

Supreme M 691

Chapter 691 Bane Part 1

As any decent Forgemaster knew, the Golems' greater weakness was the fact that they were limited to the tactics their maker managed to imbue in their core's array. No matter how talented a mage was, there were only so many situations they could cover without overloading the array.

On the other hand, living beings could learn, could be trained, and most importantly, they could be enslaved. The only problem with Forgemastering living beings had been the mana poisoning that sooner or later would kill them.

Yet by studying the death of countless specimens, the Odi had discovered that when a living being was on the verge of death, their mana would disappear. They had no idea that the phenomenon was due to the cracking and fading of the mana core, nor it had any relevance to their research.

They had gotten the idea from the pseudo-Balor experiment they kept in the Body Enhancement department. Between being dead and almost dead there lied countless applications.

The organic matter of the Flesh Golems was in a constant state of decay, but thanks to the pseudo light fusion the constructs were imbued with, their death was constantly being delayed as their tissue regenerated just as fast as they rotted.

The tubes transported the nutrients straight to their stomachs, allowing them to sustain the perpetual healing process. The whole existence of the Flesh Golems was pure agony, but that was irrelevant in the Odi's eyes.

They just needed to order them not to complain to solve the issue of their annoying wails.

Lith moved his hands, conjuring several small spheres of flames directly inside the Golems' mouths. The detonation made their brains splatter, yet they continued their attack while the flesh regrew at a speed visible to the naked eye.

'Solus, I can see two weak points right off the bat. First, the slave item. If we destroy it, these creatures will help us. Second, being alive they are vulnerable to darkness magic. Do we conscript or destroy them?' Lith asked.

'I'm afraid neither.' Solus replied stopping him in his tracks. 'The slave item is once again forgemastered in their flesh, to remove it you have to kill them. As for darkness magic, the only flesh they have left is that needed to keep them functional.

'Damaging it would only temporarily hinder their battle prowess until it's regenerated, but that's it. I can assure you that they have no vitals.'

While Lith's spheres were still exploding, Professor Yondra unleashed a volley of black arrows that struck the nearest Golems at their heads, hearts, and stomachs. She was a Forgemaster and a Healer as well, so her reasoning was akin to Lith's.

She smiled seeing the tissues turning green and black from the decay, yet it disappeared the moment all the allegedly injured constructs turned to face her with their rocky hands brimming with mana.

'See? At the moment they have no life force, yet they still work. Soon their flesh will heal, making Yondra's spell just a waste of mana.' Solus thought.

Yondra was about to be blasted away by five Golems and Morok wasn't faring any better. The constant stream of lightning kept him in mid-air, screaming while his steaming flesh started to smell like barbeque.

Phloria activated all of her magical rings, trying to buy some time. The constructs simply ignored the spells. Tier three could barely dent their bodies and their orders were clear.

Bring the youths to their masters and kill the rest. The Flesh Golems ran towards their prey with the inhuman speed that their small build and magical bodies bestowed upon them.

Rainer and the rest of the Assistants used their best spells, yet not having a combat specialization, the best they could do was mimic Phloria and obtain her same result.

"Yondra, help me!" Rainer yelled as a Golem grabbed him before using a Warping Array to disappear. Yet the Professor was using all she had and then more just to resist the combined assault of the five Golems she had attacked.

If not for Gaakhu's and Neshal's help she would have been the first one to fall. The Professors combined their efforts and artifacts to block most of the Golems, keeping them away with an energy barrier while racking their brains for a solution.

Lith didn't care about the Assistants, so he weaved his spell while trying to find a way to defeat his opponents or at least free Morok.

Everything changed when he saw that Quylla was among their targets.

Lith joined his open palms conjuring a compressing a tier five Setting Sun until it was no bigger than a tennis ball. The black flames struck at the Golem attacking Quylla, making its stone parts melt and its organic matter evaporate.

Yet what slowed the Golem down wasn't the negligible damage it had sustained, but only the push that the highly compressed flames exerted.

'Solus, please. I need an idea!' Lith thought. He had been casting non-stop, but Golems were the bane of all mages, Awakened or not. In such a confined space, most of his tier five spells were more likely to injure his friends rather than his enemies.

'I'm thinking!' She replied trying to sound reassuring, but she had no clue how to face that many unstoppable constructs.

Lith's spell still bought Phloria enough time to join him and activate her tier five spell, Torment Guard.

As a Mage Knight, she needed earth magic to conjure her tower shields, so she always kept a few kilograms of the hardest rock that money could buy in her dimensional amulet.

That way, no matter if the fight was in the air, underwater, or in a metal room, Phloria always had what she needed to execute her best spells. Torment Guard conjured a small stone tower around Quylla, infused with fire and darkness magic to reinforce Lith's spell.

She had fallen into the Odi's trap as well. Darkness dealt negligible damage against the heavily enchanted inorganic matter and the flesh on the golems was merely a bait. The humans' brains were safely stored inside their power core and the metal parts stored enough meat samples to endlessly regenerate their bodies.

The only variable was the amount of pain they would endure.

Quylla and Solus racked their brains. They weren't fighting, they weren't giving their all to stop a single dreadnought of stone and metal while everyone around them was getting beaten or kidnapped.

'Gods, I'm so stupid! The Odi are just the polar opposites of the undead.' Both girls thought in unison.

'Using darkness to fight light is pointless. Light's magic bane it's light itself!'

"Let me go, sis! I know what to do!" Quylla had no time to explain her plan, she had to execute it herself. Solus, however, used her mind link with Lith to bring him up to speed.

'If you had a body, I might kiss you right now.' Lith thought while conjuring his battle-oriented Body Sculpting spell, Cleaver.

He recalled Final Sunset to his left hand while emitting the mana weapons from his right hand together with a cold wave that would allow him to touch the Golem without being burned to cinders.

His attempt was foiled by a second construct that was hell-bent on capturing him. It attempted to tackle Lith, who was forced to take the construct head-on to prevent it from reaching Quylla.

Lith infused his Skinwalker armor with mana, turning it into quicksilver that covered him from head to toe dispersing most of the kinetic energy of the charge, stopping the Golem on its tracks.

Chapter 692 Bane Part 2

'I'll have to trust Quylla as much as I trust Solus on this.' Lith thought while his tier five spell, Scanner, enveloped the construct that was grabbing him, allowing Lith to put Solus's theory to the test.

'What the heck can I do?' Phloria thought as the first Golem was dismantling her Torment Guard as if it was made of paper, ignoring both her spells and swordplay. To make matters worse, after kidnapping her soldiers and the Assistants, the constructs were now free to focus on killing the Professors and the Rangers.

Phloria hadn't missed that the Golems seemed to have a different approach based on their enemy, yet she had no idea how to exploit it.

A third and a fourth construct were about to reach her, their arms already extended.

"Phloria, trust me, dammit!" Quylla yelled. She was so focused using Scanner on her future opponent that she couldn't afford to Blink out of her cage. It would make her lose her concentration and waste both the tier five light spells she had prepared.

Phloria snapped her fingers, releasing Quylla and used all the earth she had at her disposal to block her enemy. Alas, hundreds of kilograms were required to stop a Golem. Just a few dozens of them were merely an annoyance.

