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Langer and his entourage of golems had made it to the town gate by the time the guards finally caught up and prevented them from escaping Hesslik. After he had touched Charles with his gifted hand, his body had transformed into a golem controlled by the mind of Wothram. Unlike the Knight, Coachman, or Carriage golems, the human one was by far the most unsettling, though it was perhaps mainly because it wore the guise of his former servant.

The sight of Langer’s magic had sent the patrons of Larny’s Place scrambling for the exit. No sooner had they left than the guards had stormed the bar, seemingly already aware of Langer’s prior murder.

“**Should not have left witnesses,**” Wothram had said at the time.

As nearly fifty guards ringed around them, Langer was inclined to agree with him.

“Set me down,” he told the Knight golem.

“Drop your weapons!” yelled the leader of the guards. A few of them were wielding peculiar weapons that seemed infused with a life of their own, such as a bow dotted with blinking eyes, a sword with teeth along the serrated edge, or a shield with a smoking mouth on its façade.

Langer grimaced when the needles in his legs made themselves known, as he was settled down on the dry and hard earth of the main thoroughfare. Citizens and those bringing goods by wagon had all paused to watch the events unfolding before them.

None of them recognise the respect I am deserving of! he yelled internally, then ran his right hand across the earth and pictured the golems he wanted to create. The symbol of the Seeker glowed with power and a tremor rolled through the ground, before arms and heads sprouted below the many guards ringed around him, grasping hold of their legs as they were birthed from the soil itself.

“Kill them all!” Langer screamed.

If none of them understand my worth, then I will force them to obey me!

The Coachman, Carriage, and Knight golems all followed his commands, alongside the transformed Charles and the many earthen creations birthed by his touch. The swords and arrows did nothing to stop them as they fell upon the many guardsmen, though their magical weapons had quickly felled the Coachman and Carriage, before the Knight pulped the wielders and manoeuvred the newly-created golems to focus on those remaining few with similar weapons.

Langer placed his hand on the ground again, this time envisioning a towering statue of a man, which quickly formed below him, lifting him with it and high up into the air. He started sliding off its massive head, until it reached out a hand to catch him.

“Do not rest until the whole of Hesslik lies in ruins!” he yelled at the giant he had invoked.

“**We serve,**” said all the golems with one voice, before the giant swung its free arm through the wall and buildings nearby, sending debris falling down upon those who wished to bar his way.

Horns and bells sounded across the town, and the barracks was quickly emptied of men as the last of Hesslik’s defences came to frustrate his efforts.

All of them will die for failing to recognise me as their superior! They will die for having forgotten the name of my family!

An army of smiling men moved towards the smoking crater that had once been a city. They had marched for days without rest, but did not complain in the slightest. Their weapons were basic and in many instances nothing more than improvised tools, but it did not matter. They were effective in battle not because of their equipment or training, but because of their single-minded fanaticism.

In their midst, forty men carried a throned platform, atop of which sat a lascivious Daemon, tended to by the most handsome and beautiful of her countless army of slaves. The very gaze of her heterochromatic eyes sent giggles and laughter through those who tended her, and the sound spread outward like ripples in the water, carried by every mouth of her army.

Her control was total and though progress had been stalled more than once by the Llemanian armies’ cunning and magics, she was like an inevitable tide that would wash over their nation, all for the sake of her Sovereign: the only man who had not fallen victim to her aura of control. Their past attempts to defeat her had failed and now their survivors made up a part of her army that filled the horizon with leering grins and empty eyes.

“*I remember this worthless place,*” mused Belamouranthyne from her throne. Back when she had been confined to a mask sculpted from the skin of an Elphin, she had briefly seen this town. As she gazed upon the destruction, the smoking embers of burnt-down houses, and the splattered and broken decayed corpses, she wondered what had transpired.

Her vast army ringed around the town, as though it was a stone in a ceaseless stream of water, each droplet one of her slaves. She had her throne platform lowered to the ground, so she could tour

the ruins herself, but no sooner had she stepped off the platform than something enormous rose from the corpse of the town. It was in the shape of a man, but it was nothing but stone and earth.

With a snarl, she directed the mages under her control to destroy the giant. Bolts of fire, javelins of ice, and blades of wind slammed against the monster, but did nothing to halt it as it swung its legs and arms through the tightly-packed crowds, turning them to paste upon the ground and forcing Belamouranthyne to quickly have her throne platform lifted away to safety, while more of her army was sent in to replace those that’d been crushed.

