

## Supreme M 651

### Chapter 651 A Threat from the Past Part 1

"I think we should contact our commanding officer." Phloria said. "As a person, I just want to run away from this nightmarish place. As a soldier, however, I think we should at least make sure that by opening Kulah's gates we haven't unleashed some ancient horror upon the Griffon Kingdom."

Lith nodded. He really hoped to receive the order to retreat. In the case that happened, he would only need to have Solus's to assume her tower form above the mana geyser once to be able to return there anytime he wanted.

'If it works.' Solus said. 'The ground has been enchanted to not be affected by earth magic and even if the mana geyser has not been claimed, most of its energy is drained by Kulah.'

'There might not be enough world energy left to assume my tower form, let alone to perform a Warp.'

Phloria took her army amulet out of her dimensional amulet and tried to contact the headquarters. Unlike a civilian device, the army communication amulet had green mana crystals supporting the blue one and amplifying its signal.

Yet all the runes carved on its surface were inactive. She had to infuse it with her own mana to have even the emergency rune to lit up.

"Dammit, I don't know the reason but now the signal sucks. Give me a hand, please. I can't speak and focus so much all at once."

With Lith's help, the hologram of commander Berion soon appeared between them. Phloria reported to him everything that had happened and the losses they had suffered.

"Dammit! You should have called me the moment you realized it was a military compound! Your expedition isn't suited for that kind of recon. Historians are a must, but you need many more Master Forgemasters and Wardens." Berion slammed his fist against his desk.

Lith had never seen him angry, not even during the events of Othre. Once he looked more carefully, Lith could notice that he stood corrected. The Commander was worried, not angry.

"With all due respect, sir, the creature attacked the moment we stepped inside Kulah, despite not even it being provoked. There is no telling that even if we didn't enter the premises it wouldn't have attacked us the moment we lowered our guard."

"It was controlled by a slave item, so despite its will was restricted, it was far from a mindless creature. Also, I think that your first order would have been to assess the danger the compound poses to the Kingdom." Phloria replied.

"You are right." Berion sighed. "Those Odi were cunning. If you didn't destroy the arrays, they would have killed you as soon as the door was opened, whereas removing the arrays let that fungus thing free to murder you on the first occasion it got."

"Normally I would order you to get out of there and wait for reinforcements, but we have no idea what other contingency measures the Odi might have set in place. On top of that, now that the gates of Kulah are open, we can't risk that someone coming from the tunnels might trigger the gods know what traps or steal the Odi's secrets."

"Even worse, something could follow you to the surface, and if the fights break out inside the mines, our losses would be incalculable. For now, your task is to guard the compound and make sure that nothing gets in or out of it.

"I'll inform you as soon as the Royals make their decision. This is too big, even for me to decide alone. Over and out."

The moment the conversation was over, Phloria put her amulet back inside her dimensional item and conjured a Hush zone to prevent being heard.

"At least now we have our orders. Can you see something out of the ordinary in the tunnels?" She asked.

Lith's eyes flared up with Life Vision and then he looked around before replying:

"Nothing, but it doesn't mean much. When the Teks attacked, I had no notice of it until it was too late and I can't see inside Kulah's buildings due to the arrays surrounding them."

"Ugh, I hoped to receive some good news." Phloria said. "Quylla mentioned how the Odi used slaves and golems to do their scut work. Unless they managed to imprison another eternal being, we are bound to face golems.

"Being Kulah a military compound, there must be a lot of them, and all armed to the teeth. Can Life Vision see them or are they invisible to it?"

"They have no life force, but I can see their mana flow so I should be able to warn you in time. Unless they pull some stunt like the Tek, of course." Lith replied.

By the time the remaining members of the expedition team woke up, it was already noon. Old age was an unbeatable enemy and some of the Professors had suffered great damage, forcing them to rest for more than a day.

Quylla and Morok were surprisingly energetic. They showed no sign of fatigue and they both ate for two people. Yondra still looked exhausted, but her movements were now lighter and nimbler than before.

After Phloria brought everyone up to speed, explaining to them what had happened after they had lost consciousness, Professor Gaakhu, the expedition leader, took a few deep breaths to calm down before saying:

"As much as it pains me to admit it, Berion is right. This team is ill suited to explore such a historical marvel like Kulah appears to be."

At the word "marvel" the Professors who were still grieving needed sheer willpower to not strangle her, and so did the surviving Assistants. Yet everyone gritted their teeth and let her continue.

"Our team is still powerful, but us Professors lack the stamina and speed necessary to be truly useful. Our Assistants' inexperience is a liability, Calil almost doomed as all. To make matters worse, the Odi were truly cunning.

"In all of my years of experience, I've never faced arrays with so many layers of traps, nor creatures that powerful. I'm not going to lie, I proved to be a liability as well. If we preserved the arrays as I wanted, they would have killed us. Even if somehow we survived, I don't think I would have been able to beat that magical beast.

"I still don't understand how Ranger Verhen defeated it, but I can say that if that fungus had been on the level of an Emperor Beast, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

Everyone nodded to those words, Lith included. He had faced only a non Awakened Emperor Beast in the past, and even then he had needed help to beat him.

Now he was much stronger and better equipped, but after facing the sentient fungus, he realized that it wasn't only a matter of how powerful the opponent was, but also of how long the creature had to prepare the terrain for the fight.

The spores would have been a much easier opponent if they hadn't spent centuries multiplying.

Lith then explained to the rest of the group how he had survived the encounter.

"Gods, the Odi are almost embarrassing in their hubris." Gaakhu said when she heard about the cable fueling the arrays.

"Once again it would be a groundbreaking discovery, if not for its fatal weak point. If they applied the same method for sealing the buildings, getting inside will be the easy part, whereas facing what's waiting for us might cost us our lives."

#### Chapter 652 A Threat from the Past Part 2

"By the way, how did you find the container and how did you discover the cable?" Gaakhu asked.

Lith had already prepared an explanation and after speaking with Phloria, he had made it even simpler to justify his measly expenditure of mana.

"Thanks to Captain Ernas I had the time to prepare a Life Sensing array. Once I spotted the container, I got there too fast for the creature to follow me. I had enough time to notice that the arrays needed a power source and I did what anyone in my situation would have done.

"I struck at everything that stuck out."

"Well done. A good mix of wisdom and luck is exactly what we need to survive." Gaakhu said.

"Survive? Do you think the army will not allow us to leave?" Rainer asked, causing most of those present to sigh at his naivety.

"Of course not. We opened a can of worms and we are the only ones that can take care of it before the worst happens." Yondra said while patting his shoulder to reassure him.

"Now, since it's only a matter of time before going back inside Kulah, I'll tell you all I know about the Odi's technology and my colleagues will do the same."

Yondra explained to them the kinds of golems previous expeditions had faced and how to defeat them, going into details to the point of sharing even what Forgemasters considered secrets of their trade.

No one missed it wasn't an act of generosity so much as of desperation. Gaakhu and Ellkas prepared for everyone a list of common Odi words they had to watch out for and the secret signs used to mark dangerous zones.

By the time the seminar was over, it was already evening and everyone had quite a headache from the cramming.

"Oh gods, we're idiots." Phloria said. "Berion can't contact us if we don't boost the signal on our end." As predicted, the Commander had been waiting for them for hours, even starting to fear that the expedition had been wiped out.