It was one of the reasons Lith hadn't brought any with himself. Even if he had used his entire pocket dimension, he would have barely enough to stop a single construct at the price of losing everything he had.

Besides, he had many strings to his bow.

The Golem tried to zap him, but the Orichalcum deflected the spell. Then, it tried to lift the Ranger, but by coming this close to him, Lith's spirit magic was a raging river that the creature could barely stand.

'Okay, ignore its life force. To do any damage to whatever is left of its human side, it would take us too much time. Focus on the runes. Find and damage them.' As if Solus was speaking to both of them, Lith and Quylla performed the same task.

One was protected by her beloved sister, who was facing three Golems at once, while the other only had spirit magic to prevent his opponent from Warping him away.

It was an incredibly hard task for both Healers. Quylla had to ignore Phloria's battle screams and set aside her fears as the unliving monstrosity grabbed her, while Lith had to manage many things at once.

Yet he wasn't alone. Solus examined the Golem's complex life force, searching for the runes hidden inside the many building blocks and energy bridges that once gave life to the man in front of them.

'There, under the heart.' One thought to herself and the other to her partner.

Quylla's Chisel scraped the rune engraved in the creature's life force whereas Lith's Cleaver split it asunder. Until that moment, the Golems' movements had been relentless.

No matter what kind of attack they were under, the constructs had followed their orders with no care for the consequences. Their bodies healed the moment they suffered any damage.

Even Lith's and Phloria's combined attack had barely left a mark on them. Yet as soon as a single rune was damaged, they both stuttered. Lith and Quylla found another rune in the Golems' head, crushing it with their respective spell.

A Golem was a complex machine, but a Flesh Golem was in a league of its own. Damaging their runes was akin to removing random gears from a clockwork marvel, destroying its perfect balance.

The constructs froze, but while Quylla could only search and destroy more runes to make sure it wouldn't come back to life, Lith had other options. Solus's glove covered his hand and the Orichalcum covered Solus.

Life Vision showed him their power cores, so after using fusion magic to boost his physical prowess, he was capable of piercing through their stone shell and ripping the still pulsing power core from the creature's ankle.

"Thank you." The man said as his flesh turned to mush and the Golem collapsed.

A split second later, the Golem in front of Quylla was dead too, letting her focus on the two that were seconds away from overpowering Phloria.

"That's impossible!" Jiira said watching at the Golems control panel. Two lights had just gone offline. "Flesh Golems are perfect, immortal creatures. Not even us could take them down if not for the slave control engraved into their very being!"

"If only we still had the cameras." Rizo was tempted to bite his fingernails out of stress, but ruining his perfect body would be considered as a sign of weakness from his peers.

"It must be the non-human's work. Emperor Beasts drove us into corner one time too many to underestimate them." Leela said. "We must kill all the remaining invaders."

"What? And lose the only semi-decent looking woman of the herd?" Veiga was outraged. She had her eyes on Quylla from the beginning. "Also, we need the old ones to learn their language, otherwise spare bodies or not, we'll not last a minute outside."

"Veiga is right. We can always make more Flesh Golems whereas powerful mages are hard to find." Guuna had been a powerful mage back in her days. She didn't care if her body was male or female, as long as it was powerful.

"I have a better idea." Jiira smiled. "We order the Golems to kill only those that managed to destroy their comrades. After all, what makes the Flesh Golems truly perfect is the fact that they are not mindless machines."

"Their human side allowed us to train them in the use of the spells we bestowed upon them, to getting used to their peerless physical prowess, and more importantly, to properly follow orders."

All the Odi nodded at those words. They believed that if Kulah hadn't been cut off from the rest of the empire during the Great War, if only they had received enough supplies and specimens, an army of Flesh Golems would have guaranteed their victory.

The Odi could already picture the entirety of Mogar on its knees in front of the true and only master race.

Once the order was given, the Golems focused on Lith. All twenty of them.

"This is bad." He said.

The Professors could finally catch their breath. Up until that moment, the four of them had kept at bay the entire horde of enemies, but each time one of the constructs managed to slip through their barrier, someone had been kidnapped.

Now they were holding back seventeen Flesh Golems, the others were the one that had been frying Morok up until that moment, and the two that had almost cornered Phloria.

They all turned towards Lith, ignoring their old marks and readying their spells. Morok's body slid down the wall and on the ground, but instead of falling to a side, his feet stood firm.

"Thanks for nothing, you frigging bastards!" Morok's skin was almost black, yet he seemed to be more pissed off than wounded. "I almost got roasted because of you. Is it too much to ask for a little help?"

It was hard to tell who was more surprised if the Golems or his own allies.

"Magna!" He yelled as his hammers turned orange and his body swelled. Every muscle in his body was now as tense as a bowstring.

Chapter 693 Retreat Part 1

The Golem ignored Morok, turning around to focus on Lith. When the first hammer struck, the back of the construct exploded, spraying the nutrients stored inside its hunch all over the corridor.

The second hammer hit the Golem's side, it pierced through the stone shell until only its handle was still visible.

"Now you ignore me? Now? Too little too late!" Morok's hammers struck in a flurry of attacks, sending debris, flesh, and blood flying around. By the time the Golem managed to react, its power core was destroyed.

Morok fell to his knees due to exhaustion, too weak to even hold his weapons any longer. Both the Odi and the humans were astonished that another Flesh Golem had fallen so fast.

"All right, stop. Hammer time will resume in a jiffy." He said panting.

Normal Golems would have frozen now that their protocols were contradictory. Back when Jiira had ordered them to kill the Golem slayer, only Lith fit their bill, but now there were two.

Unfortunately, the human side allowed them to understand an order beyond its literal meaning, so they simply split.

"Never screw with the Healer, because the next time you go down, you stay down!" Quylla had never stopped moving, grabbing the nearest Golem. She was glad to discover that the Forgemastering process for all the constructs was identical.

That way she already knew where the three runes she had located when Scanning the first Golem were located in the life force of the other enemies.

Her Chisels broke them all at once.

"Lith!" She yelled while tackling with her small body the third Golem that Phloria had been facing until a second ago. The construct wasn't stupid. Its orders were to bring the bodies alive, not intact.

The little girl had already paralyzed two of its kin, and even though the poor woman grafted inside the Golem wanted nothing more than to be put out of her misery, her self defense protocols forbid her to allow any damage to be willingly inflicted upon the enchanted rock that was now her body.

The construct struck Quylla with a backhand slap, sending her slamming against a wall. Even with the Skinwalker armor's protection, the hit was strong enough to break her jaw and nose.

She fell limp on the ground, leaving a trail of blood on the wall where her head had struck.

Lith swallowed his rage to not let her sacrifice go to waste. He ignored the still active Golem and ripped off the power core from the still stiff construct, further reducing their numbers.

Now only eighteen were left, yet they were likely to be seventeen too many of them.

"We have to retreat. We can't hold them for much longer." Yondra was the most vigorous Professor thanks to her rejuvenated body. She quickly conjured a Warp Steps and gestured her colleagues to get into it.

"What about me?" Morok was still wheezing for air, cornered like a mouse between two walls. The eight golems around him had yet to attack only because they were taking position.

"Blink, you moron!" She replied while Phloria used that very same spell to rescue Quylla and bring her past the dimensional door.

