

# **Super Necromancer System**

## **#Chapter 119: The Perfect Moment - Read Super Necromancer System Chapter 119: The Perfect Moment**

### *Chapter 119: The Perfect Moment*

Nobody emerged from the hole in the front gates, and for good reason. The ten sea anemone variants were still ready to fire, and all were aimed at destroying anyone that came out of the melted down front gate to fend for their city.

Just one person emerged. A lone woman that Aldrich very much realized, despite her mask. It was noticeable from the hazy shimmer of gold that clung to her body. This was Mel Morales, rank 1 of Blackwater.

She sprinted out of the gates with her blade drawn at speeds easily rivaling a speeding car, streaks of gold streaming behind her like the tails of a comet. Any fishmen that she neared, she sliced up in an instant, mowing through the crowd of fishmen, sliced up body parts flying in the air around her as she diced her way forwards, in the direction of the sea anemones.

In response, Merman pointed one of his four arms at gangly, slimy arms at her, shouting at a group of mermen manning a sea anemone.

The mermen chanted and raised their arms to the air, and the sea anemone hidden inside its water dome fired off a pillar of hydroplasma.

Mel did not dodge. Instead, she actively ran into the beam. The beam, instead of eviscerating her into nothingness, broke apart into countless thin strands of bright blue light as it hit her body. She raised her blade up, and the strands all swirled and gathered around it, turning the golden sword blue.

With this, Mel fired off a series of ten swift slashes, sending out huge arcs of plasma energy with each strike. She had completely reformed the unstable and explosive plasma pillar into precise arcs of bladed energy.

Each arc of energy sliced through all the fishmen they passed through en masse, bisecting huge crowds of them into charred halves. It did not matter whether they were fishmen, thickly armored crabmen, or slimy mermen - they all fell before that slash.

But simple ground troops were not Mel's goal. Her slashes were targeted strategically.

Each of the ten plasma slashes crashed into the ten sea anemones several hundred meters away.

When the plasma slash smashed against the domes, their neatly condensed energy chaotically exploded outwards into an area of effect bomb of heat and destructive energy.

Since Mel had diverted the energy of one beam into ten strikes, each slash was not enough to break through the water barrier protecting them. However, what she did accomplish was killing off the mermaid variant crews that manned the sea anemones.

The mermen maintaining the sea anemone and the crabmen defending them were now all reduced to charred corpse chunks, and with them gone, the water barriers protecting the sea anemones crashed down into useless puddles, revealing the sea anemone variants beneath.

Their bodies consisted of large red, fleshy bulbs with flat, saucer shaped heads covered with hundreds of glowing blue energy infused tendrils.

In response, the Merman leader ferociously waved his arms forward, gesturing for more mermaid variants to slither forwards and secure the anemones again. But even as the mermen rushed around the anemones again, it was obvious that it would take some time for them to channel the water domes that both protected the anemones and fed them water as fuel.

That was when the counterattack of the humans truly began.

An enormous musclebound man that must have stood almost two and a half meters tall rushed out, jumping high into the air before slamming his fist into the ground.

His arms were covered in giant grey bracers that mimicked the appearance of cement rollers, and when his thickly armor-plated gauntlets hit the earth, waves of visible seismic energy echoed in front of him in a massive cone, creating a directed earthquake that made the ground in front of him undulate and lurch like it was made of liquid.

All the hundreds of fishmen standing on this ground lost their balance, and as they fell, the ground shattered. Haven's uniform, smooth roads violently splintered apart into spikes of cracked earth, cement, and concrete that jutted upwards like stakes.

Variants caught in this shockwave found themselves impaled on these upturned, spike-like rock formations if their bones and internal organs had not been completely turned into paste from conducting the shockwaves in the first place.

All in all, over two hundred variants lay dead from that one single attack, wiping out the entirety of the variants surrounding the gate. Meanwhile, Mel took the energy of the shockwave and redirected it into a launching force on her feet that she used to retreat backwards, landing beside the giant hero.

Aldrich recognized the bigger hero. He was Seismic, one of the two A- rankers stationed in Haven.

The other one, Hat Trick, must have either fled or died. Most likely fled, considering it was no easy feat to take out an A ranker, even if they were in the (-) category.

The humans then poured out from behind the gates now that the sea anemones cannons were temporarily disabled and the initial wave of fishmen directly outside the walls neutralized.

Heroes that could fly streamed out from the top of the walls. Hundreds of policemen and physically less capable heroes, technos, most likely, rappelled down the walls in Frames of varying sizes and models, the hands and feet of their mechanical suits outlined in glowing green that indicated that could tether to the walls.

Tanks rolled out from the massive hole in the front gate, as did the huge forms of several bipedal ARMA Machina Walkers. They were large mechs standing around eight meters tall and outfitted with machine guns, missiles, lasers, and several other weapons systems to deal with any type of threat flexibly.

Around the tanks and the legs of the walkers, the non-flight capable heroes and police ran out, armed to the teeth with conventional firearms, personal explosives, and body armor if they were not in Frames.

Aldrich nodded in recognition. This was a much better fight than what he thought the humans would have put up. If everyone had just charged out at once, the anemone cannons would have annihilated them.

So, Mel was the first and only one to leave.

This had the advantage of confusing the fishmen, for they obviously did not expect a single defender to come charging out. But when she proved a threat, it drew immediate panic from Merman, but even then, Merman exercised caution and only ordered one out of ten anemones to fire.

However, Merman had no idea of Mel's force redirection ability, and using that single stream of plasma, she had shaped it into ten slashes to temporarily disable the anemones.

With the anemones disabled, Seismic was the second to come forth, using his mighty area of effect shockwaves to instantly clear out the variants surrounding the walls.

This gave space for the rest of the human forces, especially their heavy units like tanks and mechs, to come charging out without getting blasted into bits while packed into the narrow choke point of the front gate.

Seismic waved everyone forwards, and the flying heroes abused their aerial supremacy to unleash a massive medley of projectiles from above. Every element and color of energy projectile rained down in varying levels of intensity.

As for the ground -

Augmenter and Mutant type heroes meant for melee brawling rushed ahead of Seismic, diving into the thick of the aquatic variants.

The heroes and policemen in Frames stopped beside Seismic, forming into several lines of troops efficiently situated to use the range of their firearms and grenades. Drones from behind the walls airdropped ammunition beside them.

Behind the Frames, the tanks spread out in their own line, firing shells deep into the variant army.

The Walkers positioned themselves ahead of the tanks but behind the Frames and they unleashed salvos of missiles while their machine guns fired countless shells into the unending horde of variants.

AV (Anti-Variant) Targeting Systems ensured that those in Frames and within tanks or mechs did not fire at the Augmenters in the thick of the variant horde, instead unleashing bullets around them.

Variants died by the hundreds as tank shells, bullets, missiles, empowered fists, and energy blasts ripped through them.

'Master!' came Valera's voice ringing in Aldrich's head. 'Are you witnessing this? The mortals, they are far more capable than I thought! And here I thought they were merely waiting for their deaths.'

You always told me to not underestimate the mortals here, but this - at this rate, it may even be that we shall not have any spines for us to take!

Shall we make our appearance now?'

Aldrich's response was immediate. 'No. Stay patient, Valera. And look closely. I will admit that human technology is impressive, but it has its limits. You'll come to be familiar with them soon enough.'

Their entrance was flashy, yes, full of explosions and gunfire and beams, but look at how much they've accomplished.

They've killed hundreds but they still have tens of thousands more left to go through.

They will run out ammo and energy before they get to clearing even half that army.

And Seismic, he's not moving. He's letting other Augmenters charge ahead of him. As an Augmenter, he should be out in the front with his naturally enhanced durability and wide area of effect powers.

That means that in all likelihood, Seismic can't keep up his power for long. He is the absolute heart of this strategy. Whenever the variants push near him, he'll fire a seismic shockwave forward, preventing the variants from getting to the ranged units.

But once Seismic's energy fades and he can no longer hold the line - then everything crumbles. It's only a matter of when, not if.'

Aldrich watched as the leader of the crabmen, a five meter tall king crab humanoid, slammed its claws together, causing its thousands upon thousands of huge, brawler-like crabmen to charge.

Accompanying this force were several times more fishmen, and backing this up were thousands of mermen situated far back, their arms glowing blue as they fired countless beams of pressurized water or thin hydroplasma beams.

The charge of the variants looked like a natural disaster. A tidal wave of monstrous bodies.

In comparison, the heroes' efforts looked pitiful.

A little splash in a big, big ocean.

Forget when. The moment the defenders broke down might even be now.

The hailstorm of bullets and projectiles and explosives would slow the variants' tsunami-like charge down, but at a certain point, the sheer amount of numbers would just overwhelm the defenders.

And at that moment, when the defensive line broke, when all seemed lost -

'The perfect moment will come soon,' said Aldrich. 'Just be patient.'

"Detecting a tremendous swell of energy," said Volantis, and he marked out in Aldrich's vision where this buildup was through a bright blue dot. "This power...it most certainly belongs to flesh that holds mighty bones."

Aldrich cut off momentarily from his Grave Ward and instead tracked where Volantis marked the energy buildup. He saw nothing but clouds underneath him, but that made the bright blue dot stand out even more.

What was incredibly notable was the position of this blinking, ever growing dot of power.

It was stationed at the rear of the army.

Where the general was.

And, with every passing moment, the dot moved farther and farther forwards.

The final boss was on the move, drawn out by the sudden and powerful resistance of the humans.

And with one final boss on the move, it was only appropriate that another final boss stood up to meet it.

"Hm. So much for being patient," said Aldrich as he clenched his fists, a surge of red and green energy - the twin auras from himself and Volantis- swirling around him...  
"Looks like that moment is here."

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#### *Chapter 120: King Of The Oceans*

Seismic stood tall with his pillar-like arms crossed in front of him. Standing like that, his massive back in front of all the defenders behind him, he looked like a huge oak tree. A rooted symbol of strength. And behind him, everyone rallied.

A rain of gunfire and explosives whistled past him and over his head as he stared down the enormous wave of variants surging forwards. The ordinary fishmen died in droves. Their scales were resistant to bullets, but not entirely bulletproof. After taking dozens of rounds, their scales shattered and rendered them vulnerable.

