

# **Super Necromancer System**

## **#Chapter 89: Learning Spells - Read Super Necromancer System Chapter 89: Learning Spells**

### **Chapter 89: Learning Spells**

Aldrich closed his eyes as he felt his body start to oscillate rapidly, his skin and muscles undulating grotesquely as if there were countless little things alive and crawling within. Then, countless patches of his skin ripped open, but from these holes, no blood pooled out.

Instead, dark metal streamed out in flowing, living strands.

Gleaming black metal streaked with an aura of crimson. The metal strands weaved and locked around each other and over Aldrich, soon enough encasing him in armor that exactly replicated what Volantis embodied.

This was armor fashioned from the flesh and bones of a Blood Dragon, and its organic origins showed in the spikes of dull white, almost gold colored bone that jutted from Aldrich's shoulder plates, forearms, and greaves.

Aldrich looked down at his hands. The gauntlet's fingers ended into curved claws meant for ripping and tearing, and indeed, the armor did not seem like something someone would wear, no, it felt like a creature of its own, a predator and hunter in its own right.

Bands and streaks of bloody red glowed throughout the armor, signifying the flesh and blood of the dragon imbued within.

The helmet that Aldrich wore - a three horned, spiked construct of black metal and gold bone and red blood with a single gleaming red dot at the eye line - fused into the armor itself with a metallic click.

Aldrich perceived the world around him in a faint shade of red at first before Volantis merged with him better, their minds and souls synchronizing and adapting. His vision adjusted to the color spectrum he was used to, and he felt the armor shift in size, adjusting its dimensions to perfectly fit Aldrich's body.

Instead of wearing a suit of dead metal armor, it felt more like Aldrich was fused with something already alive. Almost like operating a mechsuit with a highly functioning A.I., though even more personal.

'Your command, my lord?' rumbled Volantis's voice within Aldrich's head.

"How much of your own power can you use, Volantis?" said Aldrich.

'My independent strength is limited, for I am bound to you and still recovering from destruction,' said Volantis. 'While I am tethered to you, I am only capable of accessing necromancy that directly stitches the organs and flesh that I have amassed and imbued within this armor.'

General necromancy such as that involving the summoning of bone, I cannot wield.

Should you detach from me, I may use all my powers, but again, I will be weakened.

And, I will warn you, my lord, that calling upon my Shattered Bone necromancy will conflict with your own Legion Necromancy. As we share one spirit, one body, we cannot access both streams of death at once with our respective full strengths.

At the least, not until we have reached greater synchronicity over time.

As of now, I may grant you one Stitching at any given moment. Whether that be great muscular strength or wings with which to fly, it is yours to choose. But if you wish me to delve deeper into my Shattered Bone spells, stitching multiple parts at once with greater strength, it will require you to sacrifice your Legion magic."

"Tell me, can you still stitch the arm of the Blood God?" said Aldrich.

'Yes. But it will take all my might. After using it, I must go dormant, rendering me into naught but a mere shell of metal and bone,' said Volantis.

"I see," said Aldrich. He paused to gather his thoughts.

Volantis could use his Shattered Bone necromancy to grow exactly one part on Aldrich for now.

Granted, the base stats and durability that Volantis gave Aldrich was still enormous and likely more than enough to sustain Aldrich through basically any threat. Especially durability.

As an armor set, Volantis was probably the most durable that Aldrich could ever wield as a full mage, easily being on par with the defense offered by a full warrior's armor set.

Originally, Aldrich, as a pure mage type character, could not even wield proper full armor like this without suffering huge negatives, but because Volantis was a Living Armor and more a symbiote than an item, it seemed that Aldrich did not face equipment-based negatives.

Over time, Volantis would also grow stronger, recovering his strength and also becoming more and more synchronized with Aldrich. This also meant that as Aldrich leveled up, so could Volantis.

Theoretically, in a hypothetical 'end game', Aldrich could essentially have mastery over two entire necromancy Occultations - something that was never in the game because it would be game breakingly overpowered to have a caster that was also just as strong as a warrior in melee.

For now, though, Aldrich had to rely on himself to deal damage. He used the 40 Attunement Points he had received from dumping so many points into Attunement.

[Attuned Spell Limit: 7 ] 12]

[Inner Circle Units: 8/45]

[Inner Circle Units:

-Valera

-Volantis

-Chrysalis

-Geist

-Fler'Gan

-Dynamite Girl

-Antlion

-Bloodspitter Lizard]

[Outer Circle Unit Limit: 225]

As a Lich, Aldrich now had massively enhanced capacity to control undead.

Liches were forces of nature that, when angered, were basically like natural disasters.

When they attacked a city or village, they did not just wield a few dozen undead as mortal necromancers did, no, they fielded entire undead armies, submerging living settlements like a flood of death.

Thus, Aldrich's undead control system changed fundamentally to reflect this, splitting into two categories known as the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle.

The typical units-controlled limit that Aldrich fielded now changed to the Inner Circle. This encompassed undead that were strong enough to be above level 15.

Meanwhile, the Outer Circle consisted of units that ranged from 1 to 15.

The max amount of units Aldrich could field in his Outer Circle equaled his Inner Circle limit multiplied by five, allowing him to essentially raise an entire army.

The stronger Aldrich got, the higher he evolved as a Lich, the wider the level range of his Outer Circle.

On top of this, the Raise Undead spell and its Mass variation also changed from a typical spell to a mere Cantrip, giving it essentially zero cooldown when used on Outer Circle undead.

For corpses strong enough to enter the Inner Circle, however, Raise Undead still went on cooldown, and the health and mana consuming channel was the same for raising unit that was significantly stronger than Aldrich.

Aldrich withdrew from his inventory the [Tome of Skeletal Mastery] and the [Tome of Necrotic Carnage]. He used both, learning spells to pad up his spell count and replace those that were no longer needed.

Twin auras of bloody red and ashen white swirled around him, lighting the abandoned, ruined insides of the Red Circle in their eerie twin glows.

At the end of this process, Aldrich was left with the following twelve spells:

First, there were spells he kept.

Grave Consumption.

Raise Undead.

Create Greater Undead (1st Ring) - This spell was Aldrich's most useless as undead created from this could only go up to level 20. This was because he had not received the necessary [Tome of Dark Arts] to upgrade it, yet, once upgraded, would become much better. As a result, he kept the spell.

Negative Surge - A reliable spell to use in buffing an ally or Aldrich's own physical stats. Once he got the appropriate [Tome of Dark Arts], he would replace this with Death Surge.

And then there were his new spells:

Death Bolt - Aldrich's new spamable spell attack, directly replacing Chill Bolt as a vastly superior alternative.

Call of the Impaler - An area of effect spell that caused impaling stakes of bone to erupt all around Aldrich, allowing for him to generate distance or clear out enemies very easily.

Bone Wall - This allowed Aldrich to summon forth a wall of bone that could block attacks or, if raised beneath an enemy, impale them.

Bone Missile Array - This generated a circle of floating bones around Aldrich that could be shot forth according to his will like bullets. He could also supplement this with bones he found on the battlefield.

Rite of Bone Binding - By activating this spell, Aldrich could make all skeleton type units under his control in his nearby vicinity to greatly strengthen their durability and strength.

Burning Agony - Using this spell, Aldrich could cause zombie type undead under his control in his vicinity to start burning up, their blood boiling and their bodily processes maximizing, granting them heavily enhanced stats and a flaming hot ignited blood aura. Eventually, this would reduce the zombies down into skeletal undead.

Corpse Nova - A mighty spell that Aldrich could use on any zombie type undead or unit with flesh in his command, sacrificing them to turn them into a living bomb. In terms of sheer firepower, this was perhaps Aldrich's strongest attack in his arsenal so far.

Mist Phase - A spell known by all Liches. It allowed Aldrich to teleport a short distance away after a small channel of five seconds. The range extended greatly if he teleported to an undead under his command.

Aldrich's was now beginning to scrape back his original power and, as a result, his original battle strategies. As a Legion necromancer, he was used to fielding large amounts of undead, though now as a Lich, the scale of this increased tremendously.

Knowing this, Aldrich geared his spells towards being able to maximally abuse the hordes of disposable undead he could generate.

[Burning Agony] on raised zombies made even the weakest among them strong threats, and eventually, they would turn into skeletons.

At which point [Rite of Bone Binding] could turn them into durable defensive units or Aldrich could scatter them and use them to fuel his bone-based spells.

Against targets Aldrich really needed to take down, he could use [Corpse Nova] on any of his many disposable zombies, dealing massive and unexpected damage.

On top of all this, Aldrich could now thoroughly defend himself with his own defensive spells and Volantis, no longer needing to solely rely on his undead. He could afford to take hits and fight on his own now.

And yet, at the same time, Aldrich asked himself the same question he had asked himself the first time he embarked on this journey as a necromancer: what was a necromancer without his undead?

Aldrich looked around at the variant and Red Circle staff corpses lying scattered about. He smiled underneath his helm of darkness and blood.

"Serve," said Aldrich as he raised his hands up, casting [Mass Raise Undead]... All the dozens of corpses in the dance floor twitched and shuddered as they rose up as zombies, becoming the first of Aldrich's ever growing Outer Circle army.

## **Chapter 90: Exterminating Pests**

Aldrich walked outside of the Red Circle, and surprisingly, despite the heavy appearance of his armor, he did not make much noise at all.

As he approached the blown apart neosteel door leading into and out of the club, he could hear raging, whistling winds outside along with the roar of heavy rain and the occasional crackle of lightning.

Aldrich's newly raised undead comprising of the swordfish variant, a few dead aquatic variants, and much of the Red Circle's staff, followed around him, forming into an entourage of zombies.

Outside, Aldrich saw a truly apocalyptic scene unfolding before him. The clouds above had formed a thick veil of dark storm clouds, and from them, rain and gale force winds raged downwards. There was enough rain that it had flooded the roads, overloading the city's drainage systems.

The water reached to Aldrich's knees, and considering how tall he now was, that was more than enough for cars, phones, papers, and countless miscellaneous city objects to float about.

Everything was dark, nearly pitch black.

Haven City's usual collection of brightly lit billboards, holo-, and building lights had sputtered out as if under a blackout, with only the occasional emergency generator powered streetlight illuminating much of anything.

The air felt heavy. And not simply because of humidity.

There was a weight to it that was unnaturally dense, and any human that needed to breathe would likely find themselves short of breath within half an hour of being here.

