

Extras 351

Chapter 351 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 4]

Claudius Fern Frierant had an Exclusive Skill since he was born—[Dead Call].

It allowed him to resurrect a dead person to become his personal slave. Of course, this slave had neither the will nor the mind that they possessed when they were alive.

They were merely husks of their former selves.

In essence... Undead.

He knew he was special since he was a kid, and his family agreed.

He was given the most luxurious upbringing, and after practicing his Skill for years, more offshoots arose, until he finally gained the Necromancer Apprentice Class.

It was a C-Tier Class, but for a man in his late teens to have advanced that far already, it was an amazing feat worthy of celebration.

Thanks to this Class, and the Privileges that came with them—along with his pre-existing Skills—he became quite the prodigy.

Everyone said he matured a lot faster than his age, and for a while, it was considered a compliment.

But... Claudius soon understood that it was more of a curse than a blessing.

The Miasma involved in Necromancy had inadvertently caused his body to age a lot faster than it normally would, causing him to appear like a man in his thirties despite being a late teenager.

Of course, this process only became much worse the more he utilized his power.

At a point, he decided to stop in order to prevent any further aging.

But... the Dragons came.

They burned his home to the ground and took everything that mattered to him in the blink of an eye.

He wasn't strong enough to stop them.

He couldn't do anything but run away, escaping from the only place that he had grown to love.

'If only... If only I kept becoming strong, would I have been able to stop them? Maybe I could have at least saved my family! Maybe...'

Those thoughts remained in Claudius' mind as vestiges of regrets that would never leave him.

It was because of these thoughts that he abandoned his looks and health, considering them to be vanity, instead focusing on the pursuit of strength.

He joined the Mercenary Gang, and after years of practice, he eventually advanced his Class to a B-Tier Class—Junior Necromancer.

Despite reaching such a height, he kept this Class a secret and kept growing in strength.

—Even to the point where he was confident that he had surpassed the Deadly Three.

Claudius didn't care for ranks, though.

All he wanted was the power to protect himself, and provide for his every need.

Once he reached such a height, he stopped his climb to power, but at that point it was too late.

He already had the body of an elder with a young man's mind.

This was the price for power—the cost of gaining nigh unrivaled strength!

Was it worth it?

The answer was simple.

YES! Of course, it was worth it all.

And now, as Claudius stood in front of the Compound Corpse, he desired to demonstrate it once more... the value of his power.

He desired to prove to himself, and the world, that his actions were correct.

To attain strength, one had to sacrifice everything!

"Abyss Call: Knights Of Black!"

As Claudius utilized one of his three Undead-based Skills, [Abyss Call], black circles began to appear on the ground.

The black shadows were about ten inches from him, and there were three of them.

From within the darkness emerged three tall entities who donned full-plated armor.

Their armor was pure black, though signs of rust and gleams of purple appeared in several areas of their metallic forms.

The three Knights Of Black Stood, each with a weapon of speciality—a Sword, a Lance, lastly Bow and Arrows.

They instantly took battle stances, with Claudius right behind them as their summoner.

This was the power of [Abyss Call].

With this Skill, Claudius could summon the Undead he had already made prior to the event.

Of course, there were certain limitations to [Abyss Call]—like the total number of Undead he could store in his abyss, but this was his go-to Skill.

This was specifically because it didn't require Miasma to flow through and into him, hence it didn't affect his body.

His two other undead-based Skills—[Dead Call], and [Ultimate Sacrifice], were the opposite.

Since Claudius already had a wide variety of Undead in his abyss, thirty-nine in total, and others which were in his territory back home... he didn't need to utilize his other Skills.

It felt like a waste having them, but the safest option remained [Abyss Call].

"Attack!" Claudius commanded, and his loyal soldiers of the dead instantly obeyed.

They expertly rushed forth, instantly taking formation without any need for some kind of remote control.

No... these were experts.

Depending on the skill of a Necromancer—specifically their Class and its Privileges—it was possible for the Undead to possess the abilities it had back when it was still alive.

In essence, the Skills and experience—things as minute as muscular memory and instinct that had been honed over one's lifetime—could be used by the Undead.

Theoretically, it was possible to bring back the intelligence of a previously living entity, though that was a level that was too high for the current Claudius.

Perhaps a Senior Necromancer could pull that off, but not him.

For Claudius, he couldn't completely bring everything over—just vestiges, like their combat experience and one or two Skills.

Any Undead he made would always be weaker than their living counterparts.

Even with that...

'These three Knights are the strongest warrior-type Undead I have in my arsenal.'

... Claudius knew his minions wouldn't disappoint him.

~WHOOSH!~

Just as he expected, the three expertly traversed the obstacles that stood before them as if they were nothing.

The Compound Corpse was too slow and bulky for it to catch the nimble Knights, and thanks to their combined efforts, they easily subjugated it.

How? Well, by going for the four limbs, they were able to render it immobile.

After that, the knight with the sword decapitated the gigantic thing, thus ending its false life.

*

Chapter 352 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 5]

~THUD!~

The earth shook slightly as the colossal cluster of corpses fell to the ground—dead for the second time.

"Huu..." Claudius looked at his Undead minions as they gathered before him, once again taking battle positions.

Afterward, they became stationary.

'Looks like it's over. Good thing I summoned my best fighters.'

If he didn't, it would have taken a lot longer.

As an experienced Necromancer, Claudius knew all about the quality of corpses and Undead, hence he was able to make the right decision and achieve flawless victory.

'Now all we have to do is take down the opponent before he summons another troublesome thing.'

He didn't know how possible that was, though.

To make an Undead, you needed a dead body. That was a fundamental principle that remained unchanging for all Necromancers.

The only reason Claudius could bring out his minions despite having no sacrifices was thanks to [Abyss Call].

'I'm not sure if this person has it or not, but it's more likely they don't.'

Based on what the man had displayed—making such a high-leveled Undead in such a short period without any elaborate process—Claudius had to assume he used a bunch of Skills at the same time.

'At least three would have been used, the way I see it.'

Humans had a limit of five Skills, and if he accounted for the Skills he used to kill the Recon Unit and make them suddenly appear, then the list of Skills had to be consummated.

'He also at least needs to have a Passive Skill when it comes to Magic, so there's that.'

Claudius knew that the number of his Skills had already somehow reached five, so there was no room for a Skill like [Abyss Call].

'That means he'll have to summon something else from scratch. I see no sacrifices around, so he might have to go outside the Mansion's compounds to get the dead bodies of those we killed before coming here.'

Claudius wasn't going to let that happen, but even if the man managed to escape their encirclement, he wouldn't be able to make any high-leveled Undead from the corpses that he would find.

'An Undead's strength is limited to the power they had when they were alive.'

Regular denizens of the Capital couldn't qualify as powerful.

'Even if he combines their corpses, like he just did, it wouldn't be enough...'

That meant, as far as Necromancy went, he was at a disadvantage.

'The only thing I have to worry about is the unaccounted Skill that he used to kill the Recon Unit. It is very possible that it could be an Undead he already summoned, and not a Skill.'

Either way, Claudius had no intentions of letting his guard down.

He explored the possibilities in his mind as he waited for Shuro to be done with her Summon.

