

Extras 341

Chapter 341 What Has To Be Done

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Esme
- Race: Half-Elf (Human and Elf)
- Class: Elementalist (B-Tier)
- Level: 15 (98.14% EXP)
- Life Force: 100/100 (+100)
- Mana Level: 200/200 (+200)
- Combat Ability: 3 (+3)
- Stat Points: 140
- Skills (Exclusive): [Absolute Appraisal]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Absolute Magic Mastery]. [Absolute Magic Application]. [Grand Mana Recovery]. [Absolute Elemental Control]
- Alignment: Chaotic Good

[Additional Information]

A genius, even by Elven Standards... with a special heritage and connection to the World.

She is currently lost and immensely bereaved.

... Help her.

[End Of Information]

'A-amazing!'

Rey's eyes widened as he witnessed the drastic change in Esme's Status Window. Her Skills had grown so much, and she managed to rise 14 Levels beyond her previous point.

Of course, he had to address the most probable cause for all of it.

'Looking at everything that's going on here, I can guess what happened...' Rey's thoughts trailed as he took his eyes off Esme for a moment.

He settled his gaze on everything else—the ugly tapestry of lust and death.

'She must have been traumatized by this breeding going on. If I had to guess, her friends must be among the people...'

Rey used [Absolute Appraisal], and he could see why she would have broken down.

'They're merely husks of their previous selves. They could as well be dead.'

Not only were these teenagers—not even adults—under several Negative Status Conditions, but their [Additional Information] explicitly told Rey that there was no hope for them.

It was literally over.

'They've gone past the point of return.'

Once he figured that out, Rey could easily deduce the reason why so much blood and gore decorated the room.

It was the same reason Esme suddenly had a much higher Level than before.

'She killed the caretakers and guards of these people, most likely.' His thoughts trailed.

'How many were they?' Rey wondered. 'Judging by what I'm seeing here, the total number should be about two hundred? Maybe more...'

It was hard to tell since the bodies of Esme's victims had become nothing but shredded pulps that could hardly be called flesh.

'She really killed all those people, huh?'

As for the cause of death for his Elemental Summons, Rey simply had to assume that Esme did it somehow thanks to her Skills.

'She's incredible!' His thoughts echoed, despite also feeling a strong sense of tragedy for her.

He had previously thought there was a possibility that Esme's friends were dead, but he always shrugged the thought aside for her sake.

Despite his own dreary thoughts, Rey never imagined this sort of outcome.

'But why? Why would Scylla do this?' He wondered.

Rey could think of a few plausible reasons. For example, Scylla could have intended on making the Slave Trade business self-sufficient, so she wanted them to bear children for her.

'No... that makes no sense!'

It would take too much time and resources to fully cater for the children until they reached a viable age for proper trade.

Besides, Scylla could always just get viable slaves by utilizing the aid of the Mercenary Gang, which was already under her control.

They could pillage towns and obtain the kind of slaves she wanted.

'If her plan this night succeeded, no one would be able to stop her. There's no way she would have done any of this for a self-sustaining enterprise.'

Rey continued to rack his head for an answer.

'Could it be for entertaining purposes? Are there sick bastards in this world who like to see things like this?'

This was another possibility.

It was a stretch to accuse Scylla or any other person of it, but considering the diminished commercial values of the breeding slaves in their current state, and the fact that it would be a loss to Scylla's enterprise to merely raise children for years until they were ripe for selling... Rey began to think this was the reason behind such a horrific sight.

'I just... can't comprehend it.'

There were at least three thousand innocent lives here.

Why would someone put them all in this place just for them to have constant sex until they ceased to function?

It was sick!

'Treating humans like animals...' Rey sighed as he took a few steps forward.

The closer he got, the more the incoherent words of the mind-

broken masses began to make more sense.

Rey could hear words being uttered.

"K-kill me..."

"I... I don't want to... anymore..."

"Kill me... please kill... m-me..."

Words like this wafted in the air, forcing Rey's legs to grow heavy the more footsteps he took.

Before he realized it, he stood behind Esme, whose gem-like light blue eyes were transfixed on him. Their eyes glowed in their respective hues.

Both were looking directly into the other's eyes.

"What will you do now?" Rey asked.

There were a million other questions he could have asked, as well as a couple other things he could have said.

But Rey didn't say any of those things.

He simply stared hard at her, as they both heard the pleas of death from the suffering ones who still had embers of their humanity before they would cease to function as people completely.

Under the sounds of these perverse noises, Rey asked that question.

He knelt behind Esme, allowing the blood to drench his dark attire. He placed his two hands on her naked shoulders, and he whispered words into her ears.

"I won't judge you for anything you choose to do. It is your choice to make."

'I can see rune markings embedded on all of them. Even if they somehow recover from the Aphrodisiac, they won't be able to stop their actions if they have been commanded to by the runes.'

It reminded Rey of the subordinates of Ogun who could not resist the compulsive effect of their runes.

'They could also be inflicted with the Curse that Rebal talked about, so if we manage to make them stop... they could die.'

There was no way of really knowing how prepared the enemy was.

'Rather than letting them die in such a wasteful fashion, it would be better if they could be turned into EXP...'

Rey paused his thoughts and recoiled in surprise.

He couldn't believe he could think in such a way about people who—at least, during a period—were functional human beings.

Innocent, functional people.

Yet, he wasn't hesitant at all to equate them to EXP?!

'[Dead Calm] is turned off, so why...?'

Before Rey could finish his thoughts, he heard Esme's voice respond to his question.

"I'll do what needs to be done."

She slowly rose to her feet, and Rey watched her, still kneeling in his position.

Her naked form was majestic, and as Rey looked at her from behind, he couldn't help but be blown away by her sheer beauty.

Esme turned to face the thousands of livestock that continued their monotonous activities.

"Thank you, Rey." She whispered.

And then—

~SWISH!~

—With the slight of one hand, she put them all out of their misery.

All three thousand bodies plopped to the ground in a lifeless fashion, their heads rolling all over the blood soaked ground as their convulsing bodies greeted the pool of blood that surged underneath them.

In that single moment, a grand decapitation was performed.

And Esme was the executor.

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Chapter 342 Tainted

'Goodbye... everyone.'

Esme's fleeting thoughts as she stared at the rend flesh and spraying blood was one of melancholy.

She allowed all the emotions to flow through her, every ounce of her guilt and sorrow pulsating within the depths of her being.

Esme felt it all.

She closed her eyes and let tears stream down, slowing like the blood that spurted from the necks of all the innocents who died.

Her only comfort was that her actions had freed them. Through their deaths, they could finally find rest.

"Haaa..." Soft puffs of wind danced away from her succulent lips as she gazed upon the red-colored world.

It was a lot different from what she used to see.

