.

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"Four. You believe Ratpack?" He asked.

"Yes. From your description, she reminds me of an old friend of mine who passed away long ago." Lith nodded.

Then, to Zolgrish he asked: "How can he see ghosts? What kind of creature is Ratpack?"

"It would be nice if he could." The lich sighed.

"It would mean that at least he isn't a complete failure. Ratpack is a chimera, I made him by assembling the corpses of an elf child and a Balor. Then, I used necromancy to raise the corpse as a vampire.

"He was supposed to be the ultimate being. An immortal, natural shapeshifter vampire in perfect tune with the world energy like an elf, and with a Balor's Evil Eyes, capable of amplifying each of his spells.

"Instead he kept the build of the child and the inability to handle the world energy of the Balors. Becoming a vampire messed things up even more because neither elves nor Balors usually become undead. That's why Ratpack is Ratpack.

"That said, ghosts do not exist. They are just a superstition, whereas undead are magical creatures, and magic is science. All undead can be killed and need to feed, but ghosts? What could they possibly eat?

"How could you destroy something that has no body? If ghosts were real, with all the people that die every day on Mogar, there would be more undead than living. Believe me, Snart, there is no return from death." The sadness in his voice surprised Lith

"Whoever she was, no matter how important she was to you, she's gone. The sooner you accept it, the better. Ratpack is funny and loyal, but he is not the sharpest tool in the shed."

Yet Ratpack's words triggered something inside Solus.

For a moment, she spaced out as unknown images and sounds flooded her mind. At first, she was running away from something. She had no idea what it was, but she knew that stopping or stumbling meant death.

The vegetation of the woods kept whipping her face and a few pebbles had gotten inside her sandals, hurting her feet with every step she took. Her chest felt heavy, her breath was ragged yet she didn't dare to slow down.

Then she was watching the sunset together with a woman so tall that she seemed like a giant, someone she called "mom". Solus barely reached her hips, and was clinging to the woman's hand that was much bigger than her own.

"Stop daydreaming, child." A cranky feminine voice said.

"You can't become the next Ruler of the Flames if you don't focus on the Forge."

"Yes, Master Menadion." Solus's voice replied as the purple flame in front of her shattered, returning her to Zolgrish's underground lab.

Lith shared all the fear, the love, and the admiration she felt as the fleeting memories passed, but had no idea what was causing them until she shared her visions with him.

'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' She asked.

'Yes. As I've always told you, you are a person, not a thing. No matter if you were born human, beast, or tower. The moment you gained feeling and self-awareness you were a person to me. The only real revelation is that your memories aren't entirely lost.' Lith replied.

They both had hoped that, since she still remembered what the complete tower looked like and the passing of time after her late master's demise, Solus could recover part of her past together with her powers.

Yet after so many years with no sign of improvement, they had relinquished that thought. At least until that day. Now Solus could remember picking out a dress among many and the feeling of a silver hammer in her hand.

They were too faint to be memories. They were more like impressions left by an action performed so many times to have left a mark in her subconscious. Solus didn't let herself be swayed by the joy those images brought her.

On the contrary, Master Menadion's words made her focus even more on their predicament.

'Lith, we need a plan.' She said.

'To make one, we need information and rest. Have Zolgrish open one of the rooms for you. Remember that you have been fighting non stop ever since we entered the underground complex.'

Lith nodded. Even though he had used Invigoration only twice, healing his wounds had taken a toll on his body. He needed to eat to restore his natural stamina.

Zolgrish didn't like being ordered around, but without Lith his only asset was Ratpack. He could only suck it up and open one of the doors on the seventh floor. After making sure no one had followed them, Lith sat down and took some food out of his pocket dimension.

"I get the part about shutting down the device, but how do you plan to do it? If it's the key to their power and they know of your escape, it's likely to be heavily guarded." Lith said while chewing beef jerky.

"What plan? You were so confident that I was just following your lead, dear Garb. It's not my problem if something goes wrong. Ratpack and I cannot die." The lich shrugged.

Lith took some deep breaths to calm himself. Suddenly the underground complex looked like more like a tomb than a magnificent loot crate.

'This idiot is even more deranged than I thought. I need to contact the army as my back up plan. Worst case scenario, they destroy the complex, the lich returns to wherever his phylactery is, and I can stage my death to get plausible deniability.

'If I make Zolgrish believe I'm dead due to the lab's collapse, he will not resent me.' He thought.

'I don't get why Borg is so nervous.' Zolgrish thought. 'Worst case scenario, I'll make the arrays surrounding the lab collapse and flatten the mountain. Sure, I'll lose my lab and Borg will lose his life, but he's just a human.

'That way, I'd get my powers back and destroy the device. It's a win-win. At least for me.' Mean minds did indeed think alike.

"What kind of weapons do your minions have at their disposal?" Lith asked.

"Only those I made for the kitchen staff. It's unbelievable how they struggled to butcher daily specials. I had to forge a few tools because they refused to give up. Some monsters are tough to kill bare handed and the meals ended being delayed."

"What about the treasury? Or the Armory?"

"Double lock. To open them they require my mana, to which sadly Yozmogh and Dann'Kah have access, and a combination. I never shared it with anyone, not even Ratpack, so they should be safe."

Zolgrish drummed his fingers on the ground. There was something he was missing.

