

## Legion lich 111

### Chapter 111 General Astrus

Athos cannot keep watching for long. He was getting closer and closer to the wall and the arrows were becoming more and more constant, so he needed to do his best not to get hit.

Hive hawks were in a better situation, as their small size was difficult to achieve and night shrouded their figure. Athos was irritated by the constant attacks, but he was already getting a headache from quickly conjuring all the wind platforms and his mana was still not recovered.

He took short breaks while gathering the slimes in the sewers to regenerate his mana, but he still spent a good chunk of it conjuring four hot air tornadoes, even though three of them were incomplete.

Athos finally reached the top of the wall, getting too close for the ballistae to hit him. Archers fired normal arrows at him, but a wind shield redirected all arrows, even those imbued with abilities.

He wasted no time fighting and broke through the wall. Athos landed on the ground and used the lightning impulse to quickly flee the scene. The ballistae took some time to turn, but the archers' arrows rained down behind him, even though the soldiers knew it would be useless.

Countless soldiers prepared to descend and give chase, but their superiors forbade them. "It's useless to give chase to him. Let's focus on helping the fleeing soldiers and merchants. Keep the minimum number of soldiers to guard the wall and the rest come down to help!"

"Yes sir!" The soldiers responded before carrying out their orders.

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"We're finally here." Emilia spoke as she reached the top of the fortress. The top of the fortress was a huge, circular courtyard with two watchtowers on either side. There were weapons piled up in one corner and burn marks and cracks all over the floor, so it was likely that mages and high-ranking soldiers would use this place as a training arena.

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The fog of darkness did not reach that place, as the light mages conjured shields of light and blocked the way, but Emilia and Caio killed all five. It was pretty simple. The mages couldn't see through the fog of darkness, so Emilia and Caio just conjured two spears of corrupted mana each and hurled them at them, hitting four of the five mages at once.

The spears hit them in the abdomen or chest and didn't kill them instantly, but still incapacitated them enough for Emilia and Caio to have an easy time with them. The latter tried to run while surrounded by barriers of light and the cloak itself barrier, but their combined attacks finished him off.

They had to leave the corpses behind unfortunately, as it took time to turn someone with the light attribute into undead, which they didn't have.

"There they are! Kill the undead!" The soldiers in the watchtowers shouted as they surrounded them, but Emilia paid them no heed as Caio only sighed in irritation.

He held his sword in one hand and his wand in the other and ran towards the group on the left. The soldiers drew their weapons and tried to fight, but Caio used earth magic to turn the ground where they stepped into mud and throw them off balance, before slashing with his sword as they tried to regain their balance.

Caio was unable to kill them in a single blow, but left deep wounds that necrotized, causing the soldiers excruciating pain. The mana user fared a little better, but Caio managed to cut off one of his legs and left him dying on the floor.

The second group was hesitant after seeing Caio's skill and tried to attack Emilia, but she was even crueler. Emilia used her superior speed to move through the group, before cutting through the gaps in the soldiers' armor.

Small cuts accumulated in the soldiers' armpits and waist, pain slowing their movements as Emilia cut in the same place, increasing the wounds even more. Soon, there was no one standing but her and Caio.

"Should we kill them and transform them?" Caio asked.

"No, just leave them dying on the ground. Our mana is already low and barely enough to use the teleport crystal, we don't have energy to waste on skeletons that will be left behind. Also, if someone climbs up here we can use them as hostages, so they are more useful alive than dead." Emilia spoke, ignoring the groans of pain coming from the soldiers.

In good time, the hive hawk appeared in the sky and approached Emilia, but a spear of light came from below and split the hive hawk in half, the pieces falling onto the training yard along with the crystal.

A white blur rose into the sky and grabbed the spear while it was still in midair, before starting down to the courtyard. General Astrus was mounted on his pegasus, his face contorted into an angry grimace, though it wasn't visible because of his helmet. He descended from the pegasus and stomped on the bones of the hive hawk's spine, while picking up the teleportation crystal.

"My fortress...my soldiers...you will pay for this!" Astrus screamed in rage as he looked around and saw the wounded soldiers on the ground. 'Help them.' He ordered his familiar.

The pegasus obeyed and its feathers began to glow, casting a protective layer over the soldiers and slowly healing the necrotic wounds. The pegasus was a monster with a natural affinity for light, but its power was now limited because of its status as a familiar.

Emilia pointed her wand at him, causing Astrus to raise his guard, but the attack came from below. The hive hawk's skull was still relatively intact and transmitted the spell to the general's feet.

A corrupted mana spear pierced him in the back of the knee, where there was no armor, and tore his leg from the knee down. The general screamed as he fell to the side and dropped the teleport crystal, but the pegasus caught him.

Astrus gritted his teeth and cracked the hive hawk's skull, before casting a healing spell on the stump of the leg.

Emilia and Caio advanced left and right at the same time, both focused on getting their hands on the teleportation crystal. Caio conjured stone spikes just below Astrus, but the pegasus caught him and flew away from the spikes.

Emilia arrived first and grabbed the teleportation crystal, feeding it mana.

“Do not even think about it!” Astrus shouted from above, hurling his spear at Emilia. The spear had an enchantment that created a blade of wind when thrown, allowing it to fly even faster using the vacuum of air.

“Argh!” Emilia jumped back and the spear hit the ground in front of her, releasing a blast of light that seared her bones. “Caio!”

Emilia threw the crystal and Caio caught it in the air. He tried to run towards one of the observation towers, but the pegasus landed in his path and Astrus unleashed a ray mixed with light element at Caio.

“Die!” The white ray split into two smaller rays and approached Caio from the left and right. Caio canceled the attack spell he was preparing and hurriedly conjured an earthen wall to block one of the rays, but the other still hit him.

Caio suffered spasms as the light spread through his bones, destroying the darkness that controls his bones and knocking him to the ground. Caio still maintained control over the teleportation crystal, the crystal continually draining his mana.

It was expensive to fight while feeding the crystal mana, but he had no other choice.

Astrus raised his hand and the spear flew back into his hand, but Emilia gripped the spear, ignoring the pain she felt as she gripped the spear brimming with the element of light. She used the speed of the spear to kick him in the jaw with all her might.

The armor’s light barrier shielded Astrus from the kick, but the impact hurled him against the observation tower wall, causing a spider’s web-shaped crack in the wall. Emilia mounted the pegasus and pierced the back of the head at the same time as she cut her throat, before jumping away.

The pegasus started to neigh and tried to step on Emilia, but she shot two blades of black aura in his face and jumped once more, landing next to Caio. The familiar began to unravel and was absorbed back into Astrus’ body.

‘How much time?’ Emilia asked, never taking her eyes off Astrus. The bones in her right arm, thighs, and ribs were damaged from contact with the light, but she held her ground.

‘Still halfway through.’ Caio replied as he stood up. He released a pulse of darkness to restore his movements to normal, but he still felt kind of sluggish.

‘Let’s go ahead with it then!’ Emilia also placed her hand on the crystal and fed it with her own mana. Two energies with different energy signatures would have conflicted within the crystal, but Caio and Emilia’s signatures were similar enough not to conflict.

“You won’t run away!” Astrus yelled as he got up and ran towards them. A prosthetic leg made of light was in place of his lost leg and although his steps weren’t as steady as they once were, he was still a threat to the skeletons’ current state.

## Chapter 112 Emilia vs Astrus

Emilia grunted as she rose to face Astrus. The general tried to pierce it in the head now that he knew that was its only weak point, while activating the spear's enchantment and making the forked blades glow with the element of light.

Emilia also activated one of the daggers' enchantments and improved its sharpness, before blocking Astrus' charge. Sparks flew as the sound of clashing weapons reverberated through the courtyard, black and white smoke billowing from both weapons.

Astrus tightened his grip on the spear and pressed on Emilia, who couldn't resist and ducked, letting the spear pass over her head as she slid her daggers along the spear's hilt and tried to cut his gloved fingers.

Astrus took a step back and narrowly avoided losing the fingers of his right hand, swinging his spear and attempting a side swing. Emilia jumped back and dodged, launching two blades of dark aura to keep Astrus away.

Astrus blocked it with his spear shaft and lunged again, this time trying to pierce his ribs. Emilia tried to dodge to the side, but Astrus used the piercing aura skill, a spear version of the aura blade.

The piercing aura grazed her ribs, and Emilia responded by hurling one of her daggers at Astrus' forehead. The general just cocked his head to the side and tried to keep pushing.

Now that she only had a single dagger, Emilia was forced to be on the defensive. Astrus looked briefly at the other skeleton and became impatient seeing the teleportation crystal turn almost completely black. He attacked Emilia furiously to try to kill her quickly, but Emilia blocked or dodged all of his attacks.

Losing his cool completely, he activated one of the spear's enchantments, lightning stab. Each stab now released a thin bolt of lightning that left blackened marks on Emilia's bones whenever it hit, but was imperceptible on her dark bones.

Astrus couldn't see any immediate difference, so he got more and more impatient, but Emilia knew she couldn't take any more attacks like that. With a single thought, the dagger she had thrown flew towards her again, aiming for Astrus who was in the way.

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Unlike the generic enchantments that Athos asked for himself, Emilia asked that her daggers have an attraction enchantment that would allow her to retrieve her dagger after being thrown, as she had the habit of throwing daggers to gain space when fighting.