"This world is evil. It's too evil..." Esme slowly turned away from the desecrated sight of her creation.

She faced Rey, allowing him to see her in all of her nakedness.

"It has tainted me. Tainted you. Tainted everything and everyone..."

More tears fell from her eyes.

"I hate this world." She cried, pain and hatred forming a horrible mix on her face.

Rey approached Esme, and in one swift breath, he was right in front of her.

"..."

"I understand." Rey drew her close to himself, allowing her smaller frame to fall on his muscular build.

Her head descended on his chest as he wrapped his strong arms around her.

"I... I hate this world so much..." Esme felt her tears pout out, staining Rey's dark robe with its contents.

But Rey didn't mind.

Instead, he shortly caressed her long hair and nodded through it all.

His silence was her comfort.

Her screams and cries were able to fully rush out of her, enveloping the entire room in her pain.

Esme didn't really know how long they stayed like this.

All she knew was that it felt like an eternity for her. Everything felt so raw and primal that she thought she would sink inside forever.

But, everything had to end at some point.

And for Esme, it all ended when her eyes slowly closed shut and she fell into the realm of unconsciousness.

'She's finally asleep, huh?'

Rey looked at Esme's smaller, thinner frame and felt a string of melancholy echo within himself.

In a completely different context, he would have freaked out if someone like Esme was hugging him so tightly.

But... given the situation, Rey felt no pleasure at all.

He just felt genuinely sorry for the girl.

'I lied...'

Rey felt tears falling down his eyes as well. He was grateful that they were only coming out now, after Esme was asleep.

'I... I don't understand.'

He knew full well that he couldn't relate to the pain the girl was experiencing.

It burned his heart, but he really knew nothing.

He couldn't say anything.

He could only stand there like the idiot that he was.

'I'm sorry you had to experience this, Esme...' Rey took a peek at her Status Window, seeing her Level rise once again to a much more impressive height.

A sad smile formed on his face as he sniffed.

'At least you're stronger for it.'

[STATUS WINDOW]

- Name: Esme
- Race: Half-Elf (Human and Elf)
- Class: Elementalist (B-Tier)
- Level: 27 (98.14% EXP)
- Life Force: 100/100 (+100)
- Mana Level: 200/200 (+200)
- Combat Ability: 3 (+3)
- Stat Points: 260
- Skills (Exclusive): [Absolute Appraisal]
- Skills (Non-Exclusive): [Absolute Magic Mastery]. [Absolute Magic Application]. [Grand Mana Recovery]. [Absolute Elemental Control]. [Executioner]
- Alignment: Chaotic Good

[Additional Information]

A genius, even by Elven Standards... with a special heritage and connection to the World.

She is currently lost and immensely bereaved.

... Help her.

[End Of Information]

'Now then...'

After Rey placed Esme into his [Grand Inventory], he set his eyes on the door that existed at the furthest end of the room.

Perhaps Esme could not sense it, but he could.

'There's something else...'

Rey could sense Monsters, but he could also sense people there as well.

'Let's see what this is all about.' Of course, he kept his guard up, though he didn't feel any sort of threatening presence from them.

In a flash, he appeared behind the doors and proceeded through the white hallway that lined his sight.

Once he reached the end of the hallway, he noticed that the path was divided into two points.

In one direction, he was guaranteed to find Monsters and other humans who seemed to be capable to an extent.

And the other side only had a handful of humans, and they didn't seem to be threats of any kind.

'[Replicate].'

Rey decided to split himself into two equally powerful entities—one clone and one original.

He also ensured to keep a strong mental link with his replica so he could perceive everything it experienced in real time.

"Let's go..."

Rey decided to take on the more dangerous path, sending his replica to the other end.

They were both equally powerful, but Rey's intelligence and ability to make useful decisions on the spur of the moment made him more capable when it came to actual combat.

To be safe, he decided this would be the best arrangement... though he already knew none of the enemies here would be able to take on his Replica no matter how hard they tried

Rey walked down the right path until he got to the furthest end. He saw a large door, where he saw a warning sign above.

[BEWARE: Dangerous Monsters Beyond This Point]

'Are they keeping Monsters here? Rearing them? Breeding them?'

Rey had another dark thought, but he banished it from his mind and ventured inside.

"W-who are you?!"

"I-intrude—!"

Before the several enemies inside the squeaky clean room could say anything, Rey instantly killed them with [Severing Claw], coupled with [True Homing].

They were all very weak, so it didn't take a moment.

"Huuu..." Rey set his sights on the activities within the room, beyond the pool of blood and gore that spilled on the ground.

The good news was that his worst fears about the nature of the room didn't come to pass.

Monsters weren't being bred with humans.

However, what was occurring here could be perceived as equally appalling to some.

"They're feeding humans to the Monsters..."

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Chapter 343 Meat

Monsters were inside their cages, all of them docile thanks to the runic crests that existed on all of their bodies.

They weren't particularly strong Monsters; around E and D-Tier at most.

Nothing was particularly special about these creatures, except perhaps what they were feeding on.

Rey saw it clearly—the body parts of human beings.

The corpses were already pale and dull-looking, most likely the cause of being dead for a considerable length of time.

'I see. So they feed the dead ones to the Monsters...' Rey found his thoughts trailing.

At this point, he had reached emotional lull.

Even without [Dead Calm] he found it difficult to be shocked or furious at the scene playing out in front of him.

Perhaps he was desensitized.

Maybe he was simply tired.

Either way, Rey looked at everything with dead eyes.

'So, they make the slaves have sex with themselves to breed, and those who have reached expiration are sent to the Monsters as feed.'

It made sense why Scylla would want more offspring now.

At the very least, they could serve as meat for the Monsters; especially since they wouldn't have much value otherwise.

'They look healthy, which means they're being fed well.'

Rey observed the way the creatures ate their meal, not even disturbed by his presence or the fact that he had just killed their caretakers.

'How many humans have they eaten already? I don't know. I can't even estimate.'

Rey counted the creatures in an attempt to get the numbers.

'They're only about a hundred Monsters. I don't know how long they've been here, but if I assume it's recent, that means they'll have at least fed them hundreds of people—if not a thousand.'

It was no wonder the other Warehouses were empty or abandoned.

'Scylla fed the slaves of the other Slave Traders to her Monsters. Was she trying to rear them for war, or maybe for commercial reasons?'

The crests on the Monsters made it so that they would obey their Master's instruction. It was very possible that Scylla was trying to make Monster Slaves.

'No one has ever done that in the entire history of the Alliance... no, even before then.'

If Scylla was trying to break into a new market, using Monsters as the commodity, Rey could understand a lot of her actions.

In fact, he found it impressive.

'How much profit would she be able to gain from it? If she took control of the Royal Dungeon, just how high would the profit margin be?'