Perhaps his mind was so occupied that he didn't notice how the colossal cluster of corpses was rising back to its feet.

He had subconsciously dismissed it, instead focusing on the Necromancer himself.

That was his mistake!

"CLAUDIUS!" Feyu's loud voice woke Claudius from his reverie, giving him enough time to notice the Compound Corpse charging towards him.

'W-what?!' His bulging eyes expressed his surprise quite well.

He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

'H-how is this possible?!

Undead couldn't regenerate—not without some kind of Skill that allowed them to do so, either by the Necromancer or the Undead itself.

'I-it never showed any ability like that? How is it... how did it regenerate so quickly?!

These questions rushed into Claudius' mind as he stood, shell-shocked by what he was witnessing.

It was something impossible!

"A-atta—!"

Before Claudius spoke, the Compound Corpse swatted aside one of his Knights, sending it shattering into pieces.

The other two tried to attack, but it was clear that it would reach Claudius before that happened.

"—Nng!"

Recoiling from the shock, he closed his eyes and backed away in shock.

Claudius knew it instinctively... he was going to get hit.

~WHUUUUSH!~

A sudden blast from behind him sent the Compound Corpse staggering back, its two flabby arms flailing in the air as a result of the intensity of the powerful wind.

Claudius' eyes widened the moment he saw this, instantly recognizing who had cast the Spell.

'There's only one of us who can generate such a powerful Wind!'

It was Feyu.

Claudius smiled, his heart racing even faster than before.

There was no way he could hesitate now that she had just saved his life and gave him such a window of opportunity.

"Attack!"

The two Undead who were left under his command instantly rushed towards the Compound Corpse, blade swinging and lance thrusting.

~SWISH!~

In a flash, they sliced through the thing's bulky arms and legs, finishing the job by jointly decapitating it and sending its leftover body flying towards the Necromancer who summoned it.

~BOOOM!~

The earth shattered as the dead corpse's heavy body landed, sending small debris scattering around.

Once again, they had eliminated the threat.

"Thanks, Feyu." He turned behind and smiled at her.

Her stern face greeted him, and she slowly nodded before once again focusing on guarding Shuri.

That latter was in a Summoning Circle at the rear of the group, the safest position to be at the moment.

The longer the time it took to summon... the better the Familiar.

Shuri was definitely calling forth a big one.

Claudius made a wry smile as he returned his gaze forward, exhaling deeply as he watched the unmoving Compound Corpse.

'I lost one of my Knights, but... it's down for good now, right?'

Unfortunately, Claudius could not make such an assumption any longer.

'What in the world just happened?'

The Compound Corpse he saw from the start was a strong but sluggish entity who could easily be subjugated by his Knights.

It was such a simple entity that required no special strategy.

'But, just now... it's speed drastically increased.'

It also showed more decisiveness than before—almost as if it was learning.

'In the first place, how was it able to regenerate and revive? I was sure it died...'

"You appear confused." The voice of the ebony man surged forth, forcing Claudius to gaze upon his immensely handsome face.

"What appears to be the issue? Perhaps I could assist in enlightening you."

*

Chapter 353 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 6]

"What appears to be the issue? Perhaps I could assist in enlightening you."

Once again, there was a condescending element in the tone of the black-suited man despite how polite his words were.

Claudius could tell that this man saw them as inferior.

It didn't particularly vex him—though Claudius didn't like the anxiety that came with that realization.

"Why can your Undead regenerate? Does it have a Skill to do so? It didn't seem like the type to possess healing-type Skills."

"Hmm...?" The black suited man cocked his head slightly.

'Is he playing dumb? Did he not understand my question?' Claudius thought to himself.

Either way, the more time went by, the better for them. Stalling for the moment Shuri would be done with her Summoning was one strategy he could employ.

Still... he was curious.

"I've merged corpses before, so I know they do not possess such qualities. As long as they do not possess the inherent Skills in that particular field, they can not exhibit such special abilities."

Claudius spoke audaciously, taking a step forward.

He had to let this man know that he too was an experienced Necromancer who had spent his whole life exploring the art.

"It's also very unlikely, or impossible, for you to have healed the Corpse on your own. Your Skill Limit is full, and even if it wasn't... I didn't see you activate a Skill."

Claudius had explored all the options, so he desired a response out of the current conundrum.

"So how did you do it?"

For a moment, there was silence.

Tension rose in the air.

All the thousand members of the Mercenary Gang were careful about even their breathing as they watched with palpable anxiety.

Unlike the likes of Claudius and Feyu, they knew full well how powerless they would be against the Compound Corpse.

It was too strong and fast for them.

It just went to show the gap that existed between the Heads of Destruction and regular soldiers—even elites.

After a silence that seemed to last for an eternity, a sound finally came forth.

"Kukukukuku..."

Everyone's eyes widened a little.

"... Kukukuahahahahahahaha!"

Their eyelids spread even more, taking in the sight of malevolence before them.

They could hear the ugly cackles of the man before them. It sounded like metal scraping metal, loud enough to cause all that heard to nearly fall in submission.

Claudius held his ground despite all of this, furrowing his brow as he frowned.

'Is this a Skill too? No... it just feels like natural pressure. What in the world...' His eyes were blurry as he looked at the man who stood at the mansion's elevated entrance.

'... Is that man?'

As soon as he had the thought, however, the laughing man suddenly stopped cackling.

He still had a wide smile on his face, but it was the kind that a person had when they saw an ant that they lit on fire, or some kind of horrid thing befall an inferior entity.

It was a look of spite... utter disgust, and the amusement derived from it.

"What are you even talking about? Special ability? Healing? How much of an amateur are you?"

Claudius didn't know how to respond to this.

'I've been practicing Necromancy for thirty years now.'

He was the best expert he had ever encountered, not that there were many Necromancers to begin with.

Thanks to his Exclusive Skill, and his incredible dedication to the art, Claudius could argue that there was no man in the entire Alliance who knew more something about Necromancy than he didn't.

... Until now.

"Do you not know the qualities of a Compound Corpse? You mistook it for a Clustered Corpse, didn't you?"

"E-eh...?" Claudius found himself looking dumbfounded.

'They're not the same thing?!'

He had been operating on the assumption that the Compound Corpse he faced was the same as the merged corpses that he had experimented with in the past—Clustered Corpse.

To think they were not the same...

"It seems I have been a little underestimated. Why would I utilize such a crude technique?"

'Crude? Did he just call it crude?' At this point, Claudius was bordering on the edge of absolute confusion.

Yes, Clustered Corpse was a very rigorous technique, but it wasn't particularly low-leveled. Its benefits were worth it, especially if one could stack up enough corpses as sacrifices.

The only reason Claudius didn't indulge any further into the craft was because of the amount of people he would need to kill to get the materials necessary for a proper Clustered Corpse.

Plus, the exposure to Miasma in making such a corpse was incredibly higher than other techniques—but that only went to show how complex and powerful it was.

In order to preserve his physical well-being, Claudius decided to abandon the method.

'Yet... he calls it crude?!'

"Listen here, Compound Corpse is a Hollow Technique... one of the high-leveled ones under the Chaos Art."

'What... is he talking about?' Claudius found himself on the borders of ignorance.