'The Golems are charging up their arrays, we have to be quick!' Solus warned Lith, who Blinked as well and dragged Yondra with himself. He knew that unlike Wardens, a construct only needed a handful of seconds to activate an elemental blocking array.

Yondra's plan would have failed if everyone wasn't already close to each other. Not even five seconds had passed since the moment the Warp had been opened and it was already about to be closed.

"Oh shit!" Morok could feel the mana density in the air rise to the point of making his skin crawl. He had no Life Vision, but his instincts were screaming at him to get the heck out of there.

He Blinked a split second before the Air Blocking array was activated and jumped inside the Warp while it was collapsing on itself. Morok curled up in fetal position, managing to lose only the extremities of some of his toes due to the dimensional cut.

He immediately stopped the bleeding and then started to regenerate the missing flesh and bones.

"I need some help." He said, but no one made a move.

Yondra only handed him some food and said:

"Sorry kid, everyone is beat and has something better to do." She pointed at Neshal, who was chanting an array as fast as she could.

She was casting the Earth Blocking array which would greatly hinder the Golems. It would prevent them from opening a Warping Array in the proximity of the makeshift camp and limit their movements in case they came too close for comfort.

Lith was treating Quylla. Her nose and jaw weren't a problem, but the concussion was a different story. If she had suffered brain damage, she would need a long time to recover, time that they didn't have.

Lith used Invigoration on her, making her instantly recover and even partially replenishing her mana. She woke startled and instinctively raised her arms in defense.

"Don't worry, little one. You're safe." When he had heard Quylla's skull crack, something inside Lith had almost snapped. Her pallor had almost driven him insane, reminding him of Carl's corpse lying on the hospital's stretcher.

"How many times do I have to tell you to not call me 'little one'?" She angrily replied. "Where are we?" She asked when she realized that everyone was staring at her.

"In front of the elevator. The furthest place we know from the Golems." Yondra replied, noticing that Quylla was way too healthy for someone who had sustained multiple fractures and the blood loss from both her head and nose.

Healers weren't miracle workers, or so she had always believed.

Quylla nodded and took some food out of her dimensional ring, wolfing it down as fast as she could. Invigoration could do many things, but not give a body the nutrients it required.

"Can you work your magic on me too?" Morok asked, eating and healing at the same time to not collapse due to exhaustion.

"Fuck you." Lith snarled, taking care of Phloria first.

"I'm fine, don't worry." She tried to push him away, but his grip was as gentle as it was strong.

"A body with cracked ribs, arms, and countless bruises is far from being fine." Lith replied while cursing at the constructs' insane power.

Phloria had fought with all she had, and even though the Golems had only tried to capture her, they had still managed to hurt her badly. And that despite her Skinwalker armor.

"Now stay still. This may feel weird but bear with me." Lith chanted some gibberish and Invigorated her. Phloria's battered body healed and recovered as her mana was fully recovered.

The surprise made her turn pale as a ghost, helping Lith to keep up his façade. Not that he cared that much. His life was on the line and the Odi were the perfect scapegoats in case he had to get rid of any of the members of the expedition.

Only Yondra troubled him. She reminded him of Nana too much to leave him indifferent. Luckily, until they were stuck underground, he had all the time to make up his mind.

Lith took out all the food he could before Neshal's array was complete. After that, dimensional items would become useless.

"Am I there yet?" Morok asked. He was about to collapse due to the lack of nutrients and mana, yet he still had the energy for being obnoxious.

Chapter 694 Retreat Part 2

Lith would have liked to ignore him, but Morok and Quylla were the only ones capable of helping him to defeat the Golems. On top of that, he had no idea how many constructs were left, so he needed all the support he could get.

After handing to his fellow Ranger something rich in calcium and proteins to compensate for the amputation, Lith used normal tier four light magic to complete the regeneration process of Morok's missing toes.

Now both Rangers were beat and in dire need of rest.

"How long do you think we have?" Phloria asked.

"Hard to say." Ellkas replied. "Depends on how smart the Golems are and if there really is someone guiding them. We have destroyed all the surveillance items on the way to the living quarters, so they might search the entire corridor.

"Best case scenario, we have a few minutes, so shut up and rest."

Lith had to agree, their situation was beyond dire. The only way he had to increase their chances of survival was to use Invigoration on all of those present, but that meant turning any doubt they might have into certainty and being forced to kill them all later.

Both he and Solus racked their brains while taking deep breaths to absorb as much world energy they could without resorting to Invigoration.

"Minutes? Then why the heck did you have me create such a huge array?" Neshal said. Her breath was ragged and her hands trembled so much that it was hard for her even placing the mana crystals necessary to fuel the Earth Blocking formation.

"Because otherwise we would have only a few seconds of respite and because the larger the array, the further the Golems have to stay from us." Ellkas helped her to sit down on the floor and gave her some food.

Neshal took just a few bites before losing consciousness. She was way past her sixties and using so much mana in less than five minutes took a great toll on her stamina.

"How can you be so calm and why do you seem to be the less tired among us?" Gaakhu asked Yondra.

"Those bastards took Rainer, but getting angry will not help me to save him." Yondra was sitting cross-legged, in a meditative state to calm her mind and regain her mental focus faster.

"The Golems took the Assistants alive whereas they tried to kill us old fogeys, so I guess they want young bodies. I doubt the Odi will start the procedure before catching the Captain, the Rangers, and Quylla.

"Rayner will be fine as long as I stop the Odi from capturing them. As for my youthfulness, unlike you, I'm not so dumb to make an enemy of a rejuvenator. On the contrary, I sought both his services and friendship." Yondra explained.

"How can you be so sure that we're dealing with the Odi?" Ellkas asked, inwardly cursing himself for not thinking about getting rejuvenated as soon as they had opened Kulah's doors.

Ellkas knew about Lith's status, but he took pride in his well-preserved physique. Asking to be rejuvenated meant admitting he was getting old, and that was one big bullet to bite.

"First the elevator, then the flat card. We checked everything, there was no security measure that the Captain might have triggered. Also, Golems can't change their protocols without a direct order." Yondra explained.

"What do you mean when you say that they need us for the procedure?" Phloria asked, doing her best to pretend to be tired. Her mind was a blur. Now too many things finally made sense, bringing her just a small leap of fantasy away from Lith's secret.

"Silly child, you misunderstood my words. They don't need you for the procedure, they need you to stop quarreling about who gets who." Yondra's voice was calm, but her words were terrifying.

"I disagree." Morok said. "They were clearly trying to kill me."

"If that was the case, you would already be dead." Yondra sneered. "The Golem tried to make you faint, but you are too dumb to know when to give up and that saved you. As simple as that."

Morok bit his lower lip in frustration, swallowing his pride. There were many things he would have liked to do and say but he lacked the strength necessary. He could hear the Golems' stone feet hitting the metal floor in the distance.

"Do any of you has something I can use as a weapon?" Lith asked. Solus's glove had too short a range to be useful. He looked at Morok's hammers in envy, wishing he still had the Gatekeeper.

A series of "No, I'm sorry" was the only answer he got. Lith tried to keep calm, but if the Odi were still alive, then the Golems were the least of his worries.

'Yet it doesn't make sense.' He thought. 'If they achieved immortality with Life Merging, how did they lose the war? If they didn't, how the heck are they still alive?'

Solus was trying to solve that conundrum as well, but she had no answer to offer him.

