

The Eternal Legion

Prologue

This story begins in a small village far away from the dangers found in the world, like war and what comes with it. There, the people lived a simple life farming the lands, hunting and fishing to survive.

One evening, a group of friends sitting around a campfire just outside the village saw a hooded man approaching. When he came close to the fire he removed his hood, showing the face of a rather older man. He looked as if he had seen a lot in his life, his cold eyes had a penetrating look and he had more than one scar on his face. He seemed to be starved as well, so he was offered some food. Thankful of this gesture, he offered to tell a story about far away lands, where he had come from. An evening at the campfire is always better if it's accompanied by a good story, so of course the friends were eager to hear it.

He told them of a place far away from the realm of the mortals, one that could only be reached after traveling through perilous lands. There, every day Legions of immortal warriors and creatures would fight against each other for glory and spoils. Although the warriors forming those legions could fall during a battle, they could never die. As where the rules of that realm, they would always rise again after the battle, to fight again in the next one. And there was always a next one. Although Some Legions disappeared after a while, more than you could count had been fighting there, day after day, since times long forgotten. Even now, as he spoke, countless battles were raging there across different battlefields.

The friends around the campfire were speechless after hearing this. After a short silence, someone asked how that place was called as he had never heard of it. The old man called it 'The Eternal Battlegrounds', a fitting name perfectly describing the place. Someone else asked how exactly he had ended up there, and with whom he had formed a Legion. The night had already started, but no one cared, they all wanted to hear more.

The Journey

"Very well" he said, "You shall hear it. My journey starts in a little village, not much different from this one. But unlike here, it was not peaceful, there was a war raging in the country. And like in any war, food was scarce. So, like many other young men before me, one day I decided to join the army to finally get fed properly. I didn't go alone, some of my friends who were skilled with the bow or the sword and spear decided to go with me. We made our way from the village over a fresh Battleground covered in corpses and Crows feasting on them. The battle leaving behind this morbid spectacle had been fought right outside a small Town, that didn't look like much from where we could see it. It was even worse when we arrived, as it seemed only bandits lived there. We quickly moved through it, and soon we could see the Iron Ramparts of the Army Camp. We were let inside the Soldiers Encampment and given some proper gear for the fights that would inevitably come. Then we looked around a bit, just to find ourselves back in the Royal Encampment where the officers were living. Some guard saw us and quickly showed us out. After this long day of traveling we wanted to get our spirits up so we went to one of the camp's Taverns, hoping to find something to drink". He stopped staring into the fire and looked around, "You don't happen to have something to drink would you? It would make it easier to talk". After drinking a few sips, he continued the

story. "Already from outside the Tavern we would hear laughter and rumble from inside which heightened our expectations. Once Inside we ordered something to drink before taking a look at the other drinkers present. There was a strange group of soldiers that were playing a throwing game, aiming for a target at the wall. But they weren't throwing knives, they were throwing hammers! We had never seen such a strange thing before. Even more surprising were some other men standing next to them that laughed as one of the Hammer Throwers missed the target. They did not carry hammers, but empty glass bottles which they threw at the target that burst on impact which they all found very funny. We went to talk to them, curious how throwing empty bottles at enemies could be useful during a fight. They introduced themselves as 'Plague Throwers', because during actual fights their bottles weren't empty, but filled with a deadly plague like poison that spread very fast and slowed the infected down, killing them if they were exposed long enough. After talking a bit, we bid them farewell and finally went to sleep in one of the barracks nearby. The next day, we were woken up early and escorted to one of the tents. There we found our friends from the tavern back, who were as curious as us to learn what was going on. Shortly after, we learned that we would all depart on a special assignment. Apparently one of the commanders had heard stories about an abandoned Temple not too far away where he hoped we might find treasures, so he assembled a group of fighters to journey there with him since there was a dangerous Jungle we would need to traverse before reaching it. We left the camp soon after and made our way in the direction of the Jungle. The next day we reached the Jungle, but it was already late so we made camp there for the night. We didn't sleep well, we could hear strange noises coming out of the Jungle during the whole night. The next morning we made our way into the thick Jungle and it didn't take long before some creature attacked us. It was a huge beast and killed a few of our party before we could slay it. We were more careful after that encounter which likely saved a few lives, as later that day we encountered monstrous spiders that attacked us as well. None of us wanted to make camp in the Jungle, so we pressed on to reach that damned Temple that got us there in the first place. Night had already fallen when we made our way out of the Jungle into a vast clearing. There, in the middle stood a Temple reaching high into the night sky, like a Sky Temple! The moon was shining high above it, and we all stood there in awe. But some movement in the thicket behind us quickly made us advance closer to the Temple and there we made our camp. When the sun woke us up we went to explore the Temple, but having learned our lesson in the Jungle we were very careful. To reach the temple we needed to climb a board stairway, with more steps than any I had ever seen. I looked around before starting the climb and saw some strange symbols in different languages, one I could read and it warned not to climb the steps. I had not time to read more as the rest was already climbing the stairs so I followed them. It was already noon when we reached the top so we dispersed to search the Temple faster, so I started exploring. I was alone when I entered a room with some kind of altar and a giant statue behind it, on the altar there was a book I opened with great care as it looked like it would fall apart. It was written in a language I knew so I started reading, curious what secrets such an ancient book might hold. It had a lot of pages that had different subjects, some even had drawings to illustrate places and creatures. One page told me about the existence of a place where only war existed, another one about the journey there and how this temple was a part of it, but the most interesting one had a drawing of the statue standing behind the altar. The book referred to it not as a statue but as a creature, and called it 'Earth Elemental'. There was also a sentence written in a language I could read but didn't understand, in the drawings that phrase awakened the statue to live. Naturally I could not resist trying it out, so I read it out loud the best I could, curious to see what would happen. The statue awoke to life with a terrifying sound of stone hitting stone but I was already running out of the room, just to find myself face to face with my companions that had come looking at what I was doing. There was no time to explain so I shouted at them to start