His orders were predictable as well. Their mission was now to search Kulah with the utmost caution and leave only after making sure to not leave behind anything that could endanger the Kingdom.

"Sadly, sending reinforcements is nigh impossible. Because of the interference, we can't pinpoint your coordinates, and even if we could, the interference would make it impossible to open a Warp Gate.

"I can only wish you good luck and hope you find only constructs and corpses down there."

"I'd have a request, sir." Lith said. "Could you please tell my family I'm alright? They don't hear from me since the communications have been sealed. They must be worried sick."

Berion nodded, expecting the others to ask for the same, yet only an awkward silence ensued.

'Good gods, what a bunch of no lifers! Now I really feel the need to tell my wife and kids I love them.' The Commander thought before hanging up the call.

"I envy you." Yondra said. "Even if I went missing for a year, nobody would care."

"I would." Rainer's tone was hurt.

"No, you wouldn't. Because you're always with me. You're the only real family I've left."

"Well then! It's already late, so I'd say we can start our exploration tomorrow first thing in the morning." Professor Gaakhu was eager to change the subject. Her career had been as successful as her personal life was empty.

"We'll split into two teams, each one comprised of a Ranger, since they are our heavy hitters, a Warden, and a Forgemaster. Do you agree, Captain Ernas?"

Phloria nodded and after organizing guard duty, everyone went to sleep. They had a lot to do in the morning.

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Duchy of Laroxya, Crystal Mines, that same morning.

Ten days had passed since the expedition team had left the mines and the goblin-Abomination hybrid named Korgh had managed to safely resume her routine. The mines were now under heavy surveillance, but she didn't mind.

Her dimensional magic combined with her ability to manipulate light made her invisible even to Awakened ones, fake mages had no chance of finding her. The fight with the two Rangers had been a blessing in disguise.

After almost dying due to having her goblin side heavily injured, her evolution had resumed at an astounding rate. The flesh and Chaos energy which comprised her body were two separate entities no more.

They had finally started to merge together, creating something new and completely unprecedented. Thanks to the goblin's unbridled vitality and the long incubation period while being constantly overfed by mana crystals, Korgh's new body was now able to withstand the Chaos.

Puppeteer Abominations needed to find new host bodies once the one they occupied was corroded, while Eldritch Abominations' bodies were made of pure Chaos energy. It made them almost indestructible, but at the same time, it crippled their daily life.

To prevent their energy from killing or destroying everything they touched, a lot of willpower was needed. To add insult to injury, it also required to consume part of the energy they had accumulated.

Even if they could take human appearance, they couldn't keep such form for long without causing a massacre, either to feed or because they failed to control the raw energy their bodies were comprised of.

For the same reason, things like Forgemastering, Alchemy, and all creative jobs were much harder for them than for humans. Korgh's body instead was, for the lack of a better term, normal.

She could freely touch things and, unlike all of her fellow Abominations, Chaos energy didn't seep out whenever she became distracted. It was a perfect shell that decreased her energy consumption and in turn her need to feed, leaving her lots of mana to spare for her magic.

'Who would have thought that being injured was the key to my evolution? Goblin tissues have repaired my Abomination side while Chaos energy strengthened my damaged flesh. Soon all of my Forgemastery skills will become more than nostalgia!

'Fuck Korgh! I'll be once again known as Bytra, the Forge Goddess. I bet that if my so called "original" learned the truth, the envy would give her a stroke.' Bytra thought.

'You're damn right. Unluckily for you, I've no veins anymore.' An all too familiar voice resounded in her head.

Bytra turned around, watching her double standing in front of her.

'Don't try to escape. I might not have Life Vision anymore, but I can track my own energy signature when we are close. Not running away after your existence was revealed to the public is the last mistake you'll ever make.' Korgh thought.

Her clawed hands were filled with Chaos mana, ready to be unleashed. Unlike the hybrid, she had all the time to prepare for their meeting.

Back when she was still an Emperor Beast, Korgh had been a Raiju, the evolution of a Cyr (horse type magical beast) whose powers were based on the light and air element. Their appearance was that of a Chinese dragon fused with a warhorse.

The resulting creature had silver white scales covering their horse body, with large branching horns over their head, long whiskers, a thick silver mane, and a long, scaled dragonic tail.

Korgh's Abomination body was humanoid and covered by black small scales. The small horns on her head and her hair dancing in the air despite the complete lack of wind in the cave were the only vestigial remnants of her old self.

## Chapter 653 Fall of the Mighty Part 1

Bytra Blinked away, immediately followed by Korgh. No matter the direction she took, her double would follow her without fail. Soon both of them were outside the mines, in a secluded space away from prying eyes.

'Something is wrong.' Korgh thought. 'After Blinking so many times, even I feel tired. How can a hybrid have such strength? Also, why did she left the mines? I couldn't use powerful spells there without the risk of killing us both.'

'Even if she's just half as smart as I am, she can't have given me this advantage for no reason.'

'You bet I didn't!' Bytra replied, shocking her double. Korgh couldn't believe that a mere copy had developed a willpower so strong that she could easily invade Korgh's mind.

An enormous array, over 100 meters (330 feet) large surrounded them as Bytra assumed the perfect form of a Raiju. Korgh could clearly feel that her clone didn't just shapeshift, that was an exact copy of their original body.

The only difference was that its scales were black and its eyes yellow instead of being respectively silver and red.

Korgh unleashed the tier five Chaos spell, Flood Storm, only to see the Chaos magic revert to its darkness version because of the array. Bytra didn't miss the opening. She dodged all the darkness bullets as if they were still and pierced Korgh's chest with her horns, ripping it to shreds.

Korgh screamed in pain realizing she had fallen into a trap. Not only did the light-based array made Chaos magic useless, but it also made the light element seep inside everything within the premises of the formation.

Because of that, the light element was constantly assaulting her Chaos made body, turning it into darkness energy as well. The light magic flooding through her open wound was like poison, sapping her strength at an alarming rate.

Each chunk of flesh was actually highly compressed Chaos energy that once lost couldn't be recovered due to Bytra's energy signature infecting Korgh's. Unlike Scarlett the Scorpicores, Bytra knew all the secrets of Chaos magic and its fatal weaknesses as well.

Bytra, on the other hand, was unaffected by the array. Her body was physical, hence the light element was a source of nourishment for her.

'Fuck! All the spells I had prepared are now useless. If this keeps up like this, I'll be the one devoured!' Korgh thought as the Raiju tore her apart limb from limb, with such speed and ferocity that she had no time to cast a single spell.

It had taken Bytra a lot of time and effort to steal enough crystals from the mines to support her Reversal array, but it had been worth it.

The more of her original memories and wisdom she recovered, the more the psychic bond between them grew stronger. She knew it was only a matter of time before the Eldritch who had spawned her would hunt her down.

Bytra could already taste the enormous amount of energy she would obtain by consuming her double. Enough to maybe even satiate the hunger that tormented her ever since the day she had turned into an Abomination.

Suddenly, the ground trembled and the earth below the two sworn enemies turned into a hand the size of a cruise ship, crushing both the array and Bytra under its grip.

"I told you not to underestimate a hybrid. We've already lost several Eldritchs due to their conceit." Xenagrosh said, using her Mother Earth glove to trap her prey.