"Oh, yeah. They're not proper weapons, but they could use the excavation and lab tools. They were never intended to be used in battle so their effects are simple, but they are quite powerful."

"That's just great!" Lith said.

"Can you please tell me that you know what the abilities are of all the monsters who reverted to their pre fallen state? I need at least one piece of good news."

"Sorry, but no. It was an unexpected development and they never bothered to share their discoveries with me, except when they used their newfound powers to kick the crap out of me.

"What I can tell you, is that Dann'Kah has somehow shrunk his purple crystal into a ring. It allows him to stir the surrounding world energy as if it's a soup and to cast tier five spells non stop. And he never learned tier five magic!

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"As for Yozmogh, he went from a two eyed Balor to a six eyed one. The change made him physically weaker than before, but the raw power of each one of his spells is unparalleled."

"Fuck it! I need some fresh air." Lith said as he opened a Warp Steps which led as far from the lab as he could manage. Even if somehow someone followed him, they would be so weak that he could pulverize them in the blink of an eye.

"Ratpack, the human seems to be a little touchy. Are you sure he is the strongest, smartest, bravest champion you could find?" Zolgrish asked.

"Of course, master."

"What makes you so sure about it?"

"He only survivor. All others died, so he best one." Ratpack said.

Zolgrish slapped Ratpack's on the back of his head, wondering if Lamb would ever return.

While the lich was cursing the gods for giving him Ratpack, Lith took out his army communicator the moment the Warp Steps closed behind him and called his handler.

"I've disposed of the next unit of monsters. Jambel is safe for now, but I've got bad news. The dungeon has turned out to be the abandoned lab of an ancient mage. It's not just their numbers that are a problem, but also the fact that some of them are mutated."

"Mutated how?" Kamila asked. That word reminded her of the past monster outbreaks, making her worry.

"They are not like the wargs." Lith replied almost reading her mind.

"Their behaviour is like I expected it to be, only their abilities are boosted. Either it's selective breeding or magical enhancement of sorts, I don't know. The situation is very volatile, there are two dungeon masters, not just one.

"An ogre shaman and a Balor." Lith could almost hear Kamila flinching on the other side of the conversation. Lith was reporting nearly the truth, sticking to what Lord Wyalon had already reported.

"Is there really a Balor?" Kamila asked.

"More than one." Lith took out Trouble's body as proof.

"What's worse, they have access to some magical tools they managed to repurpose into weapons. So far the two groups were too busy fighting among themselves, but if they get out of there, we're talking about at least a thousand mutated monsters armed to the teeth."

"What's your plan?" The more Kamila heard, the more worried she became.

'Why the heck did I start an argument about his past? I don't want our last conversation to be a stupid quarrel.' She thought.

"The complex has no array blocking dimensional magic, so I can get in and out of it fast. My plan is to create a distraction and kill the two leaders. If I manage to cut off the head of the snake, the rioting caused by the power vacuum should do the rest.

"I know I can do it, but I want you to keep a group of Wardens on stand by. If you don't hear from me within a few hours, send them to these coordinates and have them bring the whole complex down."

Lith then confirmed the position of the entrances Baron Wyalon had found to her and explained the nature of the arrays surrounding the place, making the Wardens' work much easier.

'If only I was a better Warden and there wasn't a frigging lich involved I could do it myself. This way when everything starts collapsing, Zolgrish will have no reason to suspect me.'

"Copy that, Ranger Verhen. Please, remember that you can always pull out and wait for reinforcements." Kamila's hologram appeared suddenly. Her voice was professional and detached as always, but her eyes contained a desperate plea.

"I wish I could." That part at least was true.

"There's a big snowstorm incoming. If we don't settle this now, Jambel and its citizens will be completely isolated for days. Bad weather is nothing to an orc shaman, the monsters would slaughter them like lambs."

'Or rather, I can't live with a lich breathing down my neck for the destruction of his lab.' He actually thought.

"Copy that." Kamila said. Before the hologram could completely disappear, Lith's civilian amulet pulled at his consciousness.

"Are you insane calling me from work? Your supervisor will flay you for that!"

"Who cares! Are you alright? You have never called for back up before, not even for the Black Star. Be honest with me, how bad is it?" She said.

'Dammit, now I understand why on Earth relationship in the workplace were frowned upon. Lying to my handler is one thing, doing it to my fear stricken girlfriend is another.' Lith thought.

"Pretty bad. Don't worry, though. If shit hits the ceiling, I'll Warp out of there in the blink of an eye." Even a vengeful lich was better than a dead Ranger.

"Please, be safe. Call me as soon as you're done with the mission, no matter the hour, okay?"

Lith nodded, knowing that no words could reassure her. He closed the call and Warped back to Zolgrish.

"Did you have any brilliant ideas during your stroll?" The lich sneered.

"Actually yes. Why don't we take a few weapons from your armory to make our lives easier?" Lith asked.

"Because if I imprint them with my mana, Dann'Kah and Yozmogh could use them too if they get their hands on them. I don't trust Ratpack to use anything more dangerous than a broom, and whatever you imprint I would have no way to get back. Unless I were to kill you, of course."

"What if you consider it the rest of my payment?" Lith couldn't refute that logic, but he could propose an alternative.

"And what would prevent you from abandoning me here? Maybe even taking a few souvenirs? It's not like I could stop you even if I wanted. I prefer to keep you motivated, Nolon."