It was probable that this air also affected technology, disrupting it greatly.

It was to the point where there were few, if any news drones or hovercraft in the sky. And even if there were, they would not have survived.

Several large flying manta rays hovered above the city, the skin on their white bellies rotund and stretched out. When they opened their gaping maws, sea variants poured out, landing down below as ground troops.

On top of this, there were floating sea serpents and flying fish variants that hovered in the air, raining down spines. The constant rattle of gunfire and explosions rumbled in the distance, and bullets and shells in the form of bright streaks of light shot up, gunning down variants.

Humanoid battle drones sent by the Panopticon zipped through the air, engaging in a losing battle as they got swarmed by sheer numbers.

Countless sirens blared out a piercing wail that echoed through the whole city, ordering emergency evacuation or retreat into designated Panopticon Bunkers.

This was an absolute warzone.

An attack of this scale was a horrific disaster, perhaps one of the worst known in a decade. At the very least, the worst attack made on Haven in fifty years.

Something like this warranted a S-rank hero's response, or at the very least, several dozen A rankers. But the fact that this disaster continued meant that either the heroes were late, already dead, or not coming.

Either way, Haven was left to fend for itself.

Especially the poorer Southside district where the Red Circle and Dud ghettos were.

When Aldrich tried using his [Death Sense] passive, its range greatly enhanced by his Lich status, to see if there were freshly dead or near dead mortals around him, he registered that everyone in the nearest street blocks were all dead.

Most of the corpses were those that had been torn apart in their apartments or hiding spots by variants, and they had died merely half an hour ago. Most likely, variants had swarmed in from the eastern coast and now funneled down south, towards the Projects where the Duds were defenseless in their ghettos.

At best, the Projects had just one functional Panopticon bunker, and maybe two hundred people could be crammed in there.

Overall, though, there were over five thousand Duds living in the Projects - all of them soon to be casualties.

Aldrich sensed stares zoned in on him. There were variants everywhere, crawling on building walls, perched on roofs, on the streets, anywhere they could find purchase, they did. All of them stared at Aldrich with inhuman fish-like eyes that gleamed yellow or red.

Most of the variants, Aldrich noted, were bipedal fishmen type monstrosities with four arms, hunched backs, and scales of varying colors, some red, some blue, some white, it did not matter - all of them were weak.

The quadrupedal types that Aldrich had seen in the Red Circle were larger and seemed to be mounts or attack dogs for these fishmen.

Each fishman was a head taller than the average human, even with their hunched backs, and their imposing frames meant that they could easily rip the normal human limb from limb with no effort.

Several fishmen, those nearest to Aldrich on the streets, hissed as they sprinted at him, utterly unfazed by his imposing appearance.

"So inconceivably stupid," said Aldrich. "Can you not sense my power, even now? Well, I suppose that's a good thing, in a way."

Aldrich punched one fishman in the head and literally blew its head off like he had fired a shotgun point blank at it. Then, using the decapitated corpse as a club, he violently brutalized all other fishmen that neared him until his convenient club was reduced to a mangled mess of flesh strips attached to a cracked and twisted spine.

Several fishmen on the roofs, green scaled in color, shot spines from spiked protrusions on their fins. All of them clattered off of Aldrich's armor with as much effect as the rain.

"Pests," muttered Aldrich as he pointed at a group of green fishmen on a roof and fired a [Death Bolt]. The helical blast shot forth like a cannonball, completely blowing up the fishmen group in a mess of strewn apart, mangled limbs.

With that, the remaining fishmen, those that were some distance away from Aldrich, spared of his immediate slaughtering power, saw their kin massacred with ease and shrieked before running away. It was almost miraculous how quickly the fishmen just disappeared, slinking off into alleyways or climbing over buildings to fade away.

It reminded Aldrich of how vermin, rats and cockroaches, scattered under light.



"I don't have time to deal with the low-level grunts," said Aldrich. He looked at the corpses he had made and chanted, "Serve."

They arose, joining Aldrich's Outer Circle army.

"All of you, go down south. Clear out any variants. Protect the Projects," said Aldrich. "And before you'll go, you will need help."

Aldrich reached into the temporary storage that the Death Lord had fashioned to hold Aldrich's summons. He held out an open palm, and within, a bright green sigil formed in the air. In here, all his summons were stored, and by breaking the sigil, he could release whom he wanted to put under his control.

He saw the list of undead he had marked to raise. From there, he filled out his Inner Circle.

A Zombie Giant.

A Deathwheel.

15 members of Blackwater's A class.

The Crimson Knight Captain.

And 15 of the Death Knights under the captain's command.

That marked out Aldrich's Inner Circle to 41/45 capacity, with him leaving 4 spots for strong undead to raise on this battlefield.

Aldrich then closed his clawed gauntleted hand, shattering the green sigil.

An omnidirectional wave of green energy surged out from him, and as it did so, it materialized out of misty matter his promised undead.

A red armored vampire knight knelt in front of Aldrich, as did fifteen black armored, black caped death knights behind him. Some distance away, the large wheel-like form of the Deathwheel's many stitched together bones and corpses as well as the enormous dozen meter tall zombie giant loomed.

"The 80th Immortalis Legion is at your command, my lord," said the crimson armored captain.

"The 80th Legion, is it? What happened to the rest of you?" said Aldrich. In the game's lore, the Death Lord fielded 100 Immortalis Legions. The lower the number of the legion, the fewer knights there were in exchange for having higher leveled individual knights.

As for the 80th legion, Aldrich estimated there should have been almost a thousand knights within it. A rather disposable fighting force of level 20-30 knights when encountered during the late game.

"This is all that remains of us," said the captain solemnly. "But we are still always ready to serve."

"That's all that matters in the end," said Aldrich. "And you won't be the 80th legion any longer. You are the first knights under my service, and so, accordingly, you will be my first."

"First...?" The crimson knight stared up at Aldrich with his vampiric red eyes wide in shock. He then quickly bowed his head. "Yes, of course. We will take this great honor to our undying hearts. You will not regret granting us such a revered position."

"I have no doubts you will live up to my expectations," said Aldrich. "Captain, or rather, what is your name?"

"Chiros, my lord. Of bloodline Adal."

"Bloodline? Vampiric nobility, then? There is someone under me that I would have you meet after this battle is over," said Aldrich. "But for now, captain, if you were raised as nobility, then you were taught how to fight and how to lead. No doubt there was a reason why you were a captain within a legion."

Your job here is simple. You will go south and slaughter all fish type monsters with extreme prejudice."

"Your will is mine, my lord," said Chiros with a bow, his white cape fluttering behind him with the raging winds.

"As for who you will protect and how to navigate these streets, I will have these men and women guide you." Aldrich turned now to the 15 members of Blackwater's resurrected A class. "All of you, follow under Chiros. Guide him towards the Dud Projects.

Save all those you can but focus mostly on killing the enemy.

Secure the Projects and the Panopticon Bunker there.

You can finally fulfill your debt to society, to all those you spat on and looked down upon."

"Understood," said Alexis, the storm barrier generator. She seemed to be the de facto leader of this group now that Seth Solar was not here.

"All of you except...you," said Aldrich. His gaze settled on Zayn, or rather, the monstrous giant black crow that he had turned into.

## **Chapter 91: New Mount**

Aldrich reached out his metallic black hand towards Zayn, his palm open wide.

Zayn managed out only a rumbling growl, his vocal chords now too mutated to speak anything resembling a human language, as he hopped forwards on his huge talons, bending his head down.

When Aldrich made contact with Zayn's steely, feathered head, he tried to sense for any of Zayn's memories and thoughts within. After all, Aldrich had risen Zayn with his soul intact, so there should still be the man's thoughts and will within.

Nothing. Or at the very least, there was nothing that could remotely be considered human. It was odd. Aldrich had never heard of a case where a mutant category Alter could completely shift themselves into a variant. Even mutants whose physical appearances were permanently altered were still human at heart.

But this was different.

Functionally speaking, the individual, the human known as Zayn, was utterly gone, leaving behind only a monster. There was a soul yes, but everything that made up the individual, the memories, the emotions, the feelings, all of that was wiped away.

This might as well have been a completely new existence.

"It feels odd to address you by a name you don't even recognize. Not to mention you are not even human any longer. At the same time, I don't consider myself the most creative type, so, how about I rename you as 'Crow'?" said Aldrich.

The giant avian beast growled in assent, and that was that. Crow it was.

In terms of raw size, Crow was comparable to a fighter jet or small aircraft. Easily more than large enough to fully seat Aldrich. He leaped atop Crow's back, and Crow stood up tall, his wings outstretched.

Aldrich looked down at his knights and Blackwater's A class. "Go. Wipe the variants out."

"As you command," said Chiro. He stood to attention, his white cape fluttering as he unsheathed a red tinted saber from his hip. "Knights, dedicate your blades to our new lord!"

The death knights stood at attention just like Chiro, unsheathing their weapons and holding them in the air in a salute as Crow flapped his great wings once, sending Aldrich hovering in the air. Aldrich nodded down at them before looking into the distance, towards the top of the abandoned mega complex where Valera and the rest of the undead were holed up.

Aldrich mentally commanded Crow to move, and Crow growled before flapping his wings, sending a squall of wind raging down below, forcing rainfall and water to part from sheer air pressure alone. Crow shot forth like a shooting star of midnight black, soaring into the air with extreme acceleration that very quickly made all those on street level tiny like dots.

In the air, Aldrich faced immediate attention from various flying aquatic variants. Sea serpent and flying fish types, mostly. There were a few large sea horse type variants with fishmen riding upon them. They all aimed their natural weapons at Aldrich.

The serpents fired streams of venom or bolts of energy from their mouths. The flying fish shot spines from their fins. The sea horses generated pressurized cutting streams of water.

All the projectiles hit Crow's armored feather exterior and dealt no damage at all. Crow's response was brutal and quick. He swiped his wing towards them, and a hail storm of giant black feathers, each large enough to impale through a man wholesale, shot out like a giant shotgun spray, reducing all the variants into chunks of severed meat.

"Had you always been in this form, you would definitely have been the strongest in the A class. Barring anomalies like Seth Solar, of course," said Aldrich. "Or Mel Morales. Hm, I wonder whether she's protecting this city or whether she's fled. In either case, I suppose it really doesn't matter to what I do."

With that, Aldrich willed Crow to make his way towards the mega complex. While en route, Aldrich tapped his metallic forehead with his index finger, establishing a mental link with Valera.