running which they did without hesitation after hearing more noise from inside the room. We wanted to run back the way we came from, but the way was blocked. A strange Spire had come out of the ground and a creature with some skull as head was standing next to it. Before we could react, it started shooting lightning at the commander. We all started running down another corridor as fast as we could, hoping to escape. The skull header creature didn't seem to follow, but the moving statue still was. After running for a while, we found ourselves at the stairway and ran down with the creature still behind us and once we had left the stairs we ran back into the Jungle hoping it wouldn't follow if we were far enough from the temple. Just to be sure, we ran as far as we could before setting up a camp to rest. It was then we realized that the commander leading this expedition had died, and it had all been in vain as we didn't find any treasures. The moral was low, no one wanted to go back with such a failure, but we had little choice. We agreed that tomorrow we would decide what to do but for now we would rest. I woke up in the middle of the night, I wasn't too sure why, just to look into the glowing eyes of the living statue from the temple. I froze, but to my surprise it wasn't moving either and wasn't attacking me. I did not know what to do but then I recalled the book I had taken with me from the temple and had been too tired to continue reading yesterday. I thought there might be some clue that would explain this creature's behavior there, so I lit a candle and continued reading. It didn't take long before I found back the part that talked about the Earth Elemental and there the drawings helped me understand that the sentence I had spoken to awaken it did not only do that, but also made me it's new master! When the others awakened it was difficult to convince them that this terrifying Golem of stone would travel with us no, but after it followed a few of my commands they were somewhat reassured as it would help us against any threat we might encounter in the Jungle. And indeed, I did a true wonder at carving out a path in front of us without ever growing tired and thanks to its help we soon left the jungle. But to our surprise we weren't where we had entered the jungle a few days ago, we were in a desert. How could this be? We had run down the stairs and then went a straight path through the Jungle, like we did on our way to the temple. Then I realized That since the way to the stairs we used to climb had been blocked, we must had taken others stairs, probably at the other side of the temple so instead of going back to the encampment we were actually going further away from it. We still weren't comfortable with going back, and I really wanted to follow the journey the book from the temple talked about. Far away in the desert we could see a big dune and there was an entrance of some sort, so I suggested we should go there as maybe we would find something valuable, after all that's why we started this journey in the first place. Everyone agreed and so we made our way through the desert, this time to our luck without any trouble. Above the entrance it was written that warriors were buried here, not to be disturbed or they would rise again to silence any unwelcome visitor. Before entering, I made sure to look in the book to see if I could find anything about this place. To my relief there was something, the book could even tell me how I could control the warriors sleeping there. We went into this Ancient Tomb with prudence and I went in front to use the knowledge in the book to counter any danger. We made sure to be silent while moving through but it seemed like some undead looking creatures were awake even before we arrived. They looked sick, like they were bearing some kind of plague, but I was still able to control them with the help of the book and made sure they would follow us at a safe distance. We went deeper into the tomb, and at what seemed to be the heart of it there was a big chamber with a great sarcophagus in its middle. We did not want to awaken whatever was sleeping inside of it, as I was afraid that even my book would not be able to help me if we did. So we tried to move alongside the walls of the room where we found some other, smaller rooms. Most were empty but in one of them lay a warrior with full armor, so much we couldn't even see his face or what was likely left of it. The book showed me how to awaken this Faceless Knight, and we were all relieved when he obeyed me after waking up because he was much taller than us and his weapon

