

Legion lich 121

Chapter 121 Treevor MVP

'This is horrible.' Astrus thought. His army was being slaughtered while the number of skeletons only increased. The army's morale had sunk to the bottom and not a few already considered this a losing battle and thought of deserting for their lives.

Treevor was approaching the gate with each kill and was almost catching up with the defense team.

Astrus was casting spells and killing hundreds of skeletons in front of the gates while the reserve unit blocked the gate, but if something wasn't done about Treevor now, all his efforts would be in vain. Astrus thought for a few seconds and decided to face him personally.

"Mages, go back to the walls and drink potions to regenerate your mana, I'll replace you!" Astrus screamed and jumped off the wall. His enchanted boots created platforms of light beneath his feet and Astrus kept climbing as he approached Treevor, Astrus was sure they exchanged glances for a second.

Astrus conjured the sword of judgment again and fell into Treevor's position. The latter felt alarmed for the first time and leapt back with all his might, white lightning blasting the ground at his feet, along with all the nearby skeletons.

The surviving Crusaders roared with excitement, finally having some time to breathe. Treevor swung his whip to test Astrus and the latter easily dodged. He stopped in midair and stared at Treevor, trying to find any weaknesses in his body.

"Are you their leader?" Astrus asked without hope of an answer. Before Treevor could respond, Sevenus' voice rang in his mind.

'Keep the general away from the walls. Now that he's stopped destroying all the approaching skeletons, I'm going to send the ogres to break down the gate while the demihumans scale the walls. It's only a matter of time before we take the gates and then the fight is over. Sevenus spoke and Treevor nodded.

The only reason the soldiers were still fighting was that their numbers were superior. The moment the gate opens, skeletons will invade and it will be a bloodbath.

.....

"Can't you talk? It doesn't matter, I just have to kill you to find out what you're made of!" Astrus screamed and lunged at Treevor. He swung his sword and unleashed an arc of lightning, which Treevor ignored as he leapt at him.

'How fast!' Astrus thought and immediately gave up, jumping to the side and letting Treevor's fist pass inches from his body. Astrus sliced off Treevor's arm as he passed, the light burning the corruption in the wooden arm.

Astrus tried to jump to gain distance, but the vines wrapped around his left leg and his vision blurred. he activated his armor's light barrier by sheer reflex, saving his life. Treevor spun in the air and hurled Astrus to the ground like a bullet, creating a crevasse resembling a spider's web.

The barrier broke and kept him from dying, but it didn't stop his organs from exploding against his bones. Vomiting blood, Astrus activated one of the magic rings on his right hand and regenerated his wounds, but Treevor didn't stand by and watch.

Treevor landed on top of Astrus, the roots on his right leg crushing the enchanted silver plate and knocking all the air out of his lungs. The blow would have killed him if the breastplate hadn't had a passive enchantment that dispersed the impact.

Astrus felt like a tinned sardine and cast a cannon of light straight into Treevor's skull.

Treevor was hit in the side of the face and doubled back, Astrus seized the moment and pushed at the roots with all his might, freeing himself and rolling to the side. The vines on the back of Treevor's head chased him piercing the ground, but Astrus kept rolling and kicked the ground out of reach of the vines.

Astrus stood up and lightly touched his chest with his hand, his broken ribs throbbing in pain. The impact dispersion enchantment only softened the blow, not nullified it. In comparison, Treevor only had light burns that weren't visible for his dark color.

'Only two attacks and I almost died in both. I need to recover-' Astrus' thoughts were interrupted as Treevor's fist came from above and nearly crushed his skull. Treevor didn't give him time to think and kept pressing it.

Astrus had no way to dodge and just placed his sword above his head to block, holding on to the hilt and tip of the sword. The blow forced him to his knees and bent his sword, but the second fist caught him from abdomen to chest and sent him flying into the crusaders.

Astrus hit the crusaders like a bowling ball, but Treevor didn't stop and ran using the spirits' momentum, catching up to Astrus and punching him to the ground.

Astrus hit the ground and a rock hit him in the spine, bending his body and throwing him back into the air, where Treevor's fist found him and crushed him to the ground again. Astrus' body slammed against the ground in a bloody mess, his corpse completely mangled.

'Oops. I think I exaggerated a little.' Treevor thought to himself a little embarrassed. He unintentionally got carried away by finally having an opponent who could withstand more than one attack without dying and ended up overdoing it.

The soldiers around him seemed frozen for a second. Not even in their dreams did they expect the general to be defeated so one-sidedly. A sense of desperation spread through the soldiers and the skeletons attacked furiously at that moment, as if they had been waiting for this moment.

The truth is that many of the soldiers weren't mana users so even after being transformed, they just attacked normally. Athos had just ordered them to circulate mana at full strength, nearly doubling their physical abilities.

A thunderous sound sounded and the gate was knocked down, the two ogres stepping into their giant form and stomping the unit trying to protect the gate. Until now, the defensive unit had only succeeded because Sevenus had sent weaklings that he knew would be destroyed by Astrus.

The ogres absorbed the element of water and earth from the world's energy, but their own mana made them corrupted elements.

The mages tried to stop them, but the minotaurs and kobolds scaled the walls using their bare hands and attacked them. The minotaurs' hooves weren't good at climbing the wall, but their fingers dug into the sturdy stone using sheer brute force, and they climbed using only the strength of their arms.

The minotaurs ran furiously over the wall, using a charge ability to trample anyone in their path. With the size of the minotaurs, it was nearly impossible to dodge the attack, so soldiers on the walls tried to roll, or throw themselves off the walls, certain that they would have a better chance of surviving if they threw themselves off the walls than standing in the way of a minotaur.

Some stupid or overconfident mages tried to stop its charge with spells or mana barriers, but it was useless. The demihumans' hard bones were unaffected by weak spells and their powerful horns pierced through barriers as if they were made of paper, before impaling the mages.

The kobolds jumped at the fallen soldiers and mutilated their bodies with their claws and fangs. A few soldiers managed to get up and fight, but the kobolds used their small size and numerical advantage to cut their heels and the back of their knees, where their armor didn't protect.

The mage who was carrying the black cube dropped the cube and the last thing the nobles saw was a minotaur's hoof, before the link was severed.

The orcs invaded along with ogres and caused a massacre against the defensive unit. The natural rage the undead felt against the living added to the hatred they felt towards humans for enslaving them created an incredible synergy that took their physical capabilities to an absurd level.

They didn't even need to use skills. His bare fists went through the soldiers' shields, armor, and bodies as if they were paper. Even when soldiers used skills, the blows still crushed the soldiers' armor and bones, leaving them on the ground incapable.

"This is impossible." A soldier muttered before dropping his sword and turning to run. The soldiers realized that this was a losing battle and began desperately to flee, some heading for the fortress in the center and others trying to go around and get to the opposite gate.

It was doubtful if they could get away, but they would have a better chance than if they stayed here to fight. The gates of the inner wall opened and what came out ended all his hopes. Hundreds of the undead rushed at them, cutting off their escape route.

Emilia and Caio had separated from Athos when Treavor undid the field of the dead. Caio dug the ground until they entered the sewers and they descended, the earth closing in behind him and erasing their tracks.

Astrus had learned from his earlier mistake and placed several patrols in the sewers in preparation for an invasion, but killing them all silently and turning them into the undead was simple for experienced assassins like them.

Emilia and Caio invaded the fortress in the same way as the day before, but this time with dozens of skeleton soldiers accompanying them. The inner wall was connected to the fortress, and there were dozens of soldiers guarding the place. The soldiers tried more than once to sound alarms to let them

know that the fortress was being invaded, but the passive detection spell was constantly sounding an alarm and drowned out the sound.

The truth was that Astrus and several soldiers had noticed the attack, but they already had their hands full and pretended not to see it.

Chapter 122 Third layer

The truth was that he had given up using the inner walls and the fortress itself, deciding that it would be better to fight in the open than to press soldiers inside the fortress. If the fog of darkness were used in such a situation, he would suffer catastrophic losses and it would be the end.

Skeletons invaded the first floor where most of the traders were and started a massacre. The soldiers protecting the fortress were unable to stand up to Emilia, while Caio focused on turning the newly dead into new skeletons. The desperate traders evacuated to the upper floors and the skeletons chased them.

The chase was still in progress, but Emilia was informed that the battle was already over and the soldiers were trying to flee, so she ordered the skeletons to come out and block the way of the fleeing soldiers. There was nowhere for the traders to run anyway.

The skeletons managed to buy enough time for the others to catch up and the bloodbath ensued. An Athos in a battle frenzy and fully bathed in blood led the slaughter, laughing like a maniac as he killed soldiers nonstop.

A few soldiers managed to successfully escape, which Astrus placed to guard the opposite gate. He wasn't stupid enough to leave the gate unguarded and the soldiers fled as soon as the general died.

It was doubtful if they would be able to survive for long within the demihuman empire, but it was still better than being an eternal slave.

"More...I need some more..." Athos muttered after knocking the last soldier to the ground. Its core was pulsing as the corpses turned into skeletons and all that life force was absorbed.