The biggest issue were the Crabmen. Each of them stood three meters tall, supporting their huge, shell plated bodies on four powerful segmented legs. They possessed six arms, four of them smaller and clawed, with two main large ones holding their giant club-like pincers.

Bullets bounced off of them like rain on a windshield, and soon, when the fragile fishmen at the front died off, a line of crabmen naturally formed, their large red shelled bodies forming a shield wall from which the fishmen could charge behind without taking any bullet shots.

Higher caliber bullets from the Walker mechs and rounds from the tanks could blow them apart, but there was only a finite number of those. At the very least, not nearly enough to deal with the tide of hundreds to thousands of crabmen surging forwards, their charge shaking the ground itself.

The variants rapidly closed the distance towards the human defenders, now nearing within a hundred meters of them. Within seconds, all would be lost.

"They're going to overrun us!" came a shout of panic behind Seismic.

"Augmenters, Mutants, get back behind me!" shouted Seismic into his earpiece. The few surviving Augmenters and Mutants in the front lines scrambled back, many of them injured and scratched up.

As soon as Seismic saw the last of them rush past him, he readied himself.

Seismic sucked in a deep breath, and his eyes widened, glowing brown as he channeled his power. He felt heat circulate from his spine where, as an Augmenter, his Alter Organ was located. He raised a fist into the air, and all of the developed muscles in his arm bulged in flexion, veins of vascularity showing through his black and brown bodysuit.

A sphere of white formed around his fist.

With a yell, Seismic knelt down and punched the ground in front of him, driving the sphere into the earth. At first, nothing happened.

Then, the ground rumbled and shook as Seismic generated a localized earthquake. The cement roller shaped bracers around his arms rotated, their etherite reactors glowing as twin blue dots. These allowed Seismic to control his normally omnidirectional earthquakes into controlled directions.

With this, Seismic directed his earthquake into a massive cone in front of him. Once more, the ground under the charging variants lurched and shook like it was made of water, sending all the variants flipping in the air like food tossed in a pan.

Any variant that had their feet on the ground when the shockwave washed over it conducted it in their bodies, completely decimating their insides, breaking bones and scrambling organs. The crabmen were just as fragile as the fishmen against this level of strength, and their white organs and blood spurted from their shattered shells.

Then, the earth sundered.

Far worse than before.

This time, many jagged rock formations as tall as small buildings rose in the air, forcibly churned up from beneath the earth by Seismic's power. Countless more smaller rock spikes thrust upwards as well, impaling hundreds of variants.

Some variants screamed as they fell into uncovered fissures and faults.

Seismic took in a deep breath as he stood up.



"Holy sh\*t..." said one of the policemen in the Frames as he stopped shooting and looked ahead. All of the men and women defenders followed his lead and stopped firing in awe.

The entire battlefield had been reshaped by Seismic's one punch.

Several football stadiums' worth of land mass had been completely converted into a mass of upturned rock spikes and formations painted in variant corpses and blood.

"We've got this!" shouted someone. "We have an A-ranker by our side!"

"That's right you fish fucks, you like that!?"

"Go get em', Seismic!"

"Stay focused!" roared Seismic, his voice hoarse. He felt pain spiking around his spine and blood churning up from his stomach, painting his teeth red. "This only buys you time! Shoot at the choke points!"

Seismic wiped his mouth with his black gloved hand and grimaced at the red stains he drew back. He suffered from a condition known as Crystallization.

A fairly common condition among Alters as they aged, particularly stronger ones.

Alter powers were similar to natural organs like the muscles. Their limits could be expanded and trained by constant use and recovery in a process very similar to muscular hypertrophy.

And just like how some humans had more genetic potential to grow muscle than others, it was the same with how some Alters had more genetic potential to be stronger than others.

But in the same way that muscles could wear and tear over time, atrophying and suffering in old age, so too could Alter organs and their powers.

With age and overuse, Alter organs began to stiffen up, turning crystalline in structure, and the more they solidified, the less capable they were of circulating the Alter Cells needed for their powers.

Their cell count stayed the same, but their engines - the organs - simply became less and less efficient.

Generally speaking, the stronger an Alter's power was in their prime, the more it would degenerate in their old age. For someone like Seismic who also greatly overused his powers in his youth, Crystallization hit him incredibly hard.



On top of this, Seismic still nursed a severe injury from ten years ago. When he was cut down by the villain known as Swordmaster. Seismic's spine had been severed at the base, damaging his organ, and it was a miracle he had even survived with the absolute best of medical science and Restorer powers available.

Ever since then, though, Seismic's power had suffered.

That said, Seismic's maximum output of power was similar to back in his younger days. But it was his stamina that could not keep up. He could fight at full strength for a few attacks at best.

That was the biggest reason he had dropped all the way from the A+ rank, on the cusp of reaching the legendary S rank, down to A-.

That was why Seismic had to fight smarter now. He had used his last earthquake to blast away the variants, yes, but what he had also done was create a sort of rudimentary maze. The larger rock spiks he created formed natural walls that corralled variants into several choke points where the defenders could gun them down much more efficiently.

Seismic growled as he saw variants already rushing through the choke points, rearing their ugly fish heads out. He had not even bought a minute of rest for everyone.

"Shoot!" roared Seismic. "If you see a crabman, use an explosive round or attach a grenade to your launchers!"

The constant clatter of gunfire resumed behind him.

Seismic looked up, making sure the flying heroes were doing their job.

They were, but they were struggling. They were engaged in a massive shootout with the mermen situated further back in the variant army. The job of the flyers was to continually rain down projectiles around the ten sea anemones out of range from conventional firearms and weaponry, preventing the mermen from manning them again.

In response, the mermen fired their own projectiles, creating and shaping water into pressurized lances that shot through the sky in a rain of blue spikes. Every passing moment, flying heroes died, impaled by one of these water lances, and every passing moment, the mermen got closer and closer to fully manning the anemones again.

But in just ten minutes, the Panopticon's drone fleets would get here.

That was all the time they needed to hold out for.

Seismic stood tall again, crossing his arms, making sure his back, what everyone saw behind him, did not falter, did not show any weakness.

There was a noticeable shift in the battlefield then. The variants ceased to rush forward in their mass numbers.

Then, the leader of the crabmen variants leaped upon the highest rock formation it could find, staring directly at Seismic with beady black, stalked eyes. It seemed almost as if the leader wanted to challenge Seismic, and Seismic readied himself to fight.

But the leader of the crabmen suddenly stiffened before leaping away almost in fright, disappearing farther back into the army.

"What's going on!?" came a confused shout, and Seismic did not answer, for he had no idea either.

That was when everyone felt it.

A presence.

Their skin tingling, the hairs on their skin raising in sheer instinctual alarm. It was as if they could feel the heavy humidity of an intense storm ready to bear down at them.

The variants had not retreated. No, they had made way for something.

The rock formations at the back shook before crumbling down, as if a great force had shattered them at their base.

"Flyers, get me a visual," said Seismic into his earpiece.

"That huge water dome at the back is gone!" Mothman's voice buzzed into Seismic's ear. "Something came out of it, something fast, and it's headed right your way! I-I didn't get a clear sight of it, but this feeling - this is the Locus!"

The Locus. The center of control for large groups of variants.

The rock formations broke apart and sunk to the ground en masse, and through their deconstruction, it was possible to map out exactly where the Locus was coming from.

It was both a good and bad thing that the Locus was approaching. Last visuals confirmed that the Locus was contained in a water dome at the back of the army, meaning that it would not immediately contribute to the battle.

However, now that the Locus was free, that meant that the defenders would have a much, much harder time holding the line.

Yet, at the same time, there was a silver lining to this:

Seismic cocked back a fist. He took in deep breaths, controlling the pain and heat from his spine. This was it. If he could kill the Locus in one sudden, powerful attack, he could end this entire thing now without the Panopticon.

He still had enough energy to make a good fight. And the variants seemed to want their Locus to fight alone, perhaps by will of the Locus itself.

"I'll do it."

Seismic perked up. "You, Vig?"

Mel Morales walked up beside him, her blade drawn. "Yes. I don't have large amounts of destructive power, but killing single targets is my specialty. If I don't succeed, then I'll be out of your sight permanently, and you get the glory of saving the day.

Doesn't that sound like a good deal?"

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*Chapter 121: From Despair, Hope*

"I'll allow it," said Seismic as he watched the rock formations shudder and break apart. At first, the formations had broken apart rapidly, but now, the building sized upturned rock spikes were falling one by one.

The Locus was...slowing down as it approached them, taking up almost a casual strolling pace.

The defenders stopped firing in confusion, though they aimed their guns and weapons forwards, feeling tension cling heavily at their backs.

The Locus walked straight through the rock of the final rock formation, completely ignoring its existence. The building sized rock collapsed all around it.

When the Locus emerged out of the rubble and the dust clouds settled down, that was when it became fully visible.

Just shy of a hundred meters away from the defensive line.

The Locus did not look that menacing. It was approximately two meters tall and surprisingly skinny. It was strikingly humanoid in appearance with bipedal legs and four lanky arms. Where the crabmen, fishmen, and mermen were bipedal, they were not in any sense of the word humanoid.

Their features were distinctively monstrous. Inhuman. It was impossible to ever mistake them as a man.

But the Locus - if one did not look at it too closely, it might have been possible to mistake it was someone inside unique power armor.

One pair of the Locus's arms possessed five fingered hands while another pair ended in shrimp-like claws, though these claws were not that much larger than its hands. Its body was covered in segmented shell colored a bright iridescent rainbow color.

The color gradient of the shell constantly fluctuated in many bright, glowing shades, though the dominant colors were bright green and blue.

A shrimp-like tail swished and swayed behind it. Some red and raw strands of musculature were visible in gaps and seams beneath the creature's bright shell. Its head was covered in layers of shell that looked almost like a motorcycle helmet, and underneath the plating, surprisingly human looking rainbow-colored eyes were visible.

Twin antennae poked out of its head in long and thin, translucent blue strands that crackled with electrical charge.

The Locus walked forwards; its head cocked curiously as it observed the humans.

"Take it down!" came a cry from behind Seismic, and the defensive line fired all they had.

A storm of bullets, missile salvos, and tank shots crashed against the Locus, completely engulfing it in fiery explosions and high-speed lead collisions. Smoke and fire roared up around it, obscuring it.