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Valera stood with her hands clasped behind her back on the balcony of the mega complex's highest floor. Beside her, Casimir also stood, matching her downward gaze below where they oversaw their forces fighting against an unending wave of monsters known as 'variants'.

It was primarily the Geist and the undead fighting. A purple haze hung low over the courtyard and parking lot leading into the mega complex, and within it, fishmen dropped like flies, completely overdosed on the Geist's neurotoxic gas.

Fishmen with green scales were immune to the poison, however, and these, the undead faced off against. The grizzly, striker, troll chieftain, crabs, and all other monster type variants fought savagely against the fishmen. Individually, the fishmen were no weaklings either, and Valera estimated their combat capacity to be roughly equivalent to a level 10 or so warrior.

Each fishman was weaker than any given undead, but there were far more of them, and their numbers only increased over time. Thankfully, so far, it seemed that these fishmen were an advance force, not backed by much stronger creatures nor any significant air support.

They were weak enough to the point where the heavier hitting undead consisting of Fler'Gan, the Geist, and Dynamite Girl could easily dispatch them. Inside the complex itself, Casimir's Red Circle staff were armed and ready to deal with intruders if they made it past the neurotoxic gas field littered with hostile undead.

"It has been two and a half hours since Mr. Vane's expedition," said Casimir. "I place my faith in him, but at the end of the day, I am still but a man, and it is in man's nature to worry."

"I would wring your neck for you even suggesting incompetence of his part, but I also understand it is, as you say, also natural for weak creatures like yourself to worry," said Valera. "But have faith and hold this position. When he returns, all will be made right."

"I have never considered myself a man of faith," said Casimir. "But perhaps there is a first time for everything."

He turned to the insides of the apartment where Spybird, a short, stocky man wearing goggles that Valera had first mistakenly identified as a dwarf, and Fisk worked together, hooking up an emergency generator and signal generator to their array of laptop screens.

"Have we established Net connection?" said Casimir.

"Is difficult," said Spybird, his accent thickly Russian. He thumbed his nose with a cracked, dirty nail. "Whole city under interference. I sense it comes from above. In the sky. To establish connection, I would have to fly away from city or go very high. But far too dangerous, even if I get support from Hirondelle."

"Hm. At the very least, we HAVE backed up all the blackmail, yes?" said Casimir.

"Oh that? Of course." Spybird nodded. "But what good is blackmail when we all die, ya?"

"We ain't gonna die, little man," said Fisk.

"Even third-rate Nomad techno call me little, eh?" Spybird shook his head. "World is going to sh\*t."

"Third rate? I'll have you know; I actually went to a techno school. I just kinda got bored and dropped out," said Fisk.

Spybird just grunted and continued working. "Before communications went down, AA said this attack was A rank disaster. But don't see A rank heroes out there. Lazy sons of whores."

"It has been precisely one hour since this attack," said Casimir as he looked down at his gem studded luxury watch. "And I was made aware that there were two A rankers stationed in Haven. That they have not taken this under control by now indicates that they are either dead or require reinforcements."

Blanca, my dear, you DO have my updated will, yes?"

Blanca stood at attention with sleek laptop under her arm. "Signed and saved."

"Thank you, my dear," said Casimir.

"Why do you worry? You used that power of yours," said Valera. "It said you would not face harm this night."

"Minimal harm," corrected Casimir. "And that is the issue with my power. It has many gaps. What if I endure a small but thoroughly poisoned cut? I would die in days, and yet, it would still technically be true that I suffered but minimal harm in the timeframe my power encompasses."

Also, I am not worrying. I am simply securing the future of my assets."

As Casimir finished his sentence, Valera thrust out her arm in front of him. She manifested her cross shield, blocking several flying fish spines.

"Airborne monsters," growled Valera. She saw two flying fishes in the distance and shoved Casimir back. She then cocked her arm back, then threw her shield out using the [Shield Toss] skill. The cross shaped shield spun rapidly through the air like an oversized shuriken before smashing into one fish, then the other, before returning to Valera's arm.

The two struck fish fell to the ground, their bones shattered thoroughly.

"Marvelous!" Casimir clapped his hands in wonder. "So this is your power? Manifesting and manipulating the trajectory of this shield?"

"One power," said Valera, but she did not elaborate further.

Her mind was on her master.

## **Chapter 92: Return Of The Lich**

Valera had sent many distress signals to him for in the realm of death, it was impossible to truly establish a connection with him.

The only thing she could do, even as a Chosen Undead close to him, was send out mental messages that he may or may not even receive. She did not worry about his safety, though.

She did not believe her master would fall, no, she never once believed that.

But at the same time, she was not a fanatic either, believing her master could do no wrong. He could err and make mistakes or miscalculate. For example, he likely had no idea an attack like this was coming.

That was where she, as his Chosen, as his most trusted Guardian Knight, would stand up tall with her shield and her might and her wits to cover for him. She did not just spend her time like a distressed princess, wringing her hands together and sending distress calls to her master.

No, Valera had assumed direct command of all the undead. In the first half hour of attack by these monsters, she had stayed in the Red Circle to try and defend it, but the base was already damaged, its gates breached and its shields destroyed, and its confines were small and unsuited for a long term siege.

So, after half an hour, Valera had gotten everyone to move to this mega complex. This building formed a natural tower of defense and was also large enough that the Geist's potent poison cloud would not affect any of the vulnerable flesh and blood mortals under Casimir.

All the while, she had sent the Alloywing Eagle, Evil Eyes, and Grave Wards on scouting trips to determine what was going on. The Evil Eyes and Grave Wards, unfortunately, were not the best spies in a battlefield like this where explosions and projectiles flew everywhere. They were too slow to react to attacks and got caught in crossfires before disintegrating.

The combined efforts of all the scouts, however, had accrued valuable information.

The main brunt of this monster attack was not targeted here. It was focused directly at the center of the city, and there, defending fortified walls, the humans known as 'heroes' with their many strange war machines mounted a consolidated defense.



The strongest monsters were located there, though some were scattered apart, leading small hosts of troops under them to suppress other locations in the city.

One such stronger monster had come to the Red Circle, in fact.

A Lionfish type fishman with enough strength to require Valera, Dynamite Girl, Fler'Gan, and the Red Circle higher ups to reliably defeat, and even then, it was at the cost of much of Casimir's weaker staff baiting it into constant ambushes by sacrificing their lives.

That attack had breached the Red Circle's defenses even more than it already had suffered, prompting Valera to make the move to this more defensible building.

That creature was approximately level 30.

But even that was no match compared to what seemed to be the general of this force. A huge, humanoid sea beast covered in colorful, iridescent shell that massacred all that it encountered with powerful punches that seemed to hold no equal.

That creature, Valera estimated was strong, truly, truly strong. Perhaps level 50, perhaps even higher, and it only seemed to grow stronger and stronger.

Eventually, if the humans did not deal with that creature, the undead would have to. Yet, even Valera could not think of a reliable way to put down such a mighty foe.

Valera paused for a moment, freezing up as she felt a strange sensation of power well up within her. She instinctively looked to the direction of the Red Circle.

"What is that!?" said Casimir.

A large pillar of green light had formed where the Red Circle would approximately be, reaching into the sky and temporarily parting the thick throng of dark storm clouds.

Valera smiled widely, her vampiric fangs extending in pure excitement. "He has returned."

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Aldrich quickly dawned upon the mega complex, and from above, he saw that a strong defensive position had been set up courtesy of Valera. Undead fought at ground level with support from the Geist's neurotoxin. There was also ranged firepower from Fler'gan and Red Circle troops in higher floor windows and balconies where the human staff were safe from the neurotoxin.



It looked like a scene out of a zombie infection movie where hardy survivors would stake out in an abandoned building to fend against unending hordes of zombies. Though in this case, it was the zombies that were fighting for survival.

Aldrich was proud to see his undead work together like this, even without him. He was proud of Valera for managing this without him. He had full confidence now to trust Valera's decision making and his respect for her only grew.

But yet, proud as Aldrich was, he did not want his undead to suffer the threat of these pests any longer.

"Take care of all the vermin in the air," Aldrich said to Crow before He jumped off, taking a massive fall down into the middle of the courtyard. There, he landed his huge, armored, spiked and metaled bulk right on top of a giant crab variant that was angrily jabbing at his own mudcrabs.

The crab splattered under Aldrich's fall, its shell completely caving in as its white insides splashed everywhere. Seeing Aldrich, his two mudcrabs immediately waved their claws in the air in delight.

"Gehgeh!" The Geist clapped its hands in glee after caving in the skull of a nearby fishman.

The troll chieftain roared and pumped his cursed rock axe up and down, beating his chest at Aldrich's return. All the undead variants joined in on this roar, the alpha striker howling, the grizzly roaring, the Bloodspitter lizard hissing, and so and so forth until a medley of animalistic cries filled the night.

To any human observer, this would have been an utterly horrifying symphony to hear as all the creatures that joined in were predators that did not shy away from the flesh of men.

"About damn time!" Stella shouted as she punched into a fishman and set off an explosion in its stomach, blowing the variant apart at the middle. "And damn, look at you! Was there a gym in that dimension or something? Steroids, too? You're all bulked up!"

"I appreciate the welcome, but all of you should step back. Get back into the building," said Aldrich. "I'll deal with the vermin."

Aldrich's undead immediately obeyed, holing back up inside the mega complex, leaving Aldrich alone and surrounded by hostile fishmen and their variant mounts and companions.

The variants did not try to chase after Aldrich's undead. Instead, they warily stood around Aldrich, trying to glean a sense of his strength after his threatening entrance.

After a few seconds, they snarled and hissed, inching forwards, sensing no Ether energy from him. Aldrich had to admit that even though his lack of observable power was a benefit for the most part, it was annoying when small fry did not immediately run and had the delusional thought to even challenge him.

Aldrich punched into the ground, and a surge of ashen white energy billowed out from him. "[Call of the Impaler]."

With that chant, the ground rumbled, and the variants had just a moment to look down confusedly before huge bone spikes emerged everywhere, skewering through the fishmen and their mounts in towering stakes of barbed, serrated bone that displayed their flailing, impaled corpses proudly in the air.

Just like that, every single enemy in the courtyard had been killed. All those outside saw their brethren struggling, spitting and choking on their blood as their death throes only made the barbed bone stakes hook into their bodies deeper, and immediately turned away in fear.