'Treavor, I'm about to form a new layer. I need you here.' Athos mentally ordered.

'Do you need me to hold your hand?' Treavor asked sarcastically, but obeyed anyway.

.....

'Do not fill. You have special senses beyond the sight of death, don't you? Last time I formed a layer at my core, I created a gray skin that heals me whenever I'm injured. I want you to look at me and tell me what you see.' Athos replied seriously, but Treavor's taunt continued.

"So you're an exhibitionist? I never thought you liked being seen." Treavor arrived at Athos' side and continued playing. Athos did not respond and focused on the core itself.

He did the same process as before, making large amounts of mana circulate through his body and then sending it back. The mana continually pressed and condensed the energy of its second layer, the life force solidifying around it and forming the third layer.

The process was incredibly simple, taking less than 10 minutes and making Treevor sigh in awe. Forming the third layer should be even more difficult, as the mage would have to apply even more pressure, making the process even more painful. Athos didn't care about pain and focused only on efficiency.

"How it was?" Athos asked after finishing and checking his own core.

"Nothing much. Maybe the skin isn't related-" The words choked in Treevor's throat. He saw that Athos' core was currently rejecting incoming life force and causing it to blend with the darkness coursing through his body.

A mass of darkness exploded from his body, between his skin and his bones forming muscle tissue. His muscles were exactly the same as Athos had when he was alive, but they were gray like skin. The organs and hair were still missing, but it was another step towards a complete body.

Even their facial features were the same. If it weren't for the empty eye sockets and the darkness that lurked whenever he opened his mouth, he'd just look like a bald man with a weird skin tone.

Athos looked dazedly at his arms and removed his armor, touching his chest and abdominal muscles. A glimmer of hope appeared in his mind and he looked down his pants, black tears of happiness streaming from his empty sockets.

"He's back... my old friend is back!" Athos raised both fists in the air in victory, feeling genuinely happy. He had already resigned himself to never seeing him again, but he would be lying if he said he had no hope of ever getting him back.

"Congratulations." Treevor spoke with envy for more than one reason. He too held the same hope as Athos, but the size of the bulge in Athos' pants filled him with envy. As an elf, Treevor had a small build and consequently a moderately sized friend at best.

"No need to sulk so much, if I understand what just happened, we can replicate the same for you." Athos misunderstood the reason for envy and tried to reassure him.

"I think I already understand what happened. You know that darkness replaces everything we've lost as the undead, right? It's the reason we can still see and hear despite having no eyes or ears." Treevor began to explain.

"I already know that."

"What you failed to realize is that after you form a new layer, the extra life force you receive is not absorbed by the core and merges with the darkness of your body, transforming first into your skin and now your muscles. This process is likely to continue until you completely rebuild your body." Treevor said, shocking Athos.

"So the energy is being wasted? Hey, stop lifting the dead bodies!" Athos started yelling at the skeleton wizards, but Treevor reassured him.

"Calm down, it's not as wasteful as you're thinking. I still have to investigate a little more, but it looks like your skin and your muscles are there to regenerate you in case your bones, the really important part of your body get injured, right?" Treevor asked, trying to discern the limit of this ability.

"Yes. That's really helpful since I don't have to weaken my own bones to heal." Athos agreed with him.

“Although it serves to heal you, your skin is still a form of energy mixed with life force, so it’s likely that you have more abilities that we don’t know yet. Try circulating mana, using abilities with skin and muscles, circulating energy world that you naturally absorb, or things like that.” Treevor began to suggest ideas for Athos to test.

“Let’s go somewhere else before then. We might destroy some dead bodies by accident if we test here.” Athos suggested and Treevor agreed, reducing to human size. He and Treevor entered the fortress and headed for the top. The battle here was still going on, with several traders and their minions trying to barricade the floors to stop the undead, but Athos passed them by without a care.

“Master, what happened to you?” Emilia asked, conjuring three orbs of darkness and throwing them at the makeshift barricades, destroying the resistance on that floor and letting the skeletons finish the job.

“I want to run some tests on my body. Want to come?” Athos asked and Emilia happily nodded.

“Of course! Caio, replace me.” Emilia ordered Caio and followed Athos. Caio had a thing or two to say about that, but Emilia’s gaze silenced him and he obediently obeyed.

They reached the courtyard, only to find it was already occupied. A group of soldiers and a dozen more men in ragged clothes were there. They were supposed to be servants or slaves of traders.

Emilia took a step forward to kill them, but Athos had an idea and interrupted her. “Let’s leave them alive.”

“Which?” Emilia and Treevor asked in shock.

“I want to try some experiments on living people and I just found the perfect candidates.” Athos explained and Emilia breathed a sigh of relief.

“What the fuck are you guys saying? Experiments on living people?” One of the soldiers asked pointing his sword at Athos, the strangest of the trio.

“Nothing you have a voice for.” Athos responded and Treevor’s vines stretched, strangling them all. The soldiers tried to break free, but the vines held them until they all fainted from asphyxiation.

Athos started testing everything Treevor suggested, but just absorbing world energy worked. Circulating mana did nothing, using skill on skin or muscle made no difference. The most promising was to absorb world energy. As if it were a sponge, its skin and muscles absorbed world energy and stored it.

His dull gray skin began to glow as it absorbed energy, as if it were charging. After some time, his body stopped accepting energy and Athos felt a feeling of satisfaction, like eating his fill after starving for days.

“Looks like you’ve discovered a new skill.” Treevor said after Athos stopped absorbing energy and started looking at himself. He conjured a mirror of water so Athos could see the differences.

“Okay, I’m glowing. But is that all?” Athos asked. He tried using a simple fist boost skill, immediately noticing a change. He had to spend a minimal amount of mana to activate the ability and his body kept it active at no additional cost, without him needing to focus on keeping it active.

Chapter 123 New racial skill

Using death vision, Athos noticed that the corrupted energy stored in his body was keeping the ability active, without him needing to consume mana or focus on it. With a thought, the skill disappeared and his fist returned to normal strength.

Athos tried a few more times and found that his body held up almost any skill or spell he used, but there was a limit to how many skills he could maintain without becoming overwhelmed. Its maximum limit depended on the complexity of an ability or spell.

Abilities like death vision that used body parts he didn't already have were impossible, but now Athos was sure he could get his entire body back.

"It looks like a magical support organ that stores energy and can be consumed if you're in danger. It doesn't feel like it can recharge on its own, so you'll have to concentrate to recharge it, but it's still a great skill." Treavor spoke after Athos explained in detail.

"It's really amazing, master. You could keep your abilities active with minimal expenditure, while focusing on fighting and casting spells, or vice versa." Emilia cheered happily.

"It's a shame it doesn't regenerate mana by itself, but it's still amazing." Athos spoke up and concentrated on regenerating his body's energy back to maximum before continuing. "There's something I still don't understand. Why did my body look like this?"

"I have no idea. Undead have unique abilities depending on their species and you seem to be a new species. I've never heard of black skeletons, but their ability to mass create undead is not common.

Most species have restrictions on transforming members of other races, but you don't seem to have any. I only know of one species capable of creating that many soldiers. A lich." Treavor looked at Emilia and asked.

"My knowledge is very limited by my incomplete education, but I've heard that you used to work for a powerful dark mage in human society. Perhaps you know some more?"

.....

Emilia thought for a while before answering. "I know of one, although I don't think it fits what we're looking for. There is a species of undead called a draugr that bears some similarities to the master. They are capable of releasing a cursed aura that transforms fallen warriors into other draugrs, but I doubt the master has any kinship with them."

"Why? I'm sure I can release an aura that's capable of creating undead, or at least something similar." Athos spoke, but Emilia shook her head.

"Draugrs are only able to turn other warriors or people who died fighting into undead. The master has no such limitation. Also, draugrs cannot use magic, so their powers are quite limited."

"Then all that's left is the lich. They're very powerful undead mages, capable of creating armies in a short time. They're all bony and I've never heard of anyone capable of recreating the body they had in life, but do you have some pretty unique abilities besides your body so I think you're a mutant or superior species."

"What other skills?" Athos asked confused.

“Master, do you really think all of your abilities are normal? Absorbing a fraction of the power of each undead you create is something unheard of and would make most intelligent undead die a second time from envy if they knew about it.

I heard from the dark elder that whenever species like vampires turned humans into other vampires, they used up their own life force and that energy would be lost forever.” Emilia explained.

“Besides, this chain that binds our souls is also strange. Something capable of corrupting souls is not normal. We also have a hierarchy among us, decided only by your will, rather than the strongest being at the top.” Treevor added, but this time Emilia refuted him.

“I don’t know much about souls, but hierarchy is a common thing. A lich is absolute and all the undead are his slaves, but he can select competent slaves to become generals of his army.” Emilia said.

“I think we veered off topic a bit. What were you saying about my body and my abilities?” Athos caught everyone’s attention and urged Treevor to continue talking.

“What I was saying is that the lich is a magic-centric species, so it wouldn’t be strange for the chief to form a magic organ that aids in the use of magic if it’s really a superior species. We’d need to learn more about the undead to be sure,” Treevor said.