"Stop!" said Seismic after ten good seconds of this bombardment.

The smoke settled, and the Locus was there. It hunkered down with its arms thrust out in front of it like a scared child, but it was mostly unharmed. A smoking crater decorated with fire sprawled out all around it, but the actual damage done to it was pitiful.

There were a few scratches in its shell - that was it.

"Throw me there," said Mel.

"What?" said Seismic.

"I can't fly without a jumpstart of energy, so I need you to throw me. I'll cut it down and end this once and for all," said Mel. "Or do you have anything against a vigilante taking your kill?"

All Seismic said was, "Good luck."

From what he could tell, this girl was young. Likely driven by some form of strong passion, maybe vengeance. She had talk and attitude in her, and that was something Seismic was getting a little too old to deal with.

Instead, Seismic grabbed Mel roughly by the shoulder and punted her like a baseball. Mel at first ragdolled out from Seismic's power, but she quickly regained direction in the air, spinning in a compact ball with her blade in front of her, rotating in flashes of gold.

When Mel was directly above the Locus, she directed force behind herself and shot down towards the Locus, fueling this descent with thrusters from her greaves.

The Locus looked up at her and blinked wonderingly, not at all bothering to defend itself.

Mel slashed down at the creature's head. The Locus just stared up at her with cocked and curious head. Her blade glowed gold as it reached down to the Locus's neck. Using her force direction ability, she could continuously rotate energy around her blade at insanely high speeds capable of slicing at the molecular level, negating any durability.

This exceeded the sharpness of even the highest end of Vibroblades on the market. No matter how tough this creature's shell was, if it did not dodge, it was done for.

The Locus's antennae twitched at the very last millisecond, when the blade nearly touched it, and it moved to the side. It moved in a flash of crackling energy bolts, and it moved so quickly that it looked almost like it had just teleported.

Mel found herself stabbing into the ground.

"Y-you...", said the Locus as it's eyes landed on her golden blade.

Mel's eyes widened in sheer surprise.

The Locus had...spoken?

It was impossible for a variant to ever speak. The only time it ever happened was with parasite type variants that hijacked the brains of humans.

But this variant talked, there was no mistaking it.

"You killed mother." The Locus's human eyes narrowed into sinister, monstrous hatred.

Mel's power was a rare multi-category power that had two parts to it. The first allowed her to control the direction of energy around her body. The second allowed her mind to make exceptional levels of calculations specialized to fine tune this energy control.

Mel could thus react to the Locus's attack, but her body was far too slow to keep up with it.

The Locus reached out and grabbed Mel's sword arm wrist and her head. It lifted her up in the air with the ease of lifting up a feather. The Locus glared at Mel as it tightened the grip on its hands, exerting immense crushing force onto her wrist and upper half of her head.

Golden shimmers rapidly flickered from around her head and wrist, indicating force she was diverting away from herself.

"You don't die...?" The Locus cocked its head and stared at Mel for a few seconds. "Then, go away."

With that, the Locus threw Mel away, bolts of energy arcing with its movements. The power of its throw was such that Mel was sent soaring away over the walls themselves, likely to crash into a few buildings down in her descent.

"Stand back!" said Seismic before panic could settle in among the heroes and policemen behind him. He slammed his fists together, and his bracers clicked as they readied to channel his powers. "I'm going to take this thing down."

All of you, give me cover fire, make sure no other variants get in my way.

But do not try to step in - all of you will be dead weights in a fight of this scale."

"Yes sir!" came a resonating shout.

Seismic breathed in, then breathed out. He closed his eyes, looked up, then opened them. He saw several drones floating in the sky, recording everything. He pointed at them and did something he rarely ever did: smiled.

"Son, no, James, this...is for you. I'll make you proud. If...if I never come back, know that you made this sad life of mine worth living," With that, Seismic's expression turned grim again as he jumped dozens of meters in the air, his fist cocked back and a white sphere encased around it.

Again, the Locus did not react, instead only watching Seismic curiously as the giant of a man bore down his fist against it.

As with Mel, the instant before Seismic's fist made contact with the Locus, it evaded, its body wreathed in an aura of crackling blue energy as it instantly moved to the side.

Seismic's fist smashed into the ground, missing the Locus entirely.

"...Slow," said the Locus.

Seismic, with his enhanced senses, had heard the Locus speak with Mel, so he was not surprised.

"And you are stupid," said Seismic.

The ground around them completely caved into a yawning sinkhole gouged out from Seismic's quake power, and as the Locus lost its balance from the ground suddenly parting beneath it, Seismic quickly grabbed the creature into an expertly performed headlock to trap it and prevent the beast from using its superspeed.

All the while, Seismic generated his power around his arms, forcing shockwaves to continuously ravage the Locus's body from within and keep it pinned to Seismic with immense amounts of crushing force.

Seismic and the Locus free fell into the deep fissure.

The defenders closest to the yawning sinkhole rushed over to the edge, trying to see Seismic, and they saw the Locus struggling, putting its thin hands over Seismic's brawny arms crushing its neck.

Waves of shockwave energy continuously washed over the Locus, cracking its shell armor all over, causing strange blue blood to spurt out everywhere. Before Seismic and the Locus fell so deep that darkness sucked them up, the Locus spurted blood from its mouth as the shell around its throat cracked.

"He did it! Seismic did it!" came a rousing shout.

"That's an A ranker for you! Sh\*t, when this is over, Seismic better get promoted back to A+, hell, he should be in the S class!"

"With the Locus gone, these sea freaks are gonna start running with their tails behind their legs!"

"My family - they're safe!"

Cheers and declarations of victory echoed like wildfire around the human defenders.

Ten seconds passed. The cheers started to grow quieter.

Twenty seconds. There was only pure silence now.

Thirty seconds. Silence crystallizing into mounting dread.

Then - despair.

The earth rumbled one last time, shockwaves from deep within the ground rising up and making the ground tremble, and for a brief moment, everyone thought Seismic had landed the final blow.



Seismic shot up over the sinkhole, crashing back on rocky ground and knocking a Framed policeman over.

The policeman groaned as he got up, but when he saw Seismic -

"No...no, no, no!"

There was a gaping hole in Seismic's stomach, and his body was charred beyond recognition. The bracers around his arms had shattered into sparking grey pieces. His internal organs had been completely turned blackened, and his bones were charred into near ash.

He was dead. And no Restorer was going to bring him back from that.

Their only hope, the A ranker, the man whose back they had always looked towards - gone, reduced to nothing more than burnt and destroyed flesh.

The ground shuddered again, but this time, it was not from Seismic's quakes. It was from the incoming march of the entire variant army as they rushed forwards, confirming to the despair of all humans that the Locus was not dead either.

Gunfire and explosives resumed again, but this was just the final desperate efforts of prey before they fell to the jaws of death.

In everyone's earpieces, the panicked cries of the flying heroes buzzed through.

"We're losing ground here! Our barrier Creators are dead! We're getting outgunned! They're going to man the Plasma Anemones again!" shouted Mothman, designated leader of the flyers. "Rocket Man's been downed - we need support-,"

Mothman's voice cut off.

The policeman kneeling beside Seismic's body took down the helmet of his frame and silenced communications. He looked ahead at the incoming tidal wave of variants and shook his head. He saw as explosions rocked their ranks, but it was like scooping out shovelfuls of sand in an entire beach.

At the head of this charge was the leader of the crabmen, its enormous body barreling forward like a living tank. It took tank shots to its body and face directly, and all that did was make it pause for second before resuming its bloodthirsty advance.

"It's over," said the policeman as he dropped his gun. He could hear the sounds of people running behind him, but what was the point?

They were going to get swarmed. They would all die. All their families, all the lives they had built up, washed away just like that -

The king crab variant jumped past the sinkhole straight towards the policeman. The shadow of its enormous body cast over the policeman, and he just closed his eyes, waiting for death.

It never came.

Instead, a loud crash of metal rang through the air, and the policeman opened his eyes.

What looked like a humanoid monster stood in front of him. It was covered in black metal like flesh with living, bloody veins and patches lining it. Three horns of black and bone jutted from its head as did a single gleaming red eye.

This was a terrible, terrible monster. One that sent chills of impending death down the policeman's spine when he gazed at it.

But the monster was not there to kill him, no -

The monster's arm, covered in thick coils of raw, exposed muscle, was raised in the air, acting like a shield that blocked the king crab variant's pincer slam. The king crab variant clicked its mandibles as it struggled against the new monster to no avail.

"W-what!?" The policeman's eyes widened as he saw the scene unfolding before him.

"You've lost your will to live just like that? After all the sacrifice you've seen for your sake? Pick up your gun. Fight." A commanding voice resonated outwards from the black monster, and that was when the policeman gained his wits and realized that this was no monster, it was a man.

A man in some form of armor he had never seen before. But what the policeman did recognize was his authority.

That voice projected with authority. Authority borne from power.

The same kind of authority that Seismic himself had carried in his voice.

Tears welled up in the policeman's eyes as he stared at the black armored man's back.

For a moment, he saw the image of Seismic's back standing tall, overlapping with the armored man.

The policemen grit his teeth and drew together his will.

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## *Chapter 122: The Legion*

Aldrich stood in front of the giant, yawning sinkhole that Seismic had created. He had to respect Seismic's decision making. The sinkhole move was not only useful to get Shrimp off balance to put into a hold, but it also created a huge rift that stopped the variants on the other side from easily approaching the humans.

Even in his last moments, Seismic had always thought about the people behind him.

Aldrich had lost visual of Seismic and Shrimp when they fell into the rift, but Volantis could track Shrimp's enormous energy signature even underground.

From how the energy signatures flared and moved, Aldrich determined that Seismic, in his last dying breath, had summoned up all of his possible strength and punched Shrimp deep into the earth with such enormous force that Shrimp's energy stopped moving, indicating that it was either immobilized or recovering.

Aldrich could not reach that deep down, but what he could do for now was deal with the army. He stared straight ahead.

Across the sinkhole, the entire variant army stood against him. A mass of monstrosities tens of thousands strong.

Behind Aldrich, there stood the human defenders numbering barely up to a thousand, if even that.

But even with that number disparity, even when it looked like if the variants just jumped over the hole and charged, they could swarm over all the humans, the variants paused.

All the tens of thousands of variants stopped in unison to stare at Aldrich. To bear witness to his presence.

