

# Undead 1021

## Chapter 1021: How To Deal With Him (1)

The Severed Union was particularly brutal.

As an organisation that existed mainly to keep track of the world's nastiest potential disasters born from either extremely powerful Clusters that spawned away from the mainland; sentient magical weapons that could threaten civilizations; obscene natural disasters bolstered by the world's magical nature, and more, it was imperative for it to have a core circle.

The possibility of all the Factions being wiped out in one dangerous incident was extremely high, especially with an assignment of the calibre of the one all the current Factions were currently participating in.

An assignment with the sole objective of capturing and killing the masked man before he reached Edagon to achieve his goal.

Such a mission was quite easily the most difficult the Severed Union had had to deal with since the Unbeheaded Nightmare, Rezna, a fearsome Tier 92 Cluster General that had exploded out of a horrifically large purple-red Cluster.

As fatal as some of these missions were though, there were a few Faction Leaders who were likely to remain standing against all odds, making sure that the Union persisted.

Eaniss and her Head Faction was one.

The Bishop and her Faction, the Faux Cherub Light were another.

Warding Pride counted with her Faction, Dryad of the Scarlet Desert.

There was the Round Arrow.

... And finally, there was the Four Meridian Hands, a Faction led by a man who had, as of late, begun wearing around his neck a precious spherical gem decorated with equal portions of black and white over it.

"You suggest that we ride out the wave? Allow the masked necromancer to reach Edagon? I was under the impression that we were after the opposite," said man spoke with a taut tone.

He had quite a long face with a pointed chin. All his features were sharp, including his dark eyes and the eyebrows that towered above them.

Em-Sul looked very much like a typical villainous character one would find from a generic children's tale. His grey hair was even gelled and slicked back as one would expect, though, he lacked the sharp goatee to complete it.

Em-Sul sat on a large, couch-like armchair in a lavish, well-lit space with three other figures on all his sides.

"I agree with this crystal-faced bloke. I was under the impression that we needed to kill – or convert – this sock-wearing fool immediately! I don't know about you, but I intend to get a lifetime's worth of bread with the reward for this mission!"

An old woman adorned in a religious set of robes that might have belonged to a particular variant of church leader in another world, boldly offered her input.

On top of her long, pale hair fashioned into an innocent perm, was a tall crown about a meter in height jammed into it. This, along with the robes, would have made the old woman look approachable, if a little deranged, but the fact that her sockets spotted no eyeballs, erased that possibility.

The Mad Bishop was as viciously insane as ever.

"It's never been about what we should do. It's always been about what we can do. I don't think I'm the only one who has yet to notice that our enemy has too many tricks up his sleeve, am I?" Eaniss said.

She was no longer decked in the flaming armour which she had previously adopted during the skirmish with the Ardent Curses. Instead, a large, familiar, velvet cloth, much like a mythic ribbon unbound my natural laws like gravity, wrapped around her naked body as she sat freely.

Her sharp eyes scanned across the people before her.

"Besides, I have a feeling that the masked man's warning was something more than a threat. If we push him too far with an assault right now, he may just let loose all the reserves of strange creatures he has along with the other powers he has acquired," she added.

"Sounds a bit cowardly to me," a man with long white hair, tinted in blue at the sides and tied in a ponytail, sneered.

He wore a large, fuzzy jacket that might have been a blanket. As he folded his arms, occupying the fourth chair in this room aboard Eaniss' ship, he asserted himself as her equal.

Naturally, this wasn't necessarily true.

Eaniss turned her gaze to Aurolio without the slightest hint of emotion.

"I almost forgot you are rather green on matters to do with the Union. Let me enlighten you. The five of us here are the pillars of the Severed Union, but that does not only speak to our status. We have different, integral abilities that are necessary for the Union's continued existence and also for almost all kinds of perils," she explained while Aurolio raised a brow, slightly intrigued.

"The Bishop here, because of her unusual techniques can solve difficult situations that can't be brute forced by raw might. Even though there are conditions involved, that power of hers is indispensable for critical emergencies."

"Em-Sul is a connoisseur of all types of ancient, powerful and unusual treasures. As it were, he also tends to understand them more than anyone else in the Union, which makes him remarkably useful when dealing with enemies with ridiculous artefacts."