“Do you think you could replicate that in other of you? It would be amazing to have so many mages with that magical support organ as you call it.” Athos asked hopefully, but Treevor shook his head.

“I can’t be sure of anything, but I don’t think so. All the life force we’ve gathered goes to you, so that would be impossible.” Treevor spoke with disappointment.

“Well, we’re going to be here for awhile, so we’ll have time to experiment.” Athos dropped the bomb like it was no big deal. Treevor and Emilia stare at him in shock before Emilia asks stuttering.

“B-But, master. We weren’t going to flee to the demihuman empire? Why should we stay here? The realm will definitely send a subjugation army to destroy us, so why?” Emilia asked in panic, but Treevor understood and sighed, scratching the vines in the back of his head.

“You want this, don’t you? Wasn’t one war enough for you?” Treevor asked in exasperation.

“Exactly. Treevor, you alone would be more than enough to destroy this stronghold alone if you spent all your power, with the rest of the army it is more than possible to destroy an invading army as long as we prevent the use of large scale spells.” Athos spoke confidently.

“It’s still dangerous. The fortress has received reinforcements, remember? Which means the kingdom could send troops to target us at any moment. I don’t think it’s a good idea to stay and fight.” Emilia tried to reason with Athos, but he kept smiling at her.

“I highly doubt they’d be stupid enough to attempt this. Like the boss said, I could have crushed your army single-handedly and they know it. You’ve also seen the mage using a comm device to record the battle. They must be in an uproar right now, discussing measures to deal with me.” Treevor smiled at the thought of being feared, before shaking his head and realizing that this kind of thinking was foreign to him.

“Also, teleportation crystals are rare and hard to find. Crystals capable of moving tens of kilometers like my grandfather’s are even rarer. Crystals capable of moving entire armies are just myths. There must be some trick behind it and I killed the right person to tell us.”

“The general.” Emilia spoke and Treevor nodded. “You know, I thought you were against the war. I never expected you to support the idea of us staying.”

“I’ve just accepted that it’s useless to try to use logic with our boss. We can make the best arguments in the world and he’d still insist on us staying to fight, so we’d better save your energy and start thinking about countermeasures.” Treevor said and was surprised by his own words.

Normally, he would insist on fleeing, but something in the back of his mind was telling him to obey Athos’ will. The thought startled him and he quickly stopped thinking about it, deciding it was just his imagination.

“Anyway, we’ll still need to spend some time in the fortress, gathering the corpses and getting organized, so we can interrogate the general about how they received reinforcements and then we’ll think about whether or not we’re going to stay. How about that?” Athos decided to procrastinate the decision for now.

“Haah...just promise me you won’t make a reckless decision. You know what, forget what I said. Of course the master is going to make a reckless decision.” Emilia started to complain as she walked away, intending to find the general’s corpse soon and question him at once.

Trevor and Athos looked at each other for a second before following her, leaving the courtyard behind.

Throne Hall, at the moment the cube was destroyed.

“Oh my God!” The king screamed in fright and threw himself back reflexively, only to hit his head on the throne. Fortunately, none of the nobles were paying him any attention. All of them were in absolute silence, some trying to understand what they had just witnessed while others were trying to escape reality.

“What the hell was that?” A marquise asked for God only knows how long and as if on cue, an uproar began. All the nobles started shouting their opinions to each other, not caring about etiquette.

Treevor’s appearance and the power he displayed were enough to cause such panic. Plant monsters were incredibly rare. Plant monsters powerful enough to annihilate an army of crusaders and easily kill a combat-experienced general at the seventh level was a nightmarish motif.

But one capable of creating hundreds of undead at once and leading an army? This was madness. Such a powerful monster could threaten the entire kingdom.

In the minds of these nobles, the fact that Treevor was the leader behind all this was already an indisputable fact. The recording showed Athos turning other corpses into skeletons as well, but the impression Treevor left on them was so strong that they thought Athos was just some kind of assistant.

Chapter 124 Discussions in the throne room

Even in the midst of all this uproar, there were some figures who maintained their composure and calmly thought. Among them were the master of magic sent by the order, the supreme commander of the kingdom's army, and the cardinal of the church of Eishin.

The army's supreme commander took a deep breath before shouting, "SILENCE!"

Commander Ragnar Devis was a 1.84 meter tall black man with shaved hair and black eyes. He was wearing his army uniform, with more stars and decorations than buttons.

His loud, husky voice drowned out all the nobles, who immediately fell silent and listened to what he had to say. It was amazing how loud the Supreme Commander's voice could sound without the mana enhancement, as using any kind of skill or enchantment was forbidden inside the royal palace.

Any attempt to extract the mana from within the core would be detected and the large-scale spells would activate, immobilizing the person immediately.

"Arguing like this won't get us anywhere. While you guys are barking at each other, the soldiers in the fortress may still be alive and fighting for their lives. We must send reinforcements immediately!" The commander's voice spread like thunder and many nobles flinched.

"And for what? Give more soldiers to the enemy? Why not gift-wrap them at once?" A sarcastic voice answered him and the entire room gasped. Commander Ragnar turned angrily in the direction of the voice, only to see the master of magic staring straight at him, not at all intimidated.

The order of magic had a narrow hierarchy starting with apprentices<magicians<archmagicians<masters of magic<elders. Apprentices were those who still attended magic academies and weren't even considered true magicians, while elders were the apex any mage could reach.

As a master of magic, the envoy of the order was in a high position where even the king would have to choose his words when addressing him. The church and order were intercontinental organizations headquartered in two great empires on the Adula continent.

.....

Whether in technology or power, they surpassed the realm of Mirkor. Even portal technology was unique to the order, something the realm was unable to replicate. No court mage was able to alter the teleportation crystals, but the order was able to somehow.

The kingdom was in the midst of negotiations to buy portals and install them in major cities to facilitate movement, so everyone was walking on eggshells around the envoy, trying their hardest not to get into his bad books.

"It's the soldiers of our kingdom dying! Do you expect me to stand still knowing they are dying?" Commander Hot Head seemed to have forgotten that fact and pointed at him rudely.

"So what's your plan to rescue them? Use your unnecessarily loud voice as a sonic attack to kill the undead? And how do you plan to deal with the plant monster afterward?" the master of magic asked sarcastically.

"We can order the court mages to prepare large-scale spells before sending them through the portals, destroying that plant in one fell swoop!! After that, our soldiers will have an easy time with the leaderless undead." Commander Ragnar shouted, but the master of magic only sighed.

"Did we really watch the same battle? The speed of that plant monster was something surreal, to the point where a seventh tier warrior like that general would barely be able to react to your movements. If you intend to cast an offensive spell, I have my doubts if you will be able to hit him." The master of magic said.

"We can use a large-scale holy field to lessen its power-" The commander tried to argue, but the master of magic cut him off again.

"Even if you successfully create a holy field, which I personally doubt, we've all seen the monster teleport into a sphere of darkness and bypass anti-teleportation spells. What guarantees it won't do the same again?" The master of magic silenced the commander at that moment.

No one in the throne room knew how the plant monster had managed to appear in the midst of the mages' formation, but they understood the implications this would have. Even if they destroyed all the undead and successfully used a holy field, the monster could flee at any moment and all their efforts would be wasted.

The safest idea would be to go with the general's first idea and cast a large-scale spell to kill the monster in one shot, but that would be nearly impossible to do in practice. As long as the enchantment that forces teleport outside the wall is active, it would be impossible to take the plant monster by surprise.

The purple portals weren't as convenient as the order made them out to be. No order mage had set foot in the strongholds as the realm had insisted that maintaining the borders was their duty, so it would be impossible to teleport there normally.

What no one knew except the order was that the teleportation crystals resonated with each other, but at a frequency that no creature in this world could feel. An archmage studying the crystals noticed this by accident and reported his discovery to the order, who invested nearly unlimited resources to investigate.

By studying this unique resonance, they were able to create magic items capable of detecting other crystals, thus facilitating the discovery of new crystals and allowing the order to create portals in the coordinates of previously discovered crystals.

It was one of Ricley's duties while he was in Faltra, to record the frequency of the crystal in the platinum fist stronghold so the order could move into the stronghold when they needed to.

The throne room was silent as everyone thought deeply about what to do. The one who broke the silence was the envoy of the church of Eishin, Cardinal Nicholas. He was an elderly man with a long white beard, but the cassock he wore did little to hide the bulging muscles all over his body.

"Unfortunately, the soldiers currently in the fortress are alone and it is impossible to rescue them. Does everyone have that in mind?" Cardinal Nicholas asked and everyone nodded, even the commander was forced to agree.

Unlike most clergy, he began his career as a crusader and then a paladin, leaving the front lines at age 110 when his body stopped developing. He decided to continue serving the church as a priest and continued his career up to his current position.

"So let's consider the fortress currently enemy territory and plan a crusade to reconquer it. The church lost good men today and let's not rest knowing that these brave servants of God are slaves to a monster. We pledge our full support in a future expedition." Cardinal Nicholas declared firmly, causing sighs among the nobles.