was impressive. After walking through a long tunnel leading away from the big chamber we finally started seeing daylight. We did not know how far we had traveled through the tomb, and since the entrance was at the foot of a dune we didn't know what scenery awaited us. After another long day full of adventure and danger, we made camp at the end of the tunnel but it was already dark outside so we couldn't see much. We discussed what to do next, I wanted to continue the journey to find the place pictured in the book but I needed to convince the others. I started telling them about things written in the books, describing how we were on a journey to a very special place likely few mortals had ever seen before and that much more adventures awaited us on our way there. None of them had sufficient reasons to go back and knowing I would continue and take the creatures I had tamed with me, they had little choice but to follow or go back into a very likely death. I made sure to convince them best as I could to keep them motivated for the journey ahead. When the sun awakened us we were offered a magnificent view, before us laid snowy mountains with the peak of the highest hidden by clouds. We made our way to a path leading up to the clouds, where a stone with some inscriptions was peeking out of the snow. The inscription only said 'Eldritch Mountains'. I did not know what exactly that meant, but I knew that we needed to be on our guards. The path led through icy caves and dangerous paths on the side of mountains. The climb was very tiring so we went into a cave to be protected from the icy winds during a short break but we got startled and scared by a strange and tall creature that looked almost like a flower but was moving closer to us. I ordered my Golem to defend us, and cursed myself for not reading what the book had to say about this place before coming here. I found a picture of this creature called 'Mind Corruptor' and quickly took control of it. I realized that if I had not been fast enough it would have taken control of the Golem that would have smashed us to pieces, I did not mention it to the others. After a short break we were all eager to go to the highest peak of the mountain we could not see because of the clouds. It was strange to go through the clouds, it was like walking through a thick mist. During the break I had taken a quick look at the book to see what awaited us but nothing a book can say can prepare you for what we now saw. Golden monuments and palaces, more beautiful than anything we had ever seen, we stood before a Divine Sanctuary. We saw some armored warriors move around in the monuments and some angel like beings flying high above us. We weren't very eager to get their attention as the book had not told me how to deal with them so we quickly moved around it and made our way down the other side of the mountain. During our descent we could see a wasteland filled with ruins awaiting us at the bottom and behind it a vast forest with gigantic trees. The night was falling and the ruins looked dangerous, we could hear whispering coming from them so we made camp on a plateau on the mountain. A misty morning greeted us when we awakened, making the Whispering Ruins we were about to enter even more frightening. The book had warned me from killing beings there as some statues could use the souls of the dying to attack others. But it had also shown me how to reduce the size of these 'Soul Pylons' so much that I could take one with me. We made our way through fallen and deteriorated buildings while looking carefully around to not get surprised by anything. We found a graveyard with countless gravestones and a tall statue in its center but because of the fog I could not recognize how exactly it looked like. We were halfway to the statue when the buried warriors around us started rising out of their graves to attack us. In panic that someone might kill one triggering the statue I shouted to my companions to not kill any of them but just defend themselves until I retrieved the statue. Unfortunately one of the risen was killed and terrified I looked at the statue that with a loud 'whoosh' materialized a projectile in the air before us. It was burning with deadly blue fire and flew right at me. But just at this moment another warrior rose just between me and the Pylon saving me from certain death as he got hit. He was instantly turned to ashes and quickly I recovered from the shock to complete the ritual and take control of the Pylon and reduce its size. After that we fought our way from the graveyard