As Lith had predicted, they found little surveillance on the road to the fourth floor, where the device was located. Unfortunately, it was because most of the guards had been recalled to right in front of the lab's door.

The orc shaman and the Balor hated each other, but they knew that if their former master were to regain his powers, he would turn their eternal lives into a living hell.

Lith, Zolgrish, and Ratpack were stuck near the stairway leading from the fifth to the fourth underground floor.

"How does your minions' resurrection process work? I need to know if fighting them is worth the effort or if it would just be a waste of time and mana." Lith said.

"It works just like mine." Zolgrish replied. His condescending tone showed once again how the lich considered such information to be common sense.

"If my body gets completely destroyed, it takes me between one and three days to be regenerated near my phylactery back to my peak condition. The stronger one is, the longer it takes the phylactery to store enough word energy.

"It shouldn't take it more than a few minutes to restore those weaklings. Yet remember that if you don't destroy their bodies, they will remain corpses for a couple of hours. That's the optimal time required to field dress and consume them.

"It should be more than enough to get in and shut down the device. You're worrying for nothing."

"I don't think so. We don't know who's inside the lab..." Unfortunately, the lab was so full of powerful magics that Life Vision was as useless as mana sense.

Chapter 546 The Best Laid Plans... Part 1

"...and if they stall us long enough, reinforcements could destroy the bodies we left behind. If that happens, we'd end up surrounded and killed in no time. Luckily for me, I've got a better idea" Lith said.

He was so used to relying on Solus's mana sense and on Life Vision that using Fire Vision felt wrong. It was one of Lith's oldest skills, that he now used mostly to cook since Life Vision had proved to be superior in combat.

Fire vision granted him the magical equivalent of thermal goggles, allowing him to see in the dark in a scale of colors according to the temperature of his surroundings. The lab was lit by light crystals that didn't emit heat, otherwise he would have been blinded.

Fire Vision provided no information about the strength of the enemy, but still could identify their position and size. Lith stood still for a while, studying the patrols' timing and routes.

'I can't afford to make mistakes. One false step and we'll be swarmed. Meeting Ratpack was a blessing in disguise. Without his information, I would have taken my sweet time opening the doors and who knows what could have happened.' Lith thought.

He worried more about the orc shaman than the Balor. As far as he knew, only the former could block his dimensional magic thanks to orcs' innate ability to manipulate mana crystals.

Dimensional magic was a powerful tool. Lith relied on it for both offense and defense. Most of his contingency plans were impossible without it. After he was sure that he had a clear understanding of their situation, Lith went upstairs and followed one of the patrols.

He cursed when he saw that they were all orcs reverted to their elven state. They moved lithe as cats, with lean limbs more fitting for a professional dancer than the brutes they were. The enemies would have spotted Lith's group immediately if not for the Hush zone and the smell canceling spell he had enveloped them with. Lith kept several spells at the ready while intently following the patrol movements with Fire Vision.

The moment the orcs met a patrol of reverted ogres, Lith unleashed the spirit magic tendrils he had prepared and snapped their necks. Then, he waved his hand, making a Warp Steps appear below their feet.

It moved the corpses into one of the cells on the seventh floor, of which Lith had memorized the coordinates and closed the door before leaving.

Ten elite enemies were swallowed by the dimensional corridor and locked away in one fell swoop. No one could destroy their bodies now.

"Quick! We must move before the other patrols notice their disappearance." Lith said. Zolgrish nodded at what's-his-name ingenuity and followed his lead.

Together they quickly cleaned the external corridors of patrols. Even in his weakened state, Zolgrish had no problems using water magic to freeze his opponents and dimensional magic to lock them away.

Once they reached the lab's nearest door, Lith made way for the lich. He didn't need Life Vision to know the door was enchanted. The many mana crystals fused into its surface couldn't be just for decoration.

Zolgrish raised his skeletal right hand in front of the solid silver door, making a holographic spiral made of runes appear.

"Interesting." He said after the door refused to open.

"They have managed to tamper with my code. I wonder if their newfound intelligence comes from reverting the effects of the falling or from mastering the connection with my essence now inhabiting their bodies.

"The latter possibility is kind of disturbing."

The tinge of worry in the lich's voice made Lith even more paranoid than usual. While Zolgrish worked the door's command panel, he checked their surroundings again and prepared a few extra spells.

'My preparation was meticulous and the execution of my plan flawless, yet I can't help being worried. If Dann'Kah and Yozmogh really are this smart, then they're bound to be close.' He thought.

'To make matters worse, they just need to tamper with one of the elements composing the world energy to seal my dimensional magic. There are too many things that can go wrong. Solus, be ready to intervene.'

She was careful to shapeshift slowly from under his sleeve, while the lich was still focused on the door. When her arm protector form manifested, she made it appear as though he had simply taken it out from a dimensional item.

Zolgrish finally cracked the code and turned towards Lith.

"We're in." The lich said while looking at him like it was the first time they met.

"You seem different, somehow. Have you done something with your hair?"

The door opened, revealing the biggest Forgemastering lab Lith had ever seen. It extended as far as the eye could see, taking up the entire floor. There was no room or wall separating the various sections of the lab, only pillars to keep the ceiling standing.