Not only did it allow her to dominate the earth element, but it also distorted the elemental balance so much that it made it impossible to use dimensional magic.

After consuming her Troll double, Xenagrosh had become able to recover her human body. She looked like a woman in her mid-twenties, around 1.6 meters (5'3") tall wearing an ample cream-colored magician robe.

Her looks were kind of plain. She had light brown hair with black streaks and youthful chestnut eyes that contrasted with the ancient wisdom of her gaze.

"How long have you been there?" Korgh asked. Only her head and part of her chest remained. It would take her months to recover from her injuries without committing genocide.

"From the beginning."

"Then why didn't you do anything?" Korgh's voice was full of anger and spite.

"To teach you a lesson I hope you will in turn teach other Eldritchs. Never underestimate an opponent. You knew your clone was bound to have recovered most of your memories, yet you charged in blindly. That was beyond stupid."

"Please, let me go." Bytra said. "Original or clone, I don't care. I just want to live. I promise that if you spare my life, you'll never hear again from me."

"Beg all you want, your destiny is sealed. There's only room for one Korgh on the entire Mogar." Korgh replied.

"Then you can be Korgh and I can be Bytra! I'm tired of hiding and fighting. I want to use my hammer and Forgemaster again. I don't want to be defined by my hunger any more."

"Bytra is a name I relinquished, but it's still mine." Korgh said, regrowing her limbs so that she could stand up. "You own nothing and you deserve nothing. Once I'm done with you, I'll become strong enough to devour anyone who dares to stand in my path."

"What?" Xenagrosh was flabbergasted. "What about your title of Ruler of the Flames? What about your herd? You could finally meet other Raijus again after centuries of isolation, and all you can think of is something meaningless as preying on the weak?"

"Who needs a herd when you can have power? What use can have wasting time to Forgemaster artifacts when I can simply take them from the hands of my fallen enemies?" Korgh said with a mad grin on her face, showing many rows of shark-like teeth.

"As for my title, do not worry. I will cleanse Mogar in a Forge of Chaos!"

"I changed my mind. Feel free to eat her." Xenagrosh opened her hand and freed Bytra from her stone prison.

"What?" Both the original and the clone asked in unison.

"I told you to not underestimate your opponent, in this case, me. The cause has no use for a power-hungry fool. Neither I nor the Master have ever aimed for Mogar's destruction.

"The Master just wants to make the human race better, whereas I'm content with breaking free from the chains of fate. Since you're bound to be a problem in the future, I might as well take care of you right now in your weakened state." Xenagrosh nodded for Bytra to resume her attack.

The Raiju charged against Korgh's broken form one last time, skewering the Eldritch with her horns before absorbing the very life essence of her double. A blinding light erupted from Bytra's body as the two black cores merged into one.

If for Xenagrosh the key for her new form had been absorbing her troll's counterpart light core, for Bytra was the goblin's vitality. With each generation, they had become more and more resistant to the Chaos energy they were born with until both their cores and bodies were able to coexist with it.

Bytra wasn't just an Abomination anymore, she was now a perfect hybrid. Her human form and Raiju form were now almost identical to their original appearance. Bytra looked at her own naked figure, combing her silver hair with her fingers.

"Gods, I'm not a monster anymore." She blurted out.

## Chapter 654 Fall of the Mighty Part 2

"How do you feel?" Xenagrosh asked, her hands casually placed on her Dragontooth blade hung on her hip.

"I'm not hungry." It was the only thing Bytra could think about.

"First, you need some clothes. Second, I'll fetch you your hammer. We have a lot of work to do."

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Expedition site of Kulah, the following morning.

Everyone was back in top shape, but the morale was dangerously low. The Assistants now looked at the military compound as if it was their personal gallows, while the Professors were doubting their own skills for the first time in years.

'A simple graduate who is not even a Warden unlocked the arrays sealing the doors and if not for the army, we'd be already dead. Have I underestimated this mission, were the Odi too cunning, or have I just got too old for this job?'

Was what every one of them was thinking.

Lith was the more nervous of them all, but he was good at hiding it. His instincts were telling him that something was off.

'After the Teks attacked, I was expecting that whoever is pulling their strings would raise the ante, yet nothing happened. Then we opened the door and that fungus came out. Two more days have passed and once again, nothing.

'Are we really facing just automated defenses or is our enemy adjusting their strategy the more we reveal our cards?' He thought.

Despite all the evidence pointing at him being wrong, Lith was unable to relax. There was something akin to a tingling in a corner of his head that bugged him to no end. On the bright side, the Professors were now wearing their best equipment.



'By my maker, that's a blinding appearance.' Solus said once she attempted to look at the group with her mana sense. Every one of their items was imbued with multiple powerful enchantments.

The only problem for her was that there were so many that she had no idea which one to study first.

"It's good to see that you have geared up. We need all the help we can get." Phloria said. "We'll split into three groups. Professor Yondra, Professor Ellkas, Ranger Verhen, and I will explore the first building on the left, right after the city door.

Professor Gaakhu, Professor Neshal, Ranger Eari, and two of my soldiers will explore the second building on the left. This way, if anything happens, we can provide backup to each other with minimal notice thanks to dimensional magic.

"Plus, if the necessity arises, we can retreat behind the protection of our arrays with the same ease. The rest of my soldiers will protect the Assistants during our absence. Your task will be to make sure the camp's barriers are at full strength and prevent anyone from attacking us from the back."

"Yes!" All the Assistants said but one.

"This is unfair! I'm not a fighter, but I can help. Just like I did with the door." Quylla objected.

"And you will, if we find something we can't decipher, we'll return to the camp and work on it together. Until then, stay in the camp." Phloria's tone didn't leave space for arguing, so Quylla slouched her back and dragged her feet until she was among her peers.

"She can Blink away and has my armor. I don't see why Quylla can't come with us." Lith whispered in her ear.

"If push comes to the shove, I can order the Professors to scram and they will obey. Then you can go all out without worries. Quylla, instead, would never leave your side, she loves you like a brother. Why do you think I organized the groups the way I did? To have as little prying eyes as possible."

Lith had to admit that her reasoning was excellent. He gave Phloria thumbs up and after finalizing the details, the two groups entered Kulah again. Lith took point, using Life Vision and mana sense to make sure that nothing had changed.

After a thorough analysis of the area, he moved to the nearest building. All structures inside the military compound looked the same, resembling huge rectangular warehouses with a flat roof like those Lith had seen more than once on Earth's docks.

Each of them had a single entrance, comprised of a double door so big that a truck could easily fit with space to spare and a sealing array visible to the naked eye.

It was shaped like three concentric circles, each one inscribed with unknown runes and fueled by both purple crystals and the mana geyser underlying Kulah. A thin cable made of mana crystals connected the arrays with the ground, fueling them.

"Oh gods, I've never seen something so complex on a single door!" Professor Neshal, the only Master Warden of the group said. "It will take us days only to understand how to deactivate one of them."

"Can everyone see that thin, blue line, camouflaged along the door frame?" Lith asked.

"Yes, why?" Professor Yondra couldn't see the relevance such a visual detail could have.

At least until Lith used a small knife to cut it and two out of three arrays were suddenly powered off, leaving only the one fueled by the purple crystal active.