Even though he was a Necromancer, he had learned a lot about Magic and everything related to Skills or Spells in that category.

What was being mentioned—Techniques, Arts—they were not in his purview.

"It's Ancient MajiK, so I don't expect you to get it. You're still too young. This world is too young too... so I suppose it hasn't aged enough to learn these things."

Claudius felt like he was hearing nonsense.

"H-how does that explain the Corpse's Regene—?"

"Hush now. I'm still speaking." The black suited man placed a finger on his lips and stared at Claudius with a complicated look.

The latter gulped without realizing it.

'W-why did I fall silent so quickly?' He asked himself, though something inside him already knew the answer.

This was a survival reaction—the blessing of instinct.

"Compound Corpses have multiple lives. They possess the same amount of lives as the number of Corpses used in creating them."

As the black-suited man uttered those words, the colossal entity began to stand on its two feet.

Rather than having two hands, like before, four hands grew from its sides, and its new head had three faces.

Two faced the side, and one gazed straight towards Claudius and his two remaining Knights.

"You only killed this Corpse twice." As those words echoed in the air, an ominous ambiance took over.

"It seems you still have a long way to go."

*

Chapter 354 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 7]

'It changed again!'

Claudius exclaimed internally as he watched the new and more menacing form of the Compound Corpse that eerily stood before everyone.

Did this mean that his suspicion was correct? Was this thing learning?!

"A Compound Corpse evolves upon each death so that it doesn't suffer it again. This adaptability depends on the material used for its creation, though..." The black-suited man looked at the creature before it and sighed.

"As you can see, it is largely incompetent as a result of the inferior flesh that it was formed from. There's nothing I can do to improve trash, it seems."

'Inferior? Incompetent? That thing... is trash?!' Claudius' eyes were widening far more than he thought was possible.

'What am I hearing?!'

Claudius had never heard of an Undead with multiple lives. If such a thing existed, he was certain that he would know of it.

'It's unbelievable...' Yet such a thing was happening right before his eyes.

It was every Necromancer's dream to create a true undying Undead.

This meant they had to either be virtually immortal, which wasn't possible, or they had to be able to grow and learn so they wouldn't die.

'If his Undead keeps evolving at this rate, it'll become unkillable.'

A more terrifying thought entered Claudius' mind.

'What if... he uses even more people as a sacrifice? Just how powerful will the Undead become?'

It was a question that was too scary to answer.

"Well... I've rambled on for long enough. Why don't we continue from where we left off?"

Claudius instinctively knew his two Knights would not be enough to handle the current enemy.

As a result, he used [Abyss Call] once again, creating three more black circles on the ground.

Proceeding out of them were three Mage-looking Undead—all of them wearing tattered robes with rotting flesh for skin.

'Killing it would only escalate the problem. To properly handle this situation, it's best I restrain it!'

He would use his two Knights as guards while making the Liches in his command subdue the enemy with Binding Magic.

'I never thought a day would come when my best warriors would be treated as standby disposables...' Claudius made a wry smile as he began his command.

In response to his words, the undead creatures began to chant, their loose jaws making unintelligible words as Spells.

"Do you really expect the Corpse to just stand still and let them cast their Spells?" The black-suited man asked.

In a split second, the Compound Corpse appeared before the three Mages, its four arms ready to pummel them to pieces.

'It's fast!' Claudius' thoughts echoed.

Much faster than he had anticipated!

However...

~WHUUSH!~

A dark barrier, like a semi-sphere surrounded the Mages the moment the Corpse sent his attack towards them.

~ZTTTZ!~

Purplish black electricity crackled forth in retaliation, burning the fists of the Corpse, causing it to stagger back in recoil.

'I expected you to go after my Mages. That's why I made preparations.' Claudius grinned internally.

No matter what how powerful the Corpse was, or what it did, there was no way it could win against an experienced Necromancer!

"I see. So the barrier came from that weird skill at the top of your staff."

'H-huh...?!'

Claudius' found his eyes twitching as he cast his gaze on the black-suited man.

"To think it was actually Undead. I dismissed it earlier because it was too weak, but..." The man smiled even more, causing Claudius to shiver.

'How did he know?!'

Claudius' staff was indeed an Enchanted Item, but the skull affixed on top was one of his creations.

It only had one function—making a powerful barrier that couldn't be penetrated for a minute.

Unfortunately, it took a few seconds for the barrier to become active, which was why Claudius couldn't use it earlier when the Corpse surprised everyone and nearly killed him in its march.

The second problem was that the barrier—while very effective—
had a very long cooldown period.

'I can't use it for a few hours, but that's fine.'

Even if it only lasted for a minute, and its cooldown wasn't going to allow such a perfect defense any longer, Claudius wasn't worried.

After all...

'Their Spell is complete!'

~FSHIIING!~

Bright chains made of fiery energy rushed from the massive Magic Circle that floated in front of the extended hands of the three Liches.

They instantly wrapped themselves around the stunned Undead, surrounding its body in searing hot constraints that tightly cling to its body.

The Compound Corpse fell with a heavy thud, completely paralyzed due to the pain and extreme bondage it suffered from.

It didn't scream or groan, but the conclusion was obvious.

The Compound Corpse was done for.

'Capture Complete!' Claudius grinned as he watched the colossal thing suffer a terrible downfall.

He cast his gaze on the black-suited man, a gleam of confidence now flowing through his aged eyes.

'You made an error in judgment. By revealing the abilities of your Undead, you allowed me to figure out a way around it.'

If all of that had been left as a mystery, Claudius imagined he would have struggled even more against it.

'I suppose I should be grateful for his hubris.'

Despite having this thought, Claudius found himself being unsettled.

One look at the opponent and he could tell why.

'Even though we just beat his Undead, he appears unfazed.'

Claudius remembered how the man had called the Compound Corpse trash earlier, which meant there was a chance that he had other tricks up his sleeve.

'Or maybe he was just bluffing...'

Either way, Claudius couldn't get rid of his unease, and so he remained on his guard.

"You used the information I gave you to create a plan that involves binding and not direct killing. Not bad..."

The black suited man placed both hands in his pocket as he stared casually at the people that surrounded him.

He seemed to be enjoying every moment of the event, contrary to the majority of those who stared back at him.

'I won, but what is this feeling?' Claudius shuddered as he looked into the eyes of the enemy

His calmness was too unnerving.

*

Chapter 355 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 8]

'What more does he have planned?'

Claudius swallowed his saliva as he racked his brain.

'He's a very powerful Necromancer, so he shouldn't have a lot of combat ability in any other field.'

Yet...

"Don't look so concerned. I won't step in yet, so don't worry."

'If he won't step in, then who will?' Claudius found himself following the line of sight of the enemy and found him staring at the fallen Corpse.

'Why is he looking at it like that? Don't tell me—!'

~SLOOOP!~

Like gooey ooze, the bulky Compound Corpse suddenly divided itself into two separate forms; both of them having two hands and two legs, with two heads each.

They formed away from the flaming restraints, each standing at about two meters tall.

'N-no way...'

Claudius couldn't believe that there was even more to the Compound Corpse than he expected.

"I never told you that the things I mentioned were all the qualities of the Compound Corpse."