Ordinarily, variants and heroes could not sense his power, but the way he had easily repelled Crab, easily the strongest individual frontline unit in the variant army, was worthy of note.

Silence reigned in the air as both armies of man and monster stopped to behold Aldrich's sudden appearance.

"What are you doing?" said Aldrich as he stood tall, his voice echoing outwards in calm tone but powerful projection. He addressed the humans behind him while facing forwards, showing only his broad, armored back. "I shouldn't be hearing quiet. I should be hearing gunfire. I should be hearing the sound of all of you fighting for your homes. For your lives."

"It's hopeless!" shouted a hero, a mutant with the tusks of a boar and bristles all over his body. Countless scars and bite marks littered his skin. "You-you're strong, way stronger than me, but look! Just look at all of them!"

The boar mutant waved his hand towards the sea of variant monsters. "You're all alone, and they-they have an army!"

Aldrich raised his arms to his sides, his claws splayed out. Swirls of green and red magical energy raged around him in a brilliant aura. "So do I."

Seven dots of purple appeared behind Aldrich in an even line. The dots expanded outwards as the space around them distorted into swirls of purple that grew into fully fledged portals, each of them ten meters in diameter.

From these portals, Aldrich's legion emerged. His undead variants and monsters emerged, forming a crowd of powerful beasts behind him, their feral eyes gleaming in various shades as they bared their claws, fangs, tusks - all their natural weapons.

The Deildegasts stepped forth with their greatswords raised in the air. With each step, they slammed their bony fists against the flat of the sword, echoing out a ring that matched the beat of their ghostly march.

His fifty reanimated fishmen emerged from one portal, streaming out with hunched backs, flickers of green trailing around them as they hissed at what was once their brethren across the sinkhole.

Seeing this, the fishmen from across the sinkhole cocked their heads in pure confusion at seeing their kind turned against them.

The death knight legion marched out of a portal in neat formation, Chiros leading them in his flashy crimson armor with his saber unsheathed and pointed at the fishmen.

"Dear me, there is such an overwhelming amount of blood here for me to paint with. All I need is to extract it," said Chiros as bloody red energy shimmered around him in flickering rings. "How many among you shall I use for my newest art piece tonight, hm?"

Blackwater's ten strongest A-class stepped out of a portal in their sleek black uniforms. Though their faces were young, the way they carried themselves, the way they stared ahead at the fishmen with confidence in their faces, showed that they were all natural talents.

"Just fishmen? Aren't they what, an E rank threat? Hah, this'll be a breeze," said Simon Wells as he adjusted his visor.

"All of you are all so cocky. Keep it down a notch. They've got enough numbers to screw us over if we make a mistake," said Alexis as she and the Blackwater students that could fly floated in the air.

Electricity crackled from Alexis's hands, and her eyes turned bright white. Her dark grey hair started to flutter as if pushed by a breeze.

"Good!" Stella stepped out of a portal, her smile wide as she stared manically ahead at the fishmen, her fingers curled and wreathed with glowing orange lines. "The more there are, the more sh\*t there is to blow up!"

Valera, Portal Girl, and the Geist emerged out from beside Stella.

"How about a friendly competition?" said Valera. She cracked her neck as she balled her clawed gauntlets tight into fists. From her knuckles, studded spikes emerged to make each of her already monstrous punches that much more deadly. "The one who brings forth the most spines tonight will be the victor."

"Spines? Hah!" Sparks sputtered from Stella's hands. "When I'm done with them, there won't be anything left of em', let alone spines."

"Kill count it is, then," said Valera.

"I'm down!" said Stella. She turned to Portal Girl. "You in, newbie?"

"Ah, uh, me?" stammered out Portal Girl. "Well, um, I think I should stay back here. Portal people in and out of important places, you know."

"Oh damn, right, that was your job," said Stella. "Well, that sounds boring as all hell. Feel kinda bad for you."

"I...I think I'm quite alright, actually," said Portal Girl.

"Geh! Geh! Geh! (Look! Look! So many more friends!)" The Geist jumped up and down as it pointed the cursed rock axe towards the fishmen.

"They'll be friends AFTER we kill em'," said Stella.

"Geh...(Oh right)" said the Geist. "Geheh! (Then I kill them, and then make friends!)"

"That's the spirit!" Stella slapped the Geist's muscular back in support, and the Geist nodded in glee.

From individual portals, Crow and the Zombie Giant, the two largest in Aldrich's Legion, emerged. Crow hopped out before spreading out his enormous wings, staring ahead at the variants across the sinkhole with his six gleaming yellow eyes.

His huge feathers of sleek black, metallic structure bristled, ready to unleash a storm of piercing death.

The Zombie Giant learned from its past clumsy portal experience and this time rolled out of it, standing in the air twelve meters tall, towering over everything else in the battlefield.

Seeing this sudden emergence of countless different types of monstrosities, variants, and people, the hordes of variants across the sinkhole took another step back, especially when they stared up at the enormous Zombie Giant whose mere steps looked like they could kill swathes of them. Crab, the leader of the crabmen, a five-meter-tall hulking monstrosity, did not even reach half the size of the giant.

But if the variants were this scared, then the humans -

"Variants! More variants!" came a panicked shout from among the humans.

"What is that!?" came a terrified shriek when the giant came out, and many of the humans aimed their guns instinctively at him.

"No." Aldrich's voice boomed out, reaching all the humans. Immediately, they froze up, sensing chills running down their spines. "This is my army. My Legion.

And tonight, we will be taking back this city.

To all of you that are unwilling to make the same sacrifice Seismic did, to lay down your lives to fight for your city, then stay here, where it will be safer.

But to all of you willing to fight to the death for what is precious to you, then come with me.

Fight with me."

Aldrich knelt down by Seismic's charred body, seeing the grave marker and soul hovering above him.

He laid a respectful hand on Seismic's shoulder and cast [Raise Undead]. Green and red strands of energy fluxed out of Aldrich's hand, tethering to Seismic's body for Seismic was a powerful enough individual that he was classified as a 'boss unit' that drained Aldrich's health and mana to raise.

"Fight until you die!"

Aldrich raised his hand in the air, and as he did so, Seismic's corpse floated upwards. The red and green energy tether flowed into his thoroughly burnt and damaged body, and as it did so, his blackened, charred flesh began to heal over. His burnt organs

started to grow red again. The gaping hole in his stomach started to knit together with muscle and skin.

After several seconds, the tether broke off, making Seismic's body fall to the ground. But instead of crashing down, he landed on his two feet, raised and ready to fight once more. For now, Aldrich turned off Seismic's free will, making him a controllable unit basically.

"Fight even after you die! For with me, you shall never know death!"

With that, Aldrich powerfully thrust his fist out, aiming at the variants across the sinkhole. A gust of wind squalled out from the force of his punch. "Go, my Legion! Show me your strength!"

The heaviest hitters went out first to clear up as much space as possible.

The Zombie Giant bellowed out an immense roar, and this one completely drowned out all of the roars from the other undead in Aldrich's Legion.

It completely echoed out in booming peals that traveled across almost the entirety of the battlefield, and as its terrifying scream reached the fishmen and crabmen, they scrambled back, the fishmen shrieking in terror and the crabmen pulling in their eye stalks into their shells in a natural fear response.

This caused immediate mass chaos in the variant ranks, causing them to crash and stumble into each other. A stampede began where they started to crush the weakest and smallest among them underfoot and claw.

This was the [Giant's Bellow], a racial skill among giants that allowed them to cause tiny weaklings they directed their roar at to scatter.

And with that mighty roar, with the variants shrieking under fear and Aldrich's Legion eager for blood, the battle began.

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### *Chapter 123: The Battle Rages*

Against the giant's fear inducing roar, the only variant on the other side of the sinkhole that stood firm against this was Crab, the leader of the crabmen variants. It raised itself up on its segmented legs, standing as tall as it could, before smashing its huge pincer claws together.

A deafening shockwave echoed all around it, and as the sound passed over its crabmen subordinates, their fear dissipated. The crab variants could not speak, but it seemed that this claw smash was the equivalent of a rousing war cry.



In response, the crabmen all raised their claws up in renewed confidence.

Looks like this would be more of a battle than was initially thought.

In response' the Zombie Giant jumped over, soaring over the sinkhole and landing right at Crab with a fierce snarl. The giant smashed two fists down into the ground, and the sheer size and strength behind that blow caved out an enormous crater with Crab at the center.

Crab raised its pincers up and actually handled the blow, but with some difficulty. The red shell of its pincers were cracked, and it shook from exertion under the giant's might. Flecks of strange bright red light started to spot around the crab's shell.

All the fishmen and smaller crabmen around it were blasted away by the shockwave, leaving the giant and Crab locked in a one-on-one duel.

This duel zone marked the center of the battlefield. Meanwhile, Aldrich gave commands to organize his forces to the left and right of this duel.

"Valera, take the A-class and Stella with you towards the left. I will deal with the right side," said Aldrich.

"It will be my pleasure!" said Valera.

Aldrich turned to the crowd of fifty fishmen he had reanimated. "It's time for you to meet your brethren again."

Aldrich faced an open palm towards them and chanted, "[Burning Agony]."

In response, the fishmen all began to undergo a distinct change. Their veins started to bulge through their musculature, engorging with additional blood flow. Their bodies swelled up as their muscles increased in size.

Then, their visible veins began to glow red before blood burst out from them not in clouds of liquid, but in clouds of blazing red fire.

Auras of fire wrapped all the fishmen as their flesh and bodily processes worked to their maximum limits, generating heat like an overclocked computer processing unit.

Yet despite the fire burning on them, melting their flesh, they did not react in pain.

No, instead, the fishmen roared in sheer bloodlust, converting the agony of their burning bodies into pure aggression.

"Go. Kill them," said Aldrich as he waved his fishmen forward.

The fishmen shrieked in unison as they sprinted forwards. When they reached the edge of the sinkhole, they jumped up, clearing the wide gap with their temporarily enhanced stats.

[Burning Agony] dramatically increased the strength of undead that still had flesh on them in exchange for burning off the flesh after a set amount of time. And this dramatic increase showed itself obviously and violently.

As soon as the burning fishmen landed on the other side of the hole, they savagely reached out to any living thing they could attack. They were bigger, faster, and stronger than all their brethren fishmen by leaps and bounds.