"Or not." Professor Neshal was flabbergasted. "Is this how you freed the fungus creature? I swear, if we make it back to the surface, the title of my report will be: Odi, the dumbest geniuses ever."

"Well, there is still the last array to defuse." Lith said.

Neshal just shook her head, pulling the purple crystals out of the wall with her bare hands and giving them to Lith.

"You would be right if the arrays you just deactivated weren't also the ones protecting the energy cores. I'm starting to believe that the real reason the Odi empire was wiped out in less than a generation is that once the weak points of their workings were revealed by the Odi rebels, their defenses amounted to nothing."

Seeing such a poor design, Lith's lip curled in disgust. He wasn't a Master Warden, but even his creations required more than pulling a plug to be deactivated.

'Those morons abused the "Keep it simple" rule. They basically left on/off switches on all the arrays we met so far.' He thought.

'Maybe back then reading and magic were an exclusive of the elites.' Solus suggested. 'For ignorant folks and laymen, magic is a godlike power. It seems dumb to us because we are all cultured people.'

After giving her a mind nod, yet not stopping from considering the Odi a bunch of idiots, Lith asked:

"Why did you hand me these crystals?"

"Consider them a present. They're nothing special, so the Kingdom will surely give them to us as a reward. They will deduct them from my share instead of yours. You just saved me days of work and weeks of frustration.

"Just the thought of wasting a single brain cell to solve such a moronic device might have given me a stroke." Neshal replied.

Professor Gaakhu opened the second door under Lith's supervision, cutting the power cable before asking:

"How did you understand how they work?"

"I have an excellent mana perception. These arrays have not enough crystals to support them and the cable emits a powerful aura."

"I noticed that too, but only because I could take my time and focus on the door. Doing it under that creature's siege must have required more than cold blood. It takes talent and guts to bet everything on an intuition.

"Would you be interested in becoming a Professor for the Crystal Griffon?"

"I called dibs already." Yondra snorted.

Chapter 655 Horrors and Wonders Part 1

To stop the two Professors from bickering, Phloria gave the order to enter the second building at once. Helion and Jerth, her two best soldiers who she had assigned to the second group, yelped in surprise at the vision appearing in front of their eyes.

Gaakhu and Neshal quickly joined them, unable to hold their curiosity. Almost at the same time, Phloria stepped through the door of the first building, happy that she hadn't let Quylla join them.

She was looking at a huge antechamber, very similar to one of those at the entrance of a military base. On her left, there was a regular-sized desk and a chair, testimony how the Odi couldn't be much bigger than humans.

On her right, a series of chairs were lined up against the wall. Judging from the size of the room and the number of seats, the base had to receive frequent visits from the Odi's upper echelons.

There was no other reason she could think of to justify the presence of all the transparent tanks lined up in front of the chairs. Each tank held the remains of a member of a different race.

Phloria identified a human, a Ry, a Dryad, and an orc. The other two were members of races unknown to her. Their bodies had been dismembered and submerged in an unknown transparent liquid that seemed to have preserved them.

Bubbles of some kind of gas were pumped from below and then sucked from the upper part of the tank in a continuous loop. At the base of each tank, there was a pedestal with a holographic display.

Words and images appeared at fixed intervals, reminding Lith of an interactive museum.

"What kind of monster could do such a thing?" Phloria pointed at the body parts. Their flesh had been divided into irregular chunks, but somehow the blood vessels connecting them were intact and the hearts were still beating, giving the creatures a semblance of life.

"Humans, for example." Yondra replied. "Why do you think the definition of forbidden magic is so lax? Even Healing magic can be considered forbidden if you use it to experiment on others instead of treating them."

Before allowing anyone to touch anything, the Professors scanned the room for arrays and any kind of magical traps while Lith did the same with Life Vision.

"The place is safe." Professor Ellkas said. "Let's see what's written here." He stood in front of the tank holding a human male, around twenty years of age.

"It's mostly technical jargon that I don't recognize, but from what I can understand it's an explanation of how the life force of humans works." Ellkas could browse through the different pages at will thanks to what looked like a touch screen.

After tinkering a bit with the commands, she became pale as a ghost.

"Good gods, these are no explanations. Once you get past the introduction, there are daily reports up to this date. The tanks are constantly monitoring their condition and somehow they keep these poor creatures alive!"

Lith already knew it. Life Vision had shown him that the prisoners' life forces were tangled and twisted, almost on the verge of collapsing. Yet they had life forces nonetheless.

Most of the heads were split into multiple pieces, making it hard for normal people to notice that their eyes were following the newcomers from the moment they had entered the room.

Lith could read them like an open book. All they were filled with was pain and hope. Each time one of the air bubbles popped up after reaching the surface, Lith could hear faint screams of agony vibrating through the glass-like tanks.

The choir of voices he was able to discern thanks to his enhanced hearing made him want to puke. The fragmented beings had long lost themselves into madness, yet Lith could have sworn to recognize some words among the gurgling sounds they emitted.

"Scan everything with your army amulets and let's destroy this horror." Phloria said activating the encrypted mode on her amulet and forcing it onto all the amulets belonging to someone of inferior rank.

The data would be stored but remain inaccessible even to the amulet's owner, to prevent dangerous knowledge from falling in the wrong hands.

Lith wasn't new to pain and torture, but such a cruel exhibition was unthinkable of even for him. The Odi had clearly perfected their life force manipulation techniques to an extreme level to dismember different races like that and keep them alive for so long.

They had achieved their purpose and yet the Odi had kept their victims on display, like an animal's head hung on a wall. That wasn't science anymore, just an empty abuse of power, like a kid plucking a butterfly's wings.

"Captain Ernas, forgive me, but I think we shouldn't destroy this place." Yondra said with a pained voice.

"What do you mean? What good could possibly come out of this?" Phloria was tempted to threaten the old Professor with a charge of insubordination, but Phloria could feel her emotions clouding her own judgment.

"These pods can preserve life. If we had something like them, maybe Calil and the others would still be alive, just in suspended animation." Those words reminded Phloria of Yurial's death, cracking her self-righteousness.

"Lith? What do you think?" Asking him to be her moral compass sounded crazy even to Phloria's ears, but she had no other options.

"Normally I would agree with Professor Yondra. These creatures..." Lith refused to refer to them as people. What was left of them could be barely described as meat puppets.

"-don't seem to age nor bleed despite their terrible condition, which is good. Yet if it was up to me, I would destroy everything. First, this is not suspended animation. Their eyes still move and if you listen carefully you can hear their screams, which makes the pods just a torturing device."

Yondra put an ear against the glass-like material, flinching back in horror less than a second later.

"Second, I doubt the Odi's motives. Whatever they have done to them, is likely to be some kind of weaponization system. This is a military compound, after all. Just like for the arrays on the door, I don't trust my back to the unknown."

Lith couldn't share with them the fact that Solus had seen with mana sense something embedded inside the prisoners' brains. Something with an energy signature similar to the corrupted spores.

'No sense in using slave items on meat puppets unless they are meat soldiers.' Lith thought while placing his hand on a tank and activating Scanner. Somehow the liquid was able to transmit his mana, allowing him to study the condition of the trapped human.

'Just as I feared. These things had their life force maimed in a way that allows them to live at a terrible cost. This is no immortality. Their life force has simply been compressed to the point of stopping its flow entirely, making them neither dead nor alive.