"Quylla, what kind of weapon can a Mana Reactor be?" Lith had no time to lose. He could hear at least a Golem getting close.

"Why do you think it's a weapon?" Quylla already felt ashamed for thinking that the Odi had considered turning themselves into Golems. Her crazy theory had turned out to be just foolish. Those things weren't eternal life, more like eternal agony.

"Because I think we have misunderstood this place from the beginning. This isn't a medical facility, but a military facility to develop new weapons for winning the war against the 'lesser races'." Lith replied.

"They are all based on life force and you are the best Healer I know after Manohar. Think about it. How would you weaponize a hypothetical endless supply of energy with light magic?" He stood up, the Golem was almost at the fringes of the array.

Life Vision confirmed what his enhanced senses already told him.

"I expect you to have an answer for me when I get back. I'm going to buy us some time." Lith walked toward the corridor leading to the living quarters.

The Professors looked at him as if he was a mad man, Morok with an odd savage grin of camaraderie, while Quylla tried to stand up before Phloria stopped her. No one said a word or tried to stop him.

Crazy or not, they were in desperate need of rest.

"Sit down, sis. We are both tired." Phloria was still pale, but her voice was stern and her eyes as hard as steel.

Quylla was about to rebuke that she felt perfectly fine and that she wouldn't let Lith fight that battle alone. And that was the moment she understood her sister's words.

She wasn't supposed to be fine, at all. In her experience, after sustaining such severe injuries and using so many tier five spells, she was supposed to be barely conscious, yet she was overflowing with energy.

Quylla became pale as well, her knees buckled from the shock. As she sat down again, the Professors thought that her previous outburst was just because of an adrenaline rush.

In their eyes, there was nothing special in Lith's healing. Not now that both women were sweating bullets, incapable even of standing up.

Chapter 695 Third Eye Part 1

Those were the moments when Lith would have loved Mogar to be like a video game. That way, before consuming Invigoration, he could safely go down on HP and MP to maximize its effects.

Real life, however, was quite different. Injuries drained his stamina, which in turn slowed his reflexes down, making him an easier target. On top of that, low mana also meant having a splitting headache, blurred vision, and difficulty concentrating.

Even though he was right above a mana geyser, his natural world energy absorption rate wasn't enough to allow him fighting a Golem after so few minutes of rest. At least under normal circumstances.

'Solus, I need to delegate a few things to you to save as much energy as possible. We don't know how long we'll be trapped down here, so Invigoration is our lifeline. I want Phloria, Quylla, and Yondra to survive, in this order of importance.

'The rest of the group are just expendable pawns.' He thought.

Solus didn't like that Lith placed Phloria above Quylla. They were both supposed to be just his friends, yet he seemed to value her more despite her lesser talent. Solus didn't object though, she just mind-nodded for him to continue.

'The moment we engage the enemy, I need you to scan the Golem for any form of communication device. Golems can talk, but maybe they can also share their vision or thoughts with their kin and masters.

'Based on the results of your analysis, I can greatly improve our odds of survival.'

Life Vision flickered in his eyes, Lith kept it active only long enough to check both the Golem's position and where the array's borders were.

'Okay, stop.' Solus thought when he was about to turn around a corner. 'We're close enough that my senses can display their maximum proficiency. Give me a second.'

Solus had to admit that without Phloria their situation would have been much worse. Thanks to their work on runes during the last few days, the three of them had written a small rune dictionary.

It allowed Solus to instantly recognize the old runes of which they knew the modern equivalent. Without it, she wouldn't be able to even guess how the Flesh Golems were enchanted.

'There is some kind of communication device, but it's only linked to its ears and human mouth. They can't share their vision.' Solus said.

Lith checked that all members of the expedition were still in front of the elevator before shapeshifting into his hybrid form. Its claws were nothing compared to the Gatekeeper, but now that his prized weapon was lost, they were an invaluable tool.

The Flesh Golem had just reached the fringes of the Earth Blocking array and was about to report its findings when suddenly an invisible force pulled it inside the array as a Hush enveloped its mouth.

It could speak, cast spells, but no sound would escape its throat, leaving whoever was listening on the other side of the communicator in the dark. The moment the Golem stepped inside the array it was over.

Its limbs went limp as the magical formation sealed both the earth magic the construct needed to move and all of its dimensional spells, communication included. Lith was waiting in ambush behind a corner, using in combination his own claws, Solus's, and the Orichalcum to reach its power core before the Golem could react.

The creature tried to unleash his full power in bolts of lightning all around itself, using the metal walls to prevent its enemy from avoiding the area of effect of its attack. Alas, Solus had placed a very small yet perfectly functional Air Blocking array on Lith's hunting spot.

The wasted mana only made it easier for Lith to kill his prey in a single lunge.

'When earth fails them, they always go for air. Yurial, you truly were a moron. Arrays aren't useless. A single one can turn an invincible construct into a pile of scrap.' Lith thought.

"Beware..."The Golem who had once been a young brown-haired man said Lith with the last strength he had left. His eyes were full of gratitude and tears of joy. Finally his pain had come to an end, but he had no time to waste with thanks.

Now that he was free from the slave enchantment, he wanted to help his savior with his last breath.

..."of the green array. Destroy Reactor first. The..."The man inwardly cursed. Even using the least amount of words he could while still making sense, one breath was too little to convey his message.

Without the Golem, once his lungs were empty, he had no way of filling them again. He moved his lips, mouthing the last words with what strength he had left. Unfortunately, Lith had no idea how he could understand a long dead language, let alone how the unknown words were spelled.

The man died between Lith's arms, turning the joy of his victory into an odd sort of grieving. The youth was barely younger than Lith was when he had taken his own life. Like him, the youth had suffered an unjust fate from which there was no escape.

Yet, the young man had never given up, fighting until the last second to do what he believed was right.

Lith moved the corpse away from the hunting spot with spirit magic, giving it a bow as a thank you before using darkness magic to destroy every trace of flesh until the man was free and only the machine was left.

'All the spells engraved on the Golem have faded. No transmission was sent during the ambush.' Solus thought. 'Yet it's possible that the moment you brought it inside the array, it was perceived as "dead". Locating spells are dimensional spells as well, so Neshal's array interrupted its signal.

'Even better.' Lith thought. 'I'm far from the camp and if more Golems come, I can take them down.'

The ambush had consumed only a small part of Lith's energy, he still had no need of using Invigoration. A second Golem Warped on his comrade last known position, falling into spirit magic's clutches.

"Beware of the green array. Destroy Reactor first. The...?" Lith said, hoping that the young woman grafted in the second Golem could understand him and that she was willing to help him as well.

'I can't let her waste her last breath telling me what I already know. I must stay one step ahead.' He thought.

She looked at Lith with a puzzled look. Death wasn't the best thing to clear someone's head.

"Oh!"She said when his words finally made sense. "The basement. Go there. Thank...."

A single word wasn't enough to explain the rest to her savior. The young woman used the last of her strength to express her gratitude and stare at the floor. Even in death, her gaze guided Lith somewhere on his far right, like a beacon.

'So there is more than one underground floor and the good stuff is further below.' Lith waited that Solus had approximatively calculated where the woman's eyes were pointing at before giving her mangled flesh peace.