With hisses and aggressive shrieks, the fire wrapped fishmen tore their brethren apart limb from limb. They could even easily overpower the usually superior crabmen in single combat, punching through their durable shells or cooking their insides with prolonged contact with their flaming bodies.

Because the fishmen under Aldrich were all covered in intense fire auras, they could not get swarmed by superior numbers, making them the perfect individuals to charge through the hordes of variants.

Aldrich checked the left side of the battlefield:

"Everyone on board!" A Blackwater A-class student shouted with a cool smile as he swept back long, curly rockstar hair. Glowing green rings circled his black pupils, mimicking the large green ring beneath him.

This was Damian Fritz.

An Alter who possessed the power to create large rings that acted as platforms that he could freely levitate using his mind.

The rings could also be used as shields or thrown at as weapons, which he demonstrated now as he spun his hands together before thrusting them out, weaving out a rapidly rotating green ring that sawed into the ranks of the fishmen, cutting right through them.

All the Blackwater students, variants, and monsters that could not fly hopped on Damian's ring, and with that, he waved his hand up, making the ring float and speed over the sinkhole.

From the ring, all the ranged Blackwater students unleashed their abilities.

The Blackwater A-class students were strong. They were not individually as strong as the leader type variants, but the fodder beneath the leaders were nothing to them.

Simon Wells tapped his visor as he channeled his kinetic beam, firing off his bright blue laser that sliced fishmen right in half or, when it hit crabmen, bored through their shells within seconds.

Kat, a Mutant type Alter with twitching antennae and carapaced pale skin, pointed her wrists towards the fishmen and unleashed shotgun shot volleys of white acid balls.

Each volley possessed over a hundred acid bullets, and whenever any of them hit a fishman, even if it was a single bullet, the fishman faced an agonizing death where their flesh liquefied and turned them into steaming biomass soup.

Jonas, the unfortunate man who had gotten his head crushed by Seth Solar back in the Necropolis, pointed a finger gun at the variants as his eyes flashed purple. Beams of violet spiraled outwards, and whatever they hit, they flattened, crushing fishmen into condensed goop under ultra-condensed gravity.

But the most notable among them all in terms of firepower was definitely Alexis. She led the flyers over the sinkhole, protecting them in a barrier of swirling wind that also crackled with electricity.

From within, she clasped her hands together, and from the edges of her barrier, small storm clouds formed, each of them firing off miniature lightning bolts that exploded on impact.

Devastating small scale explosions rocked the variants, blowing them apart.

Yet, if explosions were the topic at hand, then there was nobody that could beat out Stella. She flew into the air over the fishmen with small burst explosions from her hands and feet, and when she was over a particularly large group of them, shot herself down with a smile of complete reckless abandon.

Her arms grew completely orange as her explosive blood channeled through her veins en masse, and when she landed in the center of the fish and crabmen crowd, a massive explosion engulfed the area and lit up the night sky in bright orange.

The blast wave rose up in a pillar visible from several hundred meters away.

Stella stepped out of the explosion while patting her arms down of dust. There were chunks missing from her arms, exposing the bone, but she did not mind at all, instead breathing deeply in to savor the smell of smoke and fire.

"Steamed crab. Smells real nice. I could go for some seafood after this." Stella then looked over to Valera, and Valera did not let herself get outshone.

Valera was literally running through the fishmen at rapid speeds. She had grabbed a crabman, punched its head off, and then started to rapidly spin the corpse in front of her while she charged into the mass of variants.

The crabman's spiky outer shell and body acted like a bladed rotor blade, and Valera herself was like a lawnmower, completely mowing down everything in her way. She left behind her a trail of mangled corpses, blood, shattered bones, and dismembered body parts.

"DIE! DIE! DIE!" roared Valera as she sped forwards in a sea of gore.

Already, Valera was far ahead of Stella, mowing her way deep into enemy lines.

"Tch. Show off," said Stella.

Meanwhile, the notable undead variants made their presence known. The Antlion leaped off the green ring and into the sinkhole, burrowing inside of it as it roamed the battlefield from underground, creating huge sand wells to entrap hordes of fishmen to leave them rooted and vulnerable to attack.

The Bloodspitter Lizard fired off beams of acidic blood, devastating whatever the Antlion trapped. The Geist unleashed its neurotoxic cloud freely, and any fishmen or crabmen that stayed within the noxious purple cloud for more than thirty seconds started to freeze up before dropping dead.

This was especially horrific for the fishmen trapped by the Antlion, for they had no means to escape their inevitable brain deaths. If the natural variants did not tear their throats out or reduce them into bloody acidified puddles, the Geist's toxic gas was sure to shut down their brains.

Chiros and the Death Knights moved out on their own with professional grace... They marched in formation, slashing and hacking with elegant poise, killing in trained movements and making mincemeat of anything that came near them.

Aldrich nodded at this sight, satisfied. He spoke to Seismic who stood on standby beside him. The hero's arms were crossed as he looked ahead, awaiting orders with his individuality still turned off. Crow also sat beside Aldrich, ready to move or defend Aldrich at a moment's notice.

"You're going to stay with me," said Aldrich to Seismic. "You could probably handle the riff raff over there by yourself, but I want my Legion to shine a little. Plus, you and Crow are the most suited to guarding me against Shrimp if he starts moving again.

You, especially, I need to conserve your strength for Shrimp. On that note -

Volantis, keep that energy signature on Shrimp marked... Inform me the exact moment he ever makes a move."

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#### *Chapter 124: A Storm Is Coming*

Aldrich watched the battle progress with all the poise of a seasoned general, standing calmly with a hand touching his chin in contemplation. He did not divert much brain power to the left side of the battle because Valera managed it, and he trusted in her enough to keep her bloodlust down to command his troops.

Thus, he kept his attention mostly towards the right side that he was largely responsible for with his fifty fishmen.

So long as [Burning Agony] was active, the flaming undead fishmen were utterly untouchable, but when [Burning Agony] ended, leaving the fishmen into lower leveled skeletons, they became relatively defenseless.

Single strikes from tougher fishmen such as the green scaled brutes or the crabmen shattered his skeletal fishmen with ease.

To maximize their usefulness as skeletons, Aldrich clenched his fist and cast [Rite of Bone Binding]. The white bones of the skeletal fishmen layered over in a steely, metallic grey luster, massively increasing their durability while also moderately boosting their strength.

This let his skeletal fishmen fight for even longer, and they used that extra fighting time to the very last moment, fighting even as hordes of their brethren slowly broke apart their bodies with swipes and blows.

When finally, Aldrich's fifty skeletal fishmen fell, engulfed in the sheer numbers of their opposition, he simply pointed a finger up and chanted, "Serve."

His voice echoed out across the battlefield. Fifty more dead fishmen and crabmen reanimated, green glows shining in their eyes as they shuddered and rose up.

"[Burning Agony]" said Aldrich, and once more, the aquatic variants burst out into flames generated by the heat of their very own burning blood and organs as their bodies overworked to their maximum extents.

Like this, Aldrich was plenty capable of raising his host of fishmen over and over and over again, and the losses always favored him. His first fifty fishmen had killed a thousand of their brethren, most of that during their [Burning Agony] state where they could kill enemies just by ramming into them and engulfing them in organic fire in wide areas of effect.

That was until the Sea Anemones at the back of the variant army started up again. Aldrich could have taken them out from the start, but he wanted them to fire one more time so that he could stop it in front of the humans, cementing even further his power and reputation as a defender.

All of this would become useful for later. When Aldrich would negotiate with governments, the Alterhuman Agency, and the Panopticon for his position in this world.

"Hm?" Aldrich felt Seismic patting his shoulder. "What is it?"

Seismic was mindless, but he did have some basic instinctive control over himself and what Aldrich presumed to be general A.I. movement patterns from Elden World. That is, if someone aggroed Seismic, he would attack unless Aldrich commanded him to hold position.

In addition, if Seismic found any enemies or things of interest, he would notify Aldrich. In this case, Seismic held out his earpiece towards Aldrich. It buzzed in his hand, probably from people shouting through the other side.

"I see. You want me to hear what's going on." Aldrich took the earpiece and held it to the ear of his helmet. "Volantis, put this in my ear, will you?"

"As you wish," said Volantis. Metal strands opened up from the side of Aldrich's head and grasped the earpiece, pulling it into the helmet and nestling it in the curve of Aldrich's ear.

Immediately, Aldrich was assaulted by shouting.

"Seismic! There's less than half of us left! My wings, they've been clipped, and all I can do is report to you from behind cover. We can't hold the mermen back any longer - they've already started to operate an anemone - sh\*t! It's firing towards you. Block it if you can, Seismic!" came the panicked voice.

Ah right, the flyers. Aldrich had kept them in the back of his head, not giving them too much importance because he believed they would just fly away when even a fourth of them died. But here they were, fighting even with over half of them gone.

It was respectable spirit. Aldrich would respect that by saving them himself. But first, the blast from the anemone:

"Volantis. Wings," said Aldrich. In response, his draconic wings morphed from his back, unfurling out as he jumped into the air. In the distance, he could perceive a flash of blue light from behind several dozen collapsed buildings that formed a natural fort behind which the anemones were entrenched.

Aldrich's [Grave Ward] kept an eye on the anemones, though, and he could tell exactly where the single active one was firing. It was aimed right at defensive firing line, probably towards the back where the tanks and walkers were.

A single blue hydroplasma beam spiraled outwards, traveling in an arcing trajectory aimed to crash down explosively among the tanks, confirming Aldrich's theory.

Aldrich immediately sped back towards the artillery line where the tanks and walkers were stationed. He moved as a black and red blur, fading from his spot at the front of the sinkhole to all the way to the artillery line, back almost to the walls themselves, in just a few seconds.

His movements caused gusts of wind to squall out beneath him, and several humans beneath him looked up in awe as the wind passed them roughly by.

Aldrich floated above a tank, his draconic wings stretched out to hold him in the air. He saw the beam of hydroplasma draw rapidly closer to him. What was at first a glimmer of blue in the horizon now became a huge mass of gleaming energy that nearly engulfed his whole vision.

Anyone seeing this sight, this devastating pillar of energy crashing towards them like the judgement of god, would have immediately fled, but all Aldrich did was hold out his arm. His [Death Essence Barrier] became visible, outlining him in a sphere of bright, see-through green.