'Such condition eternally keeps them on the brink of death, like a twisted version of Schrodinger's cat.' Lith thought.

'It's worse than that.' Solus said. 'All of these people have lost their mana core. The mana flow you perceive comes from their flesh. I think you are right about the weaponization. I believe this is the Odi's failed attempt to transform the other races into Balors.'

## Chapter 656 Horrors and Wonders Part 2

Meanwhile Lith and the others were taking through scans of the tanks, Morok could now understand what could have possibly made two elite soldiers yelp like little kids. The second building had an antechamber similar to the one in the first building, but filled with wonders instead of horrors.

In front of the chairs reserved for the visiting guests, there were several weapons racks, each one filled to the brim with weapons crafted from the finest materials.

"I call dibs on Adamant stuff!" Morok said while darting towards the shiny mass of sharp metals. Professor Gaakhu snapped her fingers, hitting him with the wind blow equivalent of a punch to the stomach.

"We have yet to scan the room for danger, you fool! Also, what makes you think we can use any of those weapons? I doubt the Odi would let them be imprinted by a member of the 'lesser races. It's more likely that you'll trigger some trap."

At those words, Morok snapped out of his greed fit, finally noticing that there was nothing to prevent intruders from seizing one or more of the weapons.

'If back in the day slaves cleaned this place, leaving an arsenal within easy reach would have been beyond idiotic.' He thought. Despite the epiphany, his greed and self-preservation instinct were battling to the death.

Some weapons were made out of metals he had never seen before, while others had intriguing shapes. They seemed to be made by two rectangularly shaped blocks of metal, joined to form a 90° angle with some kind of small lever in-between.

The longer block had a sight on its top and a cylindrical hole bigger than Morok's thumb right in the middle. All of them had a magical aura so strong that it made the hair on his body stand up.

When the array revealing spell was complete, the whole place lit up like a Christmas tree, especially the weapon racks.

"Ingenious." Professor Neshal said admiring once again the Odi's craftiness.

"The mana crystals imbued in the weapons have been arranged to form an array that is probably meant to preserve and protect them from hands that are quicker than the brain of their owner.

"There's no telling what would have happened if you triggered it."

"Yeah, okay. Lesson learned. My bad and all that stuff. Let's get down to the important part. Can you break the array? Is any of those weapons good?" Morok asked.

Professor Gaakhu would have liked to give him a snarky remark, but the Ranger wasn't completely wrong with his observations. Even in all her years as a Forgemaster, she had never perceived such a powerful magical aura.

All more the reason to be extra cautious.

She was unable to identify most of the metals nor the design of what Lith would have instantly recognized as guns. To make matters worse, despite them being spotless, the weapons had a peculiar smell.

Something Gaakhu was certain to know but she couldn't put her finger on.

"I can but I won't." Professor Neshal replied. "I had no time to make sure they are not linked to some kind of alarm. There are too many arrays here, so it's better to add one more formation rather than removing one."

He placed the mana crystals she had taken from the door at the four corners of the room and another one at its center, chanting a powerful spell that enveloped the room in a purple light.

"There. If anything happens, the barrier I placed on top of the Odi's arrays should give us plenty of time to get to safety. I also arranged it so that it will slow down the activation of the other arrays. I'm done underestimating the enemy." Neshal said.

Gaakhu used that time to decipher the holographic display in front of each weapon rack. Unlike Ellkas, she could read even the technical jargon, giving her a much clearer understanding of the Odi research.

She had reached her position despite her relatively young age thanks to her perfect memory that allowed her to learn anything after just a couple of readings.

"Gods, I doubt the Kingdom will give any of these weapons as a reward, and even if it did, I would turn down the offer. Here it says that they tried to compensate the metals' lack of a strong mana by fusing them with living beings.

"The weapons you can see here are all worse than cursed items. Not only were they made by using sacrifices, but also living flesh has been merged with their metal. Now I finally recognize the subtle smell of decay that fills this room." Gaakhu explained.

"That's gross!" Morok blurted out.

"Well, it gets worse." Gaakhu kept reading. "The weapons have been left in the open because they are a failed experiment. Instead of acquiring a mana flow and a life force like the Odi wanted, each one of these cursed objects is a bottomless pit of hunger.

"Even with the stasis array protecting them, here says that they failed to both find a way to prevent the biological part of the weapons from rotting and their owners from being sucked dry of their life force after imprinting them."

"I take my dibs back. Can we enter the next room now? I really hope to find something that the Odi didn't screw up with or that will not kill me on contact. Maybe even both." Morok said.

Neshal and Gaakhu performed a series of spells on the closed door in front of them.

"This is odd." Neshal said. "I have got only good news. The door is open and is not connected to the arrays in the room. Let me double-check." Yet she obtained the same results.

Gaakhu shrugged, turning the handle and stepping inside the next room. In front of them, there was a long metal corridor with many doors along its sides. The walls were made of a transparent glass-like substance, so they only needed to check the corridor for traps before being able to move freely.

Each room was both a Forgemastering lab and a blacksmith workshop. Despite the passing of time, both the corridor and the labs were in pristine condition. The furnaces looked like they were brand new and the Forges were made of pure silver.

"I don't get it." Morok said. "What good are furnaces for a Forgemaster and why silver? From perfectionists like the Odi, I would expect at least Orichalcum, if not Adamant."

"I'm afraid I know the answer." Neshal said. "Those furnaces are big enough to fit a human body. I think they conducted their experiments on fusing flesh and metals here. As for the silver, after seeing their failure rate, would you give an Odi Orichalcum?"

"Definitely not." Morok replied.

The group ignored the labs since they contained just the basic instruments for Forgemastering. There was no trace of blueprints nor ingredients. At the end of the corridor, they found two doors, each one with a different tag.

"This one is the Main Office." Gaakhu explained with a big grin on her face. "It might contain blueprints, but honestly I doubt it. I worked in an academy long enough to know that no project would be left in the hands of bureaucrats."

"This is likely to be where Forgemasters handed over their reports and requests for materials."

"Then why are you so happy?" Neshal asked.

"Because the other one says: 'Armory'."

## Chapter 657 Flesh and Stone Part 1

Neshal and Gaakhu checked both doors, just to be safe. One could easily understand the value of what lied beyond a threshold based on how heavily defended it was.

The Main Office had just a good quality door, with no defensive arrays and no locks at that. Turning the handle released in the air with the smell of paperwork that all those present knew and hated.

The room was filled with filing cabinets and had three desks, one for each side of the room except for its entrance. The place closely resembled the academies' administrative offices.

The Professors could almost hear the echoes of a clerk demanding for a report to be filed in triplicate.

The Armory, instead, had a solid metal door. It also had several powerful arrays restricting its access, a holographic pad to insert a password, and heavy metal cylinders acting as locks.

Getting rid of the arrays was the easy part. The Professors only needed a few seconds to find the mana crystal cable running along the door frame and cut it along with the power fueling the magical defense system.

"Gods, they were real morons." The group commented in unison.

The holographic pad was still active, displaying both numbers and letters in the ancient Odi language.

"Okay, we have two choices. We could force the door with magic, but it's risky. There are no active arrays any more but we don't know what kind of weapons are stored here. They might explode or worse." Gaakhu explained.