A wisp of light came out from the darkness his spell had generated, passing through Lith's hybrid body before shooting towards the sky.

'Was that her soul?' Solus was flabbergasted. 'Did she really refuse to leave until being certain that she had passed her message to you?'

'She was a brave woman.' Lith said. A single drop of water streamed down his right temple. A blue eye was now open.

Chapter 696 Third Eye Part 2

Lith's hybrid form had no blood nor tears, only flames and shadows dwelled in his body. Yet the opening of the third eye produced a small droplet of water that closely resembled a tear.

The blue eye quickly turned yellow like the other two, before closing again.

'Okay, seriously. What the fuck was that?' Lith thought as soon as Solus recovered from her shock enough to share with him her memories of what had just happened.

'Maybe water magic is linked with souls?' Solus blurted out before remembering how dire their situation was.

She performed a thorough analysis of Lith's body, life force, and mana before concluding that nothing had changed. Or at least, nothing she was able to detect.

'Never mind eye number three and focus on the potential Golem number three. My Air Blocking array will not last long without mana crystals.' She pointed out while deactivating the magical formation to preserve its always dwindling energy reserves.

Lith didn't like the sudden turn of events one bit. He had no idea what the energy mass that had just left the underground facility was, but one thing he knew for sure.

When he had witnessed the same phenomenon in the past, back in Kaduria against the Black Star and in Maekosh against Tezka, the warg-Abomination hybrid, both times living beings had been enslaved.

Their flesh had been twisted and their minds trapped into an endless nightmare until Lith had broken their chains. That revelation gave the name "Mana Reactor" a new meaning.

'According to legends, mana is the element of life, not the world energy.' Solus pondered. 'Quylla was wrong, the Mana reactor can't be something that converts mana into life force, but the other way around. To what end though, I don't know.'

'Great thinking, Solus.' Lith kept waiting for another Golem to appear, yet nothing happened. The minutes passed, until Solus was back to her full strength and could cast another Air Blocking array, but to no avail.

'Yondra is right, there's clearly the Odi's hand behind the attack. After losing two Flesh Golems, they must be worried.' Lith's reasoning was spot on.

Flesh Golems were supposed to be perfect killing machines. Two of them dying so fast had made the Odi reconsider their plan and listen to their soldiers' reports to better plan against the unknown enemy.

They were baffled learning that the major threat appeared to be the young woman. The others were just brutes and old farts. They had managed to kill four constructs only because the female mage had somehow crippled them.

Also, that was when the humans were still at their full force. After such a heavy fight, with the female mage down, they were supposed to be easy prey, yet they seemed to have gotten even stronger.

"I call dibs on the female mage!" Veiga repeated. "If one of your rust buckets damages her body, I will kill you Guuna."

"She's clearly the most powerful of the group. Her body would be wasted on a vain wench like you, Veiga. I could put her to good use." Guuna replied.

Before they could start bickering, with the serious risk of killing each other and compromise the entire group's survival, Jiira stepped in.

"Enough, you two. As everyone has agreed before, the bids on the bodies will start once we have an exact number. Dibs are for children. Now, if we want to get those bodies, we need a strategy.

"I've sent the Golem back to their charge pods, so when they resume the attack they will be at full strength. Now I want answers. How did they kill two Flesh Golems so fast and how can we prevent it from happening again?"

The Odi stopped thinking about the bodies and focused on the matter at hand. They could Forgemaster new Flesh Golems from their meat factories, but even though magical beasts could understand their orders, the Odi couldn't understand beast speech.

Also, using beasts as a material meant that the resulting Golem would be too big to be able of moving easily in confined spaces. Those were the reasons why human Golems were considered elite troops.

Yet breeding humans took years, and the Odi had barely the resources to keep themselves alive, let alone care for enough test subjects until they reached maturity. Only fourteen Flesh Golems were left, so their next attack had also to be the last one.

After waiting for more than half an hour, Lith decided to go back to the elevator. The mana geyser had replenished part of his strength, but there was nothing like sleep. By the time he was back at the camp, only Quylla, Phloria, and Yondra were still awake.

Yondra had used her meditation technique to achieve a deep trance that allowed her to rest almost as well as she had slept, replenishing her mana and relaxing her body. The other Professors and Morok had all ingested a tonic to hasten their recovery before exhaustion got the better of them.

"How did it go, young spirit?" Yondra asked.

"Two Golems less." Lith replied, almost breaking her trance. "I tricked them one at a time inside Neshal's array plus one of my own. With earth and air blocked, it wasn't hard killing them."

None of those present missed the use of the word "kill" instead of "destroy".

"I don't know how long will pass until they return. Quylla, what about the answer to my question?" Lith asked.

"I've bad news. If we consider this place a weapon facility instead of a medical facility, the nature of a Mana Reactor is almost obvious." She replied, expecting that her words were self-explanatory.

"No, it's not." Everyone said in unison, Solus included.

"Gods, guys. Mana Reactor! The name says it all. What makes a difference between a mediocre mage and a good one? Why do we need tiers of magic? It's all a matter not only of the talent one possesses, but also of the amount of mana available.

"With unlimited mana and enough training, anyone could cast all tier of spells, at least in theory. The problem is that mana is something that can't be borrowed or stolen without incurring into mana poisoning." She looked at Lith's eyes, wondering how could he violate such fundamental law of magic.

"So, a Mana Reactor is clearly something that provides to its user an endless supply of mana, making them invincible."

"No, that's impossible." Lith replied, expressing Solus's objections.

"This place, like most lost cities, is fueled by world energy, but that's not mana. World energy can condense into crystals and be used to fuel an enchantment, but it can't empower a mage."

'At least not without being filtered through the mana core, as you do with Invigoration.' Solus explained. 'If the Odi knew about cores, they would have all been Awakened, which they clearly weren't.

'Without that piece of knowledge, just injecting world energy into a living being would just have deadly effects. Static mana cores can't handle it without being destroyed. It's like forcing more air inside a balloon already full to the brim, it can only burst.'

"I'm not talking about world energy Lith." Quylla sighed.

'Sometimes I wonder if I talk too fast or the rest of the world is just slow. Oh gods! I'm starting to sound like Manohar.' She thought.

Chapter 697 Dreadnought Part 1

"I'm talking about mana, something that only a living being can produce. I think that after thoroughly manipulating their specimens' bodies with light magic, the Odi found a way to extract, purify, and store mana from other living beings.

"This, let's call it neutral mana, is something without an energy signature, allowing it to be used without suffering from mana poisoning.

"Hence, a Mana Reactor can only be fueled by living beings, which also explains why the Meat Factories have been moved down here, why the Odi keep breeding them up to this day, and how they were able to craft Flesh Golems.

"Forgemastering those dreadnoughts is otherwise impossible."

Lith had become so used to using true Forgemastery that he had almost forgotten that fake mages only had as long as a magic circle held to craft their works. Grafting flesh to stone, infusing the constructs with so many arrays and spells, it would have required more mana that even Manohar could possibly have.

'Dammit, Quylla is right. I bet that first they completed the Mana Reactor, and only thanks to that did they manage to bring the other projects to fruition.' Lith thought.

'Yeah, but why?' Solus asked, her mind sounded dejected.

'Why what?'

'Why did Quylla understand what a Mana Reactor is even though she had way fewer clues than me, whereas I failed? Maybe I'm not as smart as you think.' She replied.