The stone walls had been carved into bookshelves and each one of them was filled with ancient tomes or scrolls. The richly decorated spines of the books were the only element of color in the otherwise honey hued stone surface.

A blue translucent force field covered all the bookshelves, protecting their content from the energy employed and released during the Forgemastering experiments. Lith counted at least twenty Forges.

"Forge" was how Forgemasters referred to the silver tables they used for their work. Every forge inside the lab was covered in runes of power, which formed magic circles still pulsing with blue energy.

Some circles were complete, others were works in progress, but all of them had an object resting on their center, ready to be enchanted.

Much to Lith's surprise, the books were arranged according to a color code that went from black to white, going through the complete light spectrum.

'What the heck? Could he have split the books according to the mana core required? Solus, are you sure he isn't an Awakened?' Lith was already worried about orc shamans always being Awakened ones.

The idea that even the Balor could become one by accessing Zolgrish's memories was enough to reconsider his plan and call the army to have them raze the area.

'Pretty sure. So far he has chanted all of his spells and his mana flow is static. Either he is a fake mage or he has lost his status of Awakened together with most of his powers. My money on the former.' She replied.

"What does the color code mean?" Lith asked. He needed to make sure it was just a coincidence.

"What code? That would be an idiotic thing to do. The books are in alphabetical order. I had them bound that way so that each Forge has its own room." Zolgrish walked double time towards the Forge at the north west end of the room.

Unlike the other silver tables, there was nothing on it except five concentric circles of runes that glowed with a golden light instead of the common blue.

"Where's the device?" Lith said while sighing in relief.

"You're looking at it." The lich replied.

"Only amateurs use common silver tables for a masterpiece. True Forgemasters use adamant. It conducts mana as well as silver but it's hundreds of times more resilient. Plus, you can shapeshift it into any form you may need.

"It makes it much easier to inscribe runes with perfect symmetry on the vessel for your spell since you have an ample surface that you can later rearrange in the shape and size of your choosing."

Chapter 547 The Best Laid Plans... Part 2

At a wave of his hand, the silver table turned into a giant ring as big as a double door. Mystical energies flowed from the air into the construct as the space inside the ring was filled by a red and black essence that Lith recognized as part of a blood core.

"I don't like it. Why is there no one in here?" Lith asked while using all of his senses to scan the area.

"Because the security level was set so that anyone without my energy signature would die upon entering."

At those words, Lith conjured several barriers as the gems on Solus' arm protector form glowed with mana.

"Relax! I've disabled them." Zolgrish laughed at the Ranger's panic.

"You idiot! Doesn't that mean that every one of those who share your essence could be waiting for us?" Lith rebuked.

"Oh, please. You're simply..." Zolgrish's amusement disappeared as dozens of reverted monsters wielding magical tools appeared from thin air.

"...right. Dammit!" The lich waved his hand again, causing the ring to shapeshift back into a table.

"Not so fast." A deep and melodious voice said.

Two humanoid creatures appeared right next to the device. One was wearing a grey magician's robe, leaving only his head and hands exposed. He was 1.78 meters (5'10") tall, with light brown skin and shoulder-length golden hair.

His pointy ears parted his hair, revealing a slender neck which together with his delicate features gave him a feminine look. Only his pupils, flaming from the red mana coursing within, betrayed his real nature.

On the ring finger of his right hand rested a purple ring made of crystal. Now that Dann'Kah had activated it, it was filled with so much mana that it eclipsed the rest of the lab to Solus's mana sense.

'Whatever it is, it's not just a simple crystal.' Solus tried to make sense of what she was staring at.

'It contains multiple different energy signatures, like it's composed of several living beings compressed together. How could an orc create a cursed object in so little time?'

The answer was that he didn't. Whenever an orc shaman used a powerful mana crystal long enough, they would leave an imprint on it. Their successors, if talented enough, could use such imprints to access part of their ancestors' experience and their most used spells.

Recalling the spells of a single shaman was a hard and complex matter because the further in the past they had lived, the fainter their trace was and the harder it was to find it.

Dann’Kah was different. After recovering the abilities his race possessed before their fall, he had discovered that he was able to activate all of the imprints left by his forefathers. It was the residual mana from the past shamans that Solus had mistaken for life forces.

Dann’Kah was using part of the lich’s undead energies to keep them permanently active and have access to tier four and five spells. The residual mana mixed with the undead life force gave those echoes from the past a semblance of life.

Dann’Kah believed he had conjured his ancestors’ spirits and that they were guiding him from the netherworld, bestowing their knowledge upon him.

Unfortunately, the truth was that by having so many memories flooding his mind along with centuries of hatred and rage, Dann’Kah was on the verge of madness. He was constantly shaking his head, but not because of the effort from undoing Zolgrish’s will.

He was trying to make the voices in his head shut up long enough for him to achieve his goal.

The second creature was bare-chested, wearing only pants. Yozmogh was 2.3 meters (7’7”) tall, with pale blue skin and a cascade of long silver hair reaching his waist. He had the body of a Greek god, with muscles that looked like they had been chiseled rather than trained.

He had six eyes on his face and six feathered wings emerging from his back. Each one of the eyes was a different color, based on the element inhabiting it, and so were his wings.

The eyes on the creature’s forehead were red and blue, those under his eyebrows were black and white, while those on his cheekbones were brown and yellow. Both Lith and Solus wondered if there was any connection between Balors and Lith’s hybrid form.