"Our only other option is to guess the password. If this was the Crystal Griffon, I would devise a way to safely crack the metal door open. Our passwords are obscenely long and convoluted.

"The Odi, however, have proven to be conceited at best. I bet that the password is 'Odi'."

"Ten silvers on 'Armory'." Neshal said while pointing at the door tag.

"Twenty on 'Open'." Morok said.

Professor Gaakhu input the word of her choice in the Odi language first. The holographic display emitted a beep and the metal cylinders were pulled inside the door frame.

"I can't believe they picked a three-letter word password!" Morok handed the Professor twenty silver coins while he inwardly cursed the Odi to the best of his abilities.

"We call them Odi, but in their language, they were called Minhuyti. It means 'the chosen race'." Gaakhu said with a smug grin. "I think that you're right Neshal. Arrogance was the cause of the Odi's fall."

Neshal was glad that her colleague agreed with her, yet she was still pissed off by the lost bet.

The door slid on its hinges easily, as if it was made of paper. Inside there was a huge room, 20 meters (66 feet) wide and 15 meters (50 feet) long. The walls and ceiling were entirely made of metal and so were the shelves filling the room.

They were regularly spaced, going from one end of the room to another.

Most of the shelves were empty, but some stored weapons with several magic crystals embedded on their surface. Unlike the racks in the antechamber, the weapons were locked behind a glass-like substance that in turn was protected by a multi-layered array, each one fueled by purple crystals and the usual cable.

The floor was made of metal as well, but it was covered by a layer of sand a couple of centimeters (1 inch) thick.

"Seems we found the motherlode." Morok said while stepping inside the room.

Gaakhu grabbed his shoulder, locking him into place.

"Wait. Look carefully." She pointed at the sand under their feet.

"I saw that, but I also know it's not enchanted. It's just regular sand. Must have been a trick to spot intruders by their traces in case someone snuck inside. It's simple but effective."



Gaakhu and Neshal scanned the room, but aside from the shelves, there were no protective arrays.

"See? I told you- fuck!" Morok said.

The four corners of the room opened, revealing as many Charging Station arrays, each one holding a golem. The constructs were made of a mix of metal and earth, resembling humanoid creatures 2 meters (6'7") tall.

The moment the metal shutters revealed their presence, purple eyes appeared on the golems' faces and they were all fixated on the intruders. Arrogance had indeed been the cause of the Odi's fall as well as of the second group.

Once the wrong password had been inserted, the holographic display had attempted and failed to activate the arrays, hence the beep. Then, it had opened the door and activated the auxiliary defense system to prevent the weapons from being harmed in the incoming conflict.

"Run!" Morok said while pulling the Professors by their sleeves and regretting they weren't at least 30 years younger. That way he could have hoped instead of feared that the adrenaline rush might later lead to amorous offers.

"There are five of us and only four of them. Why are we running?" Jerth, the strongest mage among Phloria's unit asked while following their temporary leader.

"Because sand!" Just as if the Golems and Morok had rehearsed their timing, the layer of sand came to life a split second after the Ranger spoke. The Golems were injecting it with their mana, moving it as if it was just one of their limbs.

Soon the sand formed a wave that the constructs rode to chase after their prey.

Jerth used a tier four earth magic spell, Great Rumble, to use the wave against its own makers. Unfortunately, something prevented her mana to take root. The four golems were akin to four true mages, so her willpower was unable to override their combined efforts.

Gaakhu used gravity magic to reverse the gravity pull and send the constructs slamming against the ceiling. Before they could hit the metal, the four creatures shapeshifted so that their legs became their arms and vice versa, landing on their feet while they unleashed a barrage of rock bullets.

The Golems mixed together earth magic to condense the sand into magic bullets and air magic to give it a magnetic charge opposed to their own, creating a makeshift equivalent of an electromagnetic railgun.

Even the metal floor was deformed by the violence of the impact, yet the armors the group wore allowed them to survive. Each bullet still managed to overpower the armors' gravity sheath and hit them like a solid slap.

"Whatever happens, do not stop running!" Neshal said. "They have just been activated, so they are still powering up. We need to reunite with the rest of the expedition before it's too late."

The light in the golems' eyes burned brighter as a purple lightning bolt went from golem to golem, its power amplified several folds at each step until it struck the metal floor with the goal of killing all the intruders in one fell swoop.

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At the same time, in the first building, Lith's group was still in the antechamber. After scanning the six tanks and their prisoners, they were weaving their spells to kill the unfortunate creatures as quickly as possible and then some, in case something went wrong.

Once everyone was done with their own preparations, Professor Yondra was the first to strike. They had no idea how strong the glass-like substance was, so instead of unleashing four tier five spells in such an enclosed space, it was better to test the waters a little at the time.

## Chapter 658 Flesh and Stone Part 2

Yondra used her tier four darkness magic spell, Black Heart. The glass was likely to be immune to lightning, whereas fire and ice would give those poor souls a slow, painful death. Plus, there was no earth to manipulate in the chamber.

Darkness was the most humane means to put them out of their misery.

When the energy mass struck the tank, instead of passing through the liquid and kill the orc like it was supposed to, it was completely absorbed by the tank and turned into nourishment.

The liquid surrounding the orc turned muddy and so did the other five tanks.

"I'm quite sure that's not water." Yondra said while trying to understand what was happening.

Thanks to the mana now coursing through the transparent liquid, Lith could see with Life Vision that the six tanks were actually one system and that one of the creatures belonging to an unknown race was absorbing the darkness energy.

It converted Yondra's spell into pure mana and then shared it with its companions via the liquid flow, giving them new strength.

'I've got bad news and I've worse news.' Solus said.

'Hit me.' Lith replied.

'The bad news is that I was right, they are indeed some kind of Balor replica. Now that they have enough juice, I can see that each one of them is infused with a single element.

'The worse news is that a few moments ago, an alarm has been triggered. It has activated an array above our heads that I couldn't notice in its dormant state. It's very weak, but it might still be deadly.'

Unbeknownst to Solus, the golems in the Weapon Research department had just struck the metal floor with a lightning bolt, spreading a general alarm. The whole Kulah was waking up from its centuries long slumber.

The array above their heads was a safety measure that simply closed a circuit to send world energy to the bio-weapon.

The tanks suddenly lit up, each one of a different color. They were respectively red, yellow, black, white, blue, and orange, reminding Lith of the story Yondra had told him about the six components of the world energy.

The previously withered limbs were regaining their ancient vigor as the screams of agony Lith heard grew louder.

"They're getting stronger!" Lith shared with the rest of the group what he saw with Life Vision as he unleashed his tier four water magic spell, Ice Age, on the red colored tank.

He hoped to freeze them all to death or at least counter the fire energy instead of feeding more power to the Odi-made Balor. Yet his spell was absorbed and redirected by the blue colored tank, making him curse.

"Don't waste your energy. It seems we are forced to wait for the tanks to open before being able to attack those creatures." Phloria said.

"Don't worry, Captain. I got this." Yondra took what looked like a silver tuning fork from her dimensional item and after infusing it with a massive amount of her mana, she struck with it at the nearest tank.

The tuning fork sucked a small sample of the energy from the tank while emitting a high pitch. Lith could see Yondra's pure mana resonating with the sample until it was 180° out of phase with it, turning the sample into nothingness.

The whole process had taken barely one breath time.