Astrus felt the dagger approach thanks to his helmet's enchantment, which enhanced his perception and activated the armor's light barrier as he tried to pierce Emilia in the head once more.

Emilia blocked him with her dagger and ducked, the lightning nearly knocking the dagger out of her hand and pointing her other hand at knee height. The flying dagger changed direction midway and went through the leg made of light, causing him to fall backwards.

What Astrus failed to realize because of the heat of the battle is that the armor's light shield didn't extend to his conjured leg, so it was an easy target as he didn't put in much mana and just used it to keep himself upright.

Emilia took advantage of her low position and stabbed both daggers into Astrus' groin. The barrier cracked, managing to stop the daggers from going deeper, but not the mana blades. Blades of corrupted mana extended from the daggers and hit the gaps between her thighs and pelvis.

...by a few centimeters, the corrupted mana blades missed the crown jewels.

"Argh!" Astrus screamed in pain and slammed his spear into the ground for support, at the same time he landed a left hook to Emilia's jaw. The punch broke her jaw and if she hadn't jumped back at the last second, it probably would have destroyed her entire skull.

Emilia was flung through the air and crashed into the stone floor, but quickly got up on guard against possible counterattacks, but none came. Astrus fell to the ground shortly after he punched her, unable to stand.

Emilia hit the nerves in her waist and Astrus lost feeling in both legs. He couldn't get up anymore, but he didn't give up the fight. Now that he didn't need to keep his conjured leg and control his movements, Astrus was free to cast magic.

White lightning gathered in his right hand, but a spike of dark earth struck his shield from below and sent him flying.

"I finished!" Caio shouted as he approached Emilia. The teleportation crystal in his hand was almost completely black. Caio purposely avoided participating in the fight and focused only on feeding the crystal, believing that Emilia could buy him enough time.

"Let's go soon!" Emilia spoke, her speech a little affected by the loss of her jaw. Caio nodded and fed the crystal with what little energy it needed to fill it and soon a black sphere surrounded them both, the air around them quickly draining away.

"I won't let you!" Astrus screamed still in the air, hurling his spear at them. The vacuum generated by the rip in space only increased the spear's speed.

Caio squeezed his remaining mana into a makeshift earthen wall, but the spear sliced through like a hot knife through butter. The spear dug into the ground between them and released a bright glow to scorch the undead, but it did nothing to stop the teleportation.

With no other choice, Astrus tried to pull the spear back to avoid losing it, but Caio clung to it desperately and they were finally teleported away.

He fell to the ground without support and gritted his teeth in frustration. Now that the fight was over, he could hear the sound of the soldiers' screams coming from outside and it only made his mood worse.

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A few kilometers away from the fortress, the black sphere appeared with a gust of wind before knocking Emilia and Caio to the ground.

Their ragged bodies fell to the dry grass with a strange sound, before Caio stood up abruptly. The spear he was holding continued to radiate light element even after moving away from the general.

Caio looked curiously at the spear and noticed that just behind the blades, there were two magic stones embedded in the spear. The stones were powering the enchantment with their own energy, so the spear would continue to radiate light until the stone ran out of mana.

“Hey, how long are you going to stand there?” Emilia asked as she stood up and took the teleportation crystal.

“If we leave the spear here, the general will retrieve it as soon as the pursuit begins. I was thinking of taking the weapon with us, but the light is irritating.” Caio explained his idea.

“Wrap the spear in what’s left of our cloaks.” Emilia suggested. Most of the tattered overcoat she was wearing had been destroyed, but she handed over what was left anyway.

Caio did the same and wrapped the spear using the pieces of cloth. It didn’t do much to block the magical light, but it was better than nothing. “Where are we going?”

“Let’s go meet our master. We ran away in a hurry and haven’t decided on a meeting point, but it’s likely that he fled in the direction of the army.” Emilia looked at the sky, trying to use the stars to locate herself.

The army was approaching from the northwest and she started moving in that direction. As she walked, she tried to find traces of Athos, but found nothing. The darkness in the bones of skeletons drained the vitality of everything they touched, so he would leave footprints of dead grass wherever he went.

Emilia had a bad feeling about this, but she ignored it, telling herself that her master was just taking a different route to throw the pursuers off track.

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Athos was currently resting on a hill, regenerating his mana as two hive hawks flew around him. It ran for approximately an hour before stopping.

Athos had sent the third back to the army to inform them that they had succeeded in disabling the large-scale spells and that he would make a slight detour, but would arrive in time for the attack.

He was moving north to where the metal mine next to the fortress was. Athos wanted to take the metal mines before the messengers were sent. The metal mines were a source of funds not just for the stronghold but for the nation itself, so it was obvious they would check this place out.

After finishing restoring his mana and doing the same with the hive hawks, Athos walked for another hour and finally reached the mines. The sun had already risen and it was early in the morning, so the workers at the mine should have started another day’s work by now.

Without the darkness of night to cover him, Athos had to be much more careful approaching. Luckily, the terrain near the mine was uneven and Athos used this to get close enough until he could see the entrance to the mine.

There were a few wooden huts around the only entrance to the metal mines. The soldiers responsible for guarding the mines were already on standby, but something was wrong.

As far as Athos knew, the raw ore was mined here and taken to the fortress where it would be sold to traders, but the number of huts was very small. Athos hoped to find a small mining village, but the huts were only enough for a few dozen soldiers.

A mining cart came out of the mine and Athos understood what was happening.

Chapter 113 Invading the mines

A minotaur was slowly pushing the cart full of ores. It was a white minotaur, so it must have been a female, but it was extremely thin, none of the characteristic demihuman muscles could be seen.

The female minotaur walked unsteadily, before falling to her side and passing out from exhaustion. One of the soldiers approached and spat on her in disgust, before whipping her in the back. The man seemed to be shouting something, but Athos did not understand because of the distance.

'I understand. They enslaved demihumans and used them as miners. Demihumans are strong and robust thanks to the heritage of the giants, so they are excellent for heavy work and there is no cost other than food. But I don't see any housing for slaves. Do they sleep outdoors?' Athos wondered, but the truth was far crueler.

The demihuman tribes attacked the strongholds 5~6 times a year and were almost always defeated. They were rarely able to successfully conquer a stronghold, but the stronghold was quickly taken back by the humans, as the demihumans did not know how to use the stronghold's large-scale spells.

Many demihumans were killed during the attacks, but the survivors were captured and enslaved. Many of them were bought by slave traders, but all the slaves captured by the platinum fist fortress ended up here.

Soldiers treated demihumans worse than cattle, feeding them once every other day and forcing them to work 18 hours a day. Slaves had no place to sleep, being forced to sleep inside the mines.

Deaths inside the mines were common, but the numbers were always replenished, so there were no problems for the humans. Even with such treatment, the demihumans were unable to resist.

Slave collars were placed around their necks and forced them to obey. The collars drained mana from the demihumans' cores and kept them permanently empty, making them weak and lethargic. If the slaves disobeyed the orders received, the collars would drain the slaves of their life force, causing extreme pain and shortening their lifespan as long as the slave did not obey.

A second ore cart appeared and a black minotaur was pushing it, but he dropped the cart when he saw the white minotaur on the ground. He tried to run to her body, but the soldier whipped him in the face and yelled something.

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The male minotaur grabbed the female minotaur's body and shook her violently, but the collar glowed and the minotaur began to convulse on the ground. Blood began to leak from all his pores as he bled out his life force.

Even so, the male minotaur refused to let go of the female minotaur's body. The lashes continued to rain down on his back, until the soldier stopped as if he had given up and drew his sword, piercing the minotaur in the back.

The minotaur screamed for a few seconds, but the sword precisely hit his heart from behind, as if the soldier was already used to killing demihumans. Other soldiers approached to see the confusion and clicked their tongues, before dragging the bodies somewhere.

The first soldier entered the mines shortly thereafter and returned a few minutes later, followed by two orcs with pickaxes in hand. The orcs took the minotaurs' place and pushed the carts to a carriage, before packing the ores into crates and loading the carriage.

'Interesting. There must be at least a hundred demihumans inside the mines, and they seem weak enough for a single slash from my sword to kill them easily. thought Athos. There were only a few dozen soldiers and Athos had the confidence to kill them all, but it was then that a warning sounded in his mind.

Would the kingdom really leave this metal mine poorly protected like this? When could any bandit attack and steal the metals? Athos knew not, so he decided to wait a little longer. He did not consider the possibility of demihumans attacking this place, as they knew only one way to make war: attack from the front. There was no intelligence gathering, so they would just attack the fortress.

It only took 20 minutes for him to understand why. From the largest of the log cabins, two ogres emerged while yawning. Unlike the other demihumans, these were well fed and looked strong.

They walked around the little village as if they owned the place. Athos noticed that the soldiers seemed uncomfortable with the presence of these two ogres, lowering their heads as they passed. One of the soldiers brought a pig tied up and handed it to the ogres, who quickly ate it for breakfast.

'So that's the reason for so much confidence? Ogres are dangerous enemies according to Treevor, but they are still honorable, as are the other demihumans. How did the humans convince them to switch sides?' Athos wondered.

The truth was, these two ogres were troublesome individuals, expelled from their own clan. They had a bad mentality of trampling on the weak and treating them like a slave, even others of their own kind.