'There's more?! Just... just how much more?!' Claudius found himself panicking at this point.

The mere existence of the Compound Corpse already placed the enemy at about A-Tier, but if there was more, then Claudius couldn't help but wonder what kind of person they were dealing with.

Could they even win?!

"A Compound Corpse can divide itself as many times as the lives it has left. Of course, its combat ability will be reduced, but it's pretty useful in tricky situations like this."

Claudius tried his best to calm himself, and after a few seconds, he was successful.

'Think! Think, Claudius! If this is yet another quality of this creature, that essentially makes it overpowered.'

It could easily turn into numerous forms and easily handle his Knights a lot better during the first round—even in the second round.

It could have also gone after multiple targets at once.

'Yet it didn't! There has to be a reason!'

Claudius' eyes widened the moment his mind responded to the inquiry.

'Durability reduction!' Claudius stared at the two Compound Corpses. 'If it splits, it becomes smaller, weaker... essentially a lot easier to kill.'

Normally, that would be a good thing for the Compound Corpse.

But...

'It probably won't be able to regenerate if all the parts of its body are destroyed at once.'

When it was five meters tall and a lot more durable, it was practically impossible for Claudius or pretty much anything in his arsenal to one-shot.

But now that the enemy was a lot smaller... it was indeed possible.

'I've figured it out!'

~VWUUSH!~

The moment he had that thought, almost as if the heavens were smiling upon the Mercenary Gang, a surge of energy rose from behind him.

"KRIIIIIIIAAAAKKKK!!"

A powerful screech echoed in the air, emanating from none other than the Familiar that had just been summoned.

'T-that is...!' Claudius' eyes widened as he turned back to see the magnificent creature.

It stood at about six meters tall, with its winged hands spread high up, and its long neck raised upward.

The powerful tail of the beast flapped within the circle, and its gray scales glittered within the bright confines of its position.

Anyone would be able to recognize such a magnificent entity the instant they saw it.

The closest relative of a Dragon—a Wyvern!

"This is the strongest one I've ever summoned!" Shuri beamed as she proceeded to create her Bond with the Familiar.

As a Great Tamer with a high compatibility with beasts, she was able to easily contract with the B-Tier Monster.

It came at the perfect time too!

"Shuri, command your Familiar to destroy those two! Absolutely destroy them!"

"Understood! Get down, everyone!"

In an instant, the Magic Circle faded away, and the Wyvern opened its powerful jaws to release a powerful ray of yellowish light.

It was [Wyvern Breath], an inferior version of [Dragon Breath], but a powerful one regardless.

~BOOOOOOOM!~

In a burst of powerful energy, the yellowish light traveled straight for the approaching Undead, instantly consuming them in the explosion.

The ground shattered into pieces, and the charred remains of earth were barely intact by the time the eruption was complete.

~SHUUU~

Smoke rose from the ground, and not even a speck remained of the Compound Corpse.

It was gone.

'I knew it! We finally got rid of it for good!'

Claudius heard flapping wings beside him and noticed Shuri riding her Wyvern to his left.

Feyu appeared to his right, her stern facade leaking a bit of relief once she saw the destruction that her ally's Familiar caused.

There was no way the Undead could have survived from that.

"Great job, you two." Claudius smiled, wrinkles all over his pale face.

"Hey! I was the one who summoned this, you know? You should praise me more!"

Claudius raised his head and saw Shuri slapping the dense body of her Familiar and Mount. She was pouting heavily as she looked at the two of them.

"A-ah! My apologies..."

"Yeah. You did a very good job, Shuri."

Both Claudius and Feyu corrected the mistake of the former, causing the young girl to smile with full satisfaction.

"Hehe! As long as you know!"

The two adults glanced at each other and heaved a sigh of relief.

No matter how powerful the girl was, in the end she was still a child.

It wasn't easy dealing with kids, but they already figured Shuri out a long time ago.

"Now all that's left are those two." Claudius turned to look at the black suited man, and Aldred who had managed to escape attention by standing behind him.

"Don't you mean one? That handsome Necromancer is the real challenge here, right?"

"Nng!" Claudius gripped his chest as soon as he heard those words from Shuri.

Her words felt like a personal attack on him, considering how he was also a Necromancer, but far from being handsome.

It forced Claudius's mind to revisit the thing he had tried his best to ignore for so long.

'Why does he look so young and handsome despite being such a competent Necromancer?'

Claudius bit his lip as he narrowed his gaze on the enemy.

'If I can get the answer, then isn't it possible for me to finally...?' Claudius glanced at Feyu for a moment.

He saw her telling Shuri something along the lines of "Never underestimate your enemy. They're both our enemies, so we need to treat them as such."

He found himself smiling fondly at her for a moment before taking his eyes away and looking forward.

"Feyu is right. We can't afford to ignore the other target just because he's weaker."

Claudius didn't know how strong Aldred was, but there had to be a reason why the latter was taking such a passive role.

'Aldred Winsley is a Broker and not a part of the KariBlanc Militia. He's most likely not much of a fighter.'

That meant their attention would be focused on the dark suited man, while also accounting for Aldred.

"It seems you're ready to fight with me. That's nice to see." Despite saying this, the man didn't bother removing his hands from his pockets.

Despite seeing this, Claudius and his allies prepared themselves for combat

"You're making one fatal error, though."

The wide smile and condescending words proceeding from the man caused everything around to tremble.

"You've overestimated your actions."

*

Chapter 356 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 9]

'H-huh...?'

The impossible began to happen in the presence of Claudius and his entire band of Allies.

~FSHUU~

Particles of dark red liquid—blood—began to appear in the air. This was quickly followed by patches of flesh-like muscles, and then bones, before dead skin finally wrapped itself around everything to form a singular entity.

That singular entity... was the Compound Corpse.

"I-It's not dead?!"

"How?"

"Why?"

"Why isn't it dead?!"

Several voices rushed into the air, and Claudius found himself just staring at the taller, more intimidating thing that now stood before them.

It was now about seven meters tall, with six hands, four faces, and a tail dancing right behind it.

Its body was now muscular, like a veteran bodybuilder.

All of this culminated into one thing.

... The Corpse had evolved once more.

"What's going on, Claudius? Why isn't it dead yet?" Feyu looked at him with concerned eyes, worry palpable on her face.

In all honesty, Claudius didn't know how to respond.

"I... I don't know..." He could only mutter as he stared at the abomination.

How could such a monster exist? How could it have survived absolute destruction?

It was impossible...

"Its entire body was destroyed! There was nothing left! How could it have survived that! There was no body left to restructure!" Claudius yelled.

He wanted to reject what he was seeing. He didn't want to accept that there could exist an Undead of such a caliber.

"How is such a thing possible?!" His hoarse voice echoed in the air.

Claudius was desperate.

His body was trembling due to this sudden revelation.

He just had to know!

"Pfft! I told you already... it's Ancient MajiK. You wouldn't get it."

"Magic? What is Ancient Magic? What in the world are you talking about?" Claudius quickly responded to the black suited man.

Surely, whatever happened now had to have a logical reason or basis for it.

Even Magic Spells had to follow certain inescapable laws.

Necromancy, which was an outlier of conventional Magic—twisting the very rules of life and death, and blurring the lines between them—came with its own cost.