The tuning fork stopped its pitch and Yondra struck at the tank again. This time, instead of taking energy, the tuning fork released its own. The destructive interference shattered the tank on impact and quickly spread to the other five, shattering them as well.

'Yes! No damn cutscene while the boss assumes his final f- ...uck me and my big mind!' Lith thought while the six maimed bodies started to wrap around each other, forming a much bigger creature.

"Attack!" Phloria said out of habit, even though everyone was already going all out. The creatures' blood vessels moved like snakes, making the different parts from different creatures perfectly match with each other, like a jigsaw puzzle made of flesh.

Yondra had stopped the rejuvenating process before it was complete, so their attempts to combine were slower and clumsier than their creator had planned. To make matters worse, they were still coated by the colored liquid, making it obvious which part was immune to which element.

'I never thought that one I would get to fight the Frankenstein's version of the Force Rangers. Nevertheless, I'm not going to give them the time to morph.' Lith thought.

"I'll take Red!" Lith announced to prevent the other from messing with his spell.

"Yellow!" Yondra said.

"White" Phloria said.

"Blue!" Ellkas picked last, as Lith did his best to not chuckle at the irony of their situation.

'You are indeed a Ranger and picked red. Does that make you the Red Ranger?' Solus giggled while assuming her glove form.

'Oh shut it, please. This is probably one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.' Lith replied while he unleashed again his tier four water magic spell, Ice Age. Tier five spells were too powerful for such a confined space and by mixing multiple elements, he was afraid it would have made it easier for the creatures to counter.

Lith had the cold energy wrap around his arm, focusing it in the form of an ice pick the size of an estoc. He struck at the exposed heart of the fire-infused being, hoping that since the blood system was the only part of the creatures' bodies still intact, it was also their weak point.

Lith could see that the more pieces fused together, the stronger the aura of the combined monster became. The meat giant reacted to the threat like no living being could, literally pulling its flesh away to avoid Lith's attack.

'By my maker! Just like Morok's temporary waypoint had its pseudo core split into parts, so was the mana core of these wretched beings! As their bodies merge so does their magical aura. I'm afraid that once the mana core is completely formed, they will be able to use the gods know what kind of powerful magic.' Solus warned him.

"There is no time to lose! Keep it still!" Lith was apparently just stating the obvious, but the worry in his voice made everyone understand how the situation had to be worse than it appeared. Ranger Verhen had never asked for back up before.

Phloria activated the spells Full Guard and Master Sword. Master Sword was a tier five Mage Knight spell that allowed her to channel her magic inside her estoc and unleash it at will upon contact.

Mage Knights had often to fight in close combat while defending their mark, so Phloria had devised Master Sword to be able to use all kinds of spells without having to worry for her allies.

All the darkness spells she had at the ready were now stacked inside her blade, focused on the tip of the estoc and guided by her will due to the nature of tier five spells that made them resemble true magic.

She lunged at the heart of the white creature, but it managed to dodge by elongating its blood vessels until its weak point was out of her reach. Much to its surprise, Phloria opened her hand and the estoc darted forward like a bullet, piercing its target with pinpoint accuracy.

The heart exploded in a burst of dark energy that the corresponding creature neutralized as fast as it could, while the other parts tried to connect their blood vessels to the pieces of their now fallen comrade to continue the merging process.

## Chapter 659 From Bad to Worse Part 1

The Odi had taken into account that one or more of the creatures composing the pseudo-Balor could be killed in battle and had given them plenty of options.

The six heads were the first to finish assembling. The final result was a monstrous face with four mouths and twelve eyes arranged in a circle.

Ten of them were brimming with power and emitted a stream of multi-colored mana that closely resembled a Balor's elemental pillar. Except it was much weaker due to both the incomplete powering up and merging of the creatures' mana core.

Ellkas used one of his artifacts, the Void Shield, to take the full power of the mana pillar without interrupting his attack. Phloria's kill had thrown the creature off balance and by using one of its more powerful moves despite its debilitated state, had forced its movements to a halt.

Lith exploited that opening to slip under the still ongoing pillar and struck at the red heart. Unlike fake mages, all of his spells were infused with his will, so that the moment the second heart exploded, Lith managed to recover all the excess energy, leaving the creature nothing to feed upon, preventing it from healing its wounds.

Another set of eyes became dull, the flesh monster screamed in agony and envy. The survivors had to endure an inhuman pain whereas their fallen comrades were finally free from the Odi's mind control.

The creatures' movements slowed down even further, allowing Yondra to use her tier four spell, Great Glacier, on both the yellow and black hearts. It turned them into ice crystals that shattered at their next attempt to beat as if they were made of glass.

Professor Ellkas unleashed three tier four spells at once, one for each remaining heart and the third for the main body. He had no idea if once all the hearts were lost the creature would simply die or it might self-destruct.

He had seen enough of the Odi's cruelty that his scientific curiosity was overshadowed by the revulsion he felt. Lith's paranoia and Life Vision agreed with Ellkas judgment, so he used the remaining spells he had at the ready to destroy the flesh titan before it could overload its accumulated mana into an explosion.

The giant's body turned into ashes, while everyone was panting due to the repeated use of powerful spells or artifacts.

"I'd gladly take a break before moving forward." Yondra said. "I still have quite some mana left, but no spell at the ready anymore."

"Agreed." Phloria said while sheathing her blade. "Let's go back to base and prepare new spells before..." The sound of what seemed to be an avalanche was quickly followed by the noise of a heavy door crashing on the ground.

The four of them started to chant new spells while running outside to make sure that such a ruckus wasn't the harbinger of a new enemy. When they saw the second group Blinking in front of them, quickly followed by a massive wave of sand, they had their answer.

Their intuition was correct, it wasn't one enemy but four of them, making Phloria's group uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

"Gods, no!" She said when she identified the constructs as an unknown kind of hybrid Golems made of stone and metal.

"Gods, yes!" Morok said when he saw that the members of the first group were in perfect condition. "We already threw at them everything we had, but nothing worked. Buy us a little time so that we can prepare new spells."

"We are on the same boat!" Lith said pretending to have finished one chant before starting another. As a true mage, he could speak and weave spells, yet he dispelled the Final Sunset he was casting anyway.

It would have been useless against Golems. Those in front of him were the first he had ever met on the battlefield. The Golems were nothing like the modern constructs Professor Wanemyre had taught him about during his time as a student first and as Assistant Professor later.

Constructs were by far the most complex artifact that a mage could craft. The simplest ones required only a Forgemaster to be made, but a really powerful Golem required Forgemaster, Warden, and even Alchemical magic.

Golems were also known as artificial mages or mindless mages. The Forgemastering process bonded them with magic crystal that fueled their magical properties, while Warden magic was required to 'program' them, giving them a purpose and even teaching them battle strategies.

If their master had enough magic crystal to invest in their creation, Golems could even act as walking arrays. Alchemy, instead, was a great tool to provide Golems with an extra number of abilities that wouldn't affect their power cores.

Due to their enormous power, Golems also consumed an enormous amount of energy, more than what any number of mana crystals might provide. Once the output of their power cores would drop below a certain amount, they would return to their recharging arrays.

If not for such a weak spot, Golems would have been considered perfect killer machines. They could self-repair, were immune to most spells, and had no vitals, making it almost impossible to destroy them.