After being expelled from their clan, they wandered aimlessly and unwittingly invaded human territory, where they were easily captured and enslaved, their pride trampled underfoot as beings they considered weak crushed them.

General Astrus bought them and placed them here as extra security and moved most of the soldiers back to the fortress, leaving only the bare minimum necessary for the mines to remain operational. The two ogres valued their own lives more than others of their kind, so they were obedient.

"Well, I've learned enough. Time to kill." Athos spoke aloud with a devious smile. He had no description and ran straight towards the soldiers. The hive hawks split left and right, flying in front of him.

"Hmm?" One of the soldiers noticed Athos running and narrowed his eyes to try to identify him, turning pale quickly. "U-undead!"



His scream alerted all the soldiers, who spotted Athos and panicked slightly as they prepared for the fight. The tattered cloak he used to storm the fortress was accidentally melted into slime acid, so Athos was running around naked at the moment, not that there was much to see.

The two ogres looked disinterestedly at Athos, trying and failing to gauge him with the sight of mana. One of the soldiers yelled for them to get up and deal with the threat quickly, so they obeyed, even if unwillingly.

'Yes, underestimate me and let your guard down. I want you to focus on me and let your guard down.' Athos smiled inwardly as he cast his spells. He released a menacing but harmless black aura to the ogres, focusing all the soldiers' attention on himself.

The first of the ogres placed a hand on his brother's shoulder and spoke something in a language Athos did not understand, before stepping forward and facing the undead. The other ogre took a step back and crossed his arms.

Athos drew his sword and faced the ogre, before turning and running into the soldiers with the lightning impulse active. The ogre stared stupidly at Athos for a second and roared in indignation, running after him.

'Yes, keep following me!' Athos thought as he attacked the nearest soldier. The soldier wasn't able to keep up with his speed and just slashed forward, praying to hit, but Athos cut him in half along with his sword and went on to the next one.

Both sharpness and toughness enhancing enchantments were worth their price. The sword could now cut through iron weapons with frightening ease, allowing Athos to cut soldiers in half nonstop.

The ogre roared seeing the soldiers he was supposed to protect dropping like flies and cursed the humans' incompetence, but the collar around his neck began to activate and reminded him of his urgent situation. The general had left clear orders to protect the mines and the soldiers with their lives, so if the soldiers died, he would soon join them.

The ogre stopped playing and activated gigantification, growing to a height of 10 meters. He absorbed the water element from the winter cold and the earth element abundant in the region, his skin turning stone hard and turning a bluish tinge, the cold air gathering around him.

The second giant prepared to attack and activated the gigantification as well, but the hive hawk appeared behind him as it transformed, transferring a spear of black fire conjured by Athos onto the ogre's back. The soldiers had ignored the hawks in the hive and focused only on the immediate threat. Now, they didn't know whether to fight the skeleton knocking them to the ground, or the skeleton casting magic from the sky.

The spear pierced the ogre's back and exited its abdomen without resistance, its body continuing to expand regardless of the wounds. His body reached a height of 10 meters, but there was a 60 centimeter hole in his abdomen that spurting blood, the giant fell to the ground holding his wound.

Athos by accident attacked one of the greatest weaknesses of the ogres. During gigantification, their bodies were temporarily vulnerable, so even simple attacks could be lethal.

The first ogre was furious and attacked Athos, releasing fists of aura trying to crush him. The skills were filled with the earth and water elements, so the aura fists were slower and tougher than normal, leaving frost marks where it hit.

Athos easily dodged the powerful but slow fist auras. The soldiers around him not so much. Athos circled among the soldiers, slashing the soldiers' legs and letting the angry ogre's attacks hit the crippled soldiers.

"Hi, what the fuck are you doing??" One of the soldiers yelled, but the ogre was too focused on crushing Athos to care. The necklace was already draining his mana quickly, but the ogre was too furious to think. His brother was still dying on the ground and all he wanted was to crush the undead responsible.

#### Chapter 114 Patriarch

The soldiers had already been reduced to less than 10 and Athos decided he didn't need to play around. He dodged an aura fist aimed at his head and ran towards the mine entrance.

The ogre roared in annoyance, Athos was simply too fast to keep up. He thought for a moment about undoing his transformation to regain his speed, but chose not to. His energy has already dropped to 70% and he still hasn't landed a single hit, so reducing his destructive power wasn't an option right now.

Athos managed to get into the metal mine, almost immediately bumping into a mining cart being pushed around by a minotaur, but it slashed his chest and kept running.

The ogre outside thought about what to do and undid the gigantification, before continuing to pursue Athos. The few soldiers left behind started running for their lives the moment Athos was out of sight.

They didn't dare turn their backs on him because they knew they would die instantly if they did, but now that he's gone, nothing can stop them. The soldiers still watched out for the two hawk skeletons in the hives, so they spread out to increase their chances of survival. The hive hawk would have the advantage of flight, but it could hardly kill them all.

That's what they believed and that's why they despaired of the next action. A black mist spread from the hive hawk onto the mutilated corpses and turned them into black skeletons. The corpses were in bad shape, but there were dozens of them.

Athos had ordered the hive hawks to get rid of the remaining soldiers while he dealt with the ogre in the mines and that was what they were doing. The broken skeletons clung to the fleeing soldiers and knocked them to the ground, before stabbing them with their weapons.

The soldiers tried to escape, but after one skeleton clung to them, five more would jump on them and that would be the end. Three soldiers managed to escape with minimal injuries, but the skeletons pursued them.

No matter how much the soldiers ran, they could not overcome the undead's infinite endurance. Skeletons were also faster than when they were alive, so the soldiers didn't get very far.

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After making sure all the soldiers were dead, the hive hawks focused on the half-dead ogre on the ground and paralyzed orcs near the chariot. The orcs tried to fight the moment the fight started, but their orders were only to load the chariot.

The hive hawks informed Athos that they had already finished the soldiers and Athos sent incomplete spells for them to finish the enemies. fireballs and blades of wind rained down on the demihumans.

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Athos did not run long after entering the mines. Once he confirmed that the ogre had reduced his size, he turned and ran at the ogre, aiming for his knee with his sword. There was no other choice, as he could barely reach the ogre's waist.

The ogre let the attack hit, relying on the bronze body skill and tried to crush the skeleton's head with a point-blank fist aura.

Athos conjured a fireball in front of his body and detonated, propelling himself backward and avoiding the blow by a hair. The cold air still chilled her bones, making her take two steps back to gain distance.

The ogres possessed an ability derived from gigantification, called the elemental ability. They could draw the elements abundant in the world's energy into their abilities, creating the inferior version of hybrid abilities with magic.

On the one hand, his attacks would receive special effects, but on the other, the effects would depend on the environment and the ogre would not have control, so it was an unreliable ability.

Athos looked at the wound in the ogre leg and frowned dissatisfied. The cut wasn't serious and it was barely bleeding.

'Tch. The sword manages to cut him, but if I get too close, he'll crush me. His range is much greater than mine, so it's better to distract him with melee attacks and deal damage with magic.' Athos assessed the enemy and decided.

'Weak but fast skeleton. It's like a light rat. I need to make him stand still.' The ogre also sized him up. But in a slightly more simplistic way.

The ogre roared again and ran towards Athos, using his knife-like hands to fire blades of aura this time. He didn't try to hit Athos directly, but tried to cut off his escape routes while trying to crush him with his body.

Athos retreated at the same speed as the ogre advanced, blocking the aura's blades with his own sword. He cast spells and waited for the right moment to cast, sending some when the hawks in the hive asked.

The ogre felt his own mana dry up quickly and began to sweat, feeling threatened. He stopped wasting precious mana in vain and slammed both his fists against the ground, using the heavy strike skill.

Cracks spread across the floor as the entire mine shook, dust and debris falling from the ceiling. The earth element in the skill caused a small earthquake that threatened to bury them both alive.

“You crazy motherfucker!” Athos yelled angrily, hurling his sword at the ogre’s forehead, but the latter just turned his head to the side and dodged. The sword plunged into the ceiling and seemed firmly stuck.

The ogre laughed at what he thought was panic on Athos’ face, but could only bow his head in confusion as the skeleton began to laugh. Athos pointed his right arm at the ogre’s head, and only then did the latter realize that his hand was nowhere to be seen.

Black lightning flashed from his severed wrist and made the ogre go on alert, but a whirring noise came from behind and a bolt of lightning struck him in the back of the head.

Athos had thrown his own hand along with his sword, so he could use his lightning connection spell. The second bolt struck the ogre in the middle of the forehead a second later, frying what was left of its brain and killing it instantly.

‘Ufa. That was a good workout for when we travel to the demihuman empire. It’s not often you get the chance to face an ogre face to face. Athos thought with satisfaction, before turning to the tunnels and yelling. “How about you guys stop sneaking around and revealing yourself altogether? Or would you rather I force you to reveal yourself?”

For a few seconds there was only silence in the tunnels, but then the sound of footsteps was heard. Dozens of shadows emerged from the tunnels and revealed themselves to him. Athos had only entered the surface of the mines, but it seems that there were several tunnels that split like a labyrinth.

Orcs, goblins, minotaurs, and kobolds appeared, carrying pickaxes and wearing rags for clothing. They were weak and thin, but their faces were resolute. The slave collar was gone, only the mark on their necks was still visible.