The master of magic narrowed his eyes at the expected but still irritating attitude of the cardinal. He was one of the dark elder's apprentices and had been dispatched to this meeting when the order was informed that an undead army was attacking the fortress and that possibly they were responsible for the attack on Faltra.

The elder found it strange that Emilia's team did not show up in the city of Clastro after two weeks had passed and tried to contact them, but there was no response. He sent a team to investigate, but they still hadn't arrived at the scene.

A late awakening mana body from the darkness, the mysterious disappearance of a unit of mage slayers, and an undead army suddenly appearing in a nearby stronghold. The elder put two plus two together and realized the identity of the enemy leader and was incredibly excited.

The corpse had become an undead on its own, something strong enough to wipe out an entire unit of mage slayers and destroy a city, turning the entire local population into skeletons. How he managed to break into the fortress was still a mystery, but it only served to increase the elder's greed.

He sent the subordinate himself to ensure he could get the leader's corpse or at least samples of his body, but the plan backfired. This plant monster was not foreseen and the master of magic didn't know what to do now.

The master of magic wanted to close the meeting open and inform the dark elder to receive further instructions, but it would be difficult at the pace the meeting was taking. He racked his brains for a solution and said the only thing that could delay the inevitable.

"There is one thing we need to consider before we make a decision. The kingdom had informed the order that a necromancer had attacked a fortress and possibly a city as well and that is why the order decided to get involved, but we saw clearly that a monster unknown was responsible for it."

"There are many discrepancies in the information we have so far and it is extremely important to obtain concrete information about the enemy before making a decision, to avoid a massacre like we have just witnessed." The master of magic tried to appeal to the nobles' natural laziness when it came to solving problems that don't directly affect them, but Commander Ragnar snorted at him.

"The order has already made clear its disinterest in this matter, so why bring this matter up now? I agree that the origin of this monster must be investigated, but its elimination takes precedence. We cannot allow such a monster to remain alive and threaten other cities or fortress!" The commander spoke and the cardinal expressed strong agreement with him.

'You damn muscle brains, stop getting in the way,' The master of magic thought, but a voice of help came from an unexpected direction.

Chapter 125 The final decision

"I agree with the magic of master opinion. Rushing will only cause more casualties. We need to investigate this monster's origins and scrutinize the recording to look for any details or information we may have missed." The leader of the court mages spoke, causing Commander Ragnar to squint at him.

"What are you talking about Alexander? Do you really agree with this guy?" The commander looked at the leader of the court mages as if he were talking nonsense.

The commander was dismissing the master of magic idea as the opinion of a foreigner who didn't care about the realm, but hearing a fellow countryman agree was a shock. Commander Ragnar and the leader of the court mages were friends who fought on various battlefields together, so he cannot rule out his opinion.

"Just listen. That thing wasn't a simple monster. It had knowledge of magic and strategy, ordering his minions in advance to destroy large-scale spells and use acid clouds with the sewer slimes.

"We cannot treat this as a crusade against evil but rather as a war against an enemy army. An army of unknown power led by an extremely intelligent and equally powerful monster." The leader of the court mages spoke resolutely and the nobles began to complain.

"So what do you suggest, leader of the court mages? Or do you do all this without a plan?" The cardinal sends him back, feeling offended by the way he derided the crusades.

"First, we will inform the nearest cities and fortress about the threat, but only the nobles who rule them. There is no reason to cause mass panic. Then, we must investigate the destroyed city of Faltra, where supposedly the first traces of the undead army were discovered." The chief of the court mages said.

'This guy just repeated what I said in different words.' The master of magic took a deep breath to contain his anger and let it go. The nobles seemed to hear the man and he gained nothing by fighting over whose idea it was.

The leader of the mages court then turned to the master of magic and said: "We can use the portals of the order to gather our soldiers in the golden bow fortress, 10 days' journey from the platinum fist fortress. Can we count on the order for that?"

.....

The borders of the Mirkor realm were protected by a line of fortresses and forts, all named with a different weapon and metal. The Platinum Fist Fortress was the last and closest to the mainland's central mountain range.

"The order is willing to cooperate if a concrete plan is made, but we are not going to be part of a suicidal plan." The master of magic agreed to help.

"Let's get the investigation done quickly, then. I'll form an investigation team immediately and send scouts and mages to that city. We'll strategize based on the information we gather there.

“Just in case, we’ll send reinforcements to the golden arch fortress, along with scouts to watch over the undead. Is that good enough?” The commander coldly looked at the master of magic, but the latter pretended not to notice and nodded.

“It seems acceptable. The order will also send some mages to help with the investigation.” The magic master spoke and the rest of the meeting went smoothly. They worked out all the little details for about an hour, while all the king did was nod his head every now and then and nod whenever he was called upon.

In the end, it was decided that the investigations would be carried out in collaboration with the court mages and the mage order, with soldiers and knights of the realm as escorts. The nobleman who ruled the city Clastro was already organizing an expedition to send reinforcements to the city, but he had to cancel and leave matters to the kingdom.

Reinforcements were sent to the golden arch fortress using the order’s portals and entered a state of emergency, sending patrols and scouts on their way to the fortress. Those involved in the meeting were on alert for the undead army’s movements, worried that they would move to the next stronghold or flee to the demihuman empire, where it would be impossible to pursue them.

Strangely, the undead didn’t show any signs of movement and it looked like they intended to stick around for awhile. The army concluded that the undead did not intend to leave for the time being. Mages would be sent over the next few days to get a bird’s eye view using familiars, but it would take a few days for them to arrive.

The church movement was the strongest. It had been a few years since they had a crusade, so the fanatics were burning with battle spirits, many insisting that they should immediately march to the stronghold to purge the evil.

When word got out that his brothers had fallen in battle and were forced to become slaves of evil, many paladins and priests agreed that they should attack the fortress immediately, but the cardinal managed to convince them to wait, saying that they were investigating the information from the monster and preparing to attack.

The order was the most silent on the matter. The master of magic reported the information to the dark elder first, who was extremely confused by the information received. He ordered the master of magic to keep up to date on the situation while also getting in touch with his mage slayers, ordering them to quicken their pace so they would arrive before the order’s investigators.

The dark elder no longer jumped to conclusions and waited for new information before deciding what to do. He was currently the only elder in the Mirkor realm, so all information passed through him and he had full decision-making authority.

The elder, along with several important figures of the order, watched the footage of the battle several times, most trying to determine the level of threat the plant monster posed while the elder tried to find any sign of the mage slayers among the undead army.

Luckily, Emilia and Caio didn't wear their costumes as that would make them stand out in the midst of the army and they didn't actively participate in the battle, so the elder couldn't find any connection with his own team, but found a clue in an unexpected place.

The skeleton mage in the center of the army wore a cloak of order and the dark elder clearly remembered Finn saying that the corpse was being guarded by rookie mages of the order.

It wasn't enough to be sure, but it kindled a strong suspicion in the dark elder.

In the midst of this tense moment, a person who was not at the throne room meeting but was equally important became involved in the matter. This would be the master of the kingdom's adventurer guild, responsible for leading all branches throughout the kingdom, Florence Guilbert. She should have attended the meeting, but unfortunately she had an equally important appointment and was unable to attend.

The adventurers were more commonly known as monster hunters and would not normally engage in wars, focusing mainly on keeping monster numbers in check. But as the enemy were monsters and undead, the story was different.

The guild was a borderless organization, but on a much smaller scale, existing only on the Caprio continent. They were much smaller in numbers than the church of Eishin or the order of mages, but their members were individually very powerful, accustomed to fighting constantly.

Despite their low power and being a relatively small organization, the guild's influence was enormous, as most of the continent's young talent was discovered through them. The adventurer's guild was the most affordable way to earn fame and money, and they accepted anyone able to use mana among their ranks, nurturing their most talented members with their best resources.

They were a factory of incredibly powerful warriors and mages. Adventurers were incredibly versatile, taking on monsters in small groups where the army would need an entire battalion.

Guildmaster Florence included the adventurers in the war and the other nobles saw no reason to refuse. The guild master sent an extremely generous commission and many adventuring groups responded positively to the call. It was not yet certain how many would actually participate, but they would add a force that could not be taken lightly.

An air of tension began to hover among the nobles with territories close to the border, as if they were about to go to war. Many nobles began to stock up on supplies for a possible emergency, making the merchants selling the supplies suspect a possible crisis in the future and rumors to begin to spread.

The common people had no idea that a fortress had been annihilated, but the nobles' stockpiling caused a decrease in goods in circulation and this did not go unnoticed.

The rumors that traders spread of a possible crisis did not help either, and many people started to stock up on food, causing prices to reach absurd heights in a matter of days and making it difficult for the poorest population to buy food.

It was a short-term problem, but a long-term catastrophe. Before the intelligence gathering was even over, the cracks in Mirkor's realm had already begun.

End of volume 2

Chapter 126 Preliminary investigations

In the middle of a hill, a group of white fangs were camping in the middle of the night. They were the unit sent to the city of Faltra and they were only 1 day trip from the city. Unlike Emilia's unit which was focused on combat and assassinations, this unit was more oriented towards investigation and tracking.