Yet... YET...!

'Why does his power make no sense to me? It's too perfect to be real!'

How could such a master Necromancer have such an amazing body? How could an Undead have so many perks, yet it was summoned without much ceremony?

It negated everything Claudius had known his whole life.

"You thought that destroying its entire body would end the false life of the Compound Corpse, but that's not enough." The black suited man's voice dragged Claudius away from his maelstrom of thoughts.

"N-not... enough...?"

What in the world was he talking about? Regeneration and Healing only functioned if there was something to heal.

Was Claudius foolish or crazy for thinking that?

No!

That was the normal way to reason.

'Yet why is he saying this like it's common sense?!'

Anyone would have called the man crazy if they didn't see the Compound Corpse form from literally nothing.

"It's a Chaos Art, you know? It's not easy to destroy just like that..."

'Chaos Art? What's that?'

"Unless you have special existence erasure abilities, or you can kill the Hollow Technique itself, there's no point..."

'Don't tell me—!'

"You just have to keep killing the Undead until all of its life runs out."

Claudius' aged eyes widened in both shock and just a tinge of despair.

'If that's the case... then we're screwed.'

Claudius knew full well how many Recon Unit members went into the mansion, so he had a rough estimate of the number of sacrifices used to make the Compound Corpse.

"That thing had about thirty lives from the start. We've only killed it three times, and it has become this strong already...?!"

They still had to kill it at least twenty-seven more times so it would forever be dead.

'The problem is... it has already evolved to handle a Wyvern's blast.'

Perhaps a couple more blasts could kill it this time, but what about next time? And the time after that?

What then?!

"Hey, hey, Claudius... why isn't that thing dead?" Shuri asked while pouting at the monstrosity before them.

'How the hell am I supposed to know?!' He wanted to scream out.

"What should we do, Claudius?"

This time, it was Feyu who asked the question. But Claudius' thoughts were practically the same.

"I... I don't..."

Before he could complete his sentence, though, a shriek echoed in the air.

"Uahhhh! I don't... I don't want to die!"

"S-save me!"

"I'm retreating!"

"RUN!"

The Mercenary Gang soldiers were violent, not stupid.

They had heard everything the black-suited man said, and it didn't take them very long to piece together the implications of his words.

Their enemy simply couldn't be killed at this rate.

It was much better to flee.

Claudius' panicky expression was palpable as he turned back, beads of sweat forming on his face.

"Wait, you foo—!"

Before he could speak, beam of yellowish energy trailed past him and instantly shot towards the few men who were already attempting to flee.

Needless to say, they died instantly.

"A-ahh..."

The leftover parts of their bodies crumpled to the ground, jerking a little before finally ceasing movement.

Claudius' breathing became heavy.

He had sensed where the beam came from, but he wasn't even fast enough to react to it.

"Haa... haa..." Slowly, he turned his face towards the monstrosity that stood before all of them.

It suddenly had gaping mouths on all four of its faces, and smoke danced in front of them.

Claudius already knew... the Compound Corpse was the one who sent the blast.

'It instantly killed them with [Wyvern Breath].'

Not only could this creature evolve after death, but it could also learn the abilities that had caused its demise.

If this wasn't already an invincible being, then what was?

'I have no idea how to beat that thing...' Claudius felt his shoulder slump.

As his heart grew mellow, he clenched his fist and gritted his teeth.

'... At least, not without making any more sacrifices.'

*

Chapter 357 Carnage In The Capital [Pt 10]

Claudius had a total of five Skills.

[Dead Call]. [Abyss Call]. [Ultimate Sacrifice]. [Miasma Resistance]. [Life Force Recovery]

Of these five, three were Active.

And... of those three, one could be considered his most powerful move.

—His Trump Card!

"Feyu... Shuri... you might have to step away... maybe leave this vicinity." He muttered.

They both glanced at him in surprise, but Claudius kept his gaze on the surprisingly unmoving creature that had to be beaten.

'If they try to escape, that thing will try to use [Wyvern Breath]. But, I'm at least confident they can defend themselves or counter with an equally powerful move.'

That meant they could safely escape.

'If that's the case, then I can use my power to its fullest without any living witness... and with no way to sacrifice them.'

He made a wry smile and prepared himself for what had to be done.

"Wait for my signal, you two. Once I tell you to—"

"Oh? What's this? You guys aren't done yet?" A voice suddenly echoed from behind the crowd of Mercenary Gang soldiers.

'H-huh? That voice...' Claudius' eyes widened as he looked behind him.

The entire army also recognized the voice and instantly bowed while parting ways for the person, or rather, the two important people, to pass.

"Phobio! Fernand!" Claudius beamed as he looked at the two men who approached from behind.

The army that they led remained behind, their numbers also about a thousand.

Phobio and Fernand also appeared to be intact—the former was even smiling widely while the latter appeared as indifferent and stoic as always.

"What's going on here? We saw the building still standing from afar and wondered what caused the holdup... so we came to check."

Phobio's tone seemed as carefree as always, with his regal dark hair flowing behind him with every word he uttered.

As for Feenand, the claw scar on his face seemed particularly dull under the dim glow of moonlight.

Either way, two more members of the Mercenary Gang's Head of Destruction were present.

'And these two are strong enough to be considered candidates of the Deadly Three!' Claudius beamed with delight as he saw them.

With five Heads of Destruction present, the situation seemed a lot more manageable than the previous alternative.

"It's good you're here. We're dealing with a rather troublesome enemy, so we would really appreciate your assistance." Claudius swiftly responded to Phobio, his eyes trailing to the standing Compound Corpse.

"Oho! I see. So you're having problems dealing with that huge thing, eh? I understand... it's quite big and looks pretty strong."

Despite saying this, Phobio didn't flinch at all.

Claudius instantly knew why.

'His Blood Magic allows him to create a massive avatar which he can use to fight.'

If they had something that big to restrain the Undead, it was possible to defeat it.

'The only issue is that he requires a lot of blood to achieve that, so...'

"Time to use my Crimson Valkyrie! Hehe!" The man laughed as he licked his lips with delight.

Claudius was confused.

He didn't see a sphere of blood anywhere, and Phobio needed a large stock of blood to be able to utilize such power.

"Lord Phobio, how do you plan to use Crimson Valkyrie?" He asked.

"Huh? Are you stupid? Can't you see my sphere of blood?"

Phobio's irritated response made Claudius begin to doubt himself.

'I can't see it? Is it hidden or what?'

"I was able to harvest quite a lot from the battle on our end. All of those weaklings were so easy to kill." Phobio sneered.

"A-ah... so your mission went well, then?"

"Of course! Ask Fernand if you don't believe me." The young man chuckled even more.

Claudius shifted his gaze to Fernand, who merely shrugged as he spoke in a calm, collected manner.

"It's true. We were able to massacre everyone in the KariBlanc Shop and eliminate all their affiliates in the Black Market. All witnesses were extinguished, and we've pretty much conquered the Black Market in the Capital."

Claudius couldn't believe they were fortunate enough to have been blessed with such an uneventful mission.

'Ours started uneventfully too, until...'

"See? See? We did all of that and you guys were still stuck with this single problem." Phobio began to laugh, pointing at the massive Undead before them.