"Warding Pride – who so graciously rejected my invitation it seems – is a master of seals and shields. She can craft all manner of barriers, even ones capable of detaining much stronger opponents for a time."

"There's also Everde of the Round Arrow. Sadly, we lost him when the world broke apart. He must have been bundled with the weaklings on the other side of the rift the masked man made. If he were here, I might have considered launching a surprise attack on our enemy. You see, his expertise in nearly costless, massive-ranged attacks is important in situation like this.

Better yet, each of his voluminous attacks are quite brisk, and capable of dealing damage to the target via anything with a connection to them. This would have worked splendidly against the masked man."

And indeed it was true.

Each of these individuals in the Severed Union were considered pillars.

And while it seemed as though Eaniss was merely hesitating, she had seen her fair share of lesser enemies overpowering Factions not because they were stronger, but because they matched well against them.

Currently, the masked man was likely to be immune to divine powers and be a carrier of them on top of his insane capability as a necromancer.

There wasn't much in the way of numbers as far as what was left of the Union was concerned given that of the 34 Factions that had set out days ago, only less than 20 remained, and 7 of those were stripped of their privilege to continue this assignment.

The Scorching Tears, the Reverse Clusters, the Ardent Curses, the breaking of the world and inside conflicts had reduced the number of Factions.

Of the 12 that remained, most were expendable., which made the situation, rather dire.

Aurolio folded his arms and made a neigh sort of noise with his mouth, prompted by the cold he alone felt.

"Yeah well, behind all that is uncertainty, as known as fear, isn't there? Just because you don't have some convenient method you've grown used to, you won't even take a risk? Doesn't really change how I see all this. And what exactly are you useful for?"

Aurolio's piercing eyes stared right into Eaniss' as Em-Sul watched, amused, the Bishop leaning forward from her seat with childishly expectant grin.

Eaniss wasn't bothered by Aurolio's provocative approach.

"My role is a little more niche. As are my abilities. They work where they do," she said succinctly, leaving Aurolio visibly unsatisfied.

She then turned back to the others.

"Besides my note of caution, I'm also considering something else that we stand gain if we allow the masked man to reach Edagon."

"What is that?" Em-Sul asked.

"Pseudo-allies," Eaniss said with a sweet smile. "I'm willing to bet that the Giants, or at the very least the Herald on Edagon knows that the masked man is coming. There may very well be a welcoming party waiting for the necromancer when he reaches the shore of Edagon and I do believe he can't simply skim over it.

Granted, it may be easy for him, but as long as he is stalled for at least a minute, we can press him in the middle while he is torn between us and the Giants. That's how we end this."

"Oh-ho!" the Mad Bishop voiced before rapidly clapping her hands. "I like the sound of that. There will probably be thousands of Giants waiting to be converted to the faith! Ah, I wonder what they look like!"

Only Aurolio wore a face at the Bishop's remark which went in a totally different direction to the one he had thought.

That said, Eaniss' plan made sense.

It was said that millennia ago, the Giants once travelled the world, reaching all continents to teach about the Deities. Hidden in their friendly approach, however, was the sinister objective to take over the world and build themselves up as rulers of Opungale, Feinheath and Amanas, and yet they failed.

Apparently, the Giants were driven away by the rising experts from each nation.

Yet... apparently that wasn't true.

Regardless, they had to be strong given that there weren't that many of them.

Everyone had been intrigued by them.

No one had seen them since the First Grand Wars.

Well, a certain skeleton had.

The Central Boundary was guarded by the premium Paladin Champion because the Purity did not want anyone getting any ideas about Edagon.

That idea had stood for a while... until now.

In humanity's first voyage towards the land of Giants, what would be the result?

Chapter 1022: How To Deal With Him (2)

"Nice idea. Maybe pincering will work on that son of a bitch, but what if he uses his masses upon masses of undead to overcome that hurdle? What then, genius?" Aurolio asked in a deliberately tactless fashion.

"As we have seen from that first wave, the masked man's army of undead isn't made up of overly powerful creatures. There are stronger and more unusual enemies mixed in, but the majority are weaklings. Even if there is a full batch of absurd monstrosities we have yet to see, that makes it all the more feasible for us to count on the Giants.