The pillar of plasma smashed against Aldrich's [Death Essence Barrier] at breakneck speed.

His barrier flickered, registering damage as the plasma exploded into a nova of brilliant blue and white. A thunderous boom echoed from the impact, causing the tank beneath him to tremble from the shockwave of the explosion. The blast of the explosion soared into the air, lighting up the night with light borne from energy so hot that it could easily melt through Neo-steel.

The blast completely engulfed Aldrich's form, seemingly erasing him in its cascade of energy.

All of the policemen and heroes beneath Aldrich looked up at where he was, their guns down as they held their breaths, desperately hoping that their savior, their hero, was not gone.

Aldrich thrust his arm out, generating force to dissipate the light and smoke generated from the explosion. Blue flames crackled around his barrier before quickly dying, unable to catch anything it could burn.



"Is that it? Weaker than what I expected. Hm. Maybe I am still too cautious," said Aldrich to himself, putting a contemplative hand to his chin as he recalculated the amount of risk he could start taking. That was when he noticed everyone staring up at him with wide eyes.

The crew of the tank Aldrich saved had opened up its hatch, ready to jump out, probably thinking that they were going to die from the blast after it bore through Aldrich. Instead, they were left awkwardly staring at Aldrich's not-blown-up form looking down at them with some level of judgement.

"What are you doing?" said Aldrich. "This fight isn't over. Out of everyone here, all of you are the least in danger, considering you get to pilot a tank. Get back in there."

Aldrich's voice rang out with commanding presence.

"Yes sir!" The tank crew immediately hopped back into the tank, closing the hatch behind him.

"And the rest of you, continue firing," said Aldrich, addressing the humans beneath him that had stopped to stare at whether he would survive. "Don't stop to stare and gawk every time I save you. Like I said before, I will guarantee your lives to the best of my ability. But you have to make your lives worth saving.

So fight."

"Yes sir!" The heroes and policemen beneath Aldrich immediately got back to loading their weapons and rushing out to the firing line to gun down more variants.

Aldrich then heard the same desperate voice crackle in his earpiece.

"We have to fall back! All flyer squads are too damaged to hold the line here! They're going to man all the anemones!" said the voice.

"Fall back," said Aldrich.

"Who...who are you?" came the confused reply.

"I don't have time to explain," said Aldrich. "But if you listen to me, you and your squads will survive. So fall back. Retreat behind the firing line. Your job here is done, and you've done it well enough already. There is no more need to lose more of your lives."

"I wish we could," came the reply. "But we're pinned down here! Mermen are raining hell down on us. We can find cover, but the moment we take to the air, we're going to get shot down, especially with most of our Barrier Creators downed."

"I see. If you're speaking into this earpiece, then I'm assuming you're the leader of the flyers," said Aldrich.

"Yeah."

"Then tell the flyers to take as much cover as they can."

"We already are!" came the annoyed response.

"No, you don't understand. If the cover you have right now is the best you have, then fine. But if you can retreat back and find something better, something farther away from the anemones, then do that," said Aldrich.

"I know I shouldn't be wasting time asking questions in a situation like this...but why?"

Aldrich looked into the sky. Green clouds started to gather, crackling with ghostly teal arcs of energy... "Because a storm is coming."

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#### *Chapter 125: Spirit Boundaries Activated*

"...Can I ask what that means?" came the response on the other hand, but Aldrich just ignored that. He mentally called out for Crow, and the Alter's monstrous avian form came soaring through the skies before landing on the ground beneath Aldrich, right beside the tank.

In response, the tank and all the Alters around Crow reeled backwards in fright and surprise. The AC count scanners built into their frames registered Crow's AC count. In response, shocked conversation spread throughout the Alters like a wildfire burning through a dry forest.

"That thing, it's got an AC count of 8000. That's...that's an A rank variant...and that man, he's...tamed it?" said a man. "Look! Look how it just lets him get on its back like some kind of pet!"

"What!? He's tamed an A rank variant? That's impossible unless he has a power to control variants but that can't be it. He's strong, he's fast, he's got that barrier, he can conceal his own AC count, he's got those wings - just how many powers does he have!?"

"Is that the thing that surprises you the most? Just look at his army! Look at all those variants that he controls! Look at all that giant! And all those strong Alters with him too - he must be part of some massive team!"

"He's not part of any team I know."

"Then some kind of huge shadow organization, I don't know. There's plenty of rumors about them existing. He must be their head!"

"Sh\*t, if he's manning an org that big with that much firepower to boot, then I want to see if I can be part of it. They give a lot more of a sh\*t for us than the AA does, that's for sure."

"Yeah, you and your E grade techno power is gonna get you a place in THAT army?"

"Whatever it is, it doesn't matter." A stronger voice cut through the gossip. A short and stocky man waved his hand forward, towards the battlefield. On the chest of his frame was emblazoned a rectangular badge showcasing two stars.

A ranking badge that signified that he was a police captain. "All that matters is that he's saved us, and that he's right: we need to make the most of our lives as we can. So quit this yapping and get back to firing! Hold this line, boys, and tomorrow, we'll have one hell of a story to tell!"

Yes, thought Aldrich. One hell of a story. Very likely a story that would make his position negotiating against the AA and Panopticon heavily favored towards him.

"Let's go," said Aldrich, and Crow growled as he pushed his enormous wings down. With his wings stretched out like that, he was easily comparable in size to the battle tank nearby, and it was with pure relief that all the Alters there saw that Crow was not against them.

Crow soared into the air and flew over Portal Girl's position.

This, Aldrich dubbed, was the Portal Line where she worked overtime, generating portals en masse to take in undead from the battlefield to give them some resting time where they could regenerate before portaling back over the sinkhole to fight again.

Her expression was knit into pure concentration as she talked into an earpiece of her own, this one linked to the drones that Spybird and Fisk had set up. There, the drones not only recorded the battle, but also funneled battle information to her, determining which undead were injured and needed portals.

Here, the Deildegasts also stood in formation, their greatswords clasped between their gauntleted hands, ready to be shoved down into the earth.

"Hold here." Aldrich bid Crow to hover above the Portal Line. He knew that with the flyers at the back of the variant army largely disabled, the variants would start to man more and more of their sea anemone cannons.

By now, Aldrich calculated that some of them were now ready to fire, and he confirmed this with a visual via his Grave Ward.

This was the perfect opportunity to show off, then. And to test this mechanic.

Aldrich turned around on Crow and stared back the rows and rows of humans firing their weapons, nursing their injured, and manning the drones that went back and forth over the walls, ferrying what little ammunition, repair kits, and med kits they had remaining.

Aldrich mentally recognized all of the humans as 'allies', and as he did so, he saw a green glint mark all of them.

[Allies Recognized]

A message appeared in the corner of Aldrich's vision, confirming this worked. Normally, units caught in Aldrich's [Mist of Undeath] and also the [Spirit Boundary] generated by the Deildegahsts would suffer all the negative effects from them which included life loss and obscured vision.

In the game, allied units could just see through the mist and spirit boundary with no issues, and it was a given that they did not get damaged either.

So far, Aldrich had held off on fully activating his [Mist of Undeath] because of the risk of damaging Alters, but if they could see through and operate their technology freely through the [Spirit Boundaries], then he would be confident to use his [Mist of Undeath] at full throttle.

"Sorry to interrupt, but they're firing more of them!" came the desperate voice from Aldrich's earpiece. "We can't stop them! There's four, no, five beams coming your way!"

"I've got it handled," said Aldrich coolly.

Aldrich stood on Crow and looked down like a commanding general. "Deildegahsts! Set down your boundaries!"

The Deildegahsts slammed their gauntleted bony fists into their warped breastplates of dull grey metal, loosing out three strong clanks in response. They then grasped their greatswords tightly before slamming them into the ground in unison.

Cracks lined with wispy curls of black energy formed from where their greatswords dug into shattered pavement and asphalt. Their grey, stained blades glowed for a moment before huge clouds of smoke burst out from them, billowing and gathering in a swirling pattern concentrated into the shape of a large dome.

The biggest difference between a Deildegahst and a regular Ghast lay in the effective range of their [Spirit Boundaries].

Where Ghasts could be considered units for smaller skirmishes, Deildegahsts could project their boundaries over vast stretches of area to make them fit for entire

battlefields or, in the case of the game, full scale raid bosses where multiple allied heroes and their forces gathered.

The domes of smoke rose up just as four hydroplasma beams became visible in the distance, first as glints of blue light, and within seconds, as rapidly approaching pillars of destructive plasma.

The blasts slammed into the [Spirit Boundary] barriers, but just like with Aldrich's [Death Essence] barrier, the plasma beams exploded against the [Spirit Boundaries] without piercing through, merely causing the smoke to scatter for a few moments.

[Spirit Boundaries] were the perfect counter to elemental damage, being highly resistant to it. The damage from plasma mainly came from intense heat, and that filed under the fire element as far as game mechanics were concerned.

Aldrich observed that the humans stopped firing their weapons for a moment, surprised first by the boundaries then at the fact that they blocked the plasma beams.

"What is that smoke!? Just how many crazy things are going to happen tonight!?" said a bewildered policeman.

"Doesn't matter! We can see through it, so we can shoot through it! So keep firing!" shouted an older and more seasoned hero who fired spikes of metal from his hands.

Aldrich nodded as he witnessed the humans start to shoot again, their firing lines lighting up with little specks of bright light as their guns worked overtime. With that, Aldrich fully unleashed his [Mist of Undeath], stretching out his arms as he did so.

The mist emerged from his core, where his Phylactery was, still developing within him, still evolving. The ghostly green air settled down on the various injured undead beneath Aldrich, healing their wounds in a mere seconds, no matter how grievous they were.

Most of the injured, Aldrich noted, were the weaker variant and monster type undead such as the Alpha Striker, Mudcrabs, Alloywing Eagle, and Big arm Grizzly.

He noted with some level of wistfulness that they were soon going to outlive their usefulness, getting outscaled more and more as time went on and Aldrich's forces became stronger and stronger.

If they did not fall in battle, Aldrich would soon replace them with stronger units of his own creation.

That reminded him, he did know that Liches in lore could increase the strength of their undead, but there was precious little detailed information as to how they did it. But even in the lore, liches could only increase the levels of a few of their most precious undead, not any random low level monster or skeleton.