Athos conjured lightning and was about to kill them, when all the demihumans fell to the ground. Athos froze not knowing what to do, the lightning fading from his hands.

“What are you doing?” he asked after some time had passed and the demihumans had given no signs of getting up. One of the female minotaurs raised her head just enough to look into Athos’ eye sockets, but refused to get up.

“We are the only ones alive in these mines. All our clans have been destroyed and we are all that remains. We were captured by humans and forced to work like cattle, just waiting to die while we were forced to watch our peers die uselessly at the hands of humans, only for more of us to be brought here to suffer the same fate.” The female minotaur spoke the human language perfectly, making Athos’ jaw nearly drop to the floor.

She was actually the matriarch of a minotaur clan, but most of her people were wiped out. She was sent to the mines over 5 years ago and saw all the minotaurs she considered family die of starvation, exhaustion or just because one of the humans was bored and wanted to torture one of them for fun.

“But you freed us. You killed all the humans who held us and released the leash that held us captive. I owe you my life and I intend to join you and follow you in your every step.” The female minotaur spoke and bowed once more, banging her forehead on the ground until the tips of her horns were buried, a minotaur’s greatest form of submission.

“Err... I think you’re confusing some things. I didn’t come here to save you, I came here to kill you all. It’s weird to kill you all while bowing to me, so mind trying to fight back or at least try to run away?” Athos asked uncomfortably.

“We have already decided to serve you, patriarch. Nothing can change our decision.” The female minotaur spoke resolutely, not even blinking when Athos mentioned killing them all.

“Listen, I’ll make you serve me, but only after I kill you. I’m an undead, I can’t let the living serve me, but you’ll still serve me after I kill you.” Athos tried to convince her, but the female minotaur seemed to have come to a strange conclusion.

“I see, the patriarch is an undead, so we need to die in order to join you, don’t we?” The female minotaur came to a conclusion and before Athos could say anything, she turned around and started yelling something in a language Athos didn’t understand.

A light of understanding spread through all the demihumans and they took any sharp tools or stones they could find before committing suicide.

#### Chapter 115 Back to the army

Athos had underestimated a demihuman’s loyalty. The moment Athos killed the soldiers holding them captive, he immediately became their leader. They were already determined to follow him to death, dying in order to follow him would not be a problem.

He can only sigh and surrender with that level of stubbornness. Athos conjured up the undead mass raising and turned everyone into undead. The black chains invaded their minds without resistance, as the demihumans were yearning for it. Even before their bones completely darkened, their minds had already been corrupted.

The skeletons regained their senses and immediately knelt before him.

“Haah... Are there any other prisoners in these mines?” Athos asked as he ceded control of the demihumans to the female minotaur so she could answer him.

“No...they’re all...here, patriarch.” The female minotaur replied. There were a total of 130 goblins, 146 kobolds, 34 minotaurs and 15 orcs, including those outside the mines when Athos invaded.

Honestly, they were more than Athos expected. The mines were much larger and deeper than he had thought. The power of the demihumans was also surprising. Most of the goblins and kobolds were in the first layer, with a few in the second layer, but all the orcs and minotaurs were in the second or third layer, with the female minotaur in the fourth layer.

“I don’t have equipment for you at the moment, so you should gather tools to fight.” Athos suggested and the goblins and kobolds obeyed, but the minotaurs and orcs remained in place.

“We don’t need...these tools...to fight...our bodies...are more...than...enough.” The female minotaur spoke on behalf of all.

“I see. Well, other than this guy there’s nothing here for me, so let’s go.” Athos spoke, turning the ogre into an undead and leaving the mines. Incidentally, the ogre skeleton was only in the second layer, so it wasn’t as strong as Athos thought.

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Outside the mines, the hawks from the hives were waiting for him with all the skeletons behind them and the corpses on the ground. Athos lifted all the corpses before looking in the direction the soldiers were dragging the corpses of the two minotaurs as he watched.

There was a ditch a few dozen meters from the mines filled with rotting demihuman corpses. Athos used the vision of death on all of them, but with the exception of the two minotaurs, everything else was useless.

‘Unfortunately, I don’t have time to carry more corpses. I’ll leave them behind and come back for them after I’ve taken the keep. Athos thought as he lifted the minotaurs. He checked his own core and realized that he was not yet ready to form a new layer.

“I had already accumulated enough life force to form a new layer when I was in the villages, so all the 8,000 people I killed after that must have brought me closer to the third layer. How many more do I need to kill to form a new layer?” Athos wondered inwardly, but found no answer.

He soon stopped thinking about it, as he had a simple way to solve the problem. Kill more people and turn them into undead. “We’re going to march a little to the west and meet up with the rest of the army. From there, we’re going to storm the platinum fist stronghold.” Athos spoke to the demihumans around him, who quickly began to obey.

Halfway there, Athos turned to the female minotaur as if he had just realized his mistake and asked, “Hey, what’s your name again?”

The female minotaur froze when she realized her mistake and immediately prostrated herself on the ground. “My most... sincere apologies... for my mistake... my name... is Vanilla... patriarch.”

“Oh. The pun was good, but it’s a shame it doesn’t work anymore.” Athos spoke, looking down at his dark bones.

“Pun?” Vanilla repeated confused. She didn’t know all the words of human language, so the joke went unnoticed.

“Well, never mind.” Athos spoke and they spent the rest of the walk in silence. It took a few hours of walking before Athos reached the army.

“Master! I was worried!” Emilia screamed as Athos approached, looking for wounds all over his body, despite knowing he would be healed by now.

“You worried us, master. Why risk it alone instead of meeting with others?” Gaius also approached him and asked.

“Well, the metal mines wouldn’t attack themselves and if we tried to attack it after we took the fortress, it was likely to be empty when we arrived.” Athos responded as if it was the logical thing to do, but his subordinates strongly disagreed with his logic.

“Even if it was the right thing to do, it was still very reckless.” Emilia complained, but Treevor got between them angrily and interrupted the conversation.

“Can we resume the march? The chief’s recklessness is chronic and incurable, so it’s no use trying to talk. And from what I can see, he seems to have gotten some good soldiers.” Trevor spoke and ended the discussion.

“My lord, there is something I want you to see.” Emilia spoke walking away and getting into one of the carriages, before returning carrying a cloth-covered spear. She removed the cloth slightly and showed it to Athos.

“Where did you get that?” Athos asked in disgust, the spear’s overflowing light element causing a strong repulsion. The spear had long ago stopped radiating light, but the pure element of light still sent goose bumps on his skin.

“It’s the general’s spear. He intercepted us as we tried to flee and we ended up fighting. We lost the hive hawk skeleton, but we managed to steal his spear and kill his familiar.” Emilia explained proudly.

“Hoo...” Athos sighed in surprise and patted her head to congratulate her. “You did very well, I’m glad you survived. Save the spear for now, I’ll try to corrupt it when I have time.” he ordered.

Vanilla’s demihumans and soldiers mingled among the army as Athos assumed his command position at the center of the army. They resumed their march and half an hour after dark, reached the fortress.

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In the Iron Fist Stronghold a few hours ago.

“,,This is a disaster.” Astrus said disappointed, seeing the desperate expression on the faces of the mages in front of him. They were court mages who specialized in runesmithing and they had just finished assessing the damage done to the control room. He was completely healed, but his pride as a general was in tatters.

“Unfortunately, it cannot be fixed right away, General. The control pedestal was completely destroyed and the undead that exploded damaged all the runes on the walls. None of these were destroyed, but their effectiveness was severely reduced.” The mage reported in a sad voice.

“Is there anything that can be done?” Astrus asked. He knew very little about magic, so he ignored the wizard’s explanations.

“As I said, there is nothing we can do now. Even if the pedestal were rebuilt and enchanted again, the new runes would not be linked to the runes around the walls, they would be unable to activate the wall barrier.”

“We need to undo all the runes in the room and rebuild the pedestal, before runesmithing it all over again.” The wizard sighed at the end of the sentence, thinking of all the work they would have to do. He envied the order mages who knew how to repair and add runes to already crafted items.

The order kept its secrets in absolute secrecy, despising court mages as a cheap imitation of their own organization. Court mages didn’t have as many talented members or nearly limitless resources as the order seemed to have, so they were far behind when it came to magical research.

“Get to work then. I have other things to take care of, so I must leave for now.” General Astrus withdrew before hearing an answer. As he walked towards the stairs, he looked out the window and saw the entire fortress.

Until yesterday, the fortress was incredibly lively, regardless of the time of day. Soldiers worked 12-hour shifts, so there were always soldiers off-duty looking for entertainment and merchants looking to make a profit.

Now, most of the fortress was ruins. The acid clouds corroded the market, destroying most of the merchants’ products. The deaths in the market were small, but the damage was gigantic.

The armory was also almost completely destroyed, so several soldiers were unarmed in case they came under attack. Ballista ammunition was also lost, so with the exception of those already close to the walls for emergencies, they were out of ammunition.

But the biggest loss was in the garrison. Nearly 500 soldiers were trapped inside the rooms before the screams woke the others and they managed to successfully escape, and 137 of them died, with 74 with serious injuries. Soldiers able to manipulate mana broke through the walls of the rooms using their skills, but it took some time as the garrison was an emergency shelter and its walls were sturdy.