'First, you're at least as smart as she is, and even if you weren't, you would still be leagues above me. Second, you failed because of me.' Lith said.

'Because of you? Do you think that you make me stupid or what?' Solus chuckled at Lith's silly attempt to justify her shortcomings.

'No. It's just that both you and Quylla are polymath geniuses, but while Quylla has always focused solely on light magic, because of me you also practice all kinds of magic known to us, both fake and true.

'Which means that, compared to her, you didn't have enough time. Magic is infinite, Solus, whereas we only have a limited amount of time each day. You didn't fail because you're not good enough, but simply because you've chosen to become a jack of all trades but master of none to help me overcome my problems.'

Lith's words forced Solus to take a few steps back from her wounded pride and look at the bigger picture. He was right, of course. Quylla knew nothing about other specializations, whereas Solus could outsmart most mages their age in their own field of research.

The realization made her feel better because as any mage worthy of their title, Solus was very competitive. Yet at the same time, it made her worry. Lith was periodically dragged into a big mess, and every time she was his life line.

If it wasn't for Quylla, this time they might have lost an important clue for his survival until it was too late, which she promptly pointed out to him.

'You're right, but let's be honest. If I was here alone, I would have left this accursed place right after fighting the fungal creature. I'm not stupid enough to not understand when I'm outside my field of expertise.' Lith thought.

He wasn't the only one worried about Quylla's words. Yondra and Phloria were racking their brains as well, trying to find a flimsy chance of survival. They were locked inside an unknown place, with nowhere to run, and surrounded by timeless enemies.

Their situation wasn't dire so much as a death sentence. They all reached the conclusion that their only hope was to find a Warp Rune that would bring them far enough from Kulah to escape the range of the deadly gas.

Lith took a short nap to recover his strength. His natural recovery was a great help, but it couldn't reset Invigoration on its own, only delay the next use of his breathing technique.

Unfortunately, that peace didn't last long. While the expedition group rested, the Odi studied the Earth Blocking array via their surveillance devices or by sending the Golems to investigate where cameras had been destroyed.

Neshal's formation was made of modern runes, but all arrays could be broken with enough time and preparation. On top of that, thanks to their hybrid nature, Flesh Golems could use magic almost as true mages, making it easier for them to adapt their spells to any circumstance.

A bit more than half an hour after Lith had fallen asleep, the Earth Blocking array started to flicker and the mana crystals fueling it to rattle. Yondra quickly woke up everyone while chanting her spells.

Despite her daze from being still quite tired, Neshal realized what was happening and recovered the mana crystals. Thanks to her mind link with her arrays, she knew that she had no chance to block the assault by herself, at least not for long.

Instead of wasting mana to buy a handful of seconds, it was better to prepare for the incoming fight.

"This shouldn't be too hard for you, right?" Morok said, wishing he could have slept just a bit more. His strength had almost returned, but almost wasn't enough. "You killed two more Golems on your own. If we just cover your back and delay the others, destroying fourteen constructs should take you what, one minute?"

"First, weren't you supposed to be asleep?" Lith was flabbergasted by both Morok's hearing and idiocy. "Second, that was an ambush, where I struck one Golem at a time under the influence of two arrays.

"They were sitting ducks. I didn't fight them, I assassinated them. Now they come in numbers and I have to face them head on. It's completely different."

"A man can dream." Morok sighed.

"The Living Quarters are a dead end. We must find the Meat Factories and their Warp Runes. The labs are our only way out." Phloria said after explaining everyone Quylla's discoveries about the Mana reactor.

The group nodded, and while the array slowly collapsed, they started moving along the east corridor and destroying the surveillance devices on their path. They were aware that it was a double-edged move, but it was their only option.

On one hand, it meant giving away their position, since magical items didn't break down on their own. On the other hand, in the case of retreat, the Odi and their minions wouldn't be able to trace them.

"We need to make haste." Professor Gaakhu said. "If we don't get far away enough before the array collapses our back with be expos..."

As Lith inwardly cursed her for jinxing their situation, the array disappeared, replaced by two Flesh Golems on their back plus two more in front of them. More would have been unable to move along the hallway.

This time it was the group suffering a well-staged ambush. The constructs didn't try to get close to their prey but unleashed a powerful bolt of lightning in unison. The electricity traveled through the metal comprising the whole corridor.

Each time it reached a fellow Golem, the lightning would be absorbed, released, and amplified, allowing the four constructs to create a devastating electrical formation in just a split second.

Lith and Morok jumped to avoid the shock, activating a float spell to stay away from the ground. Neshal activated another Earth Blocking array she had prepared while using her Crown Staff to absorb the enemy's spells before they could reach her.

Phloria managed to cover the ground below her feet with the stones stored inside her dimensional amulet just in the nick of time, dragging Quylla above it with her.

Chapter 698 Dreadnought Part 2

The rest of the expedition team wasn't so lucky. They had many spells at the ready and even more protections, but their reflexes failed them. Once the electrical shock sent them into a seizure, they lost their focus and so any chance to counter-attack.

The Earth Blocking array only slowed down the Golems. They were still able to move thanks to their metal parts and electromagnetic fields, plus it did nothing to stop them from using other elements.

The Rangers darted forward with their flight spells, only to be struck by another bolt of lightning first, and then swatted like flies by the Golems' arms. With so little momentum and no ground below their feet, they could exert only a fraction of their true strength.

Luckily, thanks to earth fusion, Lith managed to avoid the brunt of the damage and remain conscious, but the hit was still strong enough to crack his ribs. Bouncing on the metal corridor made things worse, though.

Suddenly, more Golems appeared, flying in the middle of the group and collecting the Professors who had fallen unconscious or were about to. No matter how good their protections were, they couldn't endure such prolonged shock with an already debilitated body.

In the blink of an eye, Yondra, Gaakhu, and Ellkas were brought away and disappeared through a dimensional door opened right past the array. Then, the two new Golems moved to stun and collect the remaining women.

'Sons of a gun!' Lith thought while his teeth clattered due to the electric shock. 'The first four constructs are just a living array. The real threat comes from the other two. These Golems are damn smart.'

'It's worse than that.' Solus explained. 'They have timed their attack so to not let us stack an Earth and an Air Blocking array. This way, no matter which element blocking formation was cast first, they would have taken us down anyway.'

Overlapping arrays was a complex matter. If not done properly, the first array prevented the second from activating. During their ambush, Solus had taken her time to prepare her Air Blocking array and make sure to not mess with the camp's protection.

The Golems near the Rangers closed in on them, their stone fists ready to turn them into a pulp. Lith and Morok managed to get back in the air, but their situation hadn't improved much.

Meanwhile, Quylla looked at the nearing enemy and noticed something strange. All Golems seemed to be wary of her and somehow puzzled. Their orders were quite contradictory since the young woman had to be apprehended at all costs, but without harming her nor allowing her to touch them.

With earth magic sealed, the golems could only wait that she slipped off the rocks and fell into the stream of electricity. The current was already enough to overcome most enchanted protections, any more might kill the precious specimens on the spot.

Suddenly Quylla remembered Yondra's words and decided to take action. She shapeshifted her shoes off and jumped on the floor, giving Phloria a heart attack. The Golems followed their protocols, halting the attack before it could hurt her.