A lot of these questions swirled in his mind as the crunching sounds of Monsters devouring human flesh echoed in the air.

In the end, he found himself more curious than he imagined—enough to instruct his replica not to kill anyone he encountered in the other room.

'I need to know more...' Rey thought to himself.

Since he was pretty much done with his investigation here, Rey turned his back on the Monsters, his [Severing Claw] instantly turning them into slobes of meat.

'The Monster Cores are useless to me. Maybe the Alliance will find use for them once they investigate these parts...'

~VWUSH!~

Rey exited the room and instantly teleported to the location of his replica.

Once again, he was greeted by a pure white room, though considerably smaller than the Monster Room.

More surprising than the squeaky-clean nature of the room was what kind of place it was.

The place was a stark example of a classy kitchen.

'I never expected to see something like this here...' Rey mused as he looked at half a dozen individuals who were currently paralyzed—courtesy of his Replica.

"Good job."

As Rey uttered these words, he fused back with the other version of himself.

He took a close look at the suspended men and noticed how they were dressed like chefs.

Pure white apparels, with the chef hats and everything. The pristine kitchen, the grand decor, the clean white ambiance...

... This seemed like the dream kitchen anyone would want to eat their meals from.

However—

"What is that meat?" Rey pointed at the slab of flesh that was placed on a large tray atop a counter. He didn't need an answer to the question.

[A portion of human flesh]

That was what his Skill, [Absolute Appraisal], told him.

"You're preparing human meat... here?"

Disgust swelled within his stomach the moment a second question surfaced

'For who...?'

This didn't look like a place where food for Monsters was being prepared. It appeared to be an exquisite place made for the most distinguished of people.

Rey could see spices and a bunch of other ingredients in the large kitchen that told him that these chefs were preparing a delicacy.

He could smell something cooking—like fresh stew.

It felt absolutely amazing.

It almost made him salivate just from a single whiff.

However, there was no way anything made from this place could be appetizing to him.

Beyond this kitchen, Rey could sense a door that led to another room.

He feared what he would see there, but his curiosity got the best of him so he instantly teleported to the location.

What he found... was horrible.

Human meat, hung as if they belonged to some kind of cattle in an abattoir.

The room was freezing cold, though Rey felt none of it.

All he felt was sheer disgust.

Rey wanted to vomit.

His vision blurred as the information he received began to overwhelm him. He even staggered a little and struggled to find his footing.

His head turned back and forth as he looked at the shelves in the cold room, only to find packets of already sliced meat—all human, of course—with certain names inscribed on them.

'Names of... people? I know some of those names!'

They belonged to some rather famous merchants or rich elites in the Alliance

Of course, some of those names were obscure. They didn't know everyone, but he could picture the faces of a few.

Some were known by many to be corrupt, while others were viewed as pious and incredibly good-natured.

'Why... why are their names here?'

The packages had human meat, but it couldn't belong to those people.

Rey knew they some of them were very much alive, and it would make no sense for them to be turned into meat—

especially since their value being alive far outweighed them being dead.

Then, a dark thought coursed through his mind.

The same question he had before reappeared inside his mind.

'All this meat... who is it for?'

Rey felt like he already had the answers to his inquiry, but he wasn't satisfied.

He couldn't be!

So he teleported back to the chefs and raised one with his hand.

Utilizing [Compulsion], he easily gained access to the man's mind and asked him the simple question.

"The meat in that cold room, who are they for?"

"Our customers..." The man muttered in response.

"Who are you customers?"

"Madam Scylla's friends... in her inner circle."

Rey knew this was enough for him, but he had to be sure.

He had to hear it straight.

"What... what do they do with the meat?"

The answer was one Rey should have already known, yet once he heard it, his eyes widened considerably.

Puke swelled from the depths of his throat, and not fluids rose from his bloodshot eyes.

The abominable horror that was uttered was forever burned into Rey's mind.

"They eat the meat."

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Chapter 344 Vermin

Scylla was a cannibal.

Personally, she enjoyed her meat slightly undercooked, so she could get the moisture just right, and her spices were also milder than usual.

She also didn't like her food preserves prior to being served, which meant every time she was hungry... someone had to die.

There was no preserving her meal afterwards.

Scylla had friends who shared in her twisted hobbies and enjoyed the same delicacy as her, so she turned her disgusting practice into a business.

She would procure, process, and even sometimes cook the meals that her comrades would enjoy, and they would give her money or small favors in exchange.

Of course, these people readily agreed.

They were too high-profile to risk their names being marred by murder or some kind of illegal activity. Also, since most of them weren't particularly deep into the criminal Underworld of the Alliance, they didn't know how to properly go about killing and processing humans.

In the end, it was far better for Scylla to do the dirty work.

There was something else too...

Out of all the clients Scylla had, none had managed to outmatch her own cruelty.

She was the worst of them all.

Since she preferred her meat to be very tender, her favorite meal was the meat of young ones—the younger the better.

Imagination could go wild on that, but it was exactly how it sounded.

Her twisted nature knew no limits.

'What... the fuck?!'

The more Rey got to know about Scylla, the more the disgust in his stomach bit at him.

His bloodshot eyes couldn't stop twitching as he tried his hardest to process the information he was receiving.

'Even... babies...?!'

When Rey first saw Scylla, he thought she was very beautiful. Not as pretty as Esme, or even Alicia—in his opinion—but she was a very fine lady.

Of course, he never let that distract him from his task. However, he often thought about how her innocent face didn't fit her cruel plans.

'This is on another level, though...'

He never thought she would be such a Monster.

'Her Alignment was Neutral Evil, so I thought she only did these atrocities due to self interests...'

While that was still true, Rey hadn't known how far those 'self interests' would take her, and just how much she had done.

If he had known...

'I would have killed her myself!' He gritted his teeth as he made a murderous thought.

"I've seen enough." Rey sighed, pinching his nose with his hand.

Rage. Disgust. Downright confusion.

A bunch of feelings swirled inside Rey to the point where he just wanted to collapse and lose himself in sleep.

However, he wasn't done yet.

Since he had gotten to the final stages of his plan, he simply teleported away from the kitchen, leaving the sliced up chefs in the kitchen.

All of them, without exception, had become the very meat they were tenderly handling.

'Almost done...' His fleeting thoughts raced as he vanished.

'... Almost done with this night!'

[Moments Later]

'I'm happy you weren't there to see everything else.'

Rey reappeared in the hall that was used for the Dark Gathering, a sigh escaping his lips.

He plopped on one of the chairs, seating amidst the disturbing scene he had made with his own great power.

Once again, the stench of blood and gore greeted his senses. He was already used to seeing all of it, but after getting his full of disgusting things, Rey found himself retching a little.

He was at his limits.

'There really are some people who do not deserve to live. People who are no different from Monsters.'

No... even worse than Monsters.

