

Interlude - The Master of Death

The General attacked and Eratemus's formations glowed as a shield formed around him and his dragon. Eratemus strafed around the General, his mount spewing blue flames even as its black beam fired straight up at him. His shield refracted the beam around its surface instead of just blocking. He wasn't certain even his most powerful defenses could survive it for long. Instead, he used it. The beam fractured into a hundred smaller ones and he guided them with his formations, cutting up the monsters that tried to attack his rear. His fire had turned the ground to glass, the monsters around the General were dead, and the rest were making a large circle around them, leaving Eratemus to their General as they moved to hit the Sects.

He knew that Ryun and Selia were behind him somewhere, fighting. They had done incredibly. Had devastated an entire army, and they were going to do the same to this one probably. But they were just two people, and this army was large. They couldn't hit them fast enough to hold the tide all by themselves, even if they could prevail against it in the end. The enemy line stretched across the valley, and the remainder of the first army had joined it by now. They were about to hit the Sects again.

The beam cut off, and so did his dragon's fire. He pulled out formations and threw them to the side. They glowed and activated, creating blade constructs of Air Qi that spun and swooped down on the General. They hit his tough skin and broke against it.

The General raised a hand, then spread his tendrils and stabbed them into the ground. A dark energy pulsed out of his hand into the earth, and then tendrils exploded out of it. Black and misting, resembling the tendrils of will that Hastur used against them. First a dozen, then twice that, and then double again. Eratemus dove as one of the mountain tall tendrils made to grab him. His mount beat its wings, weaving in between the tendrils reaching for him.

He pointed his hand and fired [**Greater Deathbolt**] at one of them. It hit the tendril and made it twist, but it didn't stop moving. He grimaced, the life of that thing was so alien, so different than what his power was opposed to, it made fighting them harder for him.

{**Will Construct Creation**}, his Qi supply dipped, and two more dragons appeared next to him, shaped out of Qi. They dove and collided with tendrils, claw ripping, jaw tearing. They broke them to pieces, then moved to others.

The General spread his arms, and a wave of dark energy exploded out of him. It destroyed his dragons, and hit his shield. His formation flashed, then cracked as the shield was overwhelmed, the area attack was much harder to divert. The energy washed over him and he felt the Death Qi inside of his dragon wither. It started to tumble toward the ground, the body nothing but dead flesh. Eratemus put his hand on it and poured Death Qi from his core into it, the formations he had etched in its flesh and bones flicker back to life, and the undead dragon *woke* up.

It beat its wings slowing their descent, but they still crashed down hard. Eratemus grimaced, but managed to hold on to his seat. Then he noticed a tendril coming down on him, faster than he could react.

Spears stabbed into it, then exploded, ripping the tendril to pieces. The General that moved in Eratemus's way staggered back as a wound opened up on its chest made by invisible Qi.

Eratemus glanced back and saw Ryun in his Evolved Form land next to him. His form flickered constantly, the Qi distorting his visage. Above him Selia floated on a construct of Qi.

"I'll take him and the army, the Sects need aid," they both said at the same time. Their voices mixed and reverberating through the air so much that it made his head go blank for a moment. Their voices echoed unnaturally, and it was as if they both spoke from both of their mouths. Both voices coming from two places at once. There was gravity and

certainty in those voices that Eratemus hadn't heard before, and something... that called to a part of him.

He shook his head, looked at them as Selia gestured and the sky turned dark, a shadow cast over the valley as it was filled with objects, spears and swords, maces and axes, constructs all. The General turned his attention on them, and Eratemus nodded.

"Be safe," he told them, even though there was no safety in battle.

"I will," they spoke at the same time.

Eratemus turned his dragon, he took to the sky and had it spew fire at the monsters trying to attack them. As he flew away, he saw the objects start to fall and Ryun leap at the General. He turned his attention to the Sects, a part of the enemy army had gone around Ryun and Selia, they were pushing the lines back again.

Eratemus flew over the city, saw the battle taking place there. The palace turned to molten slag and Erdania towering over buildings, swinging her staff at a glowing barrier of light. He looked back at the Sects, sensing his Death Knights as they fought. Trying to hold back the tide of monsters. The Sects were spent, their strongest burnt their greatest perks already.

He looked down, and saw so much death. The bodies of the Sects and monsters were everywhere, mounds of it had formed, the Sects were even using some as makeshift walls. The ground was dark with blood, soaked. They were fighting in mud. They were losing, dying, with every moment that passed.