Even if they aren't expecting the masked man, no living thing can resist the stench of undeath. They will come running," Eaniss replied.

"That sounds sound," Em-Sul said as he caressed the jewel around his neck, the Harmonic Ember, which was slightly aglow with the churning of his mana.

It was visibly in use.

"But what about this? Since we already surmised that we are about two days from Edagon, why don't we attack the masked man a day from now, when we are closer to Edagon's shores. If we force the man's hand, he will show his backup plans – his artefacts, his undead and all.

If we assume he has millions of undead thralls under him, I'm sure, as you said, the force of the Giants will sense it and come our way. I believe that is a better way to confront the masked man."

Eaniss raised a brow at Em-Sul's suggestion.

"Are you wary of approaching Edagon?" she asked.

"Clearly you aren't. Trespassing on the land of the Giants with our enemy will only get us labelled as intruders as well. Perhaps you have forgotten but the Giants, millennia ago, were already strong enough to suppress the entirety of Aigas. Do you think they have stagnated since then? It's better to approach this as the pursuers that we are and have the Giants join in from a distance."

Eaniss nodded.

She understood where Em-Sul was coming from.

Her strategy perhaps hinged completely on the fact that the Giants would be rather accommodating of the fact that the Factions were innocent and harboured pure intent, which would make them overlook all their suspicions as they focused on the enemy.

Who was to say – in the Giants view – that they weren't enemies as well?

This could turn out to not be the case if both the Factions and the masked man appeared on the shores of the Edagon with seemingly no conflict between them, and with matching ships to boot.

Factoring this, it could be argued that Em-Sul's suggestion offered one slight merit.

If the Factions engaged the masked necromancer outside Edagon, it was easier to better mark themselves and the masked man as enemies while also making their case as 'heroes of justice' not at all attempting to raid Edagon more palatable.

It was a small change, but perhaps it was worth it.

"What about the necromancer's other means of attack? We have already discussed his uncanny possession of the Paladin Champion's body, haven't we? What of it?"

Eaniss, Em-Sul and Aurolio looked towards the Bishop.

A rare injection of seriousness had turned her face dark and stern, erasing all madness and mirth.

This was Aurolio's first time seeing this.

'This woman...' he thought. Looking into her eyeless sockets, a result of her supposedly gouging her eyes out because that made her life more challenging and in turn, more interesting, he frowned.

Eaniss wasn't shaken. She simply smiled brightly and answered:

"Indeed, the masked man seems to have incorporated the Paladin Champion as a dummy for reasons unknown. As far as I could tell, the man is still alive. Probably. He must have some kind of use for him. Perhaps the Champion's Divine Blessing."

Back when the masked man, Actuass, split the world in two, it had been revealed that aboard his original ship which later succumbed to the abhorrent conditions on this side of the Central Boundary, was the body of the Paladin Champion masquerading as him.

But strangely, this body of the Paladin Champion had expressed a potent, vivid presence of undeath that matched the one Actuass had.

"Not only that," the Mad Bishop said with a sombre tone. "When the masked man and the Paladin Champion duelled, Bright Storm rescued what he assumed was the battered body of the Paladin Champion. It seems this was a ploy the masked man made in order to obtain a vessel that would better ferry him to Edagon. He must have foreseen what would become of his inferior ship beforehand.

It wasn't some coincidence as we thought before."



This was old news.

After the splitting of the world, Eaniss had called a meeting between the four pillars of the Severed Union to discuss all this.

What emerged as a new finding right now, however, courtesy of the Bishop's insight, was that the masked man was likely to have an extensive foresight ability.

"Are you trying to say that this man has already seen the future and is making attempts at changing it in his favour?" Aurolio asked with a deep frown.

Eaniss wore a bizarre look of hilarity.

"You might be right? The masked man has the ability to possess other bodies. While we first imagined that he likely possessed the Paladin Champion for his Divine abilities.... what if that was only a secondary objective? Hahaha. You think he might have already known that I would reverse time back then, which would lead to us to pinning him on all sides?

As a matter of fact, there's no question! That must be it! The only reason he managed to escape back then was because he had a separate vessel, his original body on Bright Storm's ship which disrupted our formation and confused us all."

Aurolio slammed his face.

Right.

No way.

Right!

He wanted to deny it, but it seemed true.