Aside from lacking a seventh one on the forehead, the Balor’s eyes were positioned exactly the same way.

The wings on his back followed the same pattern as the eyes and seemed to be made of pure elemental energies.

"Power down this damn lab or they’ll use it against us!" Lith said as he conjured several streams of lightning to disperse the enemies and stop whatever Dann’Kah was doing.

Yozmogh’s yellow wing crackled like thunder, and suddenly Lith’s spells were drawn to it like the wing was a powerful magnet. The yellow wing stored the energy and purified it from Lith’s mana before transferring it to the yellow eye.

"Humans should not fight their gods." Yozmogh said. His voice was quiet and solemn. There was no arrogance nor threat in it, he was only stating what he considered to be the truth.

The dryad-ogres joined their hands, forming a wall of vines that quickly surrounded Lith as several reverted trolls activated the tools in their four hands to strike him down through the openings their companions created for them.

Each troll wielded two golden staves, each with what looked like a ruby the size of an apple on their tops, which emitted jet streams of blue flames.

While Zolgrish and Dann’Kah were engaged in a battle of sheer willpower, Ratpack fled from the scene and hid inside the closest shadow, hoping that no one would notice him.

The lich’s blood core was diminished, but his mind was intact. Even though Dann’Kah was several times stronger than him and wielded the same energies, keeping them in check was a constant struggle for the orc.

Zolgrish had no such problem. It was his energy, his lab. They both responded to his thoughts like they were an extension of his body.

"What are you waiting for? Destroy him!" Dann’Kah ordered to his orc-elves. He was well aware that if it weren’t for the purple crystal on his finger he would have already been bested.

The mining tools the reverted orcs were equipped with looked like silver rods, about one meter (3,3 feet) long, with topaz embedded along their sides.

They amplified the mana they were imbued with to generate energy blades capable of easily cutting through rock. The orcs had spent countless hours in the mines, slaving away for the lich.

Their mastery with the cutting tools was equaled only by their resentment for him, so as soon as Dann’Kah gave the order, they had the rods in their hands shape their mana into the form of a mace and struck mercilessly at Zolgrish from every side.

After being pulverized by Trouble for months, what such weapons could inflict to the lich was merely discomfort. His pride was almost crushed seeing his creations used against him, seeing his slaves dare to raise their hand against their master.

Almost.

Now that he was so close to the device, which Dann’Kah was so kindly keeping half open, all the energy he would lose due to the wounds inflicted upon him would be absorbed by the ring and returned to him in barely a second.

Countless possibilities appeared in Zolgrish’s mind and a cruel smile would have formed on his face if only he had one.

’The situation is much better than I predicted. Mario is unlikely to survive, but hired help is always expendable.’ The lich thought.

Chapter 548 Past vs Present Part 1

Zolgrish ignored the pain from his skeletal limbs being constantly crushed and regenerated, focusing on the adamant forge.

’Yozmogh and Dann’Kah are too close to the amplifier for me to open the control panel and shut it down. Dann’Kah’s obstinacy to keep it open means they needed me to activate it. Their control over my essence must be poor.’ He thought.

’I don’t get why Luigi wants me to shut down the lab, but since he is likely to die, I might as well grant his last wish.’

The lich stomped his foot on the power line of the array fuelling the lab. Everything that didn’t have his own pseudo core went dark.

'We're back baby!' Lith and Solus thought in unison as most of the interference from their surroundings disappeared, making Life Vision and mana sense useful again.

Lith had managed to survive up to that point only thanks to his multiple layered barrier. The wall of vines made up by the reverted ogres limited his movements and the trolls would strike at him with their enchanted tools whenever he tried to escape the encirclement.

Their staves emitted blue flames which reached thousands of degrees, capable of turning a man into charcoal with just one hit. Even when they missed, they made the air too hot to be breathable unless Lith cooled it down with water magic.

To make matters worse, up to that point Yozmogh had neutralized the spells Lith had conjured to defend himself with his wings. Not only did he almost cause Lith's death multiple times, but also all of his eyes were brimming with stored energy.

'I'll deal with him later. First I need to get rid of the trolls.' Lith thought as he Blinked right behind one of the reverted creatures. With Life Vision working again, the wall of vines no longer blocked his line of sight.

"Behind you." Yozmogh warned them as the Ranger came out from his exit point. Lith had Solus keep an eye on him, he couldn't afford any distraction in the task at hand.

His arms moved like snakes, striking at each troll multiple times. The trolls laughed at his wasted efforts and unleashed new jets of blue flames. With their thick skin and powerful muscles, that kind of attacks didn't even tickle. On the contrary, they felt full of vigor.

Or so they thought before falling to their knees, writhing in agony.

Lith's hits were weak because he knew brute strength and normal magic were pointless. Normal trolls' regenerative abilities made them hard to kill, whereas those in front of him would resurrect in a matter of minutes.

Lith had to save his strength for and from Yozmogh. He couldn't afford the Balor stealing any more of his mana, so the strikes were merely a vessel, each one imbued with a light spell.

Healing magic was the trolls' bane, overloading their already too efficient metabolism that caused their perpetual hunger. Lith's spells had pushed them to the brink of starvation. Their massive bodies shrunk like each passing second was a day spent fasting.