Aldrich did not raise those he had killed. He let them stay on these stakes as a monument. As a warning to all other variants that would dare to trespass that this would be their fate.

Instead, Aldrich leaped into the air, above the stakes, and Crow came by, swooping down to pick Aldrich up with his talons. Several corpses of flying variants skewered by giant black feathers fell from the sky, crashing into the ground below.

"Good work," said Aldrich... "Now get me to the top floor."

### **Chapter 93: Connection**

Crow grumbled in understanding before sending Aldrich way up high to the top floor of the mega complex in just one flap of his great wings. There, on the balcony, in the pouring rain, Aldrich saw Valera with Casimir standing behind her giant shield.

Valera trembled with excitement at seeing Aldrich, wanting nothing more than to crawl all over him, but she composed herself, standing tall and stiff with her shield out and her armor covering her form head to toe, maintaining her duty as Aldrich's sub-commander to the utmost of her abilities.

Aldrich hopped off of Crow and landed on the balcony with a heavy, crashing thud. He sent out a mental command to Volantis, and the helm of his armor parted in half before folding into the gorget with an almost organic fluidity.

"Master," said Valera. "It is good to see you back."

"And here I was ready to finalize my will," said Casimir with a bow.

"Good work, Casimir. All those men and women under you that you had to sacrifice today - you have my greatest gratitude," said Aldrich.

"Thank you, Mr. Vane, but your gratitude is misplaced. It deserves to those that have fought and fallen, not I who is merely protected," said Casimir.

"The devotion you have to your staff is admirable, Casimir, and I will see to it that tonight, no more of your people will die," said Aldrich.

He would have also liked to have fully raised the Red Circle staff, but one weakness that Aldrich possessed in raising undead was that to create a Risen Undead, that is, an undead with their souls intact, it required their souls to be present at the time of reanimation.

However, souls faded extremely quickly.

Approximately within one minute - the same length of time they lasted on screen in the game before fading away. In the game, one minute was a very, very long time for a drop to last, but in the real world, it was a vanishingly small sliver of time.

By the time Aldrich had returned to the Red Circle, Casimir's staff had been dead too long to raise with their souls intact.

Thus, they were just mindless zombies.

At the very least, when this all over, Aldrich would give Casimir the option to have the zombies laid to proper rest.

"And Valera, excellent work managing our forces," said Aldrich. "Under your guidance, losses have been minimal, even when I took so much time in the other realm. For that, you have my apologies."

"No, my master, there is no need to apologize," said Valera as she put her hand over her breastplate. "As your guardian knight, it is simply my duty to serve."

Aldrich saw Valera tremble again in barely contained excitement, and he nodded to her. "Come on, I've taken my helmet off, and we're safe for now. You can stop the formalities and holding back now."

Valera immediately dematerialized her armor, leaving her base unarmored outfit of curve-hugging black leather leggings and leather and white and red tunic. She rushed towards Aldrich and wrapped her arms around him in a deep, crushing hug.

"I missed you, my master, I did so very much!" said Valera.

"My lord, we are taking damage!" protested Volantis as his metal form groaned and creaked under Valera's hug.

"I-I forgot you gained levels with me," said Aldrich. "For once, I thought I'd be immune to damage from your hugs, but I guess not."

Valera pulled back and stared at Aldrich's armor. "Living armor...? Fashioned from that demon, Volantis was his name, no?"

"Right," said Aldrich. It made sense that Valera knew. She and Aldrich had defeated Volantis together twice already back in the game.

But it also seemed that the chronology of these events were all jumbled up. If everything was linear, then Volantis should have been level 80, not 40 as he was now. Valera should have been level 100.

And so on and so forth.

These were matters to think about another time, though.

"I see you have understood how wonderful it is to be in service of my master, good" said Valera as she crossed her arms and looked down at Volantis's armored form.

She gnashed her teeth together and put a hand to her mouth while muttering under her breath, "But to think that a piece of scrap like you has the chance to wrap yourself over my master's body like that, even before me..."

"I do not know the worth of this one that I am now bound to," said Volantis, his smooth yet threatening voice echoing out from the armor. "But I hold no protest binding myself to a fighter who has managed to best me not merely once, but thrice, for it is my firm belief that in pure and true battle, the worth of one's bones is laid in full display."

"And that isn't the only armor I found," said Aldrich. He took Valera's hand and placed his gauntleted hand over it. He willed items to be transferred over to her.

"M-master!?" said Valera, first reacting in surprise, then in understanding as she saw what Aldrich did.

Valera could not receive miscellaneous items from Aldrich, but she could hold equipment sets and weapons for her to wear in her inventory.

In this case, Aldrich transferred over to her the strongest armor and weapon set he had found in the Necropolis. Her basic armor set developed with her, but it was rather generic and just aided her defensive stats and abilities as a Shielder.

The armor set from the Necropolis, however, was one with far more flair and suited to giving her an impressive edge in pure offense when she flipped from Shielder to Berserker.

Aldrich stepped inside the apartment and looked up. There was a massive hole in the ceiling where rain and wind poured down. The living room was thoroughly trashed, the table and telescreen there shattered apart, not to mention the rain pouring in and drenching everything.

Fisk and Spybird gathered up electronics and shielded them from the rain under a small tarp.

"What happened here?" asked Aldrich.

"Some giant shark dude thing just jumped in from the ceiling!" said Fisk. "Damn near bit my head off!"

"It was a stronger beast, that one," said Valera as she came by Aldrich's side and looked up at the hole. "One of the commanding monsters, most likely, judging by its strength and stature."

"What happened to it?" said Aldrich.

"Well, by the time it intruded, the power you left the death realm with funneled into me through our Chosen bond, so I was more than strong enough to deal with it," said Valera. "I punched it out of the very same hole it made to come in."

I don't think my blow killed it, but I doubt it has any fight left in it, considering it has not returned."

"...I see," said Aldrich. He could imagine the rather comical scene of the shark variant crashing in, expecting a fight, only to get one punched several blocks away. "It's good to see that you're still more than capable of dealing with problems with, well, simple solutions too."

"There is no problem a good punch cannot solve," said Valera with a fanged smile.

"That said," said Aldrich. "You mentioned a commanding monster? Are the variants using military tactics now? When I look up at the sky and see this storm, the mantas carrying variants, and the flying variants raining down suppressive fire, it looks strangely organized."

"Da. Like a proper army," said Spybird. He reached into his trousers and withdrew a wide canteen. When he unscrewed the cap, the acrid smell of strong alcohol filled the room. He took a huge slug from the canteen and continued. "Not good army, no, simple in tactics, but still, tactics."

Ever heard of variants using tactic?"

"No," said Aldrich.

It was well known that variants, generally speaking, were basically just larger and scarier wild beasts.

They did not come remotely close to organizing into armies like this, let alone devising war strategies.

"Then you and me are just the same," said Spybird. He rubbed his wrinkled forehead with stubby, calloused fingers. His expression was stern and thoroughly tired. "But I think long tonight, and I remember. I was at the sinking of Neo-Moscow seven years ago. Giant worms attack the city, use hit and run tactics.

Start with small worms first, scout city defenses. They find weak points that way.

Then, they sink buildings with forcefields. Makes the city defenseless.

Then, they show up with the big worms.

Then heroes die, half of city sinks, everything horrible and bad."

Spybird took another swig of alcohol. "This reminds me of that. But you know what? If the situation is similar, then that means there is main commander. Big shot that controls everything.

In Neo-Moscow incident, when main worm deep underground died, all worms fled.

Maybe same here, I think."

"I see," said Aldrich. "So take out the head and the rest fall? Well, any candidates for this main unit?"

"Yes," said Valera immediately. "There is one. A shelled monster leading the vast majority of its brethren at the center of this human settlement. However, I must warn you, my master, that the creature is incredibly powerful.

If you faced it alone, even as you are now, you would fall."

"Good thing I'm not alone, am I?" said Aldrich.

Valera smiled. "I was just about to say that."

"But before I move out, I need to have more information," said Aldrich. He looked to Spybird and Fisk. "Have you two managed to get any news from outside?"

"No net connection," said Spybird.

"Yeah, this storm's got everything tech related real messed up," said Fisk.

"How long has it precisely been since the start of this attack?" said Aldrich.

"Almost two hours," said Casimir.

"Two hours...?" said Aldrich.

"Yes, Mr. Vane, and you must be thinking what I am thinking. Two hours without any resolution to this horrid incident? Where are the heroes? Where are the Panopticon's battle drones?" said Casimir.

"I saw Panop drones out there," said Aldrich. "But they looked like Class 5 drones, the disposable kind that the Panopticon has millions of. A city-wide attack like this should warrant a class 3 at the very least. I also saw heroes, but strong enough to be in the A class."

"Indeed," said Casimir. "Even considering the hypothetical scenario that the AA and the Panopticon are both uncharacteristically incompetent to their extremes, a response time lagging beyond one hour for an attack of this scale is absurd."

You may call me a pessimist, Mr. Vane, but I do believe Haven has been abandoned. The two A rankers stationed here have either fled or have fallen, either way, the end result is much the same: the city falls too."

"You're probably right," said Aldrich. "But I doubt it's because the AA or Panopticon wants to abandon the city. Either something's blocking them out, or something so big's come up elsewhere that it requires all their resources."

Regardless, I can't keep dealing with hypotheticals and questions. I need solid information." Aldrich turned to Spybird and Fisk. "I need you two to connect to the Net."

"But how?" said Fisk. "Nothing works, and believe me, we've tried basically everything."

"Then we brute force it," said Aldrich. "The storm is blocking you two out, is it? Then why not fly above the storm?" He waved his hand, and Crow's enormous black form hovered by the balcony like a living shadow.

"...Above?" said Fisk. "Aren't there like...tons of variants up there?"

"Do you doubt the master's ability to keep you safe?" said Valera sternly.

Fisk immediately shook his head. "No, no, it isn't that, it's just, like, I'm piss weak, you know. A stray fart from one of these things might kill me!"



"You're right. You are too weak," said Aldrich bluntly. He looked at Spybird. The short man was definitely cybernetically enhanced. At the very least, the segments on his skin showcased that he had some form of dermal plating layers that would make him far tougher than the average man. "Spybird, you're coming with me."

"Damn, you could have at least tried to tell me I wasn't weak...", complained Fisk.

"So what? You want to come along?" said Aldrich.