Despite having different functions, both were recognized as mage slayers affiliated with White Fang.

Their costumes had enchantments that lowered stamina expended and increased speed, allowing them to run great distances without tiring instead of magical dispersion. As most were in layer 4 and their leader in layer 5, they could run at horse speed for nearly a full day before getting tired.

They were on their last break before rushing into town, but none of the members were resting as they should. Everyone was too tense about their next destination.

"Captain, still awake? What do you think of our next mission?" one of the mage slayers asks, certain that everyone is still awake.

"Don't bother me, I'm trying to sleep, here." A grumpy reply came back, but the mage slayer ignored it and continued talking.

"Don't be cold, captain. I'm not the only one wondering about our next mission, you know? Information is very sparse and contradicts itself." The mage slayer spoke suspiciously.

Realizing that most of the mage slayers were listening intently to the conversation and that the man would not shut up until he received an answer, the captain sighed and answered him. "I know the information is strange, but that's exactly what we should investigate. The church and kingdom are certain that the plant monster is the creator of the undead army, but our elder is skeptical about it."

"The unit of assassins that came before us got a corpse with a mana body with late awakening with darkness, which the elder suspects is the real culprit in the situation, but we need evidence pointing to him."

.....

"What about the plant monster?" the mage slayer asked with a raised eyebrow.

"That's what doesn't add up to this whole story and what we're going to investigate." The captain spoke and turned his back on the mage slayer, trying to sleep. The man didn't ask any more questions and 4 hours later he woke everyone up and they resumed their journey.

They made the day trip in less than 16 hours, but they didn't go directly to the city, but to one of the villages close to the city. If the undead army really showed up here, they would definitely have destroyed villages to get soldiers and it would be a good starting point to start your investigation.

Before they even entered the village, the unit captain signaled them to stop and crouched on the ground, taking a handful of dirt in his hand and frowning.

"Did you find anything?" The same man who was on guard the day before asks.

“The land is dry. Very dry, as if it were completely devoid of life.” The captain tried to explain the uncomfortable feeling he felt as he touched land. The ground was almost sandy, Treevor’s world pillage making the land barren.

“It’s winter, it’s normal for the land to be dry. Maybe this region was in a period of severe drought or something, information from the city said that the region was in an unprecedented state of poverty, with many turning to crime to survive.” The assassin responded with a shrug and the captain nodded in agreement with him but made a mental note to report it.

They entered the abandoned village and tried to look for anything relevant, but found only smears of dried blood. All the houses were open, their doors smashed to the ground. One of the mage slayers went to the fields outside and noticed that the fields were completely dry.

The strange thing was that the fields seemed to be being maintained, which would make no sense with how dead the land is. Definitely something has been done here. After finishing checking the village and finding nothing, the unit bids farewell to the village and rushes into town, preferring to climb the wall rather than enter through the open gates, just in case someone left an unpleasant surprise.

The view of the city from the wall is like a war zone. Buildings completely destroyed, tents torn apart and dried blood smeared all over the place. Almost no buildings were left whole, those not directly affected were later destroyed as skeletons looted the city.

“Looks like the undead looted everything before they left.” It was the assessment of one of the mage slayers and the captain had to agree. As there was no visible threat, the team split up and began scouring the city.

They easily found the tracks of chariot wheels and footprints of skeleton soldiers, but their job wasn’t to figure out the route the undead took so they ignored it for now.

“Captain, you should come here in the town square. Now.” One of the assassins sent through the communicator and the captain could hear the anger in his voice, so he decided to hurry.

The town square was in chaos as Athos didn’t bother removing the wreckage except for the main street leading to the gates, but the assassins didn’t care, glaring angrily at the town’s fountain.

Seven corpses wearing the white fang costumes and masks were impaled on wooden stakes like scarecrows. The wooden stake was driving through the corpses starting at the ass and coming out in the middle of the skull.

All the skin on the corpses was removed and the costume was sewn onto the body, the front of the skull completely removed and the mask nailed in place. It was a little prank Athos made to kill time while Treevor was busy runesmithing.

Treevor had buried the corpses in the earth beneath his workshop along with the magical equipment, as they were useless to him. Treevor had already copied the runes, and the elves had a hard time using weapons that weren’t made of wood.

Athos also didn’t bother to retrieve the equipment, as they would be useless after a single use and Treevor had already said he could replicate them when he had time.

The captain gritted his teeth at the sight and ordered his subordinates to remove the corpses and destroy them along with the magical equipment to erase any evidence that his unit was here.

They searched inside the buildings but found nothing much. The undead had looted anything useful.

“Captain, I also found something in the sewers, but it’s strange. Someone dug a grave and buried a corpse. No visible wound marks, so it’s likely dark magic was used to restore him. He’s dead at most two weeks and in relatively good condition.” Another assassin spoke into the communicator.

“Is there any way to identify him?” The captain was surprised that a corpse had been left behind, but just added that to his report.

“No sir. He is wearing only ordinary clothes and there is no magic item on him.” The answer came a few seconds later.

“Then destroy the body so it won’t be found.” The captain ordered and the assassin obeyed.

“Guys, have you seen the view from the other side of the walls?” A new voice sounded on the communicator.

“What are you talking about? there’s nothing on the other side, just a wasteland.” The captain remembered seeing nothing and did not understand the man’s question.

“Yes, there is nothing. There should be a forest here according to the information.” The assassin spoke and they all froze in place. Even if the forest was a little further away than the information said, it should still be visible from the walls.

“How does an entire forest disappear like that? Did the undead do that?” one of the assassins asked. It was possible that the skeletons used the darkness to feed on the forest, but would they really waste time on something like this?

The captain doubted, until he remembered the tree monster. Perhaps it was a monster that lived in this forest and was transformed. There were still many questions, but the captain knew where the next step of the investigation would be.

“Let’s search the vacant lot. See if we can find anything useful. There’s nothing around here.” The captain ordered and everyone moved to where the Faltra forest was originally.

The ground was the same dry earth as elsewhere, but the battle marks were clearly visible. The assassins used their familiars to check the front and found the big hole. Some of them went down and found Treavor’s workshop empty.

“What did you find down there?” the captain asked.

“It’s empty. Whatever was here, they’ve already looted it. But this place reminds me of a rudimentary runesmith’s workshop.” One of the assassins came out of the hole and spoke.

“So, did the undead get weapons here? But who created them?” The assassins began to wonder.

“Perhaps the spirit that lived here? The information said that the forest was protected by a spirit.” It was not uncommon for spirits to be able to enchant weapons using the magical wood of their own bodies.

More than one adventurer has reported meeting a spirit and receiving an enchanted wooden weapon as a gift.

“But what happened to the spirit then? Maybe they killed him?”

“Or maybe we’ve just discovered the plant monster’s identity.” The captain suddenly spoke and all the other assassins looked at him in disbelief. Spirits were unable to leave their place of origin, becoming an undead shouldn’t change that, or at least that’s how it should be.

Chapter 127 The true enemy

“Let’s get in touch with the elder, I doubt we’ll find anything else here.” The captain spoke and the assassins walked away, not wanting to disturb the conversation. Despite their quick investigation of the city, there wasn’t much hard evidence they could find.

“What did you find?” The elder answered the call almost immediately, looking anxiously at the captain. The latter reported all of his findings and his assumptions, emphasizing the fact that the undead didn’t leave much behind to be discovered.

“...” The dark elder closed his eyes and thought in silence for some time, trying to assimilate the information that the captain had given him. Now, he was absolutely sure that the late-awakening corpse was responsible for it all.

Finn’s report said there was a master and apprentice belonging to the word keepers and the corpse came from the apprentice. It was entirely possible that after becoming undead, the apprentice would retain some rationality and refuse to change the master himself. Or maybe he didn’t know how to do that with corpses that weren’t freshly killed.

Recordings of the battle at the fortress showed that skeletons of beasts were loading carriages and carts, littered with corpses.

The elder also agreed with the idea that the plant monster was possibly a spirit. He himself had already done experiments where he tried to turn dead spirits into undead and failed, but it was quite possible that a natural undead could succeed.

But what really intrigued the dark elder was the dead earth. The city of Faltra was in disrepair because of mismanagement and a incompetent ruler, not infertile land. The information seemed irrelevant compared to the rest that had been discovered, but the dark elder’s intuition kept telling him that it was important.

“Captain, is all the land dead like this or just around the city and forest?” The elder spoke after a while.

“Let me check, elder.” The captain spoke and activated the communicator on the mask, ordering the others to check. Just as the elder suspected, only the land around the city and where the forest should have been was dead, the land in other areas was dry but not at the same level. The mage slayers also noticed that the trail the undead left was also dead, so the culprit was obvious.

.....

“Your theory seems correct, captain. Spirits are capable of extracting power from the environment, it seems that this one can extract more than just world energy apparently.” The dark elder spoke. His theory was wrong, but he was the closest to the truth these days.