"Well... it's very difficult to handle since it has many lives and it also ada—"

"Don't you worry, though. Since I'm in a good mood, I'll use my Crimson Valkyrie to help you out this time."

Once again, the Necromancer was confused.

'With what blood?'

Claudius glanced at Feyu and Shuri, sending them signals about whether or not they saw any blood sphere, but they both shook their heads.

'This doesn't make any sense, though. If they indeed slaughtered everyone in the Black Market, then the blood sphere should be massive by now.'

Yet, Claudius and his own allies saw nothing.

'Something is wrong somewhere!'

"Alright, I think I've given you all enough time to chat." The voice that echoed in the air caused Claudius to have chills.

For the first time since the start of the fight, the black suited man began to walk forward—towards the group of over two thousand.

"Now that you are all present, I suppose we should start moving on to the main event."

'Now that we're all here? Was he waiting for us to converge? Is that why he didn't make any move until now?'

Dozens of questions raced within Claudius' mind, but they were all interrupted by Phobio's arrogant tone.

"Hm? Who is this guy, Claudius? Is he an idiot? Can't he see that we're conversing?"

Claudius was frozen in disbelief, perhaps a bit of shock.

He was yet to see the power of the black suited man, but there was no way he would underestimate him after all he had witnessed.

Phobio, on the other hand, had the disadvantage of ignorance.

"Phobio, please be—!"

"Since everyone is present, I no longer require you, Corpse." The black-suited man's voice drew Claudius's gaze back to his position.

He saw that the man was right beside the giant Undead, and in a snap of his fingers, the Undead melted into his shadow.

It all happened very quickly, but Claudius had gotten a glimpse of the entire thing.

"He's a Necromancer like you, Claudius?" Fernand's calm voice echoed out.

"No. We're not on the same level. He is the superior one."

Upon hearing Claudius' confession, Fernand narrowed his gaze and let out a slight frown.

"I see..." His voice trailed.

Claudius returned his sights to the black-suited man, who was now standing by his lonesome, with Aldred still standing right in front of the mansion's doors.

'It seems he wants to fight us by himself...'

Usually, that would be good news, but Claudius didn't know why he felt even more uneasy.

'If he's a Necromancer, doesn't that mean he's weaker when it comes to head on assault?'

However, as soon as Claudius had this thought, he quickly dismissed his utilization of common sense.

'I can't think of him as a normal man. Perhaps he's also confident in his combat ability—enough to be able to handle all of us.'

Claudius had to operate under that assumption.

The mere fact that he could discard such a powerful card like the Compound Corpse... it meant he was also very strong

"Are you going to use another Ancient Magic...?" Claudius found the courage to ask.

"No. Ancient MajiK is too draining for my current form, so I'll desist from it for this round."

Claudius felt relief, but also confusion.

'That should be his trump card—the thing that escapes common sense—yet he can't use it?'

If that was the case, didn't that mean that they had a chance to win—especially if they went all out from the start?

Five of the Nine Heads of Destruction.

Two thousand Mercenary Gang soldiers.

Thirty members of Scylla's Recon Unit.

Combined, they could actually stand a chance against this man!

"I suppose it's time I introduced myself."

The man placed one hand on his chest in an attempt at a formal introduction.

"I am Ater; a name given to me by my Master." He didn't bow his head in the slightest, but he appeared polite regardless.

'Master?! He has a Master?!'

At this point, Claudius found himself swimming in an ocean of confusion

He didn't know how to navigate through it.

"We don't need to hear your name! Let's just get down to it." Phobio sneered in absolute confidence as he took a casual stance.

Fernand did the opposite and reached for his blade in caution while frowning his face.

"Who is your Master?"

Claudius was also curious, so he was grateful to Fernand for asking the question.

'There is no way the Blanc House could have such a monster in their ranks.'

Even if they did, they would have taken him to the Dark Gathering.

'Any Master of this man... what kind of monster could he be?!'

*

Chapter 358 The Malignant One [Pt 1]

"Let's get the first things out of the way."

The one known as Ater began by raising a finger, pointing the tip upwards.

"Darkness..."

In an instant, a swirling sphere of darkness, sparking with purple crackles of energy, appeared at the top of his pointed finger.

It shot up into the sky, scattering the moment it reached a high enough altitude.

Once the sphere exploded, it created a thin layer of purplish black darkness—like a veil—that covered the sky and shrouded the immediate vicinity.

In a mere moment, all of the Mercenary Gang members were within the massive dome of darkness.

'What did he just do?' Claudius wondered to himself as he stared above him.

They could still see the moon hanging in the sky, as well as pretty much everything else.

The world was just a bit darker, but apart from that, there was no issue at all.

'If his goal was not to take away our vision to restrict our mobility, then what was it?

"Don't look so concerned. This doesn't affect you in any way, so ignore it." Ater smiled, and Claudius felt like those words were directed at him in particular.

It frightened him.

"Now then, it'll be a waste of time to entertain you all any further, and I'm pretty bored, so I think I'll just end this quickly."

Before Claudius could properly process and analyze what he just heard, Ater pointed his finger towards the crowd and muttered words.

"Dark Possession."

In that instant, a powerful pulse radiated from Ater, filling the entire space in an instant.

"G-guh!" Claudius felt something slip into his consciousness, but he quickly shrugged it away.

His body felt cold, but he overcame it all through his sheer willpower.

Blinking rapidly and shrouding himself in energy, he woke up from whatever slumber he must have been experiencing.

However, what he saw next was perplexing.

"UWAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!!!"

"SAVE ME! SAVE MEEEEEEEEEE!!!"

"I'M DYING! UWAAHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

"HELP MEEEEEEEEEE!!!"

"MOMMY! DADDY!"

Multifarious voices filled the air behind him, and Claudius could hardly recognize any of them since they were yelling on top of each other.

What he knew, however, was that they all belonged to the members of the Mercenary Gang.

He heard thuds, meaning that most of them had collapsed—either in their knees, their backs, or their stomachs.

Claudius could hear wriggling. If he listened closely, itching and gnashing teeth could also be heard.

In essence, throes of despair filled the air.

Claudius was tempted to look behind him to look at his men and confirm what was going on.

However, he knew only death awaited if he did so.

The man before him, Ater, was living proof of that brute fact.

"I thought you wanted to end things quickly." Claudius asked.

His comrades were most likely experiencing anguish as a result of some kind of mental attack.

It was far from the quick end that Ater promised.

"You and I have different views regarding time." The response was smooth and downright hideous.

"An hour is a mere speck of a second for me. A day is not even worth a minute."

As the man approached Claudius, he already knew he couldn't win—not the way he was now.

'I have to use it—my Trump Card!'

Beside him were the stationary Heads of Destruction, all of them in an equal state of mental anguish.

Claudius was the only one who had fought it off.

He looked at Feyu... at Shuri... and he instantly knew he wouldn't be able to save them.

'If I try to help them, my life will be forfeit.'

Fernand and Phobio were also invalid, so he was completely left on his own.

'I am sorry, but... for my survival... I must do this.'

A bitter feeling permeated Claudius' heart as he crouched and placed his hand on the earth.