Her control was total, but the side-effect of this total command was that her slaves did not consider their own safety and had a tendency to throw themselves directly into harm’s way. This issue was on full display as every new reinforcement to fill the vacuum left by crushed slaves were just as quickly decimated themselves.

While the monster continued to mush vast swathes of her ocean of slaves, smaller men of stone, wood, and earth surged out from around its feet, seeking the core of her army where she was evacuated to.

“*Since when did Lleman have magics such as this!?*” she screamed in frustration. Their power had always lain in their dangerous Demon-possessed weapons, not in elemental puppets. But she had to give it to them, it was the perfect counter to her sway over the minds of men.

Of course, it was not the first trick Lleman had employed to stop her. They had in the past tried to form armies exclusively of women to deal with her powers, but she had turned those women’s families against them and easily crushed their spirits. As with all her victories, the women who survived were sent to Helmsgarten to work as slaves, while the men were absorbed by her army.

Her grinning soldiers fell before the devastating blows of the golems that rushed for her, and she gasped in surprise when she recognised the strategy they used. It was similar to the group of skeletal golems and puppets that had made up the Sovereign’s personal bodyguard for many years, before they were destroyed by an attack from Heimdal, when they had assaulted Helmsgarten from afar with their artillery three years back.

“*Wothram!*” she screamed, remembering the golems’ name from back then. They had been a hivemind formed of one intellect and it was clear that the same was still the case, as she watched the stone, earth, and wood golems crush her slaves with the kind of efficiency that only a monster of its kind could possess.

A tremor rolled through the ground as more golems emerged out of the earth around her platform. Suddenly, one of her beautiful slaves was pulled away from her and killed with a single punch to the

head. His killer climbed up onto the platform, striding towards her as the rest of her harem were slain in similar fashion. The golem stopped in front of her and said, **“Tell your servants to halt their hostilities. Lord Langer Tingleif rules over this place.”**

Belamouranthyne gave the command without a second thought and her entire army froze like statues.

“Bring your Lord to me, you traitorous scum!” the Daemon told the golem.

No sooner had the words left her mouth than the giant began to stomp its way towards her, crushing her slaves under its colossal feet as it came to a halt fifteen metres away, before lowering itself to settle a hand onto the ground, within the palm of which sat a malnourished and dirty child.

Langer looked at the horned woman who sat on the throne and who seemed to command the army of grinning men that spread as far as the eye could see. The fact that she had heeded the words, which Wothram had relayed on his behalf, clearly meant that he had defeated her, and the excitement of conquering so powerful a commander made his face flush with excitement.

He had experienced a similar feeling when he had executed the ignorant aristocrats of Hesslik, after taking over the town with his army of golems. He found immense satisfaction in having his supremacy proven by defeating those who thought themselves his superiors.

The horned woman arose from her throne and stalked towards him. Her skin was possessed of a dark-purple hue and her eyes glowed with two different lights, a domineering blue and a lustful pale-red. Her horns were like those of a ram, curled around on the sides of her head, and the hair that fell around her elongated ears was black and straight, as though fine silk. Her robes were likewise silken and translucent like spiderweb, hiding no part of her voluptuous and alluring body.

Her heart-shaped and menacing face seemed to curl into a frustrated frown as she looked upon Langer.

“Are you not a man?” she asked, sounding offended about something. Her voice was lilting and in a tongue he ought to not have understood, and yet he somehow possessed the mastery of this language.

“I am Langer Tingleif. I am the new Lord of Hesslik,” he asserted.

The horned lady looked behind him and then fixed him with a sharp-toothed grin, *“I see nothing but ruins, boy.”*

She took a step towards him, but the golems quickly surrounded her, Wothram not seeming to take any chances.

“You will refer to me as Lord Tingleif, or I will crush what remains of your army!” Langer growled.

His words seemed to only entice the horned lady, “*You may certainly try, but the Sovereign will have your head.*”

“You know who the Sovereign is?” he asked, surprised.

“*Of course. He is why I am here, breaking this nation beneath my heel.*”

“Take me to him!” Langer demanded.

The lady grinned lasciviously, leaning against one of the golems ringed around her, while letting out a voice like a purr. “*Make me.*”

“Wothram, pin her down,” he said and the statuesque golems quickly forced her to the ground.

With a thought, something he had mastered in the last few days of utterly destroying Hesslik, the giant hand of his great golem lifted him towards her, allowing him to reach forward with his right hand.

The horned lady was laughing as though she was enjoying herself, despite her face being pressed into the ground by the strength of the earthen golems. However, that only lasted until his fingers settled onto the back of her head.

After that she only screamed.