"Thanks for that!" Portal Girl shouted up to Aldrich before she generated more portals, getting the newly healed and battle ready undead out again to fight even as she manned portals to bring more injured ones in.

Regardless, Portal Girl was providing an invaluable tactical service here was both troop transport and first aid.

"You're doing very well," said Aldrich with a nod before he mentally commanded Crow to fly over towards the flyers at the back of the variant army.

"Y-you too," said Portal Girl with a shy blush, but Aldrich was already gone, soaring across the battlefield to his next destination... She saw Aldrich leave and then shook her head, telling herself to focus on doing her job as best as possible.

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#### *Chapter 126: Bring Down The Thunder*

Aldrich flew above the battlefield at a fast-cruising speed, giving himself some time to see what was going on.

The left side of the battlefield was decisively in Aldrich's favor with the variants getting pushed back more and more by the second.

This was entirely within Aldrich's expectations. After all, the vast majority of his forces were there.

Under a slew of massive explosions, deadly sword swings, onslaughts of laser beams and acid and claws and fangs, and Valera's murderous rampage, the variants were nothing but fodder to add to the meat grinder.

At the center, Crab surprisingly managed to survive until now.

The Zombie Giant and Crab were both still engaged in intense battle at a sufficiently high level where they were basically fighting by themselves. The shockwaves of force emitted from the giant and Crab clashing with each other, not to mention their large sizes, meant that the riff raff weakling variants either got blown apart or squished if they even got near that.

Crab seemed to have an interesting ability to convert any damage it took against its shell into energy that boosted its strength and size. That was why little red flecks of light gathered around its shell whenever it got hit by the Zombie Giant's huge blows.

The more energy it gathered, the larger it seemed to get, and by this point, Crab was eight meters tall, almost getting to even footing with the giant's twelve-meter bulk.

At first, the Zombie Giant had thoroughly pushed Crab back, but now, they were in a dead stalemate, exchanging massive blow after blow, echoing out shockwaves with each attack. They were quite literally like two kaijus amid a sea of human sized fighters, their each and every movement accidentally squishing a fishman or crabman.

The Zombie Giant roared as it grabbed crab's pincer in its two burly arms before yanking hard, ripping it off.

In response, Crab retreated backwards, stomping over dozens of its own kind, before focusing energy onto its severed limb. Red gathered around the wound, and then flesh and shell rapidly grew out of it, nearly as good as new, just a little bit thinner.

The regeneration was not as fast or explosive as the Geist's, but any form of regeneration was a pain to deal with when an enemy had an ability that benefited them in longer fights.

"Hm," said Aldrich. "That may be a problem if I let it grow too strong, though I assume there is a limit to the power."

"Shall we deal with that one first?" stated Volantis. "Its bones are quite mighty. I would not mind devouring it and adding it to my collection. And it would serve our forces well to be rid of this creature."

"Crabs don't have bones," corrected Aldrich. "But I get what you mean. Taking Crab out now would not be too hard, either, especially with Seismic here."

However, I trust in Valera to deal with this herself. She has command over all my forces here, after all, and she's shown herself very capable of handling things without me. If anything, this is another chance for her to prove herself against sudden threats without my assistance."

Valera had already sensed that Aldrich was leaving, which in turn meant that he was not raising more undead to fill up the fifty fishman attack force on the right side of the battlefield.

To compensate, she had moved over to the right side with the Geist and some Blackwater students, abusing the Geist's neurotoxic cloud to keep the variants from advancing easily against comparatively fewer numbers.

When Valera was done routing the variant army at the right side of the battle zone, she would deal with Crab in her own way, Aldrich was sure of it.

Trusting in Valera, Aldrich commanded Crow to soar at full speed over to the flyers. Crow's six eyes gleamed yellow before it forcefully pushed down its wings, loosing a sonic boom of force that sent it hurtling forwards at fighter jet speeds.



Within a minute, Crow had ferried Aldrich right over the line of sea anemones that were now newly manned by the fishmen.

Merman stood at the center of this formation of seven anemones. He seemed to actually be personally manning the anemones, explaining how they had managed to control the anemones so quickly.

At the center of his slimy blue green chest was a crystalline blue spherical organ. It glowed strongly as Merman raised his six hands up to the sky, channeling strands of water from that organ to every single anemone, powering them up manually.

The merman variants under his rule guarded him in a thick phalanx, generating water construct shields while others fired off spears and blades of water construct energy, raining down a storm of projectiles against the flyers, the majority of whom were huddled behind chunks of fallen buildings.

The fact that Merman was protected like that on top of its lack of offensive movement meant that it needed to use all of its energy and attention to man the anemones, and they were still inactive from firing before.

"Scan for all visible energy signatures," said Aldrich as he surveyed the battle zone from above. "Try and focus on all the humans present."

"Done," said Volantis.

Aldrich could see a hundred or so little white lights shining through building chunks and various other forms of cover: the presence of the flying Alters. He quickly calculated the distance they were from Merman and the anemones and determined that they were not in any danger from Aldrich's next move.

Good.

That meant that they had listened to Aldrich and retreated back. No doubt, their leader had told them to retreat on Aldrich's recommendation, but the way they were holding their hands to their ears, listening in deeply to their earpieces, showed obvious signs that they were listening into comms from the firing line about Aldrich.

In the faces Aldrich could zoom into, he could see expressions of hope.

They were waiting.

Waiting for the savior of the men and women at the firing line and walls to descend upon them.

"Alert me at all times when Shrimp's energy signature moves," said Aldrich. He made a mental note that Shrimp was still underground and immobile, perhaps buried under too much rubble.

Seismic truly must have put in every single ounce of his strength into that last attack, maybe even more.

"My eye is always upon that one," said Volantis. "You need not worry."

"And when Shrimp moves," Aldrich turned to Seismic who stood on Crow's back. "That's when you and I move together. I would like to have you use your powers on the battle zone down here, but you need to be ready at all times to assist me with Shrimp.

I can't deal with strong physical burst DPS like that, at least not for long. And your shockwaves and stats are the best way to put distance between myself and Shrimp when the time arises."

Seismic just nodded, registering Aldrich's commands.

"Now then," said Aldrich as he focused his sight on Merman and his phalanx of hundreds of mermen creating a massive dome of interlocked water construct shields. "It's time for a show."

With that, Aldrich walked off of Crow, free falling down towards Merman.

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#### *Chapter 127: Bring Down The Thunder 2*

A few dozen meters above Merman and his entourage, he stopped, stretching out his draconic wings and anchoring himself in the air.

In response, Merman's four glowing red eyes widened. His many sharp teeth bared from large gums as he snarled and pointed up at Aldrich, and in immediate response, the many mermen dedicated to throwing out projectiles shot at Aldrich, unleashing a huge volley of water spikes and blades.

Aldrich tanked the initial volley, his [Death Essence] barrier causing the projectiles to ping and pong off of it.

Up close, Aldrich noted that the water constructs were actually crystalline in structure, having been completely solidified.

Every projectile flew at speeds rivaling subsonic velocity, and it was no wonder that an entire army of mermen throwing these out could easily overwhelm masses of E and D rank heroes so quickly, even with their barriers.

In response, Aldrich clasped his hands together, generating a ghostly orb of green energy between his palms. He then thrust his hands forth, shooting a [Death Bolt] right down at the water shield phalanx.

The death bolt surged forwards, breaking apart any crystallized water projectile in its way, the helical pattern of bright green reaching sonic speeds as it crashed into a group of fishmen.

"Very impressive," remarked Aldrich.

The [Death Bolt] actually did not manage to pierce through the water shield phalanx. It had created large cracks in several shields, but the overlapping layers of shield constructs acted like thick scales that distributed the damage of the [Death Bolt] well over a large surface area.

On top of that, the shields very quickly regenerated, the cracks smoothing over.

To crack this mass of shields, this shell, one needed a single powerful attack to smash through it entirely.

"Thanks for giving us cover!" The voice of the leader of the flying heroes crackled in Aldrich's ear. "I'll use this chance to order my men to make a retreat! We'll be out of your way in a minute, maybe even less!"

"No," said Aldrich firmly. "Stay behind your cover."

"What!? Why!?" came the confused reply. "You're up there taking all those hits - we can't waste any more time, and that barrier of yours, it can't hold forever!"

"Why, you ask?" Aldrich paused. He looked into the sky and pointed at it with a clawed black finger. "Because you'll miss the show."

Trust me, it isn't a good idea to get out of your cover now."

Storm clouds started to gather above where Aldrich was pointing. Not any ordinary storm cloud. Green, eerie, ghostly clouds that formed a football stadium sized mass.

Within the clouds, the bright glows of over a hundred jellyfish shone in intervals, sending a wave of visible energy through them. That energy looked like a pulse that rippled across the network of jellyfish, moving from its outer edges down towards the center.

At the center, the Anglerfish took in all that energy emitted from the hundred plus jellyfish into its bright white lure, concentrating and amplifying that mass amount of energy before cascading it outwards again for the jellyfish to take in once more.

Like this, with each passing pulse of energy that traveled through this web of jellyfish, the energy gathered within it grew stronger and stronger in an unending positive feedback loop.

Fueled by more and more energy, the storm clouds grew thicker and started to crackle and rumble, arcs of green energy starting to violently clap out of them. Very soon, the clouds concealed the jellyfish and Anglerfish entirely.

Rain started to pour down.

The air below grew heavy and filled with static. The hairs on all the Alters huddled behind rubble raised up, and they instinctively looked up, their eyes widening in fear as they recognized the storm.

But they remained still, as even though they looked up with fear, there was a tinge of curiosity in their eyes. A sense of dreadful anticipation.

It was like watching an enormous weapon of mass destruction gearing up to fire, knowing that when it did unleash its wrath, nothing beneath it had the tiniest shred of ever surviving. But there was some awe about the sheer destructiveness, the sheer power, behind that weapon that made it strangely alluring.

When Merman and the mermen looked up at those clouds in recognition, seeing their very own living storm turned against them, they felt mounting dread, their fins rising up in sheer instinctual terror as they saw their death gather and crackle right above them.

Merman thrust his hand towards the sky, and the mermen around him fired their projectiles, but none reached high enough to hit the actual clouds themselves.