“What should we do now, elder?” the captain asked, assuming his mission was over.

“Captain, do you believe that the investigators who will come later you will be able to come to the same conclusion as you?” asked the eldest.

“Unlikely, elder. Without the report from the other team of mage slayer, they have no way of knowing that there was a late awakened corpse. But it is possible that they realize that the plant monster’s identity is an undead spirit.” The captain replied after some thought.

“Fine. Be sure to erase anything that leads them to suspect the truth.” The dark elder ordered with a crooked smile, causing the captain to tilt his head in confusion. He hoped the greedy elder would want to take the plant monster’s corpse for himself.

“Instead of taking the monster’s corpse, I’d rather take its creator. If I can get my hands on the creator of these black skeletons, I can turn any spirit into an undead.” The elder spoke as if reading the captain’s mind.

“All of you must flee to Shiima City, Captain. The investigation team is almost formed and the mages intend to take turns with teleportation crystals to reach your position in a few hours. It will be difficult to explain what you are doing there, so be sure to run away.” The elder said and ended the call.

“Guys, we’re on our way out. Let’s get away from the city and find a place to camp. We’re too tired to run long distances anyway.” The captain spoke, taking a small pink orb from his cloak pocket and eating it.

It was a nutritional bomb in a capsule, containing all the nutrients the human body needs and satisfying hunger for an entire day. The mage slayers followed his lead and fled the scene, making sure they didn’t leave any tracks behind.

6 hours later, purple spheres appeared a few kilometers away and exhausted mages and knights left, before making it all the way to the city.

The investigation proceeded exactly as the captain and elder had suspected. Investigators didn’t find anything unusual in the city, but they noticed the dead soil and vacant lot where the forest should have been and immediately went to investigate.

They made the link between the spirit and the plant monster and reported their findings to the kingdom, who sighed in frustration at the news. Spirits were considered harmless or even beneficial beings, as long as their territory was not violated.

The idea that could transform into a monster capable of creating the undead was a nightmare. The way the realm interacted with the spirits until now would have to be revised and the forests where the spirits inhabited would have to be guarded to prevent massacres like what happened in Faltra from happening again.

Of course, all this would have to wait until the current threat was eliminated.

Knowing the enemy's identity didn't help much in knowing how to face them, but now they had a vague idea of the enemies' powers and limits, a plan of attack was starting to take shape.

The kingdom was gathering troops at the golden arch fortress, and in a matter of a week at most it planned to launch an offensive against them.

Platinum fist fortress at the same time.

"Master, are you sure this will work?" Emilia asked as she looked at Athos climbing the wall and breaking the stone, as if looking for something.

"No, and that just makes it more fun." Athos replied with a smile on his face.

A few days had passed since they had successfully conquered the fortress and things had more or less calmed down now. His army had grown immensely, reaching over 20,000 units, but the increase in power was much greater.

Unlike ordinary skeletons, skeleton soldiers were trained and fought skillfully. Athos lost approximately 3,000 common skeletons, 400 soldier skeletons, 50 crusaders, 8 paladins, 28 priests.

In comparison, he gained approximately 7,000 Skeleton Soldiers, 1,500 Common Skeletons, 950 Crusaders. 42 paladins, 22 priests and 44 mages. Furthermore, half of the siege weapons on the left side of the gate had survived the Athos battle frenzy and the rest were being repaired by the skeletons at the moment.

Good news for Athos was that among the non-combatant skeletons inside the fortress, there were blacksmiths and armorers. As there was a metal mine nearby, the kingdom decided to deploy a forge so that the fortress could make its own weapons and only sell the excess to traders.

The forges were close to the armory and Athos hadn't noticed the first time he broke in because they were inactive at the moment and why there were several small buildings instead of one big building. Each building being responsible for a different type of weapon.

All the blacksmith skeletons were currently forging weapons, while the gunsmiths were fixing the siege weapons.

The collection of information also flowed smoothly. The general's corpse was in a very bad state and Athos had to use dark magic to heal him before transforming him, but after that it was simple. It only took a few thousand soldiers under his command and he became loyal and spit out all the information Athos wanted.

Athos was now trying to find a magic metal plate within the walls, where large-scale spells were enchanted. According to Astrus, the walls were just made of stone mixed with concrete and were unable to withstand such powerful spells, so court mages used mithril plate inside the walls.

Of course, enchantments still strengthened the walls and prevented earth mages from manipulating them, but they were two different objects, connected by enchantments.

The plates were only 10 centimeters wide and 3 meters long and several of them connected around the walls. It was a model of ancient spells and most of the walls of great cities these days were made by mixing mithril dust, but the strongholds were old and the kingdom saw no reason to upgrade them.

Not only was the new model much cheaper and required less metal, but it also fixed one of the weaknesses of the metal plates, since removing one would simply break the connection between them.

It would be a huge construction project and a major disaster if the demihumans attacked mid-construction.

"I found!" Athos yelled excitedly, finally finding where the metal plate was. The stones were very resistant and he had been trying to find it for almost half an hour. Athos broke all the surrounding stone with a corrupted mana drill, but he didn't dare remove it.

He heard from Astrus that without access to the control room, the large-scale spells would remain active until all energy was spent. If Athos tried to remove the mithril plate now, the energy would continue to leak out and most likely blow the entire wall apart. They would need to lower the barrier's energy before removing it.

Chapter 128 Mithril

'Is everyone already in position?' Athos asked mentally. Their skeletons were lined up around the wall, breaking through the wall at the same height as Athos did. They broke just enough to reach the mithril plates and keep the wall from toppling over.

The skeletons also broke a path that connected the wall to the fortress, finding the same magical metal plates.

It was impossible to feed the large-scale spell directly, any attempt to inject mana would just make the mana circulate through the metal, but that was exactly what Athos wanted. The runes were full of energy and easily extinguished corruption, but the undead continually injected more energy.

The large-scale spells were created by over 50 mages, so they weren't in danger of exploding even if the skeletons injected corrupted mana at full strength. The runes glowed in rejection of the corrupted energy, but there were so many entry points that the energy became scattered in an attempt to protect the runes.

Athos noticed how the glow of the runes was visibly diminishing and removed the plate at a time when the power was low. The plates were made so that they fit together perfectly and were difficult to remove, but Astrus knew the trick to remove them easily and he taught Athos.

The plates were held together using air magic to generate a vacuum at the junctions that held them together, so it was sufficient to generate air bubbles between the plates to release them.

Energy began to leak out, but it was too small an amount to explode. Athos still backed away from the walls for fear it would explode, just in case.

'Treevor, I managed to remove the first one, how is your side?' Athos asked mentally. The idea of disabling large-scale enchantments was actually Treevor's. There was no point in keeping a large-scale

spell active if they couldn't use it. Treevor intended to corrupt the plates like Athos did the corrupted willow and create large-scale spells usable by them.

The mithril plate that Athos had removed was slightly different from the others, having a teleportation crystal embedded in the surface. It was where the crystal that forced teleportation outside the wall was. Without it, the order would not have the coordinates of the fortress and would not be able to open portals near the wall.

.....

The one who explained this to them was Emilia, who originally belonged to the order and knew many of its secrets not revealed to the public. She also explained that it would be possible to use crystals to teleport into the fortress if the large-scale spell was removed, but Athos chose to take the risks.

'It's all right here. These hive hawks are really useful.' Treevor replied calmly. He was inside the control room, the vines from the back of his head spreading across the room as the flower buds on his shoulders greedily absorbed the surrounding darkness.

Darkness was being transmitted through the vines corrupting the runes on the walls mixed with mithril dust, the only part that had been updated to modern standards. The flowers on Treevor's shoulders drained the darkness quickly, but he was splitting the energy between various vines and hive hawks, so the effect wasn't as strong.

The hive hawks were inside the keep, transmitting the energy received from Treevor through the mithril plates that connected the control room throughout the keep. The skeletons had spent the last few days breaking through the floor and walls of the fortress to find all the plates.

Most of the skeletons began removing the mithril slabs as they spoke, before filling the nearby carriages and ordering the cattle skeletons to take them to the keep. They would have enough mithril to arm a small army with that amount of metal.

Athos still had to find out if it was possible to corrupt the magic metal or not before deciding what to do with it and from the way Emilia was staring at him, she still hadn't given up on the idea of making him flee to the desert.

He was stalling the decision, saying it would depend on whether or not it was possible to create his own large-scale spells. After the battle euphoria wore off and Athos calmed down, he had to admit that his chances of winning a second battle would be slim, even with Treevor's presence.

The realm wasn't stupid and would bring enough firepower to take on Treevor, his best weapon so he needed the large scale spells operational to balance the game. He wasn't crazy about fighting a battle he knew he was going to lose. No, scratch that. He was definitely crazy enough for that, but he still intended to prepare as much as possible to win.

Athos personally charged the metal plate with the teleportation crystal and Emilia followed, running to the control room where Treevor was. When they arrived the runes on the walls of the control room were flickering faintly and Treevor had already stopped flowing energy, his body a little lethargic from the lack of darkness.