He had always thought he would do anything to attain power and live comfortably, but now... he wasn't so sure.

The hesitation he felt was too real.

That didn't stop him from making the choice, regardless.

"[Ultimate Sacrifice]."

~VWUUUUUUMMMM!~

A sudden blackness suddenly swept through the area like quicksand, easily filling the ground surrounding him with dark shadows.

'Anyone in the range of my shadow becomes a sacrifice...' Claudius thought bitterly as he spent all of his energy expanding his range to accept as many sacrifices as possible.

... Until he filled the entire battlefield.

Every single ally with him fell within his range, though somehow his shadow didn't reach Ater.

'As expected. He's a Necromancer, after all...'

Claudius felt the burden on his body as he began the process.

Black patches—appearing like hands—began to stick to the bodies of those who were caught in his darkness.

It pulled them under.

As if they were slowly drowning in an ocean of ink, the bodies began to get submerged in the muck.

'There's no going back now!' Claudius gritted his teeth

His body aged faster. Hair began to fall out of his head, and more wrinkles decorated his body.

His breathing became heavy, but he didn't stop.

"Do you think I'll just stand here and let you complete the process?" Ater asked with a grin, making an attempt to approach.

Of course, Claudius was no fool.

He already knew that, despite the lax attitude his enemy had shown thus far, he could always act at any time.

... Especially in a dangerous situation.

'At least, I now know that the final results of this Skill is dangerous to him.' Claudius smiled, activating his last Enchanted Item to give him a final burst of energy so he could utilize another Skill.

'[Abyss Call]!'

He summoned every single Undead in his arsenal—from high-grade to the lowest of them all.

They all emerged from dark circles beneath, each of them only having one purpose.

"Attack that man!" Claudius screamed.

~WHOOOOSH!~

They all charged at the enemy, like the loyal troops that they were.

Claudius already knew that they wouldn't be able to win. However, they could surely restrain the enemy until it was finally time for his Skill to fully blossom.

And so, the clash began.

*

Chapter 359 The Malignant One [Pt 2]

"Please..." Claudius prayed.

"Please hang on..."

He saw how his Undead fell, one after the other, at the hands of the clearly superior foe.

None of them stood a chance in the slightest

Ater pummeled all of them with ease, using his bare fist to strike them. He instantly ended their false lives with barely any effort involved.

Until finally... there was only one standing.

"Pathetic." In a flash, that one also got destroyed by a single enemy.

All of his most powerful Undead were gone.

"Huu..."

Claudius was not worried or afraid, though.

"... Finally..."

The answer stood right behind him, in the form of an entity that was born from the ultimate sacrifice of over two thousand lives.

The Ultimate Undead—Death Knight!

Of all the Undead that existed, this was known to be of mythical status.

It was coated in obsidian armor, standing at about three meters in height. This entity had a longsword and a sturdy shield, with a cape behind it that had the color of blood.

Its rotting face was hidden beneath its mask, but the crimson eyes that glowed from within it told of its bottomless hunger for battle.

... Its immeasurable hatred for the living.

"The Death Knight is said to grow stronger the longer a battle lasts, and it is immune to Magic attacks.

The march of the Death Knight never stopped until its head and false heart were both destroyed—both of which were covered in incredibly dense armor.

Claudius had never summoned a Death Knight before, so this was the first time he was laying eyes on one.

'It's at the pinnacle of A-Tier for sure!'

It was magnificent!

"Death Knight... heed your Master's call and eliminate my enemy!"

The moment Claudius spoke, the Death Knight cast out a deafening roar.

"URUAAHHHH!!"

The air vibrated as tremors took over the earth.

In a single flash, it blasted off from its position and charged towards Ater with breakneck speed.

~BOOM!~

The ground beneath and around Claudius shattered merely due to that single dash, causing the aged man to stagger and nearly fall into the crevice of the earth.

Despite narrowly managing to escape with his frail body, he had a wide smile on his face.

"Yes! End him!"

Claudius had sacrificed everything in order to have this single weapon of destruction.

Seeing how the thing had become a black blur as it attacked his foe gave him goosebumps. Delight replaced his anger and regret as he keenly watched his own slave tear down his enemy.

'I'm going to win! Death Knight is going to win!' His thoughts echoed.

And sure enough... he was winning.

Ater was struggling to keep up with the ferocious blows of the Death Knight.

He couldn't get past the tough defenses of the absolute monster that Claudius made.

Ater even duplicated himself, transforming into so many copies of himself, but the Death Knight spared none of them.

All of them met an end by his blade.

Claudius grinned intensely as he laughed like a maniac. Seeing his enemy struggle against his creation was surreal.

At some point, Claudius stopped caring about anything Ater did to struggle against the beast.

'Yes! Yes! KILL THEM ALL!'

Even when he used Elemental Magic, he didn't care.

After all, it had no effect.

Even when he created bursts of yellowish light, it didn't matter.

Blood Magic was useless, and the Death Knight surpassed Ater at Swordsmanship. In the end, the Death Knight emerged the ultimate victor.

... Until, there was only Ater left.

Claudius stood right behind his Death Knight as he stared at the wounded Ater that powerlessly sat on the ground.

He was surrounded by the other Ater corpses, soon to join them in the eternal embrace of darkness.

"Any last words?" Claudius asked as he looked down at the pathetic one known as Ater.

His gaze was cold.

'It seems once again... the truth remains unchanged.'

To achieve strength, one had to truly give up everything.

Claudius was finally able to achieve ultimate power.

But at what cost?

"I lost everything because of you. You... you monster."

In response to those words, Ater merely smiled with the most scornful smile.

"Look who's talking." Upon hearing those words, Claudius felt something in his heart churn.

His chest tightened in pain.

He didn't want to fill that.

"SHUT UP!" Screaming, he commanded the Death Knight to execute the vermin before him.

That very instant, the Death Knight's blade was thrust downward, piercing the final body Ater had at his disposal.

Blood spurted out, instantly staining the blade with its vile liquid.

"It's finally... over, huh?" Claudius whispered.

Tears trailed down his eyes as he uttered those words.

He had no doubt that he did the right—most logical—thing, but Claudius felt an emptiness that his victory could not fill.

It felt... wrong.

'I'm done with this life. I can't take any more.'

Claudius was sure that with the Death Knight, he would be strong enough to handle Fenrir and other members of the Mercenary Gang.

He was going to quit the Mercenary Gang and live out the rest of his life alone—away from everyone or everything.

He would have taken his own life, but his will to live was far too strong for him to do so.

To atone for what he had done... this was the best thing he could think of.

'To kill the monster... I became one.'

"How long are you going to keep sulking?" A voice suddenly rang.

It sounded so familiar... so sinister.

Claudius recognized it.

It belonged to...

"You're so boring." The man who spoke stood in front of the mansion's door, right beside Aldred.

... Ater!

'H-huh? H-how?! B-but... but I killed him!'

Claudius could see the amused smile that filled Ater's face. He instantly knew something was wrong.

Unfortunately for him... this realization came a little too late.

'E-eh...?'

Claudius saw the corpse right in front of him—the one that was impaled by Death Knight's blade. It was Feyu.

'Why... why are you here?'