"Impressive." Yozmogh gave him a nod of approval.

"Let's see how you fight when even your eyes betray you."

Yozmogh revealed that he was holding a small mirror in his left hand. He pointed it at the wall of living vines and then to himself, making them both disappear.

'There was no dimensional door and I can still hear the ogre-dryads slithering on the floor. Is that invisibility?' Lith asked.

'It must be that mirror's effect.' Solus pondered.

'My guess is that it uses gravity magic to bend the light. That must be how they hid themselves waiting for Zolgrish to activate the device.'

'Thanks for the explanation, but how does that help?'

'It doesn't. The field it creates is so fine that not even mana sense can pinpoint them. I can only give you an approximate location.' Solus said as Lith felt a living wave crushing against him.

The vines coiled around his body, turning visible once again. They tried to dig their way through his skin and orifices.

'Gross! They didn't even buy me a drink first.' Lith activated his tier five spell, Setting Sun. It generated a globe made of darkness imbued flames around him that engulfed all of the dryads-ogres attacking him.

The two elements were fused together, allowing the dark energies to move at a speed that would otherwise be impossible. Setting Sun was a perfect offense and defense that would stay up until all of its mana was exhausted, but Lith didn't plan to use it for long.

'I thought you said that ogres' vines are resistant to fire. Wouldn't it have been better to use Ice Age, instead?' Solus asked.

'That's exactly why I'm using it. Just like with the trolls, I don't want to kill them, just to make them suffer. Otherwise they'll just pop up again in an endless loop.' Lith explained.

The darkness magic quickly sapped the ogres' vitality, while the fire magic of Setting Sun inflicted them blinding pain but dealt little damage. The moment the vines writhed in agony off his body, Lith expanded the sphere of black flames outwards, revealing Yozmogh's position.

As the Balor's gravity sheath dissolved, Lith could see Yozmogh's red and black wings brimming with power. He was trying to rob Lith of his spell but to no avail.

Over the years, Lith had fought opponents more powerful than he was many times. It had almost cost him his life, but at the same time, the experiences had given him the opportunity to learn from them.

He had devised Setting Sun after fighting Nalear, while Thrud Griffon and Manohar had taught him how to defeat an opponent capable of draining his mana. Just like the vortex generated by Thrud's meat puppets, Yozmogh's wings couldn't affect a spell animated by its caster's willpower.

Lith had understood the nature of the reverted Balor's powers after he had literally stolen his thunder, but feigned ignorance to lull Yozmogh's conceit.

"Such a powerful spell and no chant. You must be an Awakened!" Surprise and joy appeared on his face despite the black flames withering his skin.

Lith had no time to waste bantering. He focused Setting Sun on his fingertips, making it rotate faster and faster, until he released it against the Balor in the form of a giant spinning thorn.

Meanwhile, the battle between Zolgrish and Dann'Kah took an unexpected turn too.

"Hey, idiot. Do you know the origin of the term lich?" Zolgrish said. He grabbed one of the orcs who, in the heat of the battle, had fallen prey to the orc's natural bloodlust and come within arm's reach.

A simple touch was all Zolgrish needed to leech the vitality of an opponent, but this time that wasn't his goal. The undead life force Dann'Kah had shared with his lieutenant recognized its only true master and returned to him.

"Thanks for the meal." Each reverted orc contained only a small portion of Zolgrish's power, but it was enough to tip the scale of the battle in his favor. The orc-elves attempted to escape, but the lich only needed one of the cantrips he kept at the ready to stop them.

Some even conjured world energy to commit suicide, yet it only backfired. They were closer to Zolgrish than to the amplifier, so the undead energy released upon their death ended up being siphoned by him.

Chapter 549 Past vs Present Part 2

Ragged clothes appeared on Zolgrish's skeleton as well as flesh and muscles, restoring part of his original appearance. Dann'Kah started to panic, his willpower was consumed on too many fronts.

He had to keep at bay the voices in his head, prevent the amplifier from shutting down or lose any chance to control it, and fight the undead energies within him which were trying to return to their rightful vessel.

'How the heck does Yozmogh control them so effortlessly? I'm a natural Awakened, whereas liches use fake magic, and Balors are limited to tier three magic. Why am I losing against a pile of bones?' He thought.

The answer was actually simple. In his arrogance, Dann'Kah had spread his resources too thin. As for Zolgrish, he had prepared plenty of spells on his way to the lab. Until he lost his focus or run out of spells, he was as powerful as an Awakened.

To add insult to injury, he only needed to beckon to call back his energies and the closer he got to Dann'Kah, the harder it was for the orc to keep them in check.

Zolgrish was solely focused on the shaman, so Yozmogh could afford to let the undead energies escape from his body just to capture them again with his black wing.

Dann'Kah called upon his ancestors to conjure the ancient elven tier five spell, Lighthouse. It trapped the lich inside a hard light construct shaped like a cube that contained a small tornado.

Zolgrish wasn't afraid of being ripped to shreds by the violent air currents, so much as he was surprised by the offensive light spell. He had never seen one before.

"Not bad, but let's see if this thing is as strong as it looks." The lich snapped his fingers to release the tier five spell Raging Sun. It filled the cube with a blast of purple flames that dispersed the air currents forming the tornado, adding the orc's spell power to its own.