At the very least, Monsters had very limited intelligence, and their main directive was to kill their enemies—humans included.

They simply couldn't help it.

Compared to the kind of humans he had learned about this very night, Rey found Monsters to be quite benevolent.

Scylla had just proven to him that some humans could be worse than Monsters.

This realization caused his code to become obsolete.

'What's the difference between killing people like that and Monsters? It's for the greater good.'

Killing human beings shouldn't have to be a last resort, but something he had to actively do when it came to certain scum.

'To make this world a better, safer place... some of these vermin have to die.'

Rey wondered if he should pay visits to some of the names he saw on the list, but he decided against it.

It had been a long night already.

After leaving the underground world of Scylla, he went around and investigated the entire building where the Dark Gathering had taken place.

He searched every nook and cranny of the place.

'I couldn't find that Curse Item that Rebal was referring to. Did Adrien steal it already?'

Rey bit his lip in a bit of annoyance. However, he recognized that there was nothing he could do about the matter.

In the end, he just had to let it go.

Rey stole one final glance at the carnage he caused, straining a smile on his exhausted face.

'I should feel proud about what I did tonight.'

He had purged the world of the vermin that were eating into the goodness of the world he was living in and were making it all worse.

At the very least, he knew there would be less victims who would suffer at the hands of cruel beings like Scylla.

That was Rey's comfort.

'It's time to leave...' Rey could already sense the presence of the Alliance Forces.

They were closing in on the building and getting ready to enter.

He didn't want to be spotted there.

'Perhaps I should first of all branch Rebal's mansion and drop Esme there.'

Afterwards, he just wanted to have a long rest.

'With this... it's over.'

~VWUUSH!~

In a flash of blue light, Rey was completely gone from the scene.

And then, a few seconds later... the soldiers entered.

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Chapter 345 Reaper

"Charge in!"

General Lucy and her forces rushed inside the room at her command, their loud roars a clear testament to the resolve burning within their hearts.

However, only a few seconds after entering the room, all of their resolve melted into something else.

"A-ahh...?!"

"M-my goodness..."

"T-this is...!"

All their eyes could see it... the scene of carnage that lay before their very eyes.

The mangled and butchered corpses of a thousand people decorated their sight and overwhelmed their senses.

Even Lucy, with all of her experience on the battlefield, found herself widening her single eye.

'T-this is horrible!'

She had never seen or heard of a single human cause such extensive bloodshed on fellow people.

This felt awful beyond comparison.

It felt wrong.

'That man... Sir Ralyks... he did this...?'

Lucy had always gotten bad vibes in his presence—as if he was a dangerous one that she couldn't afford to mess with.

However, she never expected him to be so ruthless.

'The Royal Council trusts him as an ally, and since he executed the members of the Criminal Underworld, none of his actions here are illegal.'

However, Lucy couldn't help but feel anxious.

'What if he stops becoming an ally?' Lucy didn't want to imagine such a possibility.

After all, the moment Ralyks ceased being on their side would be the day she would have to raise her blade against him.

Lucy found herself gulping at the thought.

'Should that day ever arrive... I'll become nothing more than these lumps of flesh and stains of blood.'

It caused her to shiver.

"D-don't just stand there! Examine the corpses and identify the ones who belong to the respective Houses." Lucy declared.

"I'll lead a separate unit on an investigative tour of the entire building. We will be stripping this entire place of all its secrets, from top to bottom!"

Lucy turned behind her and looked at Kara Verte—their ally and informant.

The girl also looked as disturbed as everyone else present.

The General could see why.

'If she hadn't taken our side... she would have ended up the same.'

Lucy took steps forward, feeling her metallic boots kicking away fleshy parts and going through the currents of thick blood. Once she took in the entire sight, Lucy reached a conclusion.

"That man... Ralyks; he's neither a Hero nor is he an Adventurer."

Heroes committed valiant deeds without the stigma of horrors attached, while Adventurers caused carnage only to beasts such as Monsters

None of those applied here.

Instead of Monsters, humans had been cut up. He had committed a valiant deed indeed, but the horror was too glaring to be ignored.

'In the end, Sir Ralyks was different.' Lucy closed her eyes and gazed at the bloody chandelier.

"... He's a Reaper."

~VWUUSH!~

Rey appeared before the Blanc Mansion, and it was in perfect condition—just as he expected.

As he took a step forward, the blue distortions behind him flickered and vanished, leaving him standing all by himself.

The ambiance of fresh air took over his nose as he inhaled deeply. He missed the lovely taste of fresh air, a sharp contrast to the bloody musk he had inadvertently gotten used to.

Everywhere felt still; so peaceful and quiet that it was difficult to tell if anything had even transpired here this evening.

'I'll find out from Ater later...' Rey's thoughts trailed as he looked at the massive mansion before him.

'First things first.'

He could already sense where Rebal and Asher were, so he teleported there in a flash.

The moment he did so, he found himself in a lounge, with the father and son staring at each other in utter silence.

They both looked scarred by something.

'Maybe I'll ask them later.' Rey sighed internally.

He only wanted to do what he came here for.

"I'm back." His voice startled the two, who instantly jumped to their feet and bowed before him.

"S-Sir Ralyks... welcome back!"

"Welcome back, Sir Ralyks!"

Their greetings seemed to contain an additional layer of respect, though Rey wondered if it was simply the product of his imagination.

'Well, whatever...'

He didn't really care for any of that at the moment.

"Here." In a sleight of his hand, Esme appeared on one of the sofas, her unconscious form gracefully laying on it.

Rebal and Asher looked at her in shock—specifically because of her white hair and pointy ears.

Their faces exuded confusion, and it seemed like they had several questions on the issue.

Rey, however, didn't want to have any of it.

"Don't ask me any questions. It's a long story."

"O-of course!" Rebal promptly answered and lowered his head.

It felt a bit too much, but Rey allowed it.

"Take care of her and nurse her to full health. Pay close attention to her and ensure all her needs are met." Rey instructed.

The two men nodded instantly, responding affirmatively to everything he said.

Rey had a sad smile on his face as he glanced at Esme for the last time that night.

'This wasn't how I expected things to go. But I guess the both of us ended up getting the worst surprise of our lives.'

He didn't know what kind of person Esme would be when he next saw her.

Rey only had one wish.

'I hope you allow this to make you grow...'

Not everyone grows when pressure and tragedy is applied to their lives.

Some crumble under the pressure.

Some never let go of what was to embrace what is.

However, for the ones who learn to embrace the change and evolve past their circumstances... to them is given more power to rise.

Power not to experience the same again.

'I hope that's the case for you, Esme...'

With that faint smile still playing on his face, Rey took a few steps away and attempted to teleport back to his residence.

He stopped short of a step and decided to give in to a bit of his curiosity.