Claudius staggered back, nearly tripping over nothing as a mix of both fear and pain washed over him as he saw her dead body.

'N-no... no that's not her! That's not Feyu...'

To perhaps distract his gaze from her, he looked at his immediate surroundings, only to find more confirmation for his despair.

Fernand, Phobio, Shuri, and her Wyvern... their bodies were all positioned right where Ater's corpses should have been.

All of them were dead—gruesomely impaled and butchered by the full might of the Death Knight.

'No... no I didn't do this... I didn't—!'

Behind him, there was no one. All of them had been consumed to make the Death Knight.

The bare sight of everything behind him, and the horrors that surrounded him, made Claudius shrink back.

"Where do you think you're going?" Ater's voice echoed from right in front of him.

"Are you fully awake now?"

It was at this moment that Claudius realized the truth.

The time when Ater had uttered "Dark Possession" and he resisted it... that wasn't how it went.

Claudius was the target all along.

He had fallen for the power, despite thinking that he was the only one who resisted it.

And so, in his grand delusion, Claudius singlehandedly caused the demise of everyone.

*

Chapter 360 The Malignant One [Pt 3]

"I... I killed... them all...?"

Claudius felt his body grow weak and his face turned pale. Falling to his knees, he shivered uncontrollably.

He felt like vomiting.

The woman he loved stood a few feet from him, brutally murdered as a result of his insanity.

His comrades—allies that could have assisted him in taking down the enemies—were all slaughtered by his hand.

'I did this? I... I...'

"Indeed! Congratulations, I suppose!" Ater's voice echoed, delight in his tone.

Claudius' body froze the moment he heard those words.

He gazed up, ignoring the snot that dropped from his nose and the tears that overflowed.

Ater was blurry in his sight, but it wasn't like he couldn't see the man.

"YOU..."

Claudius remembered it well.

He wasn't the one who did this. He was under some kind of mind control, and the one responsible for that was the man before him.

'He killed... he used me to kill everyone!'

Claudius felt rage unlike anything he had ever felt before enveloping him.

He forgot the pain and regret that permeated his heart and focused on the rawest and most primal emotion that kept rising at an astronomical rate.

—RAGE!

"TLL KILL YOU!" Claudius roared, pointing his staff at Ater's stationery self.

"Kill him, Death Knight!"

~WHOOSH!~

In a brilliant blur of darkness, the massive Undead left its position and charged towards the enemy

Claudius let his desire run wild in his mind.

He wanted to see Ater bleed.

Beg! Suffer! Cry!

And then repeat the same process over and over again until he finally died.

His mouth watered as his eyes bulged like a madman.

However—

"Weak." With a single swat of his hand, Ater caused the Death Knight's body to be crushed by some invisible force.

'E-eh...?'

The invincible warrior of the dead was instantly consumed by purple flames that burned through its armor in no time at all.

Claudius saw it... the naked body of the Death Knight that was hidden underneath its armor.

It was disgustingly pink—so tender, like the flesh of a newborn baby or an internal organ.

The whole thing was easily swallowed by the purple flames until there weren't even any ashes left.

'M-my... Death Knight...?'

"Death Knights are not very impressive if you bypass their defenses, you know?"

Claudius felt like his mind was breaking as he heard the words that Ater was uttering.

"In the first place, they're supposed to be used as Cannon Fodder. I do understand your sentiment, though..."

Claudius was on the edge of insanity.

"You're still too young. You probably got excited since it was the first time seeing such a new toy."

Insanity beckoned for him, and he freely gave himself up to it.

There was nothing left waiting for him.

"Perhaps a Death Gladiator could have some more use, but—"

"Uwaahhhhhh!!!" A loud shriek erupted from Claudius' lips as he jumped to his feet and ran away.

Tears filled his eyes as his blurry vision navigated his path far away from the compound.

He knew not where he was headed.

... As long as it was far away from the one known as Ater.

'DIE! DIE! I'm... going to DIE!'

As he ran and screamed, he neared the edge of the dark dome that surrounded the mansion and its immediate vicinity.

Claudius feared what would happen if he attempted to cross the dark threshold.

However... he was too desperate to care.

"UWAAHHH!"

Much to his shock, he was able to pass through the dark veil without much issue.

He didn't feel anything off about his senses and movements. His body was fine too.

'So why...?'

This thought was immediately overridden by Claudius' desperation as he kept running, quickly regaining the vitality he had in his youth.

'I... I can't DIE here! I... I can't...!'

"You look like you have something to say."

Ater glanced at Asher, who was standing in the corner while shivering for some reason.

"Come on. What's on your mind?" He asked in the most polite way.

His master had told him to treat the people of the KariBlanc Group courteously, after all.

"A-are you just going to let him get away...?"

"Ah, that. Of course not." Ater smiled.

"Those men in black costumes also snuck away, thinking I didn't notice. They'll be dealt with, don't worry."

"A-ah... I see..." Asher muttered, though he still appeared as bemused as ever. "S-so... why did you make this veil?"

Ater smiled at the ignorant human and explained himself, not even bothering with the corpses that slowly began to rise before him.

"They allow me to resurrect any dead entity within its parameters. As Undead, of course."

"U-Undead...?"

"Yes. These are high-ranking members of the enemy group. They are bound to have information that I can deem useful. It would be a waste to let them die just like that."

"T-true... but why did you not just take the information from them before killing them?"

Ater liked Asher's questions. The boy was obviously scared, so Ater had to influence his mind a little so he would be motivated to ask the questions.

But, it was intriguing to see.

"You won't remember most of this conversation anyway, but I'm bored, so I might as well run my mouth."

Ater pointed at the Undead who now stood in front of them—
neither fully dead nor fully alive.

"Normally speaking, one could think I wanted to increase my Master's arsenal by employing these individuals, but they're too weak to be of any real use..." He began smiling at the four humans and single Wyvern.

"There's also the benefit of leaving them alive so that my Master can copy their abilities, but there's really no need for that."

Ater grinned with a little twinkle in his eyes.

"With or without them being present, the powers they possess can still be transferred to my Master."
He still wasn't gone elucidating potential reasons.

"Perhaps this is retribution for attacking this place and daring to go against my Master. All of these are valid reasons, but..." Ater's grin grew demonically wide.

"... There is only one reason why I would go through such lengths."

Ater crushed his fist, and all at once, the Undead began to squish together, forming an abnormal amalgamation of all of them.

Before long, a new—more hideous—Undead was born from their Union.

"I just wanted them to suffer."

Asher's surprise grew even more as he looked at Ater's malevolent grin.

"Just... to suffer?"

"Indeed. That's all there is to it." He responded with a shrug.

"The fools who were convinced of their victory. Those who were certain of their escape... all of it culminates into the despair that I feed on."

No one understood this but Ater.

It was merely in his nature.

The same way humans couldn't help but enjoy a tasty meal, or shared company, so too did Asher relish the sight of horrors and despondency.

"I suppose I have rambled on for long enough. It's about time for the finishing act."

As Ater said this, a being entered the world within the veil.

It was none other than Claudius.

His skin was grey, and the white in his eyes was black. Everything about him felt unnatural and twisted, and he reeked of Miasma.

There was no doubt about it.

Claudius had become the very thing he once commanded—

Undead.