Sadly, this truth wasn't the kind that set one free. It only came with a weight that threw freedom out the window.

What was devastating about this revelation wasn't simply the fact that Actuass had a ridiculous ability to foresee what could happen in the future. It was the fact that he might have seen how everything would unfold before embarking on his journey!

'Is that why he warned us not to try anything again? It wasn't just a threat but actual advise? Fuck me!'

If this man was this meticulous and this confident, it certainly made sense how he made an event like the Premium Age Royale work at all.

It even made sense why he knew about Aurolio's Veneration art!

"That changes things then, doesn't it?" Em-Sul said with a heavy sigh.

Eaniss pulled on the fabric of the ribbon-like cloth around her body as if to tear it apart.

She grinned and... blushed.

"No, it doesn't. We'll stick to the plan."

The three others in the room gave her quizzical looks.

"What? You do realise that this plan of ours may have already been seen though, right? What's the use in continuing on with it?" Aurolio was puzzled.

Eaniss grew silent for a while.

"In as much as we are sharing information and concocting plans on top of plans... we are still individuals participants in this race, are we not?" she then said with a white glow in her eyes.

Indeed.

This was still an assignment branded with an attractive reward for whoever put down the masked man.

"So what?" Em-Sul asked.

"So... let's each execute the plan as you proposed, but in our own ways. We were always going to anyway, right? I don't know how far or how vast the necromancer's foresight is, but I am quite sure all Divination is weak to intense volatility. The human mind is the hardest to judge because it seldom attaches itself to a strict code. It can be swayed.

If you say we should attack, let's do so, but in the most chaotic way possible."

The two other Faction Leaders mulled it over.

The masked man couldn't be all-knowing. If that were the case, he wouldn't make errors of judgement.

But then again, had he made an error in judgment yet?

Still, he had to be fallible in some way.

His abilities were weak to something, and that something was likely the schemes of other humans.

"Very well," Em-Sul said.

The Bishop regained her playfully demented spark and kicked her feet.

"Can't wait to claim all the bread I can eat!" she exclaimed.

Aurolio on the other hand...

"Isn't this the risk you wanted us to go for? Why the sudden sullen face?" Eaniss said to the pale man's face which bore an expression of unease.

Aurolio turned to her but didn't answer her question.

Instead...

"What will you do about Bright Storm? I thought you were very fond of him. That thin stalk of stars might have bit it long ago. It's fucking hard to travel without a ship. Even that necromancer knows," he said with obvious snark.

Indeed.

What had become of that freshman Faction Leader and his gang?

Ever since their vessel was stolen, there had been no word or sight of them for the last three days.

Could they have, as Aurolio said, truly perished?

Of course, it wasn't like the pale man wished for Bright Storm to have fallen.

He had vested interest in him.

He had vested interest in that Null creature he had seen with Bright Storm's crew.

That thing was clearly different from the Null Badubs.

It was no ordinary Null beast.

If he killed it...

Eaniss didn't say a word to Aurolio's inquiry.

Well, she had intended to, but she found herself looking up at the ceiling, rather the underside of the deck.

The others in the room did the same, looks of surprise on their faces.

Naturally, what they were looking at wasn't the sublime textures used to craft the comfortable underdeck, or even the umbrella-shaped barrier past.

What they gazed at, was past the ship entirely, and high into the clouds!

Far above the ebony sea, a large vessel as tenebrous as charcoal, if not moreso, could be seen.

It hung in the air, as still and as calm as the clouds it shared the airspace with.

It was just as large as all the ships given by the Emissary, with similar features as well.

"What is that?" Em-Sul asked curiously while narrowing his eyes.

"Speak of the devil," Aurolio said with a grin.

Eaniss also donned a creepy look of exhilaration, and was the first to vanish from the gathering, appearing on the deck to her ship.

She kept her gaze up and even ordered the ship to be stopped.

'So he wasn't done for after all!'

Indeed He wasn't.

He was diligently keeping himself alive for her amusement, as she had asked him to!

Right when the Bishop, Em-Sul and Aurolio appeared on deck as well, the beast black ship far into the sky spat out four figures.

Three humans and one beast.

All four fell with style, and just when their figures became more than just dark dots to the ordinary eye, each of them expelled furious bursts of meaningfully woven mana that had distinctive characteristics.