The acid cloud released at the training ground was the most harmless, but it moved towards the walls and destroyed several catapults and ballistae. The fog of darkness also caused severe damage to the interior of the fortress. Although he had dispersed some of the fog as he descended the stairs, much had already spread through the halls.

An entire floor where the civilian officers slept was destroyed, their bodies consumed by the darkness to dust. Several patrolling soldiers were also killed, but most fled down the opposite stairs and were saved.

...The truth was that the dust came from the wooden bunks, but the general had no way of knowing that.

## Chapter 116 Reinforcement

Without him realizing it, the general had already arrived at his office. He greeted the soldiers and said he would contact the kingdom so no one should approach.

Astrus entered his office and locked the door behind him, before sighing heavily. He had already made an emergency call informing him of the attack, but he didn’t give too many details and focused on dealing with the aftermath of the attack.

He sat down in his chair and opened the bottom drawer of his mahogany desk. There were only documents in the drawer, but the bottom was fake and inside was a single wooden box with a communication device.

It was a small black cube that fit in the palm of his hand. He fed the cube with mana and a buzzing sound sounded for 5 seconds before the other side connected. A circle of light shone on top of the cube and a hologram appeared.



A royal scribe answered the call and immediately asked him to detail the situation of the fortress and how much damage it had suffered. He spent nearly an hour reporting it all and the scribe frowned as he listened but said nothing.

Contrary to what most commoners thought, scribes were not only responsible for writing the laws. They could also act as representatives of royalty in domestic affairs. It was a way for royalty to sneer at servants who failed important missions, saying that it was beneath them to deal with incompetents and that a scribe would suffice.

Royal scribes worked directly under the royal and had access to almost all important information about the kingdom, so it was only natural that they would hold an important position. There were no ministers for internal affairs as the nobles were almost autonomous in their territories and the scribes were responsible for resolving most matters.

The king only had to worry about the truly important matters, like dealing with his harem or the internal power struggle.

“So the undead escaped, as did the one responsible for creating the acid cloud? The large-scale spells, the only thing keeping the fortress standing in the face of constant attacks from the demihuman savages, completely inoperative? And to top it off, was the general still defeated in battle?” the scribe asked disdainfully.

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Despite Astrus being a general in the army, the scribe was currently representing royalty and therefore his position was superior. Also, the general’s great failure left his current position at best uncertain, so all he could do was duck his head so the scribe wouldn’t see the murderous light in his eyes.

“Yes sir, I have no excuses for my mistake.” The general spoke.

‘What a headache.’ The scribe thought. ‘According to the general’s report, the mage who attacked the small town of Faltra and the mage who attacked the fortress are the same person or at least they are linked, but there are some things that don’t fit together.’

‘The methods and timing between attacks are simply too different to make any sense. The distance between Faltra and the Iron Fist Fortress is only a few days by chariot, so there’s no point in waiting that long for a second attack.’

‘But if these attacks are not orchestrated by a single person, that raises other questions. Who and why? These attacks make no sense and only cause destruction, there is no gain for anyone.’ The scribe wondered for a while, but had no idea.

A necromancer’s attack on a stronghold made sense. There was already a precedent for this. Necromancers trying to gather soldiers’ corpses for experiments and targeting distant fortresses had already taken place. How he invaded the fortress was still unclear, nor how he managed to create and control undead powerful enough to fight the general, but it was still within reach.

But why kill several soldiers, cause massive damage to the fortress and then just run away? The lack of logic was giving the scribe a headache. Before he could share his thoughts with the general, someone began hurriedly knocking on the general’s office door, causing the latter to frown in annoyance.

'I ordered no one to disturb my meeting. Someone's head is going to roll over this.' The general spoke before apologizing to the scribe. "I'm sorry, I'll scold my subordinates right away, so--"

"Let them in. It seems to be important." The scribe spoke and increased the cube's sound pickup, making sure he could hear the conversation.

The general nodded and shouted for them to come in and a soldier immediately opened the doors and shouted. "General, it's an emergency. An undead army is approaching the keep. They should arrive later today, just after dark."

"What??" The general and the scribe shouted at the same time, but for different reasons. The general gritted his teeth realizing that the invaders were just an advance team and that the real army was on the way, while the scribe was wondering how an army had moved within his territory without them knowing.

'How did an army appear near the borders without anyone noticing? Besides, how did he manage to gather so many corpses?' The scribe wondered as he leafed through some papers in front of him, with all the relevant information from the attack on the city of Faltra, when he finally understood.

The messenger arrived in the city two weeks after the attack and there has been no news from the city since. It was quite possible that the city had been attacked again in the meantime and had fallen this time. What if the enemy mage had spent those two weeks turning the city into the undead.

"How many undead are there in the army?" General Astrus asked, interrupting the scribe's thought.

"Approximately 8000, sir. All black skeletons, like the ones seen yesterday. Most skeletons are humanoid, but there are skeleton beasts pulling carriages, as well as several skeleton birds in the sky." The soldier reported.

'The numbers match.' The scribe thought, reading a second report, this one containing information from the city of Faltra. The number of citizens in Faltra was approximately 10,000, and 2000 people had died according to the messenger.

"General, the soldier has already done his duty, so dismiss him for the time being. We need to continue our meeting." The scribe spoke and the general dismissed the soldier, but his expression was not good.

"With all due respect, but I need to leave now to organize an emergency defense, so I'm going to have to stop our meeting here." The general tried to end the call here, but the scribe intervened.

"General, I want you to call me the moment the attack begins. There is an unknown enemy on the borders that has already destroyed a city and somehow also invaded its stronghold. We know that he is a powerful necromancer capable of creating black skeletons and has some knowledge of alchemy, but we don't know anything else about him.

We need to discover the identity of the enemy." The scribe concluded.

The general nodded in agreement, but made a request in return. "Can't you send emergency reinforcements? The fortress won't withstand attacks if there are other powerful undead like the ones that invaded the fortress.

“It is difficult to mobilize many soldiers until nightfall, but I will see what we can do.” The scribe answered uncertainly and ended the call. The fortress usually relied on barriers as its first and main line of defense, the siege weapons and magic of court mages to reduce the number of enemies.

When the demihumans finally broke through the barrier, their numbers would have already been reduced and the army commander would order a retreat to reduce casualties in the army itself. They would also set fire to all food as they retreated, leaving the demihumans only with an empty shell.

A retake force would be formed and they would attack the fortress a few days later. This is how the strongholds have remained to this day and this thought has spread throughout the army and royalty. The constant failed invasions, the idea that the fortresses could be retaken and not necessarily defended tooth and nail, made the kingdom careless with its borders.

It would be a headache to convince those stupid nobles that they needed to send reinforcements quickly and it wouldn't be possible to retreat and counterattack like they always did. Just the thought of dealing with that stupid king and all those stupid nobles made him feel disheartened.

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General Astrus prepared as best he could for the attack, moving most of the catapults and ballistae in the intended direction for the undead army to appear, as well as ordering soldiers to dig and bury alchemical items to form a defensive perimeter. .

The scribe also managed to gather reinforcements, but not as many as Astrus had expected. The nobles didn't take the threat seriously, or didn't want to commit their own forces to something that wasn't profitable for them, but the church pledged to help as soon as they heard that a necromancer had amassed an army.

50 priests and 50 paladins, each paladin leading a unit of 20 crusaders were sent as reinforcements, totaling 1100 fighters. It was all they could muster so quickly, but it was a relief to Astrus. All priests and paladins could use magic from the light element, the weakness of the undead, while crusaders were famous for their fanaticism, so they could be used effectively as shields of flesh.

The spell order didn't move a single mage to help, but they used dimensional crystals to conjure purple portals and send the church troops to the fortress. Purple portals were a variation of teleportation crystals that, instead of teleporting everything within a certain limit, opened a portal and kept it active as long as it was fueled with mana.

#### Chapter 117 The arrival of the army

The fortress forced the purple portals outside the walls, nearly giving the soldiers at work a heart attack. Hours passed and tension mounted among all the soldiers and merchants in the fortress.

The traders initially tried to flee the fortress when they heard they were about to be attacked, but immediately backed off when they learned the attacker's identity. The demihumans didn't chase the fleeing humans, but the undead wouldn't stop as long as there was someone alive.

Being protected within the walls with the army preparing for battle was far better than being alone with just a few guards. All of them were currently ensconced within the fortress.

The general was currently on top of the wall, his silver armor gleaming with light and a longsword at his waist his backup weapon. The undead were not yet visible, but scouts sent to monitor the army and make sure they did not change course informed him that they would arrive soon.

Strangely, the undead army didn't react very strongly to the scouts. They pursued them a bit when they were spotted, but soon gave up and returned to their positions. The supposed necromancer was nowhere to be seen in the army. Some of the mages who had flying familiars tried to investigate from the air, but the skeleton birds killed them all without exception.

They seemed heavily on guard against aerial surveillance.

The sun finally set and the first undead appeared on the horizon. It would be some time before they reached the keep, but the tension between the soldiers on the walls was as if they were already in battle.

"Give me." Astrus reached out to a nearby soldier, using binoculars to watch the undead. The soldier handed him over and he started looking for the undead who fought him, but it was in vain.