Fire would inflict them no damage since it would take a prolonged exposure to a flame thousands of degrees hot to vaporize their bodies, and a Golem never stood still. The same applied to water, air, and darkness magic.

Stone and metal would just ground lightning bolts, ignore the cold just like they did for the heat, but most of all, they were darkness magic's bane. Darkness strongest suit was its ability to bypass protections and attack the vitals of its target, but a Golem had none.

When encountering their enchanted bodies, darkness magic would eat at their magic first and then at the matter the Golems were made of. Turning stone into dust required an enormous amount of energy, to the point that even tier five darkness spells would barely scratch its surface.

The Golems' only weakness was indirect attacks performed by using earth magic. Once their movements were restricted, one only had to wait for their battery to run out. Time was a Golem's worst enemy.

Unfortunately, the whole Kulah was protected by an array which made its surface immune to earth magic, so the only thing the expedition members could use was the sand that the Golems used to speed up their movements.

To make matters worse, Golemsmiths were aware of the limits constructs had, so there was no Forgemaster that wouldn't give them the ability to manipulate earth. Lith tried to take control of the sand, just like Jareth had done barely a minute earlier, and he failed as well.

'Solus, why can't I manipulate the sand and what kind of power can those things draw upon?' He asked.

'Bad news #1: that's not sand, it's part of the Golems. They have pulverized the outer layer of their bodies to move faster and be able to physically attack from a distance. You can't control that sand more than the Golems can force your arm to punch you.' She said.

Mana sense allowed Solus to see that Golems and sand had the same energy signature. It was another clever trick of the Odi, to make fake mages waste their mana in a fool's errand.

## Chapter 660 From Bad to Worse Part 2

'Any idea why they are made of both metal and stone? What's the advantage in that?' Lith opened a Warp Steps, allowing the others to reach the camp in a split second, while he covered their retreat.

'I have a few theories, but none of your liking.' Solus knew that Lith was hoping she could find the Odi's trademark fatal flaw of design that would allow him to effortlessly destroy them.

'No visible power switch? No cable fueling them?'

'None that I can see. Why are you still here?' She asked after he closed the Warp Steps the moment the last of his allies had crossed it.

Lith's reply came in the form of a giant mass of blue Origin Flames aimed at the closest Golem. Much to his dismay, the constructs waved their hands in unison, making the sand wave turn into a shield that smothered the flames like a wet towel.

'Four versus one isn't good. They simply have to use the mass of the sand and their mana flow to overpower Origin Flame's effects. Now, for my next trick...' Lith conjured the tier one Float spell.

He could have used gravity magic, but he was afraid that sending them against the ceiling would only give them more earth to manipulate. The fungal creature had employed the same strategy, exploiting the stalactites to circumvent Kulah's array.

Golems lacked creativity and Lith didn't want to give them ideas. Float, instead, was supposed to lift them from the ground long enough to make them deplete their energy.

The Golems had the sand coil around their limbs like an anchor, but that was within Lith's calculations. He conjured a big wave of water that drenched the sand, allowing him to easily freeze and destroy the footholds.

The Golems, however, had yet to tell their side of the story. One of them unleashed a stream of purple flames that vaporized the ice while another used a tendril of sand as a sling to throw itself at Lith.

The flying Golem's arm opened, revealing what looked like a Gatling gun that instead of metal cylinders had magic wands.

'This bodes poorly.' Lith thought as the Golem activated the wands in pairs, releasing at the same time a burst of flames and a blast of wind.

Wands could only store up to tier three spells, but thanks to the Golem's clockwork precision in both aiming and timing their cast, the synergy between the air and fire elements boosted the power behind its attack on the level of a tier four spell.

Lith could see with Life Vision where the construct was aiming, but it had so many wands that Lith had no place to retreat. The perfectly chained explosions blackened the streets of Kulah and made its walls tremble until the oxygen in the area was completely consumed, smothering the flames.

The Golems used the cover that the smoke provided them to release chains of purple lightning. By combining their efforts, not a single centimeter in front of them was spared by the electrical onslaught.

Their creator had devised this strategy starting from the assumption that the lack of air would make the enemy incapable of defending themselves. It was a two-pronged attack executed without a split second of delay.

And that was the reason it failed. Lith had timed his Blink so that the explosions would cover his escape, hoping that the massive release of mana would jam the Golems' sensors.

'I have good news and I've bad news.' Solus swallowed loudly despite the fact she lacked a throat.

'The good news is that your plan worked. The Golems have just wasted a lot of mana in the attempt to kill you. The bad news is that they have still plenty of juice left.'

By the time Lith Blinked inside the camp, the others were still casting their first spell. Several blades almost struck at his throat, believing him to be an enemy.

"I'm the student and you are the Professors. Do any of you have something to take them down?" Lith asked.

Yondra finished her chant before answering.

"Yes and no. Here the ground can be manipulated and I've yet to use my best tools, so yes, there's a lot I can do. No, because there is no way to destroy a golem in one hit. Unless you know where their core is and manage to damage it, of course."

Golems could move their power cores freely within their bodies, but Lith could clearly see them thanks to Life Vision. His problem was how to destroy them.

"I know it may sound crazy, but I've trashed Golems before." Morok said, drawing everyone's attention. "Spells are just a waste of mana. The quickest way to get rid of them is to go in close quarters and expose their power cores."

"How do you propose to do that?" Phloria asked. A crazy plan was better than no plan.

"You guys stop trying to damage them, you would only risk hurting us." Morok said while pointing at Lith and himself.

"Some of you have to use spells that can hinder their movements or throw them off balance, while the rest must wait for the moment the power core gets exposed and strike with all they have got."

The Golems reached Kulah's gates and unleashed a hail of electromagnetically charged stone bullets. The defensive arrays trembled, but they managed to nullify the attack.

The Golems scanned the magical formation for a split second before resuming their assault. Since the bullets bounced on the barrier, they could quickly retrieve them and use them again as if they had infinite ammo.

The four constructs focused their fire on the same exact spot, weakening the barrier enough for one of them to slip inside.

"What are you waiting for? A written invite?" Morok said. "Keep them busy while we take care of the unwanted guest."

Lith was way ahead of him, using the tier five spell, Land Shark. It conjured a stone maw filled with magma right under his enemy. Without the sand to boost its movements, the maw was supposed to take care of the Golem's lower body while Morok attacked high.



Unfortunately, the construct's body promptly reacted to the threat by activating an Earth Blocking array that dispelled the stone jaws even before they could fully open.

'Those Odi were idiots to the bone.' Morok thought. 'What good is such an array to a stone-made creature? Now the Golem is paralyzed by his own hand and it can't block my war hammers.'

The Odi mage who had designed the Golems had Forgemastered them out of an iron-rich ore exactly for that reason. The metal allowed the Golems to use air magic to generate powerful magnetic fields that could be used to move them while they were under the influence of the array or as a guide for their lightning-based attacks.

The apparently helpless Golem used both those abilities at once, using its own electromagnetic field to raise its arms, using them to block the attack of the enemy, and unleashed a purple bolt of lightning.

The construct split the spell evenly, striking at all the members of the expedition at once. Morok was struck at point-blank so he was also the first one to fall. He gritted his teeth, trying to not lose consciousness while his entire body sizzled, emitting the characteristic smell of barbeque.