"Grant me the chances!"

"Paradon Parody."

Shiiiiiiiiing!

Chapter 1023: The Team

A few minutes ago...

"Boss, we are ready," Grim said with his usual bold and unbound explosiveness. Frankly, it was almost as overwhelming and outlandish as his appearance.

An introverted soul would have said, 'Good for him. At least his features and personality are a perfect match,' without the slightest hint of joy.

And indeed they were.

Grim was a man with a full head of white hair and a pair of striking red eyes that saw far and wide. He often held a smile on his face, with his bubbly personality being infectious to anyone other than Pherdanta.

Speaking of the stoic, dutiful beauty...

"Do I really need to go too, Master? Can I selfishly demand to remain by your side just this once?" she said to the man who sat on a large, comfy cushion made of tangible darkness.

The voice that leaked out from Pherdanta never would have matched her appearance, at least for those who were used to her.

She had lengthy dark hair that ended in a ponytail, this tail end featuring a tint of green.

She had sharp eyes and an accusing, pointed nose that, quite like Grim, matched her personality. At least when she felt cross with someone; that someone usually being Grim.

Also like Grim, she was adorned in a sturdy armour of blue, white, silver with visible plates across its chest plate that channelled Null Life Essence.

Granted Armament.

Unlike her bubbly colleague's version of the specialised armour, though, hers turned into a pleated battle skirt below the waist, a set of tall greaves adorning her legs to the knee.

To Pherdanta's delicate request, an answer came.

"To even suggest that this is the only time you have tried to selfishly stand by me is absurd. As the closest to reaching the Incandescent Stage out of everyone else, you must join in on the front lines according to the plan," the man on the dark cushion expressed with a tired sigh.

It seemed Pherdanta only grew worse with each passing day.

Did she have attachment issues or something?

Well...

Despite what possible mental issues she suffered from though, Pherdanta had excelled in her Stages in the past three days.

Said days had sponsored nothing but a brutal regiment for each of Replicus' special combatants, the Unlimited.

Since Grim and Pherdanta had already polished their Classes and were very familiar with them, Replicus had had them focus on advancing their Stages.

To do this, the two had to focus on completing their Tasks and as it turned out, their Tasks mainly involved fighting under special circumstances with fair consideration to their Classes.

For Grim, his Tasks demanded that he cycle through the different forms of his Hidden Class to kill specific quantities or qualities of monsters. Of course, the Tasks got harder with each one he completed, but he made steady progress.

Pherdanta was even more impressive in this regard. Her Tasks required her to use her blade or blades to perform different techniques, simple and hard alike.

For instance, one of her Tasks required her to mimic what was called an Acute Lateral Slash; a type of sword swing that produced a flying slash shaped like the corner of a triangle. It was simple to understand but hard to execute. After all, it was to be performed in one swing.

Yet, perhaps because Pherdanta often thought Replicus always had his eye on her, constantly judging her value as his bodyguard, she mastered this slash in a matter of hours.

Pherdanta continued this trend until she levelled from 36 to Level 39, same as Kenno – if he had remained stagnant in the last five days.

Grim was sitting comfortably at Level 37 from 34.

Replicus had been pleased.

As the Hybrid Luman, he stood up and looked at the broad sky past the bowsprit of the ship.

Today was a good day.

The hellish routine of the last three days was finally over, and hopefully, it would all pay off.

He had a good feeling.

The winds blew his slicked back auburn hair and peppered his skin relentlessly. His blank eyes stared ahead, but his senses were molesting everything below.

The black vessel he had made out of [Evil Darkness] was particularly sensitive. Since he had raised the rank of his affinity with [Evil Darkness] naturally to A over the time he spent working in the



Severed Union, the darkness became rather flexible. He could see through it. He could feel through it.

It acted as an enhancer to his sensory abilities.

Through this specific trait, Replicus was able to detect the presence of the vessels of the other Faction Leaders practically flying a few hundred meters ahead... below.

A smile emerged on his face.

'Yeah, this will work,' he thought to himself.

"Allora," he suddenly said.

"Yes, boss!" a rather tall lady with wiry frame shook and exclaimed. If one didn't know any better, they would have thought she had been daydreaming before being called.