"Was my subordinate able to handle all the problems?"

"Y-yes! Yes, he was!" Asher blurted out.

"And... how was it?"

For a moment after Rey asked this question, no one said anything.

Asher's gulp was audible to Rey, but he said nothing of it. He simply waited for the answer.

"It... it was a bloodbath."

Upon hearing this, Rey found his smile growing wider. No one could see it since he wore a mask, but it was a twisted grin.

"Good."

And with that, he vanished from the Blanc Mansion.

Rebal and Asher still felt their bodies trembling even after Ralyks departed from them.

This was no mere man, and if they didn't already know that before, this night had reinforced the truth and burned it into their very minds.

One could even go as far as saying he wasn't human.

"I-I'll sort through her well-being and handle everything, Father. You should go and rest in your room."

Upon hearing the words of his son, Rebal smiled and nodded gently.

Right before Ralyks appeared, the two of them had quite a bit about the horrors they experienced.

It was more than enough to deserve a break.

"Thank you. I think I will."

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Chapter 346 The Prelude To Horrors [Pt 1]

[Moments Earlier]

Rebal found himself within his mansion in the blink of an eye, once again finding Ralyks' teleportation ability very strange.

It was just a moment before that he was staring at the bloodied corpses of Ralyks' victims, and yet... here he was.

'Sir Ralyks really is amazing.'

Nothing short of awe and dread currently enveloped Rebal as he thought of his savior. He had never met a man like Ralyk, and he didn't think he ever would.

'The Mansion appears fine, so I'm guessing Sir Ralyks' subordinate must have taken care of everything.' The man grinned as he began to walk.

'Where's Asher, then?'

Rebal knew his own premises like the back of his hand, so it didn't take him very long to locate his son.

He was seated in a pretty small lounge—one that T?? long sofas opposite each other, with a center table separating them.

"Asher, my son! It's a glorious ni—" Before Rebal could complete his echoes of joy, he noticed something off about his son.

The boy was seated in absolute silence, his vacant eyes looking at the ground.

'He looks absentminded. He didn't even notice my presence...'

Rebal instantly knew something was wrong.

As part of his training, Rebal had taught Asher to be constantly aware of his surroundings so he would never let his guard down.

His son had followed this counsel, and Rebal always saw that he never let his guard down.

However, this night was completely different.

'I haven't seen him this shaken since his mother's death...'

Rebal drew close and placed his hand on Asher's shoulder.

"Uwaaaaahhhhhh!"

Asher's sudden screams frightened Rebal, causing both of them to recoil back for a few seconds, the former landing on the hard floor.

"S-sorry. I didn't mean to startle you like that." Rebal was astonished as he said these words.

The look of sheer terror on Asher's face was not something he had ever seen on his boy's face before.

It made Rebal as curious as he was worried.

"What happened to you?"

Rebal and his son now sat on their respective sofas opposite each other, and while silence was the central theme in the room, it was constantly interrupted by their audible breaths.

After a few seconds of saying nothing, Rebal finally spoke up.

"What happened?"

Silence followed the question—at least for about five seconds.

Then...

"T-the one Sir Ralyks brought here... his subordinate... he was..." Before Asher could complete his words, he covered his mouth with his hand, almost as if he wanted to retch.

No, this wasn't merely disgust.

It was just sheer fear—the kind that made one hesitant to speak of its cause.

"What did that man do—?"

"HE'S NOT A MAN!" Asher suddenly raised his voice as he hit his two hands on his laps, having widened eyes with moisture evident in them.

His distant gaze was enough to drive anyone insane.

"He's... not a man..." As this tone of his trailed, Rebal had no choice but to agree with him.

"So, what did this subordinate do?"

Everywhere was so silent and peaceful that Rebal was still confused about the details of the event that happened in his absence.

If it wasn't for what he heard from Scylla's communication device, he would have thought they hadn't even begun their attack yet.

'The fact that he scarred my son like this means it was quite the big deal.'

"Is it how he killed the enemies? He used some gruesome means, or...?"

Rebal found Asher shaking his head, so he stopped what he was saying as he watched the latter look him in the eyes.

"He didn't kill anyone."

"H-huh...?" Rebal was left quizzical. "What do you mean he didn't kill anyone?"

"They begged for death... but he didn't kill them."

"They're still alive?"

"Alive? C-can I even call them alive...?"

Rebal was confused. If they weren't dead, that meant they were alive—right

There were just two states of being, and even if someone was being starved or tortured, they weren't dead yet.

They were still alive.

'Isn't he contradicting himself right now?' Rebal thought to himself.

He began to wonder if his son was overreacting.

After all, he too had experienced Ralyks' cruelty and he saw how the man brutally murdered his enemies.

What exactly did the subordinate do that could trump the deeds of his Master?

"What exactly happened here? Were the enemies killed or not? There can only be one."

No... no, Rebal didn't understand.

Asher shaking his head was enough proof, but the older man couldn't comprehend it.

There was only one way for him to truly realize the error of his ignorance; so he could reach beyond his limited understanding.

"I will tell you... exactly what happened." Asher finally said, much to Rebal's relief.

Unknown to the man, it would soon become his nightmare.

"It seems the time has come."

Ater was looking at the moon through a large window from where he stood when he uttered those words.

His gaze appeared distant, as if reminiscing about some far off land, or a time that had long passed.

It wasn't like Asher could understand any of it, as the young man simply sat a short distance from Ater—ready to attend to whatever requests he made.

Despite being a subordinate, Ater's status vastly exceeded Asher's, and the latter knew that very well.

After all, this man was the only one who could save their empire.

"Those fools. They plan on seizing the Capital in a head-on assault rather than splitting their forces and attacking specific parts in order to make proper use of their time and resources." Ater's whispers made themselves known to Asher.

"At least they bothered to divide their forces into two—one attacking the Black Market and the other focusing on the surface. A simple strategy, but it works..."

At this point, Ater turned to Asher and smiled at the young man.

Asher felt a tingle down his spine as he felt the crimson gaze upon him.

Something about it seemed malicious, and the pressure it gave off actually exceeded Ralyks' own.

"This should be interesting."

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Chapter 347 The Prelude To Horrors [Pt 2]

"Will you be alright by yourself? Is there any way I can assist?"

Asher wasn't asking these questions because he doubted the abilities of the man before him.

Rather, it was just a sign of courtesy. As someone who was placed in charge of the Mansion and the Blanc resources in the absence of his father, Asher had to act the part.

He had to represent his father well and show as much hospitality and goodwill to their guest.

"Hm. I think I'll be fine on my own." Ater smiled with a gleam in his eyes.

Asher gulped and nodded, instantly believing it.

The way the man's all-black suit completely complemented the rest of his clothing already gave the impression that he could handle himself.