These skeletons all looked the same to him and it would be impossible to discern the small details on their weapons. Astrus tried to look for the necromancer, but there was none. He suspected that the necromancer was hiding in one of the carriages.

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He handed the binoculars to the soldier and took a deep breath, but a clang of metal came from under him, on the inner side of the wall. Astrus looked down only to see a soldier hurriedly grabbing his spear and bowing in apology to the others around him.

The general noticed the nervousness in the soldiers around him and decided that this would not be good. He waited for the undead to come a little closer and become visible to all, before standing at the edge of the wall, where all the soldiers could see him.

He coughed once to clear his throat and amplified his own voice with wind magic. "WARNING!"

His magically amplified voice caught the attention of all the soldiers, who immediately jumped into readiness, thinking that the undead had already reached the walls.

"In no time at all, a necromancer leading an army of the undead will reach our walls, the same who attacked our stronghold last night and killed hundreds of our own." Some of the soldiers touched their own limbs, as if they could still feel the acid wounds.

"He has also destroyed our barrier, our greatest defense against the demihuman empire, putting all the people of this realm in danger out of sheer greed and lust for power. He sees us only as resources for his army, nothing more than corpses for your collection." The expressions of some of the soldiers turned slightly terrified, while the priests and paladins grimaced in anger.

"He has already destroyed the small town of Faltra a few days' journey from here, killing all of its innocent citizens, regardless of whether they are men, women or children. This necromancer is ruthless and will not stop until everyone we know and love is dead." The general lied through his teeth. It was

still unknown what happened in the city and it was just a guess by the scribe, but Astrus decided to spread it to the soldiers as if it were the truth to ensure that hatred outweighed their fear.

It worked like a charm. Almost all the soldiers here came from villages and small towns, more than a few dozen came from the city of Faltra itself, so knowing that all the families they left behind were dead came as a shock to them. Screams of rage sounded among the soldiers and Astrus hammered while it was hot.

“Will you allow this assassin to come and take our lives without a fight?! This necromancer to live while their families are dead, sentenced to become the eternal slaves of a madman?” Astrus yelled and the soldiers roared in response.

“Then raise your weapons, my soldiers! Let’s avenge those we’ve lost and protect those we still have! Let’s put an end to this necromancer and stop his madness, so that no one else has to die in vain!” Astrus raised his sword above his head and made it shine, the soldiers did the same as they gave a battle cry.

Astrus nodded in satisfaction and took the black cube before calling the scribe. The call connected immediately, but the scribe was nowhere to be found. Instead of the small office last time, the throne room was in the background, with the king himself seated on the throne and several important figures lined up on either side of the hall.

Members of the royal family, dukes, marquises, the cardinal of the church of Eishin, a master of magic sent by the order, the supreme commander of the kingdom’s army, the head of the royal guard, the chief court mage and...

Nearly every important person in the kingdom was there, their sharp gazes piercing his body. They probably gathered to watch the battle, as if they were watching a show.

Astrus straightened his posture and cleared his throat, turning his face slightly to the right so that the cube’s hologram caught his good side.

“General Astrus, nice to see you. How are things on your side?” King Balfas Mirkor Aske asked from his throne, a disinterested expression on his face. The king was one of the most horrible people Astrus had ever seen in his entire life.

He was a man who looked to be in his late 60s, with blue eyes and light blond hair, at least where there was still hair. The top of his head gleamed as if there was an enchantment of light there, some of the nobles around him needing to look away so the glint of his bald head wouldn’t blind them.

Balfas was an obese man from decades of sedentary lifestyle and compulsive gluttony, to the point of having difficulty moving without the aid of magic. The throne he sat on was made of adamant, one of the strongest alloys of magical metals known to humans. It was a golden metal and was considered the strongest metal physically.

It was well known throughout the nobility that the king had ordered the throne “adapted” to its grandeur more than once and from the way its sides touched both armrests, it was likely that another “adaptation” was on the way.

His clothes were totally tacky and mismatched, it was likely that he wouldn't have liked the ensemble chosen by the castle maids and dressed himself. Balfas was wearing a pure white tunic with gold embroidery over a yellow wool shirt and emerald green pants.

The crown on her head was made of the same metal as the throne and was studded with magic stones. The crown reflected the light from his bald spot and amplified it, increasing the glow to another level.

Balfas was sweating profusely, despite the cold inside the throne room. Astrus avoided looking at him, mainly because the buttons on his pants were undone and he seemed unable to close his legs, none of the surrounding nobles daring to warn him.

"All preparations have been made and the army is ready for combat." General Astrus deactivated the hologram and activated a second enchantment, a kind of peephole. A circle of light appeared in the middle of the black cube and began recording.

Astrus moved the cube so the king could see all the soldiers screaming in rage and then moved it outside the walls towards the undead army. Most of the nobles didn't react much, just raised a questioning eyebrow as to how such a large army could be created so quickly.

"Oh...!" The king exclaimed in surprise, his neck bobbing with every syllable he uttered. Balfas had never seen an undead army or a battle royale, so he was incredibly excited. No good general would waste his mana just to entertain the king, but Astrus was desperate.

The next battle would be bloody and the loss of life would not be small, so he wanted to please the king as much as possible. Astrus tried and failed to find his own brother, the current marquis of the Mifar family among the nobles in the throne room, and that was not a good sign.

"I'll have to command the army, so I'll leave the communication cube with a subordinate and he'll record the entire battle for you." Astrus spoke and handed the cube to a mage, who frowned at the tedious task.

Astrus realized that the undead were already almost within range of the catapults and shouted for the catapults to prepare to fire.

## Chapter 118 Field of the dead

A few minutes ago.

"They look animated." Athos spoke as he looked at the wall. He couldn't see in detail, but a flash of light appeared at the top of the wall and a war cry reached him despite the distance.

Athos is currently mixed among the army, trying to go unnoticed. He's wearing city guard armor and his skin is retracted back onto his body so he looks like just another skeleton.

"The general must be trying to cheer up the army." Emilia answered a few rows away. Caio and Trevor were also nearby, while Sevenus was in the prominent position riding a rock bear with most of the mana users surrounding him. It was a gimmick to keep attention away from the truly important.

Athos had considered spreading his commanders across the army, but chose not to. Unlike humans, he wouldn't need multiple leaders to spread orders, all it took was a thought to do so. Spreading out your best assets would only make them easy targets that could become isolated when the battle gets chaotic.

“In a few minutes we’ll be within range of the siege weapons, stay tuned because I’m going to scream and everyone runs to me, understood?” Athos spoke. Caio and Emilia nodded, but Treevor looked a little wary.

“Are we really going to do this? I mean, I can manage, but the three of you are probably going to die, you know that, right?” He asked just to confirm. He was currently human-sized at 1.90 meters tall, the maximum size the willow could shrink without crushing his real body.

He hated to reduce his size so much, but it was necessary to not stand out too much. Treevor needed to possess the willow, but that would make his body unconscious and he would need to control it like a puppet. The corrupted willow didn’t have the same limitations as his humanoid body and Treevor had to be very careful not to break his bones in impossible moves.

“It won’t be a problem. The three of us are going to work together so we don’t die while you do your job. Look at it positively, man. If it works, the army will get close enough that siege weapons are ineffective, and if we fail, I’ll die and you’ll be free. Or you will die along with me, we still don’t know what will happen to you if I die anyway.” Athos said it like it was no big deal, making Treevor roll his eyes.

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“Master, there’s something strange here. These people seem to belong to the church, but I don’t remember seeing any churches when we investigated yesterday.” Caio spoke suddenly. He had already resigned himself that Athos would be reckless and decided to just do as much as he could to keep him safe, so he was using the hive hawks to look inside the fortress, even if from a distance.

“Um? Let me see.” Athos did the same and realized he was right. Right in front of the gates, there were soldiers wearing white armor that easily stood out from the rest of the army, who wore armor of metal plate or reinforced leather.

There were a few old men who wore more suitable robes for ceremonies than a battle and a second group wearing silver armor. The paladins had decided to form an elite group rather than scatter across their crusader units.

All the priests seemed intent on conjuring something, Athos suspected it would be something like the holy field that Treevor used against him.

“I’m seeing church reinforcements, but there don’t seem to be any kingdom reinforcements. Why?” Athos asked confused.

“It is likely that the nobles do not want to commit their own forces to an unprofitable enterprise. They must want to incite their political enemies to do so until the church has volunteered. The political situation in the capital is unstable at best and a single victory or defeat can cost a lot.” Emilia explained, since Athos was a layman when it came to politics.

“No matter the reason, it’s best they don’t have too many reinforcements. Treevor, a little change in plans. Attack the church reinforcements first, then go to the massacre. We’re going to attack the siege weapons.” Athos reformulated his plan and the skeletons nodded.

Athos touched the teleportation crystal stuck between his ribs and realized that it was almost full. Once they were almost within range of the catapults and soldiers on the walls had become visible, Athos used the eyes of the hive hawks to look for the perfect location for the teleportation and finished feeding the crystal, ordering the others to approach him.

A black sphere appeared around them and sucked in air before teleporting them into the midst of the priests' formation, causing panic among the humans. The gust of wind knocked most of the priests into deep concentration causing them to lose control of the large scale spell they were casting and wasting their mana.

Large-scale spells could be created temporarily without enchanting them into an object, but doing so would require dozens of mages working in sync to keep it stable and would consume your mana like a bottomless bucket.