She had facial features that looked as though they had been stretched taut by excessive fits of laughter. Even when she was sullen, she looked quite vivacious.

She too wore the acclaimed Granted Armament.

"What's our mission?" Replicus asked without turning.

"Uh..." Allora stammered.

"You're getting cold feet, huh?" Replicus said before turning to her. He then donned a warm smile. "I understand. You're about to jump into what just might be the second biggest fight of your life. It's natural to get shaky."

'Second?' Pherdanta and Grim wondered.

Allora didn't think much of it. She merely listened silently.

Replicus walked her way and looked her in the eyes despite not seeing any of the trembling in hers. He only felt it.

"I'm quite proud of you. You had the guts to demand and grab your moment because you felt confident in your abilities. And look. You did it. You're standing with the people you admired from afar mere month ago. They are your peers now.

You've grown."

Allora's eyes widened.

Was this... acknowledgement?

A smile attempted to crack open on her face.

"I need whatever crazy inspired you to dive deep into the depths of the sea to challenge whatever monstrosity guarded the legacy of the Charmed Illimitable Rounder and prevail. I'm counting on you."

Allora's chest swelled.

She grinned.

"You got it, boss!" she said with rising vigour.

She had certainly needed to hear this, after all, she had a very important role for the boss' strategy.

Two roles, in fact.

Replicus had revised the first plan he had concocted to deal with the other Factions as the fleet passed the Central Boundary. Now, it had greater links and more risks but the reward was likely to be even more satisfying.

"Now what's the goal?" Replicus asked again.

"To retrieve the Harmonic Ember!" Allora replied without stall or stammer.

Replicus' smile grew wider.

Indeed. That was the goal.

The spherical jewel around the neck of the man who headed the Four Meridian Hands, Em-Sul, was his target.

The objective for added strength; the intense desire to develop an overpowered ability from the artefact he had acquired from the Ardent Curses, could only be completed after that gem was retrieved.

Replicus couldn't wait.

This wasn't going to be easy, however, and it wasn't the only goal he had.

At this point, there was no way anyone had a singular plan that didn't involve integral side-quests and side-goals linked to it.

That said, finalising the creation of an ability tied to the unique skill-extinguishing trait of the wand Flawless Flail of Ruin, and the unavoidable revelatory effect of Lambent Phosphor was imperative. It was the first and prime goal.

Some would even say it was necessary for Replicus and company to stay alive after what they were about to incite.

"Good," he said before looking to the side.

To his left, a pale creature stood at attention, almost seeming to be minding what was happening on deck.

It eclipsed everyone on the ship in height except Allora, but failed to express a presence befitting of its stature. That presence, that air, was hidden.

ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN, the Titan World Storm Penetrator's third Apostle, had grown and changed vastly.

His pasty, pale and wrinkled skin remained the same, as did the somewhat long locks of white hair over his head, but he seemed to have gained a substantial amount of bulk to him, which pressed against his heavy, grey and silver armour he wore.

His empty sockets and hole for a nose were as chilling as ever, but while Allora and Grim had attempted to poke their fingers into them before, when Araeyn's defences were down, they wouldn't dare do it now.

The Apostle wasn't as approachable.

Over the chest plate of its armour, its name showed, burning over the magical steel as a constant reminder.

"Araeyn," Replicus called the Apostle, and he shifted awkwardly. "It's just about time. Go and fetch him."

Without a word or gesture, Araeyn trudged below deck and returned seconds later with a familiar creature; one that featured no eyes, plenty of mouth and plenty of arms.

Replicus turned to the figure, as did the Unlimited. Then he spoke:

"I will need your services one last, Thrill. After that, I might just let you go free."

Chapter 1024: Accelerate To The Result

Thrill looked utterly pathetic despite being adorned in his long white robe which accommodated his unusual physique which featured four long arms.

Both his mouths – one which was where his eyes would have been and the one which was appropriately placed in relation to normal human anatomy – curled up in a deep frown as he glared at the figure of Replicus and those pure white eyes which seemed to dig deep within him, past the unnatural barrier that prevented normal phenomenon from reaching him.

The Ardent Curse hissed.

Never in his life had he experienced such humiliation as he did in the last three days.

He had thought that his innate untouchability would prove to be a tough hurdle for Replicus and company to overcome even after they had successfully captured him, but, well, that wasn't the case.