The resulting explosion made the sides of the cube crack as the lich took control of the shockwaves it generated with air magic and sent them back and forth against the weak points the two colliding spells had created.

It was an impossible strategy for any creature, living or not. Zolgrish could ignore the damage he received only because he had no vitals.

"You fool!" He laughed as his bones kept cracking and healing.

"You should have let the device shut down. It would have taken me hours instead of seconds to regain my strength. The closer I get to it, the stronger I become. It's like being next to my phylactery to me."

"Thanks for the information, old man." Dann'Kah replied. He sent the cube rolling to the opposite side of the room, following it closely to not lose control of his spell. If darkness magic's weakness was its speed, for light magic it was its range.

"But I need the amplifier to take everything from you, just like you took everything away from me. My dignity, my honor, even my life. I'll use your life's work to escape from this cage and torture you until the end of time."

"What a coincidence! It's the end of time o'clock for you. Right, Ratpack?" At those words, Dann'Kah realized to have brought the lich in the spot he had seen the small maggot disappear.

Ratpack emerged from the shadows, stabbing Dann'Kah with his Coward's Knife multiple times before the shaman could even turn around. The enchanted blade was a long dagger for a man but it was a short sword to Ratpack.

Zolgrish had infused it with light and darkness magic. The darkness spell acted as a venom against living beings and as an acid against everything else. The light element closed the wounds the moment they were opened.

The forced healing would sap its victim's stamina and accelerate the spreading of the venom through their body by enhancing their metabolism. Dann'Kah managed to stop the darkness spell with one of his own, but he was helpless against the light magic which broke both his focus and his spell.

As soon as the cube shattered, Zolgrish dashed forward and grabbed the shaman's face with his hands as he summoned back the undead energies that had been stolen from him.

"Thanks, you idiot! I would have never escaped from that thing on my own!" Zolgrish said.

"You're welcome, master!" Ratpack said while turning into a puff of smoke to avoid the lightning bolts the orc had unleashed trying to get rid of the small pest.

"Not you! I mean, yes you helped me, but it was sarcasm." Zolgrish sighed at the ruined moment. He had been on his last leg, focusing all of his remaining mana on the healing process to pretend that he was stronger than he appeared to be.

Recovering from small wounds like those the tools inflicted was one thing, withstanding tier five spells was another. The lich had deceived his captor hoping that Ratpack would find the courage to step in the fight.

The moment the lich and the shaman came into contact, they started a tug of war for the control over the undead energies trapped inside the orc's body.

One second the lich looked almost human, with pink skin covering his face and pretty clothes over his body, whereas the orc was once again a bald, tall brute. The next moment, Zolgrish was reduced to two arms connected to his skull only by the shoulders, and Dann'Kah looked more magnificent than ever.

The world energy would burst out of his body, forming a crown of pure mana above his head and making his skin shine as he had turned into a god.

"Oh crap." Zolgrish said. He hadn't realized that the channel he had opened between the shaman and him could go both ways.

Even though the undead energy well remembered his touch, now that they were so close Dann’Kah could use his crystal ring to steal the little life essence that the lich had left.

"Ratpack! Zalma! I need help!" He said.

Unluckily, Ratpack had run out of courage, and Lith had his plate full.

"Dammit! Do you want to dance? Fine, but I’ll lead." The moment Zolgrish regained the upper hand, he Warped them away. Yozmogh was still busy dealing with Lith, but after the lich’s call for help, he had noticed how dangerous his situation was.

If Zolgrish managed to strip the undead energies from Dann’Kah, he would be the next. If it was the orc shaman to emerge victorious, they would no longer be equal and the Balor’s fate would be sealed anyway.

He ignored Lith’s Setting Sun and darted forward to stop Dann’Kah, but the lich beat him to the punch, moving his fight to an unknown location. A searing pain spread from the Balor’s light wing as Lith pierced it with his spell.

’If I’m right, as long as he has all six wings, he should be able to use some kind of Invigoration by absorbing the six elements that make up the world energy. To gain an edge, I must cripple his recovery abilities.

’Without his light wing, all the damage I inflict to him will be permanent and he will be unable to recover is mana too. Two birds with one stone!’ Lith thought.

Yozmogh couldn’t agree more. His conceited expression was replaced by worry as the thorn made of black flames turned most of the white feathers into ashes. He turned around to protect his exposed back, but Lith managed to follow his movements thanks to air fusion.

The Balor yelled in outrage realizing his mistake. His power was unmatched, but he couldn’t cast spells against someone outside his line of sight.

Chapter 550 Eyes and Wings Part 1

A Balor’s body was unable to channel mana. It was one of the reasons why millennia ago such a powerful race had attempted to force their evolution and ended up joining the ranks of the Fallen races.

Unlike all other creatures, they could conjure spells only through their eyes, making it vital for them to always face their opponents. Their other biggest limitation was their inability to cast spells above tier three.

The highest tiers of magic required to fuse and manipulate multiple elements at will, while each one of the Balors’ eyes could only handle one specific element. Activating more than one eye at a time was possible, but they were unable to cooperate.

The only exception was the creation of hard constructs, like weapons or armors made from ice. They could be infused with multiple elements, but always one at the time.

Balors couldn’t use gravity magic, dimensional magic, nor complex arrays. They were unstoppable soldiers on the battlefield, yet as a race, they had been dependant on others for the creation of even the simplest enchanted item.