“Is it possible to remove the crystal from the metal plate without destroying it?” Athos asked as soon as he entered the room.

“The only way to find out is to try. The metal plates are still enchanted, but they’re useless on their own. Try to corrupt it and undo the runes, maybe then you’ll get the crystal.” Treevor answered between gasps, feeling lethargic as the willow recovered.

“Isn’t it better to copy the runes first?” Athos asked.

“The Skeleton Wizards guarding the stronghold are the runesmiths who created the large-scale spells, so they have the original designs.” Emilia spoke. Athos didn’t care about the skeletons’ functions until he needed something from them, so he didn’t know what most of them did.

Athos did not coil and began to flow corrupted mana through the mithril plate, immediately frowning. “The crystal absorbs my corrupted mana before it can corrupt the runes. I need to find a way to remove the crystal to avoid destroying the metal.”

“Aren’t you going to keep the crystal?” Treevor asked.

“And let the order open gates near the keep at any moment? No thanks. I’ll destroy this thing and put Emilia’s crystal in place.” Athos took the crystal from Emilia and compared it to what was on the surface of the mithril plate, noticing that their sizes were similar.

“Emilia was also part of the order. What makes you think her crystal is also untraceable?”

“It’s because it was my family who discovered the resonance between crystals and it was my father the runesmith who developed the crystal tracking device that allows opening the portals. The crystals my father uses in the family are not traceable by order and Elder would rather fight to the death with my father than ask him for help. We are safe until eventually my father finds out about my death.” Emilia replied confidently.

“It didn’t give me much security, but that’s fine for now. Boss, my hope was that corrupting the runes would allow you to remove the crystal without destroying the integrity of the mithril, but it seems like it’s impossible. Let me try something.” Treevor spoke and the willow split open, its true body lifting and stretching its bones before it got to work.

Treevor touched the sword and cast his runesmith spell, spirit eye. The spell revealed to him not only the runes and total amount of mana in a material, but also the location where mana tendrils connected the crystal to the metal.

Runesmiths could use different ingredients to create enchantments with elements that the material had no affinity for, or smelt mana stones to increase the total amount of world energy a metal had, but it’s impossible to perfectly fuse two different materials.

Runesmiths used mana tendrils and connected both materials in a similar way to the binding spell, but the teleport crystals had no mana so the tendrils would be made on one side only and hopefully could be undone and the crystal removed.

Treevor conjured tiny tendrils of corrupted mana and began to slowly untie the mana knots. It was like a messy ball of yarn and he had to subtly untie it. Treevor has forcefully suppressed his mana's corruption effect, trying his best to avoid any damage.

He was currently the only skeleton capable of suppressing the effects of corrupted mana, as the others were more interested in maximizing it. Treevor still had to be careful as continued contact would still cause damage, but it gave him time to work.

'Shit, why does this have to be so difficult?' Treevor began to mentally curse. Mana knots weren't that difficult, but the teleport crystal was constantly trying to drain his mana with a ferocity that overshadowed even the magic of darkness.

Treevor had to keep the tendrils in check with sheer force of will slowly undo the knots. Whenever he lost focus even for a second, the crystal would absorb his mana and force him to conjure a new tendril.

As the knots unraveled, the connection between the mithril and the crystal became smaller and smaller and with it the crystal's draining effect, allowing Treevor to speed up the process. When approximately 15 minutes had passed and the last knot had been undone, the crystal slipped out of the metal, as if they had never been connected.

"Good job." Athos clapped Treevor on the shoulder and caught the crystal before it hit the ground.

Chapter 129 Death iron and dark mithril

He'd followed most of Treevor's work with the vision of death, but the tendrils of mana were just a blur to him. Athos made a mental note to ask Treevor to teach him that spell later.

"That's just the first step. We still have to know if it's possible to corrupt metals the same way you do with wooden weapons. Wood was part of a living being at least while metal is totally inorganic after all." Treevor spoke, but still excitedly hoped that Athos would succeed.

Athos didn't dare use a precious material like mithril in an experiment, so he mentally ordered a skeleton to bring some iron ingots from the forges. A skeleton arrived a few minutes later with and brought the iron ingots before leaving.

"Cheaper and with less power. Hopefully, it should be easier to test." Athos spoke and the two agreed with him. Athos took an iron ingot in each hand, flowing his own corrupted mana into the first and flowing corrupted world energy into the second.

He watched closely with the vision of death as both metals were corrupted. The first ingot almost immediately started to deteriorate, while the second one lasted a few seconds longer, but deteriorated all the same. Interestingly, the second ingot darkened slightly for a few seconds, but it was not able to withstand the corrupted element.

"Two failures, but the second one was a little better. Any suggestions?" Athos asked after clapping his hands a few times to dust off his hands.

"I think the problem is with you and not the metal. You try to corrupt metal as quickly as possible. But metal decays faster than you can corrupt it." Treevor pointed out the problem in the Athos method.

"What should I try to do then?" Athos asked intrigued.

“Try to control the corruption as much as possible and instead of corrupting the energy present in the metal, try to replace it by absorbing the energy present in it. The metal will try to extract external energy to replace the energy it has lost and that’s where you work your magic.” Treevor proposed his theory and Athos agreed with him, having no better idea.

.....

Athos took a third ingot and used vampiric touch, an energy drain ability he had recently developed. The metal’s energy was devoured starting from where his hand was touching and he conjured a layer of corrupted mana around the metal, making sure the world energy didn’t enter by accident and injecting the corrupted world energy.

As there was no energy present in the metal, Athos didn’t have to worry about supplying the natural impulse of the corrupted world energy to corrupt everything it touches. The metal began to visibly darken, until it almost reached the hue of charcoal. Athos raised his fist in the air in victory and broke the barrier, but the metal began to clear again, absorbing pure world energy and even correcting its balance.

“Shit!” Athos swore as he remade the corrupted mana layer and drained the pure world energy, returning the metal to its dark color. “I managed to transform the metal, but it’s only temporary. I need something else to do the trick.”

“Hum...” Now it was Treevor’s turn to look thoughtful. He was not at all used to working in metals, so his knowledge in the area was scarce. Treevor thought of a few theories, but dismissed them a second later, realizing they wouldn’t work.

“Maybe put on a spark of life force? You know, like I did to you?” Athos asked after the three of them stood looking at their feet after a while.

“It’s worth the try.” Treevor nodded his head.

Athos used a single spark of corrupted life force in an attempt to stabilize the corrupted energy in the metal, but it was a futile effort. The life force tried to gather the corrupted world energy at the center, but a single spark was unable to gather all the energy from the ingot and dispersed.

“Interesting. It didn’t serve the purpose I intended, but it seems that with enough life force, the metal would gather the energy in one spot, as if it were a mana core. Perhaps we can create artificial beings-” Athos began to ramble on in his theories, but Treevor snapped him out of his reverie.

“Yeah, too bad if we don’t figure out a way to stabilize the corruption in the iron ingot, we won’t know how to do the same with mithril and we’ll be too dead to try something else.” Treevor said, bursting his bubble.

“Perhaps the nature of the metal has remained the same, only the energy that flows has changed?” Emilia asked suddenly, making them both turn to her.

“What do you mean?” Both asked at the same time.

“Master, you just injected corrupted energy into the metal, but it didn’t change its nature. The corruption changed the nature of a corpse or plants by transforming them, but the metal remained the

same. I believe that if we change the nature of iron, the energy it absorbs will change too.” Emilia spoke her theory.

“The problem is how to change the nature of iron. I’ve never done this before and Treevor has no experience working with metals.” Athos began to frown as he thought of a solution.

“How about we try runesmithing? If we turn the energy into runes, we can prevent the world’s energy from correcting its balance and forcefully adapt the metal. We can learn a proper way to corrupt metals later, we’re in a race against time after all.” Treevor agreed with Emilia’s theory and offered a temporary solution.

“I don’t think a single ingot can withstand a proper enchantment, so try to use the weakest enchantment you know.” Athos handed the ingot to Treevor, but still kept the layer of corruption around it, just expanded enough for Treevor to be able to work.

Treevor took less than 5 minutes to do a simple enchantment on the iron ingot, it would only slightly improve the ingot’s toughness when activated. Athos undid the layer of protection as he crossed his fingers for the best.

The iron ingot failed to correct its balance this time, the corrupted runes did not move and forcibly absorbed the corrupted world’s energy. Like a spell, an enchantment used the user’s mana as fuel and world energy to activate, but enchantments absorbed the world’s energy in advance and only needed the user’s mana to activate.

It was the reason why regular enchantments didn’t have a cast time and enchantments mage slayer boots had a cooldown, as they used up all their accumulated energy in a burst of speed.

It also explained why Treevor’s aura blades were so powerful. Despite being abilities, they also used world energy as if they were spells, taking their potency to another level.

“It’s a success, Treevor. Your idea really worked, congratulations. Now we just have to do the same with all the thousands of mithril slabs the skeletons are bringing.” Athos held up both thumbs at him and grinned from ear to ear, nearly causing Treevor to convulse.