Ater's red hair flowed like blood, and his red eyes seemed much darker and deadlier than Ralyks'. Despite all of these qualities, however, he had a bright smile on his handsome face.

He was too good-looking, having a form of roguish charm that made him irresistible. Yet, Asher felt like if he got too close, he would be swatted like an insect and meet his end.

These mixed signals caused the man to keep his distance while speaking to Ater.

"Now that I think of it, though, it would be nice to have a spectator." Ater narrowed his gaze on the trembling one.

"What do you think?"

Something within Asher told him to reject the subtle invitation, but he also knew he couldn't run away from his responsibility as the host.

He was meant to help out as much as he could.

"I-I would gladly spectate your battle!" Asher realized how lame his declaration was as soon as he said it, but he stuck to it anyway.

"Oh? You're volunteering yourself? That's so nice of you."

'Eh? He didn't mean me?'

The confusion on Asher's face was filled with shock when Ater suddenly appeared in front of him and placed a hand on his shoulder.

A devilish smile played on his face, causing Asher to shudder.

He was beginning to have doubts about his response, and an inner voice screamed at him to back away.

But wasn't it too late?

He had already given his word.

"Don't worry, you won't be in any danger. Thank you for offering yourself." Ater tapped his shoulder and gave a softer, well-meaning smile.

"I accept your offer."

Asher gulped after hearing those words.

There was no concept of the Devil in the world of H'Trae, but if there was, then Ater seemed like the proper representation of such.

—An entity of untold malevolence.

"It looks like we're all set."

The one who spoke was a man in a dark purple robe.

He seemed like a priest, having a long staff on his hand, with bangles dangling from the top of them.

A skull of some kind of creature was affixed on the top of the straight staff, and while most of his body was covered in the robe, his aged, pale skin partly showed from his hands and face.

Of the Nine Heads of Destruction, only seven were left, and of those seven, two were in the Dark Gathering as the surviving members of the Deadly Three.

That meant only five Heads were involved in the current mission.

Of the five, Fernand and Phobio—the strongest of them—decided to go to the Black Market with their allocation of soldiers while the rest stormed the Capital.

It was a basic strategy, one which this particular robed man had tried to protest against.

However, they would have none of it.

'Perhaps I am being a bit too cautious.' The man thought to himself, looking at his fellows.

Before him were two women—though one could hardly be called one due to her age.

Saying they were a woman and a girl would be more appropriate.

He was chosen as the leader of their own attack squad by unanimous vote, with the both of them saying stuff like;

"Claudius, you're the most suited to lead us!"

Or

"Claudius, we need your sound judgment!"

This old man—Claudius Fern Frierant—knew they were just trying to butter him up.

In actuality, they just wanted to leave all the work to him so they could slack off on the mission.

'Tch! How annoying...'

Everyone always assumed he was the 'responsible' and 'wise' one because of his status as an old man, but he really wasn't very old at all.

He was just in his early thirties.

The only reason he looked like this was because of an overuse of his Exclusive Skill.

He didn't regret any of his actions, though.

It was only thanks to all he had done that he was able to come this far—both in power and status.

'No one cares about the last prince from the fallen Kingdom that was destroyed by the Dragons all those years ago.'

What mattered in this world was power.

And Claudius Fern Frierant had gotten said power.

'Fools would think of ascending to higher ranks, but I need none of that.'

He had learned his lesson from watching the actions of his father and how his Kingdom fell into ruin.

Instead, all he wanted was to live a comfortable life.

Enough food and water to properly enjoy life, and enough money to get whatever he desired.

So far, he seemed to have achieved all of that.

Of course, the price he paid for it was the need to do the dirty work of the Mercenary Gang—such as on this particular night.

'Many innocents will die, and their blood will be on my hands...'

Even though he felt bad about it, Claudius didn't bother apologizing in advance.

That would be hypocritical.

'I have to do what I have to do to get what I want.'

Such was the nature of this world.

After the Dragons came and burned down his Kingdom, turning his world to ash, he had an epiphany.

—Living is not for the weak.

The strong takes whatever they want, and that is the natural order of things.

That was why he ended up burning through his life essence— looking like an old man as a result.

It was so he could live.

'I just have to complete this mission and be done with it. I'll enjoy my fine wine in my luxurious home and eat the finest of meals.'

That would help sate his conscience.

Then, he could tell himself that his actions tonight were worth it.

"Jawl is with the rest of our troops. We're ready to depart at your command."

One of the ladies, Feyu, was the one who uttered those words.

She wasn't particularly attractive, but Claudius desired her. Unfortunately, she would never even look at him for even a second.

Not while he had such a hideous face.

Her speciality was Elemental Magic, though only at the basic level.

She was still quite skilled.

"When are we leaving?" The second female spoke.

This one had the height of a ten-year old, but she was actually twelve.

Rumors had it that she was Fenrir's daughter, and due to her immense talent, she was added to the ranks of the Mercenary Gang.

Regardless of her status or whether the rumors were true, the fact remained that the girl named Shuri had climbed the ladder of the Gang on her own.

Without any aid, she was able to become a member of the Nine Heads of Destruction.

Out of all the members, she had the most potential.

"Huu..." Claudius heaved a sigh and looked at Feyu and Shuri with narrowed eyes.

He steeled his heart and prepared himself for yet another massacre.

"We're leaving now."

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Chapter 348 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 1]

Claudius and the two ladies behind him met with their armed forces, an estimate of one thousand men.

A few more members were also in their midst, led by Jawl—Scylla's personal dog.

'Looks like our performance will be watched by Lady Scylla's Covert Squad.' Claudius mused as he got closer to the group.

'At the very least they're being open about it and not hiding in the shadows.'

He assumed that some were also with Phobio and Fernand, so Claudius chose not to make a big fuss about things and just go with the flow.

"The plan is simple, really. Security is very loose tonight in the Capital. As a result, we can go wild without anyone stopping us."

Personally, Claudius would have preferred a more elaborate plan, but the members of the Mercenary Gang were a rough and simple bunch.

They actually preferred arrangements like this.

"Our primary target is the Blanc Mansion, so please ensure that in your acts of violence, you remain on the path to get to the Mansion."

It was possible to get lost in the thrill of slaughter—not that Claudius could relate—but they couldn't forget their primary assignment.

"Once we're done with the Blanc Mansion, we'll be taking viable individuals as Merchandise for Lady Scylla." Claudius added with a sigh.

"Leave the selection of the appropriate goods to me and my men. Don't kill the ones we tell you not to kill, and help us in restraining the ones we tell you to."

Jawl's voice carried a lot more weight than Claudius', but the Gang members still looked at the latter for confirmation.

After all, they didn't answer to Scylla. They answered to their leaders—who in turn answered to the Chief at the very top.

"Haa... do as he says." Claudius shrugged.