Yozmogh activated his red eye, turning all the agonizing monsters lying on the floor into cinders. Their corpses turned into spheres of smoke that orbited around the amplifier. The device started to reconstruct their bodies at a speed visible at the naked eye.

Then, the Balor activated his yellow wing, obtaining the same effects of air fusion. The sudden boost in speed allowed him to escape from Lith and put some distance between them.

Lith cursed when he noticed that Yozmogh was capable of using his white eye to slowly regenerate the white wing, yet his mood improved when he noticed that the mana it stored wasn't being replenished.

'It seems that wings and eyes are connected.' Lith thought.

'Indeed. Unlike Trouble, Yozmogh's eyes cannot accumulate world energy on their own. A wounded wing means he cannot recharge the corresponding element, we can't allow him to buy even one second.' Solus pointed out.

Lith darted forward, using a flight spell to match the opponent's speed. The Balor was forced to interrupt his healing spell to activate his yellow wing. It allowed him to negate Lith's air magic and unleash the lightning bolts he had previously stored.

Or so he believed.

After fighting Thrud, Lith had spent hours learning how to infuse his will even inside low tiered spells, so Yozmogh attempt to slow him down failed. The focus needed to succeed prevented Lith from retaliating to the incoming lightning pillar, but he didn't need to.

Solus opened a small Warp Steps in front of them, which redirected the massive spell against the amplifier. The adamant it was made of and the enchantments protecting it resisted the assault, but the monsters surrounding it weren't so lucky.

They had yet to regain half of their bodies that they were once again reduced to smoke and ashes.

"Nice artifact, human. I have some too!" Yozmogh said. A small silver sphere in his right hand shone with the intensity of a small sun as he launched himself against the enemy.

Lith was aware of the enormous gap in physical strength between them, but time wasn't on his side. Stalling meant giving the Balor the opportunity to recover his light wing and his minions.

'To add insult to injury, I don't know if Zolgrish will prevail. I might be able to deal with one of those reverted monsters at a time, but if they team up, I'll be forced to leave. I'm greedy, not idiotic.' He thought.

Lith had noticed several completed artifacts still lying on the Forges. If the lich failed his mission, Lith was willing to collect everything he could on his way out as compensation.

Lith dodged to the side, avoiding a head on clash with the Balor and cast another tier five spell, Stormnado. It was a mix of air and darkness, that conjured a thunderstorm of poisonous gas.

The destructive mass of energy and the lab defenses clashed as Lith made sure the amplifier was caught in the area of effect of his spell, delaying the reverted monsters' resurrection even longer.

Yozmogh appreciated Stormnado's prowess, considering the pain it inflicted him like a foretaste of the power he would wield once he completely assimilated the lich's essence.

His plan was now actually twofold. If before his aim was to undo his own fallen state and overcome his ancient limitations, capturing Lith would open endless possibilities to him.

'If I can steal the secret of Awakening, Dann'Kah will be no match for me. Both my body and magic are superior to his. If not for him being an Awakened, I would have long had him under my heel!' He thought.

Yozmogh activated his yellow and black wing, but this time he didn't try to absorb Lith's spells. He instead reverted the flow, sending mana from his eyes to his wings and making the corresponding elements in the world energy unstable.

No matter how much Lith focused nor the amount of mana he pumped into Stormnado, the spell waned as the two elements composing it became unable to coexist.

'What's happening?' Lith took the Gatekeeper out of his pocket dimension. His flight spell failed him too and he couldn't afford to waste more mana.

'It must be what Zolgrish talked us about. A reverted Balor can not only drain the world energy through their wings, but they can also use their stored mana to upset the balance and disrupt our magic.

'To cast an air or darkness spell, you have to counterbalance the distortion Yozmogh caused.' Solus said.

'Easier said than done. Damn lich, stirring the world energy my pale ass, this is jamming.' Lith didn't like his odds. The Balor's spells seemed to be unaffected by the mana distortion, making him apparently even more dangerous than the orc shaman and his crystal.

Lith infused himself with all the elements and prepared for the worse. Yozmogh's eyes lit up one after the other, emitting highly compressed elemental beams. Lith dodged with a roll, but the beams kept following him wherever he moved.

They were so powerful that even the blue translucent barrier protecting the library couldn't keep up. Only the presence of a second barrier below the first one prevented the precious tomes from being destroyed.

"Stop running! I need you alive, not healthy." Yozmogh said as his eyes darted along the room to follow Lith's irregular footwork. Despite his words, every one of his attacks had been aimed to Lith's vitals.

'Any brilliant ideas?' Lith was almost out of breath. Escaping on foot from a flying enemy while dodging the elemental beams was a mammoth task.

'Yes. Don't get caught. I don't like how he keeps that shining sphere at hand.' Solus replied.

'The good news is that between his jamming and his unrelenting attack, Yozmogh is almost out of darkness and air magic.'

Lith didn't find any solace in her words. Three or five rays made no difference to him, the Balor only needed one to kill him. Lith took cover behind the amplifier, hoping that the enemy wouldn't take the risk of damaging it.

He was right. His move caught Yozmogh by surprise, forcing him to spin like a top to look away from the priceless device.

Lith managed to get a single breath worth of energy from Invigoration before the Balor resumed the chase, but it was enough.