“Are we going to have to work in that much metal? That’s impossible! I’m going to die again if I have to runesmithing that much!” Treevor cried out in alarm, taking a step back as if afraid of Athos.

“Don’t worry, the skeletons of court mages will work on this, we’ll both be corrupting the metal plates while the mages runesmithing the large-scale spells. Your plant arm can also conjure corrupted world energy, so you’ll work with me to corrupt them.” Athos spoke, trying and failing to reassure Treevor.

Corrupting mithril plates was easier than enchanting them, but with just two of them it was a lot of work.

“Master, what should we call this new metal? You can’t call everything corrupted this, corrupted that.” Emilia asked.

“Just add a Death or black to the name. Black iron and death mithril sound good, don’t they?” Athos replied without giving it much thought. “Now, if we’re done playing, we’ve got a lot, a lot of work to do

and not a lot of time. Let's take one of the meeting rooms on the first floor and order the skeletons to bring the mithril slabs there."

"What about this room? We need to seal off the place to corrupt the metal long enough for the Skeleton Wizards to enchant everything, so it's going to take quite a while." Treevor asked resigned to having to work nonstop for the next few days.

'I should have demanded a vacation when we were negotiating.' he thought sadly.

"Let's leave the control room for last and focus on the mithril plates first. We already have enough work for one day." Athos said and left the room, descending the floors to the place where the skeletons were stacking the plates on the first floor.

"There's one thing we're forgetting. How are we going to power a large-scale spell? We don't have magic stones and even if we did, we'd have to figure out a way to corrupt them before using them." Treevor returned to the corrupted willow and spoke as he followed.

"We can feed the spell with our own mana. After all, we have many soldiers willing to cooperate." Acts replied.

"I see. Normally, a large scale spell couldn't be powered by a mage, no matter how strong he is and different mages would have conflicting energy signatures, but thousands of skeletons would solve this problem." Treevor agreed with his idea.

Chapter 130 Corrupted large scale spells

Athos and Treevor spent the next 5 days in hell. They worked non-stop for a single second. Athos conjured a corrupted barrier and let his body keep it active and robotically corrupted the mithril plates, his mind nearly shutting down at how tedious the task was.

His body would have run out of energy very quickly if not for the vampiric touch draining the mithril's mana. The metal was rich in world energy, even more so than the corrupted willow sword and 1/10th of the energy was more than enough to fill it.

Treevor was even more efficient than Athos, the corrupted willow conjuring up a great barrier of corrupted mana while his arm continually absorbed vast amounts of world energy corrupted. Athos taught Treevor the vampiric touch and the latter used the skill on the vines, draining several mithril plate at once.

Court mages also crowded into the room, as it was difficult to physically move the mithril without wasting all the work. They worked with precision, timing, and speed that would scare even an elder of the order of magic into every mithril plate.

The biggest difficulty in creating large-scale spells was reconciling the different conflicting energy signatures into a single item. Different mages also had different forms of runesmithing, even though they use the same technique. Each mage was unique and adapted spells to best suit him, even if unconsciously.

Skeletons didn't have that problem. Their similar energy signatures allowed them to work nonstop and cover each other's flaws, where they would normally have to stop what they were doing until the mage corrected their mistake, or risk wasting all their work.

Even though the number of mages dwindled, the process flowed so smoothly that the overall result was superior to what originally existed, leaving plenty of energy for one more spell. The mage skeletons split into smaller groups to speed up the process, causing Athos to panic for a second until Treevor reassured him.

"Most of the energy spent when casting spells on a large scale is spent preventing everything from exploding with the conflicting energies, but that's not an issue here. Most mages barely had time to forge a single rune before the process was over. It's much more efficient to split them into different teams to get the work done."

"Usually it would take almost a month to finish the job, but we can finish it in 6 days if we work non-stop." Treevor spoke in wonder at the timing of the skeletons and the myriad possibilities.

.....

Athos didn't know this, but the greatest weapon of the realms these days was large-scale spells, as their destructive and defensive power was on another level. If they could get their hands on or create their own large-scale spells with such efficiency, it would be an amazing weapon.

The mages started to run out of mana after some time of non-stop runesmithing so Athos and Treevor directed the energy they were absorbing from the mithril plates to them, refreshing them to the apex without them having to stop working.

A surprising discovery they made was that hive hawks could act as intermediaries, so Athos could transfer world energy to them which would then transfer to court mages or any skeletons within reach.

It couldn't transfer mana directly between them, as despite the similarities, their signatures still weren't quite the same, but world energy could be transferred freely between the skeletons now.

The enchantments that court mages were runesmithing were barriers of corrupted mana, air and earth detection spells, forced teleportation, and finally, the field of the dead. Treevor taught the runes to the court mages, who had no problem adding one more large-scale spell now that they had plenty of energy to work with.

Alone, each enchantment would cover at most a few meters, but once they were joined, they could cover the entire fortress and more than 500 meters around it. It would have been impossible to create these enchantments without the right ingredients, but the mithril had already been imbued with all the ingredients beforehand.

As the sun went down on the 5th day, Athos and Treevor finally finished all the mithril slabs, falling backwards as their minds felt like they were going to explode. The court mages were even worse off, but Athos forced them to keep working anyway.

The two remained sprawled on the ground for approximately an hour before the court mages finished their work and rose to their feet, knowing their work was not done yet. They moved to the control room

again, where Treevor conjured up a small field of the dead and sealed off the room, draining all energy from the walls and ceiling.

The concrete naturally tried to absorb world energy and absorbed the corrupted energy. He just needed to keep the undead camp active while the court mages worked.

“Couldn’t you have done that from the start with all those mithril slabs, saving us so much headache and whole days of work?” Athos asked suddenly and Treevor froze in place.

“Oh.” was all he said in response, a silent dark tear of frustration running down the black skull, wondering why he hadn’t thought of it sooner.

The truth is that it would be impossible to use the idea of Athos, but tired minds have not realized this fact. Treevor would have to keep an expensive spell like Field of the Dead active for a full 5 days, the time it took for court mages to finish enchanting everything, even working at full speed without pause.

“I swear I’ll kill you for this.” Athos made a promise and watched in silence as the court mages worked. All the court mages worked at the same time this time, the control enchantments were much more difficult than usual.

After the court mages have finally finished their work, Athos can turn off death vision to admire the job well done. The pedestal was rebuilt using earth magic and the stone fragments with mithril dust.

The entire room glows like obsidian, dark runes all over the room. The pedestal was approximately 1.30 meters and was kept as simple as possible, as the mages were in a hurry. The pedestal was enchanted to be the only way to power and control large-scale spells once they were activated.

“Have the skeletons put the death mithril plates back in the order the court mages order. I don’t know if there’s a specific order, but I don’t want the whole thing to go wrong now that we’re so close.” Athos ordered and the skeletons moved to obey his orders.

‘Speaking of which, where is Emilia? I understand her not hanging around when I was just corrupting metals, but it’s weird she hasn’t shown up until now.’ Athos thought suddenly, trying and failing to get in touch with Emilia. She was far enough away that Athos could not feel her.

‘Does anyone know where Emilia is?’ Athos sent a question through the mind link to all the skeletons inside the fortress.

‘While you were busy, flying monsters that we assume to be familiar began to appear and we spotted several scouts approaching the fortress. We imagined that the nearest fortress would be investigating us, so Emilia and Caio pursued them saying that they wanted to have an idea of what was happening and how much time we still have.’ Astrus responded instantly.

‘How long has it been since she left?’ Athos asked worriedly. The loss of Emilia would be a huge blow to him and the entire army, as spies and assassins are in short supply. There are a few scouts and fast-attacking troops, but no one comes close to the power of those two.

‘It’s been two days since she left, but no need to worry, my lord. Emilia continually murdered patrol units and her skeleton soldiers came to the fortress. We have almost 100 new skeleton soldiers and almost the same number of horses.’ Sevenus appeared in the conversation, reassuring Athos.

He had felt the life force building up as he was corrupting the mithril plates, but his mind was practically off and he ignored almost all external stimuli.

'Well, let's hope she's okay and keep getting ready.' Athos ordered as he watched the skeletons get to work. The skeletons first placed the boards that connected the control room and continued down the floors. Just below the pedestal, there was a hole with the same dimensions as the death mithril plate.

There was a hollow wall underneath the plinth that the skeletons broke while removing the plates and they put the plates back in place. Sevenus and other earth mages conjured the surrounding stone and held the plates together, preventing them from moving while closing the walls.

The same happened underground in all four cardinal directions. The plates were buried 3 meters below the sewers, a real headache for the skeletons who had to excavate all this. The death mithril slabs continued until they reached below the walls, where they rose 90o until reaching a height of 4 meters inside the walls.

The plates formed a perfect circle around the fortress, but one thing was missing for the full-scale spells to be complete. It lacks energy to activate the whole thing. Athos had exhausted almost everything to safely remove the plates and it would take a fresh flush to activate them.

'All ready?' Treevor asked inside the control room, the corrupted willow reduced to human size. It took over 3 hours of work to put all the death mithril plates in place and fix the floor and walls.