"I'll be here doing, uh, research!" said Fisk as he immediately began to fiddle with his laptop despite the fact he could not connect to anything.

"Me? Heh, just my luck. Run from one city ending disaster, find the next. Well, good thing there is vodka to make things better. But no use complaining. I will come," said Spybird.

"Take a moment to get ready," said Aldrich. "Arm yourself if you need, but make sure you prioritize getting a connection to the outside world."

"Get ready, eh?" Spybird nodded. He smiled before he glugged down the rest of his canteen down to the very last drop. He then crushed the metal canteen like a soda can in his bare hand before tossing it away. "Now, I am ready!"

"The alcohol won't slow you down?" said Aldrich.

"Slow me down?" Spybird furrowed his brows and made a heavily offended face. "No, it makes me warm. Makes me sharp. Keeps me alive."

"...Alright then," said Aldrich. He turned to Casimir for confirmation.

"It is true," said Casimir. "Spybird does function better with a deadly dose of alcohol flowing through his veins. He even claims he possesses a generator in his liver that converts the alcohol into power, but I am still unsure whether that is true or drunken rambling."

"Heh, and you will never know," said Spybird. He packed a bag with a laptop, a small rectangular signal generator, and various wires and cables.

While Spybird packed, Aldrich spoke to Valera. "Valera, optimally, I would want to take you with me. But everyone in this building is low leveled. You are the only strong warrior I can trust to defend this place."

"Understood, master," said Valera. She bowed her head. "But promise me, if ever you are out there and you feel as if your life is in danger, even the slightest bit, do not hesitate to call me. I would give my life and soul - everything - for you."



"You won't have to worry about me staying alive," said Aldrich. "I'll be careful. And I do have to give you an answer, no? Can't do that if I'm dead."

Valera's pale faced turned bright red as she stammered out, "Y-yes, that is true. I'd...almost forgotten about that with how busy this night has been."

"All set!" said Spybird as he went out to the balcony and hopped atop Crow's back.

Aldrich nodded to everyone before he also got on Crow, aiming now towards the stormy, variant filled skies.

## **Chapter 94: Sky Fight**

Crow pushed off the balcony and hovered in the air, allowing Aldrich to inspect the sky. The wind raged around him in angry howls, carrying a torrential downpour of rain that nearly even managed to drown out the sound of high caliber gunfire and artillery shells exploding in the distance.

The roar of occasional lightning pierced through all this noise, cracking down in heavenly judgement against buildings, especially those near the city center.

"That's no natural lightning. The kind that strikes down at random," noted Aldrich. "It's being used with purpose, almost like their form of artillery. I'll need a closer to look to figure out what's really going on, though."

'Stitching [Farseer Eyes],' stated Volantis, and a single blue, crystalline shaped eye formed on Aldrich's helmet forehead. Through this, Aldrich could see far into the distance and identify life forms that shone bright blue through the cover of the dark storm clouds.

That was when Aldrich came to understand how exactly this storm was being managed. There were large jellyfish type creatures positioned in a huge lattice like matrix across the storm, and each of them linked together to generate storm clouds and electrical charge.

These jellyfish were also responsible for casting an electrical interference net via these storm clouds.

Aldrich saw an artillery shell fly through the storm cloud, piercing several jellyfish and shredding apart their soft bodies.

In an instant, the jellyfish reformed.

The jellyfish were highly regenerative so long as all of them remained tethered to each other, feeding off of each other in a positive feedback loop that massively enhanced their natural abilities of electrical charge generation, manipulation, and healing.

This made them essentially invincible unless a large number of them were destroyed all at once.

Or unless they were killed with an ability that rendered their regeneration useless.

Like the rotting effect of the [Death Bolt] spell. Yet at the same time, there were so many of them. Casting [Death Bolt] on all of them one by one was about as effective as trying to scoop the ocean out with a bucket.

"Thank you, Volantis," said Aldrich.

'Our synchronization is not yet complete, but we are linked enough that I may sense your intent and aid it. I may also provide you with sensory awareness all around you, regardless of where your line of sight is faced.'

"I'll trust you to cover me, then. For now, I'm going up." Aldrich spoke to Spybird. "Brace yourself. I can slow down and try to make sure you don't fall off and die, but you'll need to put in effort too."

"Understood," said Spybird. He dug his fingers into Crow's back, and hydraulic clicks indicated that Spybird's fingers were locked in with a steady grip.

With that, Aldrich willed Crow up, and Crow loosed a piercing, rumbling war cry before flapping his wings down with immense force, instantly shooting him up like a dark comet. His acceleration was exceptional, and in terms of sheer speed, Crow could easily reach the realm of a fighter jet, though for now, Aldrich held back on the top speed to keep Spybird conscious against G-forces.

As Aldrich approached the air, aerial variants comprising of flying fish and floating sea serpents reacted, firing off spines and bolts of energy respectively.

Aldrich activated his [Death Essence Barrier]. This was a passive shield of energy unique to Liches that constantly formed around him.

It was essentially an upgraded version of the Necromancer's [Corpse Barrier], and in the lore, it was said that Necromancers formed the [Corpse Barrier] as a cheap imitation knockoff of the [Death Essence Barrier].

Where the [Corpse Barrier] rotted over time, was weak to fire, bludgeoning damage, and other undead weaknesses, the [Death Essence Barrier] was a shield of pure energy. A mana barrier formed from the essence of death, and in Elden World, mana barriers were highly resistant to elemental or energy type damage.

Dozens of energy bolts from sea serpents just fizzled out against Aldrich's shield while the spines were too weak to pierce through, pattering off like toothpicks.

Aldrich did not pay these flying weaklings much attention. He only wanted to get above the storm clouds for Spybird to establish a connection.

"Fly through them all," said Aldrich.

Crow growled as he folded his wings to his sides and thinned down to a streamlined, missile like form meant for pure speed. He shot through the flying variants like a living battering ram, completely shredding apart anything in his path by slamming into them with his steely feather covered body.

It was roadkill to the maximum extent, sending severed body parts and chunks of fish flesh raining down.

As Aldrich quickly neared the stormclouds, the jellyfish within reacted. A webwork of glowing blue energy became visible in the clouds, shifting around energy and centralizing it around the jellyfish cluster nearest to Aldrich before it exploded out into a lightning bolt.

Aldrich shifted near to Crow's head and thrust out his arm. His [Death Essence Barrier] shone green, and the lightning strike crashed against it with a thunderous roar. The lightning fizzled out as it hit the energy resistant barrier, dealing minimal damage.

"Brace for impact!" shouted Aldrich.

Spybird tightened his grip and hunkered down. Crow smashed through the clouds, completely shredding apart several jellyfish. The air turned immediately heavy, dark, and full of static as Crow flew past the storm clouds, focusing only on moving straight up.

A few arcs of electricity shot out at Aldrich, but again, he absorbed them with his barrier.

Within a few seconds, Crow had pushed through to the other side of the clouds. Here, above the clouds, Aldrich could now clearly see the vast amount of jellyfish needed to make this storm.

There must have been over a thousand of them all lined up neatly, feeding energy through each other in a complicated organic network of circuits.

The jellyfish glowed blue in color, but once Aldrich flew above them, hundreds of them below turned an angry alert red. That was when they began to fire lightning bolts en masse at Aldrich.

Up here, all alone, Aldrich had become a prime and lone target against which they could all focus their firepower against.

"Higher!" said Aldrich. Even if his barrier was energy resistant, he could not just stand there and tank the full force of a bioelectric storm.

Crow soared higher, spinning and swerving and ducking to dodge countless streaks of lightning. A few did hit Crow, but he was durable enough that they did not deal significant damage, not to mention that Crow possessed a potent healing factor of his own.

Eventually, Aldrich was high up enough that the jellyfish stopped targeting Aldrich. This was high enough in the atmosphere where even the cloud cover below looked tiny. There was no rain here, nor were there strong winds.

It was strangely calm, a clear contrast to the raging rumble of lightning in the artificial storm below.

"Can you breathe?" said Aldrich to Spybird.

"Have augmented lungs. Will be good," said Spybird. He immediately unzipped his pack and booted up his laptop, hooking it up to the sleek rectangular signal generator. A blinking red light at the end of the generator turned blue. "Connection established. Am diving now-,"

Spybird took a glove off his left hand, and his stubby fingers snapped back at their knuckles, revealing wires laden inside his digits. They snaked out like they had minds of their own, funneling into the laptop as Spybird merged his consciousness with the tech.

The cylindrical goggles on Spybird's eyes clicked and clacked and glowed blue.

"Connected?" said Aldrich.

"Da. But...", Spybird's face set like stone. "You will not like news."

"Just tell me one thing," said Aldrich. "Are reinforcements coming? Or will I be dealing with this disaster myself?"

"Neo-York, Neo-San Francisco, Neo-Miami: all under attack. Bigger attack. All S class and A class heroes routed to them. Panopticon drones also busy with them. Haven, well, is not even on news. Too little a city for news to care about. All there is on net is disaster about bigger cities.

Official AA and Panopticon stance is that Haven and many other tier 3 cities are lost. All valuable citizens have been evacuated, but many still left behind. Some smaller news corps covered Haven until storm cut them out.

Latest details I see from one hour ago. All the corporate suits in Haven Center long gone in their jets, but everyone else from other, poorer districts have moved into the center where walls are bigger, there are sentry guns, and strong forcefield.

They man those defenses now, but they are holed up. Soon, will die."

Spybird shook his head. "Poor bastards. All their lives, they probably fantasize about living in City Center with all the big buildings and rich corporate Suits. But now, city center will be their coffin. Ironical, no?"

"And the two A rank heroes stationed here?" said Aldrich. He understood now that establishing a Net connection to see who was coming to help, to see what data the Panopticon and AA had about the attack, to see how much the media had covered to gain information - all of that was impossible.

Haven was utterly and thoroughly abandoned. There was no news or information about it. It was doomed.

"Hat Trick and Seismic. Hat Trick has fled," said Spybird. "Seismic was last seen fighting an hour ago, but since then, nobody knows."

"I see," said Aldrich... "Then looks like this city truly is our responsibility and ours only."

## **Chapter 95: Corpse Nova**

"Is this city our responsibility, though?" said Spybird. "We can always run. Set up base elsewhere. The lives here, are they worth so much we lay down ours for them?"