Aldrich floated higher into the air, also moving out of the range of the projectiles.

"It's time," said Aldrich with anticipation. He felt the very same type of excitement he did whenever he used an extremely strong weapon for the first time in a game.

That feeling of knowing you were about to unleash pure carnage with the hard earned weapon or summon or spell you had grinded for - there was truly nothing quite like it.

Just how much damage was he going to do?

Just how many was he going to kill?

He was very, very eager to find out.

The energy pulses from the clouds started to ripple back and forth from the center in much more rapid waves, each ripple echoing out a threatening, deep bass rumble that

grew increasingly higher and higher pitched, signaling the buildup of power on a colossal scale.

Then -

Aldrich put down his hand.

The skies lit up completely bright green, almost white.

The brightness from the all that energy built up in a single point before being released down unleashed light at such a scale that for a moment, among the many flyers who held their injured bodies behind rubble, they thought that the night had turned into day for a split second.

A mass of lightning gathered into a branch so thick that it looked like one massive, unending pillar crashed down against mermen variants like the hand of god. When old superstitious texts spoke about punishment from the heavens raining down like lightning, THIS must have been what they meant.

The pillar smashed through the huge water phalanx like a sledgehammer driving through thin glass, completely engulfing the variants beneath in searing light.

The sound followed right after. It was the sound of lightning cracking, but at a scale dramatically higher than any naturally born lightning. The lightning did not merely clap, no, it roared. The roar of an unbound force of nature.

A green shockwave blasted outwards, completely disintegrating rubble all around the blast zone. As the shockwave gusted out, it rocked the giant chunks of rubble, some comprising of several stories of high rise buildings, that littered the battle site.

Relatively speaking, though, the area of destruction from the thunderbolt was rather localized. After all, lightning did not really spread out in any real explosive impact, it concentrated at a single point for the most part.

And for good reason. Aldrich wanted to preserve most of the sea anemone in the area to raise for his own.

When the light of the lightning died down, Aldrich nodded to himself in pure satisfaction. He gazed down upon a deep, smoking crater that shone bright white and red from sheer heat energy melting concrete and rock.

That said, Aldrich had not let his excitement for causing carnage to get a hold of his head. He had aimed the thunderbolt slightly ahead of the mermen, aiming to try and preserve Merman's corpse and the anemone behind him.

To that end, Aldrich was successful. All the weaker mermen were dead, completely disintegrated or broken down into splatters of scales and blood, but Merman's larger body parts remained in the form of the charred skeleton of his upper body.

But there was no mistake about it either: if Aldrich aimed down that thunderbolt directly at anyone, even if they were a proper A class hero, no, maybe even if they were in the S class, that was going to be a fatal blow.

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### *Chapter 128: Raising Merman*

Aldrich folded his wings back, and they absorbed into the metal of his armor. He free fell from high up, landing on shattered pavement with a heavy crash. The acrid smell of charred flesh filled his nose as he stared ahead at the corpse of Merman.

Aldrich walked over and looked down at Merman's burnt upper skeleton. There was not even a smidgeon of flesh left behind on it, and the bones themselves were so blackened he worried that a strong breeze might disintegrate them.

Thankfully, a Grave floated above this mangled corpse, shining in green visible only to him that let him know that there was enough corpse left to raise. This was cutting it quite close, though. Corpses generally became unreliable to raise when over half their bodies were destroyed.

Nevertheless, Aldrich would take the freebie. As he raised his hand towards Merman's corpse, a notification popped up in his vision.

It was an experience tally from all the units he had defeated tonight.

[21,000 miscellaneous units defeated]

[Low Level Unit EXP Buffer Applied]

[+42,000 EXP]

[x1 'Shark' defeated]

[+4000 EXP]

[x1 'Merman' defeated]

[+4000 EXP]

[Total EXP Gain: +50,000]

[EXP Bar: 50,000/50,000]

[Level up!]

[Level 41 ] 42]

[EXP Bar: 0/55,000]

[5 stat points available to distribute]

Aldrich nodded to himself. The fact that he received so little experience from defeating fishmen, a measly 2 for each one, was well within his expectations at this point. In the game, after a player hit thresholds of level 40 and 80, they faced a 'Low Level EXP Buffer]' that prevented them from gaining much experience at all from sufficiently low leveled units.

This was presumably to prevent a sufficiently dedicated and perhaps somewhat insane player from farming trash mobs over and over and over again to level themselves, and at a certain point, if one killed too much of the same mob, the EXP gains also underwent diminishing returns that could potentially reach down all the way to 0.

Aldrich knew this well. Because he had precisely been the type of dedicated and insane player to kill basic slimes and goblins over a hundred thousand times to see how much he could level.

Overall, though, if Aldrich killed all the variants here, even if they counted as low level mobs now, there were so many of them that he figured he could squeeze out one more level from them. The remaining level, then, would come from Shrimp.

Aldrich immediately distributed his stat points into Attunement.

[+5 Attunement, increased to +10 with stat affinity bonuses]

[Attunement: 211 ] 221]

[Inner Circle Limit: 47 ] 49]

[Outer Circle Limit: 235 ] 245]

Aldrich noted that his EXP bar's number value continued to rapidly tick up, though in extremely low increments, indicating that his army was slaughtering fishmen that provided little to no EXP. After about 30,000 fishmen kills, they would start giving out 1 EXP, and then at 50,000 kills, little to nothing.



It did not seem to matter that the fishmen had many different subspecies among them. They all fell under the same 'branch' of monster type, so the penalty applied equally among them all.

Aldrich filed away all these observations and focused back to Merman's corpse.

"Not much of you left, is there? Well, I'll change that soon. Serve." said Aldrich. Strands of green emerged from around his black metaled hand, wisping outwards and flowing into Merman's corpse.

Merman's charred skeleton levitated in the air, and Aldrich willed his [Mist of Undeath] out. The ghostly green mist traveled towards the skeleton and as it clouded the horribly damaged corpse, it reversed all the damage the corpse had suffered.

Charred flesh broke off to reveal new, pink flesh. Muscle built up. Bones regrew and fused back together.

The skeletal and muscular systems of Merman built up, making him look like an anatomy chart of exposed flesh before his slimy green scales covered his many arms and serpentine, slithering tail.

His eyes flashed red once more, and the blue crystalline organ at his chest glowed with life again.

Aldrich felt a faint blur hit the edges of his vision. His mana had dipped below 20%. He would have to go out and consume graves to restore it. This was why Legion Necromancers were so fierce in a battlefield.

When Graves became disposable resources that popped up everywhere, they not only became a source for minions, but also endless free health and mana.

"Gorok-gara-khos (I serve you, Ocean King)" Merman flared his gills open, exposing the frilly veins within them. A gesture of deep respect and loyalty.

"Interesting. Your kind has a language?" said Aldrich. He knew that smarter or more social variants could gather in tribes and packs, but an actual functioning language? That was something near completely unheard of.

But if ever there were variants out there that could defy common convention and research, then it was with deep sea variants who could evolve far out of sight and study of mankind.

Merman was about to respond when several heroes stumbled out of their cover and inched towards Aldrich with wonder in their eyes.

In response, Merman grew aggressive, his bright blue, crystalline spines flared out from his back, arms, head, and tail. He bared his sharp fangs as his arms channeled orbs of blue water.

"Stop," said Aldrich with commanding voice. "They are my allies."

"Gorok-Shel (I apologize)" replied Merman. His voice undulated in a strange, almost alien way, and his voice was distorted, making it almost impossible to actually parse out what he said. To the ordinary ear, whatever Merman said would have sounded like unintelligible snarls and grunts, and that was what they had sounded like to Aldrich beforehand too.

Aldrich could only clearly make out what Merman said now because of his master-summoner link with the variant. It was highly probable that whatever tongue Merman spoke was difficult to fully articulate on land as well.

"I heard on the comms that you could control variants, but I thought they were just sh\*tting me. It's real. And it's not just that. You can...you can raise the dead?" said a hero as he stepped ahead of the others as their representative.

"I recognize that voice. You must be the one I was talking to over my earpiece," said Aldrich. He recognized the man because of his distinctive appearance. He was a mutant type Alter with moth traits, antennae sticking out of his forehead with carapaced skin that bore cracks practically everywhere. Four large grey moth wings lay folded on his back. "Mothman, is it?"

"You know me?" said Mothman, surprised.

"Of course. I kept tabs on every D ranker in line to be promoted to C rank in Haven," said Aldrich.

"...Can I ask why?" said Mothman.

"Because I hoped that one day, when I decided it would be time to stand out of the shadows, I would be able to work with all of you," said Aldrich as he extended out a hand, and Mothman shook it cordially, if with considerable amounts of awe.

Mothman looked up at Aldrich's menacing armored form with awe, then at Merman, then back at Aldrich.

Every single one of the other heroes did the same, staring at Aldrich and Merman with wide eyes and open mouths.

It was understandable. The man they had heard about, the man in strange armor who had brought an entire army with him, the man who had stepped down onto the

battlefield and turned the tides of a desperate and hopeless stand in one single moment, was right here.

And all the stories that the flyers heard about him over comms, it seemed, were true.

Not only that, but here this man was, raising forth the very monstrous variant that had made their lives a living hell of dodging and taking projectiles just minutes beforehand.

Mothman was the first to snap out of this awed trance, showcasing a level headedness to him that made it very clear why Seismic had trusted him to lead all the flyers on a job like this.

"I have to thank you for saving all of us," said Mothman. "With you, we would still be getting our asses handed to us, hiding behind rocks, just waiting for one of those water spikes to shove through our brains."

"Don't thank me yet. The fight's still going on. I've completely secured the airspace here with my living storm, so all of you are free to retreat back to the firing line. There, patch yourselves up and take a rest.

All of you deserve it," said Aldrich. "Now go."

After Aldrich said this, the heroes did not move for several seconds, probably still in shock and awe that someone had actually saved them, and that they had been saved with such an overwhelming display of might.

"You heard him!" said Mothman, snapping the heroes out of their trance. "Get to the air! Get back to the firing line! I'll contact trauma teams to be ready for our arrival. All of you who can fly, take the grounded ones with you!"

With that, Mothman and the flyers started to file out, giving Aldrich some privacy.

"Now then," said Aldrich to Merman... "It's time for you to show me what you can do."

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