"Thanks for your kindness." Quylla said while activating both Scanner and Chisel. The Golem tried to dodge her, but its movements based on air magic were too slow compared to her potion-enhanced reflexes.

It tried to push Quylla away but the "do not harm her" command was quite annoying. Meanwhile, the Rangers could finally plant their feet on the ground. Flying in such a confined space was as hard as it was dangerous.

They had no space to maneuver nor to kite their opponents, but it was the only way they had to avoid being electrocuted to death.

"Now what?" Morok asked. Their situation had just gone up from horrible to terrible. The Earth Blocking array prevented them from using dimensional magic and being so close to each other sealed the other elements as well.

"You and Neshal take care of the two in the front, Phloria and I will hold the others back until you're done." Lith said while darting backward.

Now Morok was alone against two Golems, but at least had all the space he wanted whereas his opponents stumbled because of the array. Professor Neshal was trying to think of a way to help him, but her staff was holding an insane amount of energy she had no idea how to get rid of.

Hitting the Golems with their own spell would have just recharged them, hitting the floor would have killed her companions, which left her with no choice.

"Dodge!" Neshal said while unleashing the mother of all lightning right in the middle of the constructs. It moved past the corridor and turned around the corner guided by Neshal's will, who hoped to have blasted open a door.

Now that she had her full focus again, she started chanting a spell as her staff floated in front of her, leaving her hands free.

'I really hope the old bat knows what she is doing.' Morok sighed as the air in front of the Golems was turning pitch black. Some powerful darkness spell was about to be activated and he had no way to counter it.

Meanwhile, Quylla had grabbed the construct in front of her and used four Chisels to destroy as many runes as she could in one go. Conjuring so many at once was exhausting, but she couldn't

afford to take down just one rune at a time.

The punch that had almost killed her was vivid in her memory, so she decided to gamble on the Skinwalker armor to protect her in case the Golem's priority changed and it attacked her.

Just as she had predicted, as soon as the creature was deactivated, its companion took off its gloves and sent a powerful shock to make her faint. Quylla pumped her mana into her armor, deflecting most of it while she tried to grab her next victim.

The Golem welcomed her with a fist to the face. It knew that with such a level of protection she wouldn't die, Quylla had fallen for its trap. She took the full force of the improvised counter-strike and her body bounced with a silvery sound against the wall before collapsing like a rag doll on the floor.

Phloria stared at the scene in horror, but there was nothing she could do. Her estoc was pointless against golems and even her best spells inflicted them no damage. She could only slow them down, but without earth magic, most of the spells in a Mage Knight's arsenal were sealed.

Lith arrived just in time to see the Flesh Golem picking up Quylla's body and take flight. The face of the human grafted on the construct was smiling. Now that it had its prize they were limited no more.

Its body glowed before emitting a sphere of darkness as big as the corridor, making it impossible for Lith to dodge.

'Nice thinking. If I just go through the spell at full speed, I'll be blind for a second, take some damage, and let the spell strike both Neshal and Morok down. Too bad that cheating is a game two can play.'

Lith breathed a burst of Origin Flames which devoured the darkness spell, allowing him to pass the black shroud unharmed. The Golem kept smiling, emitting one pulse after the other and forcing Lith to a halt.

Chapter 699 Fugitive Part 1

'Either that man has gone crazy due to the prolonged agony, or he enjoys his work.' Solus pointed out. 'The other Flesh Golems are way less creative because they limit themselves to follow their commands whereas this guy is doing his best.'

It was indeed a smart strategy. Just like true mages, constructs didn't need to chant. Even better, they could use some of their abilities freely, without even wasting time weaving spells like Lith did.

By using wide darkness pulses, the Golem was making sure that Lith was forced to either exhaust all of his spells or doom the other two humans behind him. Normally, Lith wouldn't have cared much for either Neshal or Morok, but without them, he would have to face three Golems instead of one.

This time math was a harsh mistress.

To make matters worse, the black pulses were packed so close that Lith had to resort to alternate spells and Origin Flames to not get overwhelmed.

The Golem noticed the human's absurd casting speed and soon grew tired of that game. It turned around to leave, but its body refused to move. Quylla had just finished destroying five of the runes forged in its life force.

She had just played possum, taking her time to incapacitate the opponent while saving as much mana as she could. Between the tier five spells and the beating she had taken, her energy reserves were dangerously low.

"They are both helpless!" She said to Lith who granted the first Golem a swift death while making sure that the sadistic construct would suffer as much as its body allowed it to.

Quylla was really curious about how Lith seemed to be able to always find power cores at his first strike, but in that moment she didn't care. Phloria was about to fall and there was nothing either of them could do.

"Is there really nothing useful you can do?" Morok said while nullifying two darkness pulses with as many spells he had at the ready. "Seriously, if you can't fight, why go to a dangerous city and put innocent Rangers in danger instead of spending quality time with your grandkids?"

He had tried to physically attack the Golems, but they kept him at bay by shooting spells non-stop. Corridors were truly a nightmare for him since ice lances would shatter against the walls and release razor-sharp shards that were almost impossible to dodge.

Fireballs would produce enough noise and light to make him blind and deaf. Morok had managed to survive the last few exchanges only thanks to his enchanted protections and the fact that the Golems seemed to be more interested in taking Neshal alive than killing him.

Whenever he got close to her, they would lower the output of their attack. Morok would have gladly abandoned her if not for the fact that once the old bat had fallen, so would the array. Also, he didn't have anywhere to run. There were even more Flesh Golems on the other end of the corridor.

"Ekidu!" Morok said as his hammers turned pitch black before he lunged them into the incoming darkness blasts to nullify the Golems' spell.

"Please, there's no need to rush, granny. I wouldn't want you to sweat." His voice oozed sarcasm.

The Rangers were doing their best, but their spells were useless and by coordinating their attacks, the Golems made it impossible for Lith to get close enough to touch them or for Morok to hit them.

Whenever one of them came too close, the constructs would just electrify their bodies and push them back. Phloria had managed to hold that long only thanks to the Skinwalker armor's defensive abilities that covered her in Orichalcum every time she infused it with enough mana.

Otherwise the constant onslaught of spells they had inflicted upon her would have made her collapse. The worst thing about facing a Golem in such an environment was their lack of a weak point coupled with their ability to instantly cast spells.

Once again Lith suffered from having lost the Gatekeeper. He could see the power cores, he could get close enough to strike at them, but none of his prototype weapons could withstand the mana necessary to pierce through the constructs' body.

Both teams were fighting a losing battle, where the enemy would relentlessly move forward while they were forced to step back. The Golems were constantly sending streams of lightning to each

other and the nearby walls, creating an electrical curtain that prevented their prey even from escaping.

"We could Blink to safety, if not for your stupid array!" Morok said to Neshal once he and Lith were back to back. "Since I'm going to die, please be honest with me. Whose side are you really on?"

"Will you shut the fuck up?" Neshal roared while slamming her staff on the ground and releasing the spell she had painstakingly prepared despite all of his yammering. "Destroy them, now!"

Neshal knew that, for a mage, keeping more than one array at the ready was impossible and so it was casting a second one for another mage without them taking their time to study how the first mage had organized their formation.