Replicus looked him dead in the... mouth, smiled and then manifested in his hand... a long golden wand of precious quality.

This was of course, the Flawless Flail of Ruin.

Replicus casually handed the wand to the Curse.

"Here. I need you to use it on me one last time. I might just get a bit of improvement in before engaging with those stuck-up bastards," he said.

The air turned heavy and taut immediately.

Thrill's fury died down considerably and beads of sweat started to fall from his face.

'Dammit! Dammit!' he thought in despair.

Six eyes glared at him, piking absolutely ferocious killing intent his way.

Pherdanta, Allora and Grim always inspired this amount of fear into Thrill every time he was given the golden wand to use for their master's intended desire.

The Flawless Flail of Ruin had belonged to Hope, the Cluster General for the Cluster Thrill was born in; the powerful Ardent Curse who had six arms and six deadly wands.

The Cluster General's wands could only be used by another Ardent Curse, and as such Replicus had brought Thrill aboard. His role was, of course, to use the Flawless Flail of Ruin on Replicus

whenever he assumed his Penetrator form; in such times, Replicus would conjure clouds for his subordinates to stand on until the cooldown for [High Cosmetic Body] ended.

Of course, at first Thrill resisted Replicus' demands.

...Until he was sent to think carefully about his position in Stagnant Space.

Replicus had realised that the Ardent Curses weren't immune to every kind of attack.

The theory he had developed some time during the voyage was proven to hold some credence when he considered that the Ardent Curses could be contained in a Cluster.

Since that was the case... then he might have been right!

Stagnant Space, the massive dark space that existed somewhere in the folds of Aigas – a large block of stability – was what facilitated the creation of Clusters using the divine energies that leaked from the bodies of the three Deities; the land, the sea and the sky!

Clusters were named as such because of the chaotic mashing of energies that crested them, but that potent energy needed a stable background to eventually form something significant, and that stable background, Stagnant Space, could be accessed by Replicus.

...And he used it to his advantage.

Thrill couldn't resist getting sent to the dark space, even with his unusual invulnerability, and after only being stuck there for a few hours, he had already begun begging to do Replicus' bidding.

Replicus' Unlimited glared at him in the same fashion as they did currently, when they sensed his rebellion.

It didn't help that, for their sake, Replicus could send Thrill to the shadow real- Stagnant Space just for his Unlimited's entertainment.

"Fine," the Curse muttered with his lips drinking sweat. His hand reached out for the Flawless Flail shakily and the intense pressure from the Unlimited only soared.

The three dared the bastard to do something outside of what Replicus ordered.

Thrill was gulping several times every second, when the tension was finally broken by the entrance of a noble, humanoid beast wearing a baggy, white outfit with thick, long sleeves and thick bountiful pant legs.

Baddan looked rather neat and intimidating despite wearing an emotionless face around his thick matte of whitish silver fur that represented his hair and glorified beard.

"I was going to give you a few more minutes, Baddan. You're ready?" Replicus asked the Sky Watcher.

Baddan wore a smile and nodded.

"I'm quite excited."

Replicus nodded back.

"I'm a little jealous," he said before turning to the point past the ship's bowsprit.

It might have been a hard to recall fact, but because of the Reverse Clusters, flight and spatial manipulation were exceedingly difficult to execute. Even the clouds were halted still.

This was why Replicus' ship of [Evil Darkness] was standing frozen in the sky. He couldn't make it fly.

This had sufficed until now, but...

Two great chains of darkness whipped out from the thick, sturdy black along both sides of the ship's hull, and zoomed forward, disappearing into the distance.

Replicus had positioned the ship in this specific spot because ahead of it, there was a straight shot ahead which wasn't hindered by Reverse Clusters, meaning that the chains could go forth without

interruption. They were less likely to be hindered by the anti-spatial influence when compared to living beings, after all.

The chains seemed to extend endlessly.

They shot out so quickly that they even caught up to the fleet of vessels belonging to the Factions and sped past them in the air.

Once they overtook the ships by double the distance between them and Replicus', darkness oozed from them like sap, and fell below to form gigantic wheels, like great cogs which then fit into the gaps within the segments of the chains.

Right after they fully formed, they began to spin forward furiously, pulling the chain that connected to Replicus' ship.