'So that's why they're here. It's not just to observe, but to select the people to capture for Scylla.'

It was no secret what these people were going to be used for.

'Slavery, huh? How annoying...'

Claudius had never liked the concept of Slave Trade, even when it was legal and commonplace in his own Kingdom.

In fact, one of the things he wanted to do when he became King was to abolish the trade.

However, now that he was a criminal himself, he had a whole new perspective on the entire thing. Even if his Kingdom was never destroyed and he had abolished the trade, it wouldn't go away.

It seemed like it was inherent in human nature to desire some form of dominance over fellow humans.

Whether this was in the form of government, employment, or extremes like slavery; people wanted to feel superior to others.

It was unfortunate, but the ones who were weak had no choice but to serve the strong.

'I personally don't see the point, but...'

It was what it was.

"We move out now." Claudius commanded, his two colleagues trailing right beside him as the army charged forward.

'... Let carnage begin.'

Just as Claudius expected, it was a slaughter.

Men. Women. Children. Infants.

It didn't matter who they were and what they looked like—they were all mercilessly killed by the bloodthirsty mobs that scoured the Capital.

Of course, in certain instances, Jawl and his people would stop the deaths of certain people.

This wasn't out of benevolence, however.

Death would have been the preferable option if these poor people knew what would befall them in the eventual future.

Of course, the Mercenary Gang Members weren't too pleased about this development.

However, they endured for the sake of the mood.

Rather than whine and complain about it, they chose to revel in even more violence and entertain more bloodshed.

That night, the entire Capital was bathed in blood, starting from the entrance—and continuing as they kept up their advancement.

Claudius simply removed his eyes from the grotesque sight and kept up his calm, slow pace towards the mansion.

On the way, he and the two ladies with him encountered a few guards who tried to fight them in their inadequate numbers.

They were all killed by Feyu—and very swiftly too.

Shuri was a Tamer, so she had to summon her Familiar to fight the battles for her. It wasn't a swift process, and it consumed a ton of Mana, so she wasn't relied upon when facing weak fodder like guards.

Her Summoned Familiars also disappeared after a set period of time, so in order to use them to their best capabilities, it was best to summon them at the time when they had to be used.

As such, she didn't have to summon anything.

As for why Claudius didn't fight, it wasn't that he couldn't do so.

He wasn't averse to killing as well

If the situation called for it, he would take a life without hesitation. The problem was his proximity with these two ladies, and the nature of his power.

Based on these circumstances, Feyu was the best for the situation.

Her mastery over the four basic elements was incredible, and while she could only use them in limited quality and quantity, the fact that she could control them well without Spells was an amazing feat.

'Elemental Mages really are something, huh?'

Claudius made a wry smile and looked ahead and noticed the mansion standing erect.

"Is that it? Will I finally be able to kill some people when we get there?" Shuri asked in her usual blunt tone.

The older man nodded, already used to his comrade's twisted and sadistic behavior.

"Hehehe! I can't wait!"

Shuri's sweet smile betrayed her malevolent desires—the urge to kill.

Her fair skin and cute appearance was just for display. Inside, the girl was as cold and twisted as one could imagine.

'As for Feyu...' Claudius glanced at the woman he desired.

Her dirty blond hair and plain face drew him in. She had freckles on her face, with a stern facade constantly being displayed.

Claudius knew there was more to Feyu than mere business and killing, and he often wondered if he could one day discover those parts with her.

'Ahh... what am I thinking?' He sighed, shaking his head as his dark purple robe danced with the cool wind.

'Let's just focus on the task at hand.'

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Chapter 349 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 2]

The carnage was wrought.

From the looks on the faces of the men who began to gather, one after another, they were yet to have their fill.

They desired more death.

However, for the moment, they had to abandon all of that and focus on the primary assignment that concerned them.

—The utter destruction of the Blanc House's legacy.

That meant killing and completely devastating the mansion that stood before them.

'This is it, huh?' Claudius stared at the massive building.

It was by far larger than his own home, but he personally didn't mind. He didn't need all of this room anyway.

... Not when he didn't have anyone to share it with.

"Would you like to scout inside first, or should we begin the task?" Claudius turned to look at Jawl as he appeared beside him.

"We'll take a look inside."

'As expected.' He smiled wryly.

Scylla might have given them another assignment that they weren't disclosing. It was also possible that they were after the wealth of the Blanc House and not willing to share the spoils with the Mercenary Gang.

Either way, it was none of his business.

"Alright. Please proceed. We will wait here for your return."

"Yeah. We'll be back soon."

Claudius watched as Jawl signaled about half of the men with him—all of them equally shrouded in dark attires—and they nodded back.

Afterward, they proceeded inside the mansion, like shadows dissipating into the darkness.

'If it was going to be like this, they should have done this earlier, while the slaughter was going on.'

Instead, Jawl was making him and his men stand by and wait for the completion of Scylla's hidden agenda.

'It's annoying!'

Yes, Claudius was well aware of the possibility that he was overreacting or overthinking again.

'They probably needed us to surround the Mansion so there would be no escape for the targets in case they caught wind of their actions...' He tried to give excuses like this.

But that was all they were—excuses!

'They could have split us up into two or more groups from the start... just as I wanted.'

That way, there would be enough people to surround the mansion while the slaughter would still be ongoing.

For the men who would be dissatisfied with not killing, they could alternate roles at intervals so that everyone could have their fun.

'Besides, how is it fair that we have to remain on standby because of their own agenda? If anyone escapes from the Mansion, wouldn't it be due to their incompetence?!'

Claudius calmed his heart and decided to remain calm.

'It'll soon be over anyway.' He told himself.

Before he could conclude his thoughts, Claudius heard the creaking sound of a door up ahead.

'Huh? Did one manage to escape?!' He narrowed his eyes and clicked his tongue.

Something was off, though.

Why would anyone think of escaping through the front door? Wouldn't that be the last place one would think of when it came to stealthily exiting a building?

'Sure, we have this place surrounded, so their actions are useless either way, but it's not like the denizens inside will know that right away.'

Claudius' confusion was further compounded once he set eyes on the man who stepped out of the building.

He had red hair and ebony skin, with a pure black suit clinging to his body. His shirt and tie were equally black, same as his shoes.

He also had red irises that seemed to glow as soon as he stepped out.

The most distinguishing trait of the stranger, however, was his extremely handsome face. He appeared to be sculpted by the divine, and the calm smile on his face only added to that splendor.

'Who is that...?' Claudius wondered.

It was puzzling to see someone just step out so casually, with both hands in his pockets as if he was going out for a walk.

Before Claudius could think any further, he noticed movement behind the red-haired man, causing him to twitch slightly.

'He's not alone...?'

Behind him was a man Claudius knew, having met him once or twice. His name was Aldred Winsley, a broker for the KariBlanc Group.