That because in the case two arrays were to overlap badly, the second one would simply fade into a waste of mana. Since in battle there was rarely the time to cast a second magical formation, Neshal had devised a way to use her own spell as a framework for the following array.

By making use of the runes they had in common, she could shorten the cast time at the expense of the duration of both magical formations. When the Air and the Earth Blocking array overlapped, the Flesh Golems fell face-first on the ground.

Lith struck one of them while Quylla and Morok did the same, yet soon the group was forced to run. The Golems were paralyzed, but far from helpless. They emitted a thick darkness fog from their bodies that almost killed both Quylla and Morok.

Lith had struck down the power core of his mark, so at least one construct was unable to retaliate, leaving them enough space to get to safety. Lith had to take on his shoulders his two fallen comrades while they sprinted away as fast as they could.

Right after darkness magic, the constructs had started to unleash spells in random directions, exploiting the corridor's confined space that made any area of effect spell impossible to dodge.

"Can we really afford to leave them alive?" Lith asked. He and Solus were racking their brains to find a way to destroy the temporarily paralyzed constructs, but to no avail.

Lith had yet to heal his wounds and even once he did, such a powerful layer of darkness magic would have likely killed him even with the Skinwalker armor's boosted protection.

That if he managed to get past the barrage of explosions that were ravaging the corridor.

"No, but killing them will drain my last energy. Do you think you can protect us all until we recover?" Neshal asked.

"No." Lith shook his head.

"Oh, well. I've lived long enough." Neshal took what looked like three giant nails out of her dimensional amulet, starting to chant another spell. She was so weak that her breath was ragged and from time to time she had to hold on her staff to not fall

Chapter 700 Fugitive Part 2

The Flesh Golems were close enough that a small array was enough to cover all of them, shortening the length of Neshal's chant and requiring less mana.

As soon as it was complete, their power cores became visible despite the darkness shrouding the Golems. A wave of Neshal's hand deactivated her arrays and sent the three nails flying at their targets at such a speed that the air deformed at their passage.

The enchanted items made short work of the construct's protections and pierced through their cores. Then, they absorbed the lingering energy of their master's arrays and injected it inside the Golems, killing them on the spot.

"Feel free to leave me here." Neshal said while collapsing on the floor.

Lith had no time to ask her what she had done exactly and why she hadn't done that earlier. First, he had to treat Quylla and Morok, who were in a desperate condition. The massive dose of darkness element at point-blank range had aggravated their wounds and crippled their vitality.

After stabilizing them, he and Phloria were the only ones still conscious, and that only because Phloria had left most of her wounds untreated. Without her shield, she couldn't block the Golems' attacks, which had resulted in her taking quite a beating.

Several shards of ice were still edged in her left side, a fireball had burned part of her hair and turned the right side of her face red. She had no more eyebrows and her right eye was veiled.

Under her armor, her skin was a collection of burn marks due to all the electricity she had endured, yet she was still standing.

"Oh, fuck it." Lith said, placing his hands on her shoulders while chanting gibberish. He fully invigorated her, making Phloria feel as if she had just woken up from eight hours of sleep.

All of her wounds had disappeared and even her hair was back. Phloria was too tired to be shocked, so she simply accepted that blessing and waited for an explanation.

"I need your help." Lith said instead. "I can't carry them all by myself and take care of the security measures at the same time. I'm not leaving Quylla here and these two are needed for our survival."

"Just one question." Phloria replied. "What use could they possibly have in such a state? Wouldn't it be better if you recharged everyone now? What good are your secrets if the Odi get their hands on our bodies?"

"I'll take my chances." Lith said.

Before they moved towards the research area, Phloria put her rocks back inside her pocket dimension. They advanced slowly, destroying the cameras on their passage to prevent the Odi from spying on them.

Quylla wasn't the only one who had thought about playing possum. Manohar's reckless act to find out Thrud's hidden fortress had been a hot topic for quite some time.

The moment the Golems had surrounded them, Yondra knew that struggling was pointless, so she had used her resources to not lose consciousness and had let the construct take her.

'We are too much at a disadvantage, fighting can only buy us so much time. This way, instead, I can find out what happened to Rainer and get behind the enemy lines in a single move.' She thought.

Quylla had explained to her how to defeat the Golems, so Yondra had used that time to Scanner her captor and the moment he had brought her in front of the cells, she had struck at its runes with Chisel.

It was enough to paralyze but not to kill it. To do that, she needed to employ much more crude methods. Time was of the essence, so she just stabbed with her most powerful enchanted blade all of the Golem's stone parts until she cracked its power core.

It was a feat that would have been impossible if the construct wasn't completely helpless. Knowing that she didn't have much time, Yondra used her detection spells to check for the presence of surveillance systems and study the cell's door.

Her aim was to rescue Rainer and then find a way out of there. She would have loved to help Lith and the others as well, but Yondra wasn't so naïve to think that she could manage to do everything by herself.

Like everything else, the underground prison was made of metal and its doors were made of some kind of reinforced glass to allow to look inside. The cells clearly weren't meant for prisoners so much as for specimens.

There was no bed nor bathroom, only glowing red chains from which the Odi's victims were hung to the wall. Yondra looked at Ellkas and Gaakhu, lying unconscious at her feet, wondering if they could be of any use to her.

It took her just a second to decide to heal them just enough to wake them up.

'I can't read the Odi language and if things turn for the worse, I can always use them as a diversion.' Yondra thought.

She didn't wait that her colleagues recovered and started looking around for her beloved Assistant. Each cell was made to contain up to four specimens, so the missing members of the expedition were held into two different cells.

One for the soldiers and the other for the Assistants.

After disposing of the security cameras, Yondra was quite surprised to discover that there were no protections on the doors. The only thing restricting the prisoners was the same chains that had been used to imprison the Abomination-disease hybrid.

The youths were all awake. Some were pale from the fright, while others had their eyes red from the crying. Rainer was among the former, yet his face regained color when he saw Yondra.

"Seriously? I get that you are scared but with your hands and mouth free how could you have chosen to remain here?" She loved Rainer like a son, but the idea that terror had led him to sit idly enraged her beyond what words could express.

One thing was being meek, being stupid was another thing entirely.

"I tried to escape, but these goddamn chains block my magic." Rainer conjured a small wisp of light before the chains started to glow. They emitted an ominous pulse of energy that made Rainer's veins bulge as waves of pain ravaged his body.

Yondra felt guilty for her rushed judgment. Rainer had willingly endured that pain to reveal the nature of the magical artifact to his mentor.

"This explains why the hybrid was unable to use anything but physical attacks." Yondra mumbled. Even though she had no time to waste, her scientific curiosity made her cast a few Forgemastering spells to analyze the chains.

'Such knowledge might come in handy in case we get captured again.' She thought in an attempt to justify her actions.

Curiosity was what separated powerful magicians from a mediocre one, just like the brush they used allowed to distinguish between a painter from a whitewasher.

'What in the gods name is this? The chains are able to lock on the life force of their prisoner to nullify their mana flow and to heal them in case of injuries. That's why the magical beasts the Odi captured didn't manage to commit suicide nor the hybrid to escape from the chains. Even amputating your limbs is not an option.'

Yondra was amazed by the cruel ingenuity of such a device, but luckily, it was older than her first diaper. A simple tier four Clean Slate made the red chains open, freeing Rainer.