"That calculus is always in my head. If this city is too hard to defend, then I have no qualms leaving it. But so far, I don't have enough information to make that judgement call, and, to be honest, I'm still itching for a fight," said Aldrich simply. "I still haven't tested the full extent of my powers."

He put a clawed metal hand to the pointed chin of his metal helm. "But how should I approach this battle, hm. Haven is still large enough where I don't have nearly enough forces to cover all of it.

That means I should target the main variant leading this on the ground, but if it gets constant air support from this storm, then it'll be next to impossible fighting it while worrying about an endless rain of lightning.

Which means I should break this storm formation, but at the same time, I don't want to go around individually Death Bolting every single jellyfish.

I don't have the mana nor the time for that."

"My analysis is complete," said Volantis suddenly.

"What?" said Aldrich.

"When you utilized the [Eye of Farsight], I analyzed what you observed. I have thoroughly seen the flow of energy from these creatures and determined that it follows a spiraling pattern leading to an anchoring force at the center of this storm.

Eliminate the center, then the entire formation breaks apart. "

"And you managed to figure that out with a single look?" said Aldrich.

"Among Demonkind, Living Armor were forged to be the ultimate battle companions to the highest of Battle Demons, often Battle Demon Princes, and their fondness for direct battle," said Volantis. "Thus, each and every one of us forged with the highest level of Truesight.

Granted, I have never found anyone worthy of donning me, and so my Truesight is rather lacking in practice, but it is more than enough to perceive this level of energy flow."

"So that's how it is," said Aldrich.

He knew from Elden World that Living Armor were, as Volantis said, supposed to be the demonic equipment of a specific type of demon called a Battle Demon.

Battle Demons were fanatical devotees to the Demon God of War Carnasus, and they had a special racial ability where if they fought head on with pure martial honor with no sneak attacks or ambushes or even much of a plan other than a desire to do battle, then they received damage buffs, immunity to psychic damage, strong regenerative capability, and damage reduction.

Consequently, this way of straightforward, smash everything on sight battle also made them highly susceptible to sneak attacks, ambushes, and traps.

Battle Demons thus absolutely hated being the subject of such tricks, believing them incredible insults to their very way of existence.

Thus, they forged demonic constructs called Living Armor that had something called Truesight which let them perceive hidden units.

Living Armor and Battle Demons therefore had a symbiotic relationships. Where battle demons were the aggressive muscle and brawn, living armor were calmer, made better decisions, and had higher observational ability.

In the lore, Truesight was said to be sight capable of reading the flow of all energies so well that nothing was ever hidden to it, though functionally it just revealed invisible units in the game.

Truesight was not limited to Living Armor, nor did Living Armor have the best Truesight out there, but there was no other class or monster that could have Truesight active permanently like Living Armor did.

Aldrich was conditioned to think of Truesight as just something that revealed invisible units and traps, so he was temporarily surprised to see that it had much more applications in the real world, allowing Volantis to read the flow of energy in living creatures exceptionally well, even those he should not have had any familiarity with.

"Well then, looks like I have a plan," said Aldrich. He looked back to Spybird. "You're no longer needed here. Staying here will just make you a hindrance to me. I'll have Crow take you back to the mega complex while I settle this storm."

"And you? How will you manage in the air?" said Spybird.

"[Stitching: Blood Dragon Wings]" said Volantis.

The back of Aldrich's black armor shuddered and shook before bursting into a pair of fully grown draconic wings. The wings were bony white with gleaming red flaps, clawed at their tips in the case they needed to be used for offense.

"Ah, I see, you can do that too. Why am I even surprised at this point? You know, I see your powers and I mostly keep quiet, but it does make wonder where they begin and end. How many do you have? How do you have so many?" said Spybird.

"A discussion for another time." Aldrich hopped off of Crow, floating in the air as Volantis operated his wings. "Now go."

"Woaaaaah!" Crow's six yellow eyes blinked before he shot away in a rush of wind, disappearing into a black blur as Spybird held on for dear life.

"Was it a wise decision to leave your mount?" said Volantis. "It seemed to me a formidable creature."

"Crow has no barrier to fend against lightning," said Aldrich. "And my barrier mostly covers myself. I cannot extend its protection reliably over him. He would eventually suffer too much damage if he tried a frontal assault with me."

Plus, I needed to get Spybird out. After all, I promised Casimir that no more of his men would fall."

"Understood," said Volantis.



"Lead me to the center of this energy swirl," said Aldrich.

"Directing..." said Volantis as he maneuvered Aldrich's wings.

Aldrich flew through the dark night, and as he neared back down to the storm, the single crimson circle in his helm gleaming as he scanned the clouds below. He was high up enough where he could perceive the jellyfish glowing through the dark clouds but not close enough where they saw him as a target. His vision zoomed in on the mass formation of glowing blue jellyfish as Volantis's voice reverberated through his mind.

"I have mapped a course through your vision," said Volantis.

Aldrich saw a glowing red trail circle through the jellyfish-storm formation and he flew through the air, maintaining his distance from the jellyfish swarm to try and get a visual identification of the centerpoint first before thinking about trying anything.

Soon enough, Aldrich saw the center: floating amidst a throng of shining blue jellyfish was a giant flying anglerfish.

Its flesh was a slimy, scaled black with an oversized, gaping, permanently open mouth filled with dagger-like teeth. Its beady eyes glowed a bright white, channeling crackling energy from the teardrop shaped lure jutting out from its head.

A mass amount of jellyfish were gathered around the anglerfish, their translucent blue tentacles all wrapped around it, merging with it to symbiotically feed off its energy. The hundreds of jellyfish formed a giant spherical cocoon of translucent blue flesh around the anglerfish, and together, they formed the heart of the storm, the engine that kept it going and rumbling.

The lure from the anglerfish shone bright blue, and from it, waves of visible blue energy permeated outwards, fueling the jellyfish. Each jellyfish acted like a conductor, taking in some of the energy, amplifying it, then spreading it out to its brethren, and like this, it created an enormous bio-generator of massive proportion to fuel a storm as strong as this.

"Hm," said Aldrich. "Approaching that will be difficult."

At the center of the storm, around the anglerfish, the jellyfish concentrated in the strongest numbers. If they all tried channeling lightning against Aldrich, the damage would be immediate, massive, and in such a large scale that dodging would be nigh impossible.

"The energy there is at its peak," said Volantis. "Any resistance you face here will be the mightiest this formation of creatures may muster."



"I know. There's easily enough there to overwhelm my Death Essence Barrier. I need to scatter them somehow," said Aldrich. "Without triggering their aggro, too, because the moment they perceive me, they will all be on alert."

"If I replace the current Blood Dragon Wing stitching, I may instead bestow you with a Plague Toad's Acid Bomb Spitter."

"No, I need these wings for maneuverability," said Aldrich. "And acid bombs from Plague Toads are relatively slow moving. They'll notice and shoot it down. Afterwards, they'll all be on alert."

I have an alternative solution."

Aldrich put a hand in front of him. "[Create Greater Undead: 1st Ring]

Green dots of energy materialized in front of Aldrich, filling into the purple robed, tattered hooded form of a Skeleton Assassin. Aldrich held the skeleton up in the air by its arm, and it dangled loosely while staring at Aldrich with its eye sockets for instruction.

"Your service to me will be short but worthy," said Aldrich. With his other hand, he put a finger on the skeleton's forehead, casting [Corpse Nova: Delayed].

A glowing red sigil appeared on the skeleton assassin's forehead.

[Corpse Nova] was a powerful sixth circle spell that was among the most devastating in terms of area of effect damage in a Necromancer's arsenal.

Easily strong enough to blow apart the throng of jellyfish surrounding the anglerfish below to disrupt the storm at its very heart.

[Corpse Nova] was also unique in that it could be [Delayed], allowing Aldrich to remotely cast the detonation at any given time, though there was a ten minute time limit before the [Corpse Nova] sigil faded away.

The biggest weakness of [Corpse Nova] was that because it was so strong, it could only be marked on a single target at once, with this limit increasing at higher levels up to a max of 3. There was also the issue that the red sigil was highly visible, though stealth effects did hide it.

"I'm going to throw you down there," said Aldrich as he nodded down towards the thick network of jellyfish wrapped around the giant anglerfish. "You will cast your [Shadow Walk] so that nothing detects you."

When you get close enough, I will detonate you."

The skeleton assassin chattered its teeth and gave Aldrich a cheerful thumbs up.

"Your sacrifice will be remembered, warrior of worthy bone," said Volantis.

Aldrich then aimed, made sure the trajectory of his throw was right, then flung the skeleton assassin down to the anglerfish. The skeleton assassin rolled up into a ball to prevent itself from getting buffeted by winds before turning invisible, entering into its [Shadow Walk].

Aldrich watched intently as the skeleton assassin fell rapidly down below. It sunk into the thick cover of storm clouds, then sunk deeper until it crashed into the giant ball of jellyfish clung around the anglerfish.

The moment its invisible body made contact, the jellyfish around it glowed an angry red, preparing for a threat.

But far too late at that point.

The skeleton assassin withdrew its serrated dirk from a sheath at its hip and stabbed it into a jellyfish to get one kill for itself before bowing its head, accepting its end.

## **Chapter 96: Ruler Of The Storm**

The red sigil on its head glowed brightly, emanating a threatening shine even through the storm clouds for just an instant. Then, a huge sphere of green light suddenly exploded outwards from it, hungrily expanding and completely devouring everything within it.

Anything caught in that light was immediately disintegrated, and that included a huge chunk of the giant apartment sized sphere of jellyfish, exposing the anglerfish held within.

Not a moment later, the shockwave of the blast then rocked outwards in a wave of condensed green energy.

An ear shattering rumble echoed through the air as jellyfish were scattered away when the shockwave crashed against them, their frail balloon like upper bodies eviscerating from the sheer force of the blast wave.

Remarkably, though, the jellyfish were tenacious even that even the ones closest to the blast wave still remained attached to each other and the anglerfish, their tendrils holding on with a strength and durability that far exceeded their physical limits even as their heads were blown away.

Most likely because their tendrils were the main receptacle to channel the energy, thus making them more durable.

The disintegrating light had not hit the anglerfish, but the shockwave had, and it grotesquely flattened the fish's body, breaking most of the bones in its body, likely instantly pulping its internal organs to kill it.

The shining white lure dangling from its head drooped low before sputtering out, and the moment it did, it was as if someone had just turned off the power switch in this giant biological generator.

A wave of darkness spread out from the center of the storm as every jellyfish lost its source of energy spontaneously.