as now we could kill our assailants. Still, we wanted to move on as fast as possible as we had heard some screeching during the fight, loud enough to render us deaf if we had been close. After running over a decaying bridge we made it out of the mist into the open and we could see the forest we had seen from the mountain again it wasn't very far in front of us. It was only noon so we entered the forest after a short rest. Above us, on the branches of the enormous trees were crows croaking at us as if warning us that we were not welcome. After a long march without major incidents, we found a clearing where we made camp for the night. We were woken up by rain early in the morning, it was still dark and we were about to continue our way in a bad mood when we noticed all the small lights around us. There were a ton of them, small blue lights glowing in the dark and they were everywhere. That lightened our mood and we started making our way through the forest over the trunks of dead trees, through small streams of water and over bigger ones. Suddenly the roots of the trees around us started moving and grabbed us. They were starting to crush us when a woman appeared from behind one of the trees and made a movement with the staff she held in her hand. She must have commanded the trees because after that the roots let their hold of us go. When she came closer we saw that she was dressed like you would expect from someone that lives in the forest, and her staff had a strange glow about it. The book called her a 'Druid' and although she could not talk our language she helped us, with a knife she carved a drawing on a piece of dead wood that showed us a safe way through the forest and gave it to me. After leaving the Druidic Forest behind us we finally reached the last place that was described in the book. The Valley of Giants. The small path leading down the valley was flanked by two giant swords so big we all worried what we might face further down the path. After passing the skulls of a few dead giants our hope rose that all of them might be dead, none of us was keen on fighting one. A bit further down we were just contemplating the statue of a Giant Toad when we heard wolves howling and it sounded like a lot of them. We had time to prepare and the path was small enough for us to form a defense. I ordered the golem and the undead warriors in front and materialized the Soul Pylon just behind them. The Faceless Knight formed the second line with the plantlike corruptor, the soldiers with their plague bottles and some of my friends from the village. Finally came my other friends with their bows and the soldiers who had hammers. I climbed on the toad statue in order to oversee that battle knowing full well that once it started I would be of no use to shout orders as they would not be heard correctly and could only cause disarray in the troops, so I decided to observe them fight. Countless wolves came running at them and those were big wolves, likely Dire Wolves judging by their size. They were not alone, Giant Toads that resembled the statue I was standing on accompanied them in their charge. The battle was quick but brutal and soon enough all the wolves and toads were dead. It seemed that most of us were alright which was surprising as I thought I had seen some of us fall. I took the book to see if it held any answer to that mystery but before I could open it it started glowing intensely, I could feel that something was happening. An instant later I felt like something was pulling at me from all directions, and then, just like that I was in a different place, and my companions were there as well. I had no time to look around, the book I still held in my hands opened itself displaying a glowing text. The text told me that we had reached The Eternal Battlegrounds and that we should prepare to fight. So I did that, telling my companions and friends, the creatures I had taken with me, my Legion, how they should position on the battlefield not knowing what enemies we would face. After the first fight I figured out that all my fighters that had died rose again, they were as surprised as me. After hundreds of fights I started realizing what this place was and how fitting the name it wore. After thousands, I still stood high behind my troops, giving them instructions whenever it was necessary. I stood there, with my books still and forever in my hands as it held the secrets of the place, I knew it. It held the key to improve my legion, to make it stronger, and if I one day wanted to, to leave this place as it had brought me here".

He stopped talking, still staring into the fire. "So, you managed to leave the Eternal Battlegrounds, as you are here after all?" someone said. "Yes", he answered, looking up from the fire. Not wanting to press the subject as clearly he did not want to talk about it, they wanted to ask him other questions. But it was very late by now, the moon had already risen high in the night sky and the old man was very tired. As everyone was going to sleep someone offered him a place to sleep which he thankfully accepted.

The next morning when the village woke up they were excited and ready to hear more stories from this mysterious man. But when they went to the house in which he had gone to sleep they found that he was already gone. Sad that they would not have the chance to hear more stories they went on with their daily lives. That evening around the campfire they made up stories themselves, imagining that the old man had gone back to The Eternal Battlegrounds and was commanding his legion again, defeating enemy after enemy.

Epilogue

Traveling through the lands, the old man never came across anything that compared to the glory of The Eternal Battlegrounds and soon grew bored of it. So using the book he always carried close to him, he went back. Since then he has been fighting, day after day, year after year, commanding his Eternal Legion. But he does not fight for the spoils of war, those no longer interest him, he fights for the eternal glory that goes to the victor, now and forever.