Eratemus closed his eyes. The Sects were not his peoples. He had no peoples. He stood alone, trying to keep the fragile peace, trying to prevent the mistakes of the past repeating themselves. Often, he wasn't successful, but for every failure, he had successes. They had years of peace.

He was a Necromancer, or that was what they called him. He had done so much to make sure that Necromancers weren't hated, despite it being

so easy. Necromancers were dangerous. He had hunted down hundreds of those who had tried to carve a path of death through this world. He was the reason why Necromancers were not as reviled as Murderers and Monsters.

And it was because he kept himself contained, to his small territories, contained to raising only the dead bought or granted to him. Restraining himself. He made pieces of art out of the dead, each undead he raised was carved up with formations of his own make. They were stronger, better than they were in life. He looked ahead, saw Ryun and Selia fighting in the middle of the enemy army.

He remembered them coming on the mission to kill Hastur. Remembered how even though everyone had their own reasons, in the end, they were there. And now they were here. Here were people all around him, fighting far from their homes to keep everyone safe. Even those who perhaps didn't deserve it. He landed his dragon and stepped down from the saddle into the mud soaked with blood. The healers stationed with guards protecting them made to rush over to him, but he raised his hand, forestalling them.

He pulled out a formation, a large disk platform glowing with golden etchings. He placed it on the ground, then stepped on top of it. He pointed a hand to the sky and used **Formation of Death**, a plate appeared in his hand and activated. It pulled and all the Death Essence forming in the field of battle around him surged into it. A maelstrom of black and blue, it entered the formation and he channeled it down through his body into the platform. With an effort of will and Qi he activated it.

The vessel he held withered as fuel, all the formations he had laid in it were consumed by the platform. Power shook the world around him. And then his soul detached. It remained above the platform as power rose to a high note. Then, the remains of the vessel twisted away, and something else appeared in its place. His soul slid into it, and he felt... more comfortable than he ever could be. His body, his real body straightened and he opened his eyes. Death and Soul thrummed inside his core. It had

been more than eight hundred years since he had moved his real body out of the heart of his territory. He had improved it, hundreds of years of layered formations on the flesh and bones, alchemical solutions to improve the liquid that flowed through his veins moved by will and death and not a beating heart. He triggered his formations, and his skin brightened up with light, gold and blue etchings glowing out of from beneath his pale skin.

People around him stared, but he didn't pay them any heed. He mounted his dragon and moved up into the air, then flew over the battle.

With an effort of will and shaped techniques as fast as he could. He pushed Qi out of his body, and flooded the battlefield. He saw the Sects falter, he saw them try to pull back from so much Death, but he didn't target them. His Qi entered the dead.

{Harvest Death and Bone}

The entire valley shook as the dead tumbled through the air. The dead monsters tore themselves to pieces as bones flew out of their dead flesh. By his will and **{Bone Shaping}** he crafted titans of bone and death, towering monstrosities equal to the enemy Generals. With **{Field of the Dead}** the fallen of the Sects rose again. Undead, mindless, his will pointed them in a direction, and he unleashed them on the enemy.

He pointed at the pile of bones, monster and sect warriors unlucky to have been too damaged to be raised properly. He cast **Raise Greater Bone Behemoth**, the bones fused together, creating a behemoth of thick bone plates with empty eye sockets glowing with an eerie blue fire.

He flew over his army as it smashed into the enemy. As titans tore the earth and monsters, as his behemoth leapt and crashed into a towering general, its fists with spikes on ends stabbing into the monster's flesh. As undead soldiers stabbed and killed monsters, not caring for their own bodies.

The Sects didn't hesitate before following behind him.

Eratemus focused and stretched his will across his undead, then used **Greater Empower Undead**, making them stronger, faster, better. These were the weakest of the undead, nothing like his armies. These were the expendable raised forces, unchanged by his formations. But these were the dead of the Sects, the dead with true bodies, stronger. As his army started to roll over the enemy, he kept spilling his Qi into the field, kept using his techniques, with every fallen on either side, his army grew.

He moved bones, he shaped them into formations with **{Bone Shaping}** and **|Perfect Engraving: My Touch, Memory of Opus|** carving them from a distance. He created cannons of bones that worked for only a single shot, but decimated the enemy. He carved formations that protected the lines of Sects as they took down a General. He fought with all of his power, for the first time in too long.

Then, he let his **Domain: Field of Bones and Souls** and transformed the already grim battlefield into a desolate land filled with the bones and souls of those he had slain. Then, he unleashed them on the enemy that had caused so much death and destruction.

Nothing could stand in his way now, for Eratemus was **HE WHO CRAFTS UNDER THE EMBRACE OF DEATH.**