Aldrich could immediately see that the jellyfish were shriveling up and dying when they were detached from their energy source. This indicated that they had relied entirely on the anglerfish to even survive outside of water.

"Not yet-," Aldrich immediately flew downwards, into the center of the storm as it began to crumble apart, the dark clouds fading away. He had to get down there before the jellyfish completely rotted away, before the cocoon formation around the anglerfish completely broke apart.

He flew straight into the anglerfish's broken body and dug his clawed gauntlet into the variant's head.

The crimson eye dot in Aldrich's helm glowed green as he held down the sizable variant's corpse.

"Serve," said Aldrich, and his voice resonated outwards, reaching all the jellyfish nearby that had died the moment their link to the anglerfish was severed.

[Inner Circle: 41/45 ] 42/45]

He casted [Mass Raise Undead] and raised not only the anglerfish, but as many of the jellyfish nearby as he could.

Because of how many jellyfish there were, this immediately maxed out his Outer Circle unit limit, but for very, very good cause.

A wave of green energy radiated outwards from Aldrich, and every jellyfish it hit, it infused with energy, stopping their decay and giving them new life in the form of undeath.

Most of these jellyfish comprised of just bare tendrils that managed to stay intact after [Corpse Nova's] shockwave, but Aldrich now had them regenerate.

He activated his [Mist of Undeath], a Lich racial ability that replaced the [Anti-Life Shell] which, like the [Corpse Barrier], was just a cheap imitation of the real thing.

A ghostly green fog spread out from Aldrich's form, covering his surroundings in a massive haze.

Within the mist, any non undead were afflicted with the 'Low Visibility' debuff that, though it did not blind them, made it so they could not see far ahead.

On top of this, the mist also had the same life draining effect as Anti-Life Shell though if one got close enough to the center of the mist, it would also afflict both crippling fear and a constant instant death check that scaled based on how low level and how low health a unit was.

But perhaps the most powerful function of the [Mist of Undeath] was its vastly enhanced undead healing factor. The mist retained [Anti-Life Shell's] passive healing of undead, and that passive healing increased the closer an undead was to the center of the mist.

However, Aldrich now had the ability to manually expend mana to massively accelerate the healing process for undead near him. The rate of healing was such that Aldrich could probably instantly restore an undead from a single limb back to their full bodies within seconds.

The main weaknesses of the [Mist of Undeath] was that the mana cost to heal scaled exponentially higher the stronger the healed unit was and Aldrich could not restore units that were reduced down to nothingness.

Using [Mist of Undeath], Aldrich rapidly regenerated all the jellyfish under him, but this process left his mana dangerously low. This would all be worth it, though, if things went according to Aldrich's head.

[Mana: 30/471] \*This total mana value is post equipment bonus from Volantis\*

"Now gather, all of you, gather as you did before. But this time, gather under me." Aldrich held up the giant anglerfish's body.

It dwarfed Aldrich, being easily the size of a small house, and in an instant, all the hundreds of jellyfish that Aldrich had reanimated floated towards the anglerfish.

The jellyfish extended their undead tendrils outwards hungrily, latching back onto the anglerfish, and as they did so, they connected back once more into their biological generator of living storm.

Aldrich flew upwards once the jellyfish finished tethering to the anglerfish, watching the scene of his making unfolding below.

The lure from the anglerfish, once glowing a bright white, now shone an eerie, misty green, and with that, a wave of green light spread out through every single jellyfish attached to the fish.

When the green light infused into a jellyfish, their once blue glow turned green as they amplified the light, passing it on to the next jellyfish in their web, and on and on again until -

The previously dark storm clouds now shone an eerie green, and instead of creating bright blue lightning, the crackling of incandescent teal bolts now raged within the cloud cover.

Aldrich raised his hands up, feeling the power of a living storm beneath him, obeying his each and every command.

He had successfully hijacked the storm.

Granted, the storm was much smaller than the original as Aldrich could only raise several hundred jellyfish where before the original storm comprised of thousands, but it was still enough to be a formidable threat.

The rest of the storm dissipated, fading away and returning some semblance of calm over Haven.

This would at the very least grant Haven's defenders a massive break from getting slammed by lightning bolts over and over again, not to mention being freed from the storm's tech disruption field.

It would also draw media attention again, and this was good.

Aldrich had enough power that he now calculated it was about time he could come out of hiding.

As after all, he could not hide in the shadows forever. But he could not just emerge with his odd powers randomly either, not until he was strong enough to hold his own, strong enough to make the major organizations of the AA and the Panopticon completely beholden to him.

And there was no better way to make these organizations and the government recognize Aldrich than in clearing a disaster like this, especially if the people of Haven recognized him as their savior.

In fact, the AA was officially forced to recognize him for clearing a disaster like this, putting them in an awkward spot where Aldrich would have all the leverage he needed in negotiating how independently he could operate, for he had no intention of folding himself into the existing hero framework.

Gone were the days of Aldrich putting his life on the line all for a sh\*tty hero's license to try and have even a tiny semblance of freedom to do what he wanted.

That was when he was weak, when that was all he could get.

Aldrich floated downwards, through his new personal storm, emerging out below in a shroud of wispy green cloud matter like an angel of death dawning to enforce judgement.

Beneath the clouds, he saw variants huddled under the storm for defensive cover.

They now stared up at Aldrich in complete wonder.

Flying fish. Sea serpents. All familiar foes.

But what was different here was that there were hundreds upon hundreds of them gathered here.

More importantly, the giant mantas used for troop transport also rested here where it was safest, where the storm could strike down any enemy.

This was the heart of this invading force.

The heart that gathered under the eye of the storm which, just moments before, had been the safest haven for them.

But now, this was no longer the very center of safety for them, no, this was the terrible eye of a natural disaster that would ruin them all.

"Begone," said Aldrich as he waved his hand across in dismissive manner, like a god enacting judgement, and indeed, with the force of a storm, of a natural disaster at his beckon and call, it truly did seem as if he was a deity raining down righteous fury.

The green storm above rumbled, and countless bolts of green lightning shot down in a rain of heavenly fire, each great bolt blasting apart entire groups of variants, blowing apart their bodies into charred chunks.

Whenever a variant was struck by lightning, their bodies acted as a conduit for the lightning to arc further until green electricity bolts surged everywhere, annihilating hundreds of variants all in the span of thirty seconds.

The mantas wailed in pain as lightning bolts assailed their backs, blowing out seared chunks from them until they fell to the ground, too damaged to sustain flight.

And in the center of this carnage, of this judgement enforced with the might of the heavens themselves, there was Aldrich, his horrible form of dark metal and bone and blood standing in the sky with outstretched draconic wings as countless burnt body parts and corpses fell down all around him.

All the while, experience constantly flowed into Aldrich from this massacre of enormous scale.

[1240 miscellaneous units defeated]

[+68,450 EXP]

[EXP Bar: 68,450/45,000]

[Level up!]

[Level 40 ] 41]

[EXP Bar: 23,450/50,000]

[+5 stat points available to distribute]

Aldrich knew this was inevitable, but he began to feel an issue with harvesting enough experience to level up now. Even with the hundreds, no, a thousand plus variants killed, he only got enough experience to level up once now that his EXP requirements were much higher.

At this rate, past level 60, it would take Aldrich wiping out entire variant ecosystems just to scrape up a few levels. This was partly another reason why Aldrich needed to make his presence publicly known once he became strong enough.

At a certain point, the sheer amount of experience he needed meant that he needed to clear out the biggest variant nests to level up, and those were all closely monitored by world governments, the AA, and the Panopticon.

He distributed his stat points and looked to the next step of clearing out Haven.

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

[Attunement: 201 ] 211]

[Inner Circle Limit: 45 ] 47]

[Outer Circle Limit: 225 ] 235]

With most of the storm now gone, Aldrich could now safely float in the sky to inspect the city from a high vantage point from which he could plan the next stages of his attack.

## **Chapter 97: Holding Out**

Aldrich scanned the city from above. It was odd to see it so dark. From a helicopter or plane, Haven or any city, really, was always lit up, and in the dark, they looked like rivers of sparkling gold speckled with bright and bold dots of neon.

But Haven was dark. As dark as it could get. The only real visible lights came from Haven's Central District where the large forcefield encompassing its walls shone a faint blue, shimmering and flickering as it took occasional hits.

Where the light was, the fighting was. The bioluminescent forms of various aquatic variants formed an odd and eerie approaching ring around the forcefield. The variant army was slowly closing in. The rate of fire from the various wall turrets and artillery were slowing down, either running out of power for energy-based weapons or running out of ammunition.

Haven's Eastside, its shipping district, was completely dark and flooded over, likely hit by the initial wave of a small tsunami strong enough to smash through its flood barriers and engulf any land defenses before they could get activated.

That let the variant army intrude into the city at frightening speeds.

Westside, Haven's tech district, was thoroughly abandoned, its usual medley of colorful lights faded into darkness.

Northside, the manufacturing district, was also dark and abandoned. The main manufacturing zones themselves, however, were fine as they were located outside of Haven's walls. It was only the residential districts where workers and engineers working for the factories lived that faced the most damage as they were in Haven city proper.

Southside, too, was thoroughly dark.

This meant that all of Haven was either evacuated, dead, or holed up in the city center, behind the forcefield.

Aside from a few splinter groups of variants, most of the variants were also located around the city center in the form of a siege.

"What shall we do?" said Volantis.

"Clearing this storm should buy the defenders around the forcefield some time," said Aldrich.

"Yes, but in my battle experience borne from countless warzones, I can perceive that it is only a matter of time before those walls fall," said Volantis. "I am unfamiliar with the nature of weaponry or magic in this era, but those cannons and ballista stationed within the barrier fire with less and less vigor over time."



"Then we wait until then," said Aldrich. "I want the defenders to weaken that force as much as possible, at the very least until that forcefield gives out. And, if I arrive when the forcefields break down, at the height of hopelessness, I can make a much bigger impact.

"Ah, you intend to perform a timely entrance to raise morale," said Volantis.

"That, and I'll need as much good PR as I can get. If I can become this city's savior in the eyes of its people and heroes, then I have even more leverage against the AA and Panopticon that practically abandoned them all," said Aldrich. "So, until the forcefield falls, we wait."

"And the lives that may fall before then?" said Volantis. His voice had no hint of judgement to it.