None of the priests had expected the sudden intrusion and they didn't know how to react for a second, but that was enough time for Treevor.

The thin vines and branches that made up her hair elongated and pierced the nearest priests, injecting the venom into them. Treevor still couldn't control that many vines accurately, but a target lock enchantment connecting the helmet to the vines solved the problem. He just focus on one point and one of the vines would pierce the spot.

Like his spear and whip, his venom merged with his parasitic spores and morphed into something new. Now, its venom drained the victims' vitality and used it to increase their volume like a parasite, increasing the rate of vitality absorption until the victim became a dry corpse.

Treevor released the priests as soon as he hit them, certain they were finished. Even if they could use healing magic on themselves, it would accelerate the loss of vitality and kill them faster.

He grew to 5 meters tall and took a whip in each hand, swinging left and right, releasing blades of aura that cut the still-living priests in half. Treevor felt that the shockwave enchantment would not be appropriate for his fast-attacking form and preferred to enchant aura blades instead.

"Protect the priests!" All of this happened in less than 6 seconds and that's how long it took for the paladins to come to their senses and attack Treevor with everything they had.

Light spells rained down on Treevor, but the last one didn't care. He raised an arm as high as he could and the darkness pooled in his wrist like a black hole and whispered.

"Field of the Dead." Darkness spread from her wrist and formed a 50 meter dome around her. The air became toxic and the darkness drained the paladins of their strength, but these were just side effects. There was one thing Treevor hadn't taken into account when he enchanted this spell in corrupt willow.

He didn't know the corresponding dark element runes to create the field of darkness, so he used pure mana runes, which naturally turned into corrupted runes, and hoped for the best.

The field of the dead not only passively healed all undead and weakened any living being, it also corrupted the world energy, extinguishing the surrounding light element. The light spells already cast were unaffected and continued towards Treevor, but everything around them became a barrier that diminished their power.



The corrupted world energy sapped the spells' power, so when they reached Treevor's body they were nothing more than sparks that didn't even leave a mark. The paladins were in a bad spot right now. The mass of darkness that surrounded their bodies blinded them and even their mana vision became useless.

Even Athos and the other skeletons were unable to see normally in the field of the dead, but death vision solved the problem. Athos and the other skeletons were shocked by Treevor's preposterous display of power, but they didn't stand still.

Athos, Emilia, Caio and two skeletons wearing guard uniforms who were caught in the teleportation scattered among the paladins, taking the opportunity to attack them while they were defenseless.

To add insult to injury, the paladins could not even cast magic. All paladins tried to use magic, but their conjuration rings were unable to withstand the corrupt world energy and turned to dust.

"Everyone, regroup at my position! Improve your hearing instead of your eyesight, the skills are still effective!" The paladin leader screamed, trying and failing to find a solution to this desperate situation. He was the first to regain his calm and realize that his other senses were still the same, only his vision was compromised.

He considered ordering them to turn around and run as fast as they could, but he had no way of knowing how far the darkness extended or if other domes of darkness had appeared, so he decided to try to persevere as much as possible while they waited for help outside.

The paladin leader was circulating maximum mana through his body to slow the darkness, but he was still human and would still need air. He had the idea to activate his equipment's light enchantments, but it was useless.

He couldn't see it at the moment, but the elemental light runes around his armor and weapon were glowing. No matter what, everything that existed in the world of Elbon possessed world energy and naturally absorbed energy, no matter how slow the process was.

Corrupt world energy was using this to infiltrate equipment, much like Athos did to corrupt weapons made of wood.

Of course, it would take decades for weapons to corrupt and it was likely that a rune would disperse and cause a chain reaction that would destroy the weapon, but still serve to render the weapon useless.

#### Chapter 119 The beginning of the fall

The corrupted energy not only slowly seeped into the equipment, it also corrupted it from the outside. The metal began to blacken as the paladin leader tried his best to circulate mana through it to slow down the process.

A blade made of wood entered the slit of his helmet with a T-shaped opening and pierced his nose until the point came out of the back of his neck, killing while he was focused on his weapon. Emilia used the silent steps ability and killed him in one hit, making sure he didn't scream to alert the other paladins approaching his position.

The paladins approached their position like moths drawn to the flame and Emilia used the sword aura dance in conjunction with the silent footsteps. Emilia moved between the paladins with grace, using nimble and precise movements to cut between the gaps in the armor.

Screaming sounds were heard, but that only accelerated the other paladins' steps. They knew that the enemies had also heard their leader's call and would attack him, so they activated their sensory abilities to the fullest and ran.

One or two paladins used abilities similar to Athos' sensory field and detected the skeletons, but Athos and Caio noticed that their movements were different from the others and cast magic before they could warn the paladins of what was happening.

A stone thorn hit one in the groin and a black bolt hit the second, knocking them both to the ground and unable to move, albeit for different reasons. Athos broke both their necks and looked around, noticing that most of the paladins were on the ground, Treevor and Emilia made a massacre.

Athos wasted no more time and began to raise all the corpses as undead. The field of the dead proved useful once again, as Athos didn't even need to use mana, just injecting his corrupted life force was enough.

He also transformed the priests, the field of the dead healing those cut in half.

"Finished?" Treevor asked as he looked at the edge of the field of the dead. Crusaders were surrounding the dome and shooting blades of aura across the surface. Crusaders were mana users who served the church but could not use magic or had any elemental affinity.

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They were desperate to rescue the paladins and priests, but the first to enter the dome had to run back and fell to the ground, unable to breathe.

...The idiot yelled "In the name of Eishin!" with all his might before entering, only to fill his lungs with toxic air and die almost instantly. The other crusaders, fanatical as they were, did not run to their useless death and tried to weaken the summit.

"Yes, you can go for the kill. We're going for the siege weapons." Athos replied and Treevor undid the field of the dead. Despite its incredible effect, it consumed a lot of mana to keep it active and compensate for all the energy expended by the Crusaders' attacks.

The crusaders closest to the dome shouted Eishin's name as they saw the darkness begin to dissipate, before Treevor leapt above the dome and landed in the middle of their formation, crushing the slower ones to swerve and knocking the rest off balance. Treevor also conjured dozens of dark stone spikes a second after falling to the ground, impaling the still-falling crusaders.

Treevor stood up immediately and whipped his left and right crusaders. The crusaders successfully blocked the whip using their shields, but not the subsequent attack. The whips released point-blank blades of aura that sliced through the shields along with the arms that held it.

Some crusaders used the arrest ability and purposely threw themselves at the whip, sacrificing an arm to successfully grip the whip. Other crusaders tried to use the breach to cut the whip, but it was unexpectedly tough.

The vines were flexible as rubber and hard as metal, so the crusaders' swords could not cut through them all the way.

Treavor didn't let the crusaders have their way and yanked his arm with all his might, flinging the crusaders attached to the whip into midair, before slamming them back to the ground in a bloody mess.

The crusaders lunged at Treavor as he raised the whip desperately trying to cut through the roots that formed his legs. They used the weapon break with all their might, causing deep cuts to the roots.

Treavor knelt on his right knee and the crusaders cheered and attacked even more violently. The whips moved like serpents without Treavor needing to swing them and cut the closest crusaders, but others replaced them. Cuts appeared all over his body and Skull's mask smiled.

Small flower buds appeared on her legs before dark purple flowers grew and released their venom in gas form. The poison gas spread to all crusaders, corroding their skin on contact and entering their bodies through their noses and ears.

The crusaders jumped back and some fell to the ground as they screamed in pain. The vines and thin branches pierced the Crusaders' bodies while they were on the ground, using the darkness to drain their vitality even faster and regenerate their wounds.

Treavor rose again, his body almost completely healed, and turned to the dead crusaders at his feet. He activated one of the few darkness enchantments on the corrupted willow and unleashed the undead raise en masse, turning the dead crusaders into skeletons and leading the way to the gate.

At the same time, Athos led the paladins and priests towards the siege weapons behind the walls. to the left of the gate. Foot soldiers tried to get in their way, but the paladins' physical prowess was no laughing matter. Even without activating their weapons' enchantments, their abilities were still more than enough to kill soldiers after three hits and their shields blocked most hits.

The enchantment of light ended up helping. The light element in the sword made it resistant to corruption and allowed them to fight without worry that their weapons would break at a critical moment.

The priests weren't useful in physical combat, but they still had their spellcasting rings and Athos ordered one of them to spend all of his mana on a single powerful spell whenever the soldiers got too close.

Each spell released a burst of corrupted mana that killed at least a dozen soldiers, some spells nearly twenty if there were too many soldiers clustered in one place.

Athos mixed his presence with the environment and only lifted the corpses as they fell, also healing the paladins whenever an attack overcame their defense. When his mana started getting low, he would drain a nearby corpse instead of raising it like an undead. Unfortunately for him, his advance was halted before the siege weapons could reach.

The crusaders were the main force in front of the gates and the paladins stayed close behind them, defending the priests as they cast spells to weaken the undead. This also meant that there were soldiers on both sides and Athos was quickly surrounded.

The number of skeletons around Athos had grown to nearly 300, but the priests' magical support was running low and the soldiers were desperately trying to stop them from reaching the siege weapons.