It wasn't strange to see Aldred here, but what was he doing behind the handsome stranger?

Why did they both appear from the main door?

'Aldred appears a little nervous, but not the other one. Both of them aren't displaying surprise too, despite our numbers far exceeding theirs.'

Claudius found his brain ticking as he tried to figure out what all of the details before him translated to.

'They're clearly not surprised to see them here. The Blanc House should have known what would happen if they went to the Dark Gathering and left their goods unattended to.'

But why were they so calm?

Aldred indeed looked nervous, but it wasn't enough.

'Isn't this the time where they surrender? No... in the first place, why would those fools let intruders out like this?'

This wasn't the plan at all!

'Damn you, Jawl. Do we still have to wait for you and your men despite all of this?'

The answer was simple.

'No wa—!'

"Greetings, everyone. It's a pleasure to see you all gathered here tonight."

Claudius' thoughts were interrupted by the calm voice of a man.

It came from the one in black.

He took a step forward, bringing out his hands from his pockets to stretch them out as he gave his address.

"So many new faces. An approximate of one thousand and ninety-six." His gaze seemed to flow from one person to another.

Claudius felt the man's gaze land upon him for a second, and they made eye contact. The feeling was enough to send chills down his spine.

"Not a bad audience. The rest will be joining us shortly, but we can begin with a bit of preliminary fun."

With a clap of his hands, several mangled bodies descended from above, along with a rain of blood.

'H-huh...?!'

Claudius' eyes widened as he looked at the corpses. They were twisted and mangled beyond proper recognition, but he could still place their identities.

'The Recon Unit!' His eyes nearly bulged.

What in the world happened?!

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Chapter 350 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 3]

Scylla's Recon Unit didn't have members as strong as the Nine Heads of Destruction—except maybe Jawl—but they were still elite.

They matched the Mercenary Gang's Elite in ability, though they were sorely lacking in numbers.

What made them even more scary was their cloaking speciality and stealthy maneuvers.

In that regard, they were definitely superior to the Mercenary Gang's Elite.

If it came to an enclosed space, especially in the dark, if they had their numbers... there was hardly any enemy they couldn't beat.

Yet...

'W-what is this...?!'

Claudius' jaws trembled as he watched the bodies of all the members of Scylla's Recon Unit descend from above and plop to the ground.

Blood sullied the stained clothes of everyone present, further bathing them in the crimson liquids that once flowed through people.

"This one seemed to be the leader, so I gave him special treatment." A voice came from the man in the black suit, forcing Claudius to raise his head.

Once he did, he saw one body appearing out of nowhere, as he was held from the head by the dark-suited man.

'I-Is that... Jawl ...?' Claudius' confusion was understandable, considering how the man looked like now.

All the skin had been peeled off the body, and it also seemed like the hair had been yanked out very violently.

The two eye sockets were empty, with thin strands of flesh protruding out to hold the dangling eyeballs that hung beyond their hollow sockets.

No teeth. The body was a vile representation of a human, but the worst part was...

'He's still alive...?'

Compared to the mangled corpses that filled their sight, the one whom Claudius suspected to be Jawl still seemed to be breathing—albeit barely.

"It would be a waste to just leave him be, so I'll do this instead."

The ebony man flung the skinless body forward, causing it to land on the pile of flesh and blood that stood a distance from him.

"It's a shame that I can no longer use my previous abilities. Most of them were abandoned upon the reset, but that's fine." He began to draw both of his hands to each other.

"I just have to remake it..."

A dark gleam appeared in his eyes as Claudius heard words he didn't fully comprehend.

Purple sparks of energy began to surround him, and the crimson glow in his eyes took on the same hue. It radiated, pulsating forth until the litter of corpses began to exhibit the same color.

Then—

"Hollow Technique #7..."

The world held its breath as it waited for the man to complete his words.

Claudius wondered why he and his allies were still. Normally, they would have rushed the ebony man and gutted him.

Yet...

'It almost feels like an impenetrable wall is in front of me.'

Perhaps it was shock that paralyzed them, but Claudius thought it was something else entirely.

Something akin to instinct.

"... Compound Corpse."

The moment he uttered those words, the meaty flesh and bloodied entrails of the corpses began to jerk to life.

All the blood around them swiftly started to converge, all of them seeping into the distorted forms of men. It happened so quickly that only a few could process the occurrence.

Once the blood vanished, all of the plump flesh began to seep into just one target—the skinless form of the one who was yet to die.

Soon, his body was covered in the flesh of everyone.

"Fshuu..." It gave heavy breaths as it rose to its new, towering form.

It was at least five meters tall, with a plump body that showed the combination of several life forms being merged into one.

One could still see toes or some heads sticking out of the robust abomination that stood tall and mighty.

This thing could no longer be called a human.

It was... a being of horror.

"I thought, as an appetizer, you could enjoy your first battle of the night with this." The Ebony man stretched his hand towards the flesh monster.

He had a tone that oozed pride. It almost seemed like the man thought his actions warranted thanks and reverence from the audience.

More than that, however, Claudius was specifically stunned.

He could see the eyes of his comrades on him as the Undead Monster stood before them, still stationary—thankfully.

'He did something of this level with merely a few words and no prior preparations? What Level is he in?'

Worst of all, it didn't seem like the man had put any effort at all in the Undead's creation

He could clearly perceive the corrupted Mana—in essence, Miasma—that was slowly rising from the massive entity before them.

It was immensely dense.

Claudius gulped and his mind went to work.

'That is undoubtedly an Undead creature, which means this one is a Necromancer...' Claudius narrowed his eyes as he stared ahead.

Necromancers belonged to a special category of individuals—

obscure beings who could bend the laws of the world even more than normal.

This stemmed from their power over even life itself.

'The fact that he can bring forth Miasma and create an Undead from sacrifices proves my point.'

The man before him fulfilled all the qualifications of being a Necromancer.

"Claudius..." Feyu muttered as she looked at him with concern.

The older man instantly nodded his head the moment he heard his name being uttered.

There was a reason why he knew so much about Necromancers, and why this particular occurrence bothered him the most.

It was because he was also a Necromancer!

"Yeah, I know. This is a tough one, even for me." Claudius said, his eyes narrowed on the man who stood behind the Undead.

The Undead itself wasn't too much of a threat.

It was strong, sure, but not to the point where an experienced Necromancer like Claudius would be so nervous.

The problem was the man who summoned it.

'He must have greater skill than I do. Even more Energy too.'

However, Claudius wasn't blind to his own advantages in the current conflict.

'I have numbers on my side.'

"Shuri, begin your Familiar Summoning Process. Feyu, protect her. As for me..." As Claudius said this, he took a few steps forward, away from his teammates.

"... I'll take care of this one!"