After all, he was still a demon, even if he had been a human knight in his past life. His valuation of lives was low, subject to the same cold distance Aldrich felt against them as an undead.

Volantis only asked this question to gauge a sense of Aldrich's values, to better understand his wearer so that he could supplement Aldrich's decision making more efficiently.

"They will be men and women worthy of respect that died for their city. Heroes that sacrificed their lives for a greater good. I will honor them in my memory as best as I can. But they will still be sacrifices," said Aldrich flatly.

"Understood," said Volantis.

=====

Southside Haven, near Panopticon Bunker C88

Over two hundred men, women, and children were packed together in the underground confines of Southside's single functioning Panopticon Bunker. As a C-class bunker, it was an earlier version that had limited whose construction had been phased out over fifty years ago, but it was all that Southside could get.

On dusty white tiled floor, this mass of people laid down what bare belongings they could get. Blankets, some food and water they could scrap together at the last minute, spare changes of clothes - the barest of necessities.

Despite how much society had progressed since the Altering with its hovering cars and smart phones and drones and towering buildings, when it came down to it, when desperation hit its peak, what people reached for to keep themselves alive were the same basic things they had reached out to for thousands of years.

And that was another thing that humanity knew deeply well throughout its history: desperation.

Minuteman could practically smell the desperation in the air as he saw the civilians wide eyed, clutching at what little they had, straining out drenched clothes, shivering and huddling together, and he tried to stay strong for them.

"Everyone!" shouted Minuteman, his commanding voice resonating through the underground bunker's sterile white floor and walls. "You're all doing great! Remember to pace your breathing and keep quiet! As a C class bunker, we only have limited oxygen! If we wait just a little while longer, we'll get help!"

"Help!? When!?" said a mother as her child clutched at her hand. She shouted with a voice made hoarse in terror. "It's been hours! Where's the help!?"

"We've been abandoned, I'm telling you!" shouted a man.

"All the rich fucks took off on their private hovercrafts and copters and jets! All we are is fish food! A distraction!"

"You heroes!" A teenager with a broken, twisted arm shambled forwards, pointing with his one good arm at the row of heroes behind Minuteman that had led this evacuation.

The young man's face was twisted in rage, his face caked in dirt and tears streaming down his face. "You're all here to just watch us die, aren't you!? You led us down here, down into our own graves! All because we're Duds, isn't that right!? I bet you're enjoying watching us suffer!"

"Shut the fuck up!" roared Rockshaper, one of Haven's C-class heroes that had followed Minuteman tonight, mostly to tie themselves to a stronger hero to ensure their survival. "You're lucky we even wasted our damn time to make sure you useless fucks are safe!"

"See!? At the end of the day, of you heroes care!" shouted the teenager, and tension built in the room, nearing a boiling point that would descend into mass chaos.

Rockshaper's jaw set under his mask and he stepped forwards, raising a fist into the air. A jagged, spiked rock formed in front of his fist, hovering threateningly.

Minuteman gripped Rockshaper's shoulder tightly, and Rockshaper winced in pain. The jagged rock fell to the floor, breaking apart as Rockshaper lost his concentration.

"The fuck was that for?" said Rockshaper as he whirled around to face Minuteman.

Minuteman got aggressively close to Rockshaper, towering over the smaller hero. "If you have nothing productive to say, then don't talk. Do you understand me?"

Minuteman was a solid B rank hero who in terms of both rank and strength was Rockshaper's senior by far. There was nothing Rockshaper could do here, especially considering he was a Blaster category Alter versus Minuteman who was a classic example of an Augmenter specialized in close combat.

Rockshaper grimaced and nodded.

## **Chapter 98: Minuteman**

Minuteman stepped up to the teenager and looked down at him. The kid looked away, intimidated by Minuteman's powerfully built, navy blue uniformed body.

"Kid, it's okay, I'm not here to hurt you. Here, look at me," said Minuteman gently, and the boy looked up at him. The kid blinked in surprise as he looked into Minuteman's surprisingly soft blue eyes.

Those were not the eyes of a fighter or a killer, they were strangely doe eyed and round and innocent - an incredible contrast with Minuteman's muscled, trained body and scarred face.

Pain and fear and anger were all mixed up in the kid's eyes, and all of that compounded by the glint of something that Minuteman was intimately familiar with - loss.

"Who'd you lose tonight?" said Minuteman.

"Why the fuck do you care?" said the kid.

"Because I know how much loss hurts. I know how much it takes away from you, and I know how alone it makes you feel. I know you don't know me, and I don't know you, but I'm still here to listen," said Minuteman.

The kid paused before whispering out, "My mom and my dad."

Minuteman gently put his dark red gloved hand on the kid's shoulder and bent down, meeting his eye level. He did not do well with basic condolences. The 'I'm sorry for your loss' type of formality. Those were empty words that just reminded those hurt about their loss.

"Anyone left?" said Minuteman.

"...My little sister," said the boy.

"She here with you?" said Minuteman.

"Yeah."

"Then you can't afford to be up here lashing out like this. You're all she's got, and she's all you've got. Down here, it isn't my back that she's looking to for strength, it's yours.

You've lost a lot, I know, but you still have someone to live for. Someone you have to fight for." Minuteman patted the kid's shoulder. "Go back to your sister. Keep her calm. Fight on.

Tell her it'll be all right."

Minuteman smiled and pointed a thumb at himself. "And I'll make sure you won't be lying."

The kid nodded and shuffled away, and Minuteman went back to the line of heroes. They were all C rankers native to Haven. Among the stronger heroes in the city, explaining how they could survive so long.

"All of you have completed basic hero training, correct?" said Minuteman.

The heroes nodded in unison.

"Then get the med kits stashed in this bunker and start treating everyone here," said Minuteman.

"What!?" said Rockshaper. "There's barely twenty of us, and two hundred of them. Do you understand how long that will take?"

"You have anything else better to do?" said Minuteman. He got up close to Rockshaper again, and the man visibly shrank against Minuteman. "Until Miles gets the hangar and the carrier running, all of you need to keep these people calm, and there's no better way to do that than by comforting them."

"All this sh\*t for Duds?" spat another hero. "We should have left with the first wave of evac when they got all the people that mattered out."

"For people, not Duds," corrected Minuteman. "In a situation like this, we're all just desperate people, you understand me?" Minuteman pointed a red gloved finger to the ceiling. "Above ground, the variants don't give a sh\*t whether you're a Hero or a Alter or a Dud. Whether you're filthy rich or dirt poor. You're all just food for them. So why do you care?"

Silence was the response against Minuteman.

"I don't want to hear anyone using the word 'Dud' again, do you all understand me?" said Minuteman.

None of the C rankers dared to protest against Minuteman. That was just how big the rift was between the C rank and the B rank. Even if they wanted to mutiny and fight back, Minuteman could hand them all their asses on a silver platter, especially with how tired they already were.

"Good, now get to work, heroes," said Minuteman as he waited first for the heroes to get the medkits before leaving them, going to the separated control room where Miles, a techno Support from the AA, plugged into a large monitor, getting control of the bunker's functions.

"How's the situation?" said Minuteman.

"This hangar hasn't been maintained in decades. Don't even know if the carrier inside it will take off, but if it's using a standard electro-etherite engine, I can use my powers to jumpstart it. The issue is this-," Miles tapped the monitor, and the screen switched to surveillance on aboveground.

The hidden bunker cameras were completely wired to prevent disruption from abilities that disrupted wireless technology, so thankfully, they could still operate even in this tech disrupting storm.

A mass amount of variants were gathered around above, circling around the dirt caked vault doors of the bunker.

"They've sniffed us out," said Minuteman as he crossed his arms. "But they can't break through that door. It isn't Neo-Steel, considering how old it is, but it's still too much titanium alloy for them to chew through."

"Yeah, for the normal fishmen, but shark man's back." Miles tapped the screen again, and it switched to another camera, this one showcasing a hulking, shark shaped fishman walking towards the vault doors.

"What!?" Minuteman immediately uncrossed his arms in alarm.

This shark variant was immensely strong. Minuteman had clashed with it before while leading the initial evacuation of Southside.

Minuteman, along with Gladiator, Haven's native B ranker, had fought the shark variant, and though they had killed it, it was at the cost of Gladiator's death.

Granted, Gladiator was still heavily injured from the past attack against Haven, but it was still an incredible feat that this beast was able to contend with two B rank heroes, both specialized in melee combat, at once.

And, it seemed, the creature had some ability to resurrect itself as Minuteman had made sure to crush its head with his shield.

The variant seemed to be even stronger than before. Where before it had just one fin on its back, it now had three, and its muscle mass had increased significantly. On top of that, its sharp grey scales had grown thicker, almost into armored plating.

The plating was especially pronounced around the variant's head and chest.

As it was now, Minuteman knew he would have an extreme difficulty fight against it. He might even have to use his Minute of Freedom to secure a win.

"That thing is strong, but even it can't smash through those vault doors with raw strength alone," said Minuteman.

That was when something the situation went from bad to worse. The shark variant waved its muscular, grey scaled arms forward, and in response, several dozen fishmen lugged forwards huge spiral shaped black shells on their backs.

They put down the car sized shells with the holes facing downward and into the vault doors, and with that, the spiral pattern on the black shells began to glow a molten red. Molten lava began to pool out beneath them and heat started to permeate through the grey metal vault doors, rapidly superheating them into a bright orange.

"Vent Worms," muttered Minuteman.

Vent Worms were deep sea variants that lived in volcanically active veins in the ocean. They fed on molten rock and could generate intense heat waves from within their shells. They were not very mobile creatures, but they fended themselves against predators with their intense heat generation.

Very soon, the worms would melt holes straight through the titanium alloy doors, and then, it would be a pure massacre.

"How's Portal Girl doing?" said Minuteman.

Portal Girl was a D rank hero, a new graduate from one of Haven's hero academies. She could create portals that had a range of three hundred meters from her current position. The biggest limit was that every single time someone passed through her portal, it drained her stamina, and by now, she was so weak she could barely move.

"She's still dealing with a killer headache. I doubt she's going to be good for a mass evac," said Miles. "She's been making portals all night, and she's way beyond the limit of people she can handle portaling in a day. There's no way in hell she's going to be able to portal out everyone away from here-,"

"She doesn't need to," said Minuteman. "She just needs to get one person out."

Miles paused before he turned to Minuteman, his eyes wide in shock. "You cannot be serious. You're going up there? All alone? Look man, you're going to die-,"