To make matters worse for Athos, most of the soldiers he killed were archers or light infantry, so they were wearing light equipment so as not to hinder movement. Without the proper equipment, a single blow to the skull could crush a skeleton's head.

Athos ordered them to form a square formation, with all the paladins heading towards the walls and the priests in the centre, while the rest tried to prevent the soldiers from reaching their back. Every time a skeleton was destroyed it detonated its own core, generating an explosion of darkness and buying precious seconds for another skeleton to replace it.

The small army slowly approached the siege weapons firing at the undead army outside, but Athos could only grit his teeth and hope that his preparations against them had been enough. As they advanced, the soldiers slain by the paladins came within reach of Athos and he raised them to replenish their dwindling numbers.

"Stop them from advancing at all costs!" A platoon leader shouted and a group of elite soldiers stepped into the paladins' path, blocking their path. Athos looked in the direction they had come and realized it was an elite unit near the gate, to replace the Crusaders in case they needed to retreat.

Unlike the skeletons he's killed so far, all the soldiers were mana users, experienced fighters and armed with enchanted weapons, so they managed to stop the paladins' march. The elite soldiers were cunning and didn't face the paladins directly, the ones in front blocked their attacks while spearmen behind them pierced them, trying to find a loophole in weaknesses.

"The skull is the weak point! Aim for the skull!" A soldier suddenly screamed, accidentally hitting a skeleton soldier's skull and seeing him collapse. The blast of darkness came soon after and engulfed him, but the soldiers nearby heard his last words screamed at the top of their lungs, the news quickly spreading through the rest of the army.

Soldiers took aim at the head and the number of skeletons destroyed increased to a level that Athos could not keep up with, but this came at a price for the soldiers themselves. The resulting explosions from so many skeletons generated a black fog that did not dissipate easily and made it difficult for the soldiers to fight back.

The battle became a stalemate, with the paladins unable to advance any further.

Chapter 120 Simultaneous battles

"Shit, don't move from your positions! Get back immediately!" General Astrus screamed in rage, seeing the Crusaders abandon the gates to attack the strange plant giant. He had no idea what it was or how he managed to teleport, but he had to be stopped at all costs.

“Mages, stop this thing from advancing and don’t allow it to approach the gate! Left reserve shield unit, block the undead rushing towards the siege weapons and the right unit take over the gates! Siege weapons, prepare to shoot!” Astrus shouted orders and the soldiers rushed to obey.

The skeleton soldiers outside came within range of the siege weapons and Astrus ordered them to fire. The catapults and ballistae fired, raining arrows and rocks onto the vanguard of the undead army.

Who advanced to block the attacks were the hawks. The hawks flew in the direction of the arrows and the queen transferred incomplete wind barriers to them. Barriers of wind formed around them and deflected the ballista arrows, but the stones were too heavy for that.

The stones would have enough force to rip through the wind barriers, so the hive’s hawks blasted the barriers on impact, the stones losing their momentum and falling harmlessly to the ground.

...Well, not so harmlessly. Several explosions took place on the ground where the stones fell. The soldiers had buried alchemical items in the ground near the gate and its surroundings, where they knew the undead would come.

It was a hurried job, as the minefield was usually done at the opposite gate, where the demihumans used to attack. The land was obviously excavated and it was just a way to delay the skeletons while the siege weapons attacked.

The undead army stopped a few feet away from where the explosions started and a single hive hawk descended. Sevenus in the center of the army transferred an earthquake spell to the hawk and the latter cast it to the ground before flying off.

The earthquake spread in front of the gate and several explosions of various elements happened a few seconds later. The army resumed the advance and Astrus began to panic.

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“Shoot! Shoot again!” Astrus yelled. He tried to hit the birds with a light spell, then a wind spell, he even tried to hurl the nearest soldier, but the distance was too great and it gave the hawks time to dodge even his fastest spells.

The catapults would take some more time to reload, but the ballistae were almost ready to fire again.

“Shit!” Athos shouted from behind the paladin formation. He spat a flaming breath at an armored soldier blocking his path, causing the soldier to yelp in surprise and fall back.

Athos grabbed the soldier’s shoulder and impaled him with his sword using the other. Before the soldier even fell, Athos removed his sword and cut off the man’s arm and stole his shield, before equipping it on his own arm.

Several soldiers from the same unit tried to rescue their fallen comrade, but Athos released a black aura that stopped the soldiers in mid-step. An ordinary aura would only paralyze a weaker enemy, but an undead aura sent shivers down the spine of even the bravest soldier.

It was something that shouldn’t exist naturally and full of malice, triggering all the extinct basics of survival of any living being. Athos was slightly surprised by the effect of his aura of terror, as he decided to call it, but wasted no more time.

He just ordered his skeletons to deal with the paralyzed soldiers and turned around, jumping above the paladins while conjuring wind platforms. The soldiers tried to attack the skeleton above their heads, shooting aura blade or hurling their own weapon, but Athos dodged most of them and a simple mana barrier blocked the rest.

Athos ignored the elite soldiers and fell among some normal soldiers, his aura of terror paralyzing them immediately. He advanced while using the meteor charge to run over all soldiers in his path. His shield caught fire as a blade of wind spun at high speed, sucking the flames into a spiral of fire.

Athos also used lightning thrust, black bolts flowing through his bones as he accelerated. He crushed any soldier that got in his way, catching up to siege weapons in seconds.

A team responsible for defending the siege weapons stood in front of him with determination to die to stop him, but seeing the flames concentrate in the center of the shield, they realized it was in vain.

The flames blasted the soldiers and sent them flying. Athos discarded the now half-melted shield and kept running, impaling the soldier about to load the ballista into his chest. He cut the rope and rendered the ballista useless, but the others had already shot at his army.

The hive hawks blocked the arrows once more, but the rocks flew a few seconds later and fell on top of the army, crushing nearly a hundred skeleton soldiers. The hawks were starting to run out of mana, so they could only block ballistae one more time. Fortunately, Sevenus got in touch at this point with good news.

'My lord, leave the siege weapons of the right to me, please take care of the left!' Sevenus spoke and Athos immediately understanding his plan. Skeleton birds were flying towards the siege weapons on the right, carrying sacks of alchemical items.

The birds soared high above the magic's range and dropped the sacks precisely on top of the catapults and ballistae, with only one or two missing their targets.

The bags exploded as they fell, destroying the siege weapons and sending the soldiers carrying them into the air. With that, the siege weapons on the right side were completely useless, leaving only the left side for him.

Athos activated the sensory field and realized he was being surrounded by soldiers defending siege weapons. He touched the corpse he had just killed and drained all of its mana, before running to the line of soldiers.

The paladins began to fight frantically to get to him and at the expense of some of their members, they managed to break through the blockade of the elite soldiers and were trying to team up with Athos, but the latter was too happy to worry about small details like that.

The amount of life force Athos was constantly receiving almost made him smile unconsciously, but luckily his skin was retracted at the moment. Also, the more powerful enemies were all busy focusing on Treevor, the biggest threat, so he was free to kill as much as he wanted and there was no one able to stop him.

His core was also giving the first hints of being ready for the third layer, that faint feeling of being about to accomplish something. Athos ignored that feeling for now and focused on the soldiers trying to kill him.

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“Soldiers, stop them from breaking down the gate!” Astrus yelled at the top of the wall, casting his sword of judgment spell on the undead trying to break down the gate. The gate was also enchanted and incredibly tough, but the continued onslaught of the undead was putting the defensive runes to the test.

He raised the sword above his head, white lightning accumulating on the blade and slashing downward, releasing lightning bolts and that turned the skeletons in front of the gates to dust, but the situation was still dire.

All the mages were in the lines behind the crusaders trying to stop that plant titan’s advance, but it was proving impossible. The simple blades of aura released by the whips cut most spells in half and the spells that passed didn’t do enough damage to kill him, only to make him temporarily retreat and drain corpses back to full strength.

And this was all only possible thanks to the crusaders and the fortress soldiers pressing the plant monster and its skeletons from all sides. The crusaders tried their best to stop Treevor’s movements so the mages could do damage, while the stronghold soldiers kept the skeletons from getting in the way.

Treevor didn’t care much about the magic damage, as the mages were on the first or second tier, and only one of them was third. Instead, he fell for the Crusaders’ taunt and focused his attacks on them.

Spikes of black stone, blasts of black frost, and vitality-draining spheres of darkness rained down on the crusaders, but they did not falter, firmly believing that they were sacrificing their lives for a purpose.

Unfortunately for them, the number of skeletons was increasing rather than decreasing. Treevor was constantly raising undead, so soldiers and crusaders had to sacrifice more and more to stop their movements. It was only a matter of time before the Crusaders were decimated and then that would be the end.

Everyone knew this, but no one knew how to reverse this situation.

‘This is amazing.’ It was all Treevor was thinking at the moment. He was expending energy like a madman, activating enchantments and casting spells nonstop, all the while improving the willow’s physical prowess to the max, but he didn’t feel the least bit tired.

His core was already in the lower half, but amber energy was still around 80%, so he could still fight a lot longer. Treevor sincerely felt he could destroy this stronghold alone at this rate and he still hadn’t used all of his weapons.

Treevor took a quick look in Athos’s direction to make sure the idiot wasn’t killing himself, but saw that he was just having fun massacring soldiers and decided he wouldn’t need help.