There was a lot of creaking, but the chain barely moved. The black ship barely moved.

"I suppose I'll just expend all my mana in this form. It's not like I'll need it anyway," Replicus said as he felt the ship merely lurch a few inches forward.

As mana exploded out of him into the chains and the ship, eighty-two more wheels were formed along the length of the chains, and they spun forth, pulling with heft!

Finally, the dark ship galloped forth, drawn by nothing but an aggressive pull!

It shot ahead with thrice the speed it was capable of on the sea, and soon, it passed the formation of ships below before coming to a stop a distance ahead.

When it stopped with a great, momentous jerk, no one seemed to need another verbal cue from Replicus or a motivational speech.

Baddan, Allora, Grim and Pherdanta headed for the edge of the ship and waited for the formation of Faction ships to arrive below them.

Rapid thoughts filled their heads, as did the rush of adrenaline to their bodies.



Replicus had already told them all to expect their pre-established thoughts and assumptions to be wrong, but nevertheless, they were to stick to the plan.

Good.

All was good so far.

Huff. Huff.

Grim could already feel his blood boiling, and his eyes shone with a crimson light when he saw the vessels finally pass right under them.

Under the stupefied stare of Thrill, he was first to dive, followed closely by Pherdanta then Allora, then Baddan.

At the same time, Replicus' casual smile faded as a notification popped in his view.

['High Cosmetic Body' has timed out 00:00:00:00]

His simple shirt and pants vanished as a tall, slender, majestic and domineering armour that highlighted the limitless glare of countless stars over its dark base took their place, a set of sharp horns growing from its helm.

Four slots opened on said helm, and from them, four blinding flashes of blue light gushed forth, originating from the figure within the Hollow of the armour; he who shed his skin and flesh to become the infamous Titan World Storm Penetrator!

"That's better," Replicus said just as Baddan disappeared from deck, and he looked at Thrill.

The Curse's head scrolled back to Replicus and he looked up, adjusting to the new height and power.

The Penetrator pointed at the Flawless Flail of Ruin and then at himself.

Thrill didn't need to hear the Null Lifeform's instruction to understand his task.

After taking a glance at Araeyn's emotionless face, he shakily pointed the Flail at Replicus, and a bolt of energy rushed out to smack onto the Hollow Dusk Prison...

#### Chapter 1025: Finding The Target

Grim, Allora, Baddan and Pherdanta seemed to fall in slow-motion. They watched as the formation of ships started to stop below them, and it became clear that they had been spotted.

What had likely caused the pause was probably the surge of energy from the boss reverting back to his Penetrator form, leading more than a few to sense his presence from above.

Well, this strategy wasn't entirely hinged on popping out of nowhere to surprise the enemy. In fact, it was better if they all saw them and stopped to see – as had just happened.

As the wind blasted against him mercilessly, Grim attempted to make out the position of their target with the sharp sight from his red eyes.

He could see nothing.

All the ships still had on the umbrella-shaped barrier, which, unfortunately for them, couldn't be pierced by natural sight to see who was aboard the ship. Only Incandescent Stagers who could recognise the details of souls could do that.

'Oh well...' Grim shrugged.

The boss had already told them:

'I've marked the ships belonging to Eaniss, Em-Sul and the Bishop. You can probably recognise Warding Pride's ship with no issue on your own. I don't want you to rely on this though, so I won't tell you which is which. Conditions on this battlefield are always changing, so I'll let you figure that out in real time.'

The boss had then given an encouraging look to Allora.

Grim did the same as their altitude decreased.

Allora wore a firm face filled with resolve, her eyes staring down with focus. Her body which bubbled with mana that she was doing her damndest to keep in check was rather stiff, but she seemed ready to break out of such an undesirable posture when the time was ripe.

Grim almost wanted to laugh.

'Why so damn serious?' he thought. 'Ah, that's right. If she screws up, she'll add a burden on the boss.'

Right then, the group felt an abundance of attention coupled with hostile intent. All the remaining Factions had their eyes on them now, including heavyweights like the Bishop and Eaniss.

Now was the time!

Pherdanta grasped her swords and they let loose a sharp noise as they slid out their hilts.

Baddan brought forth his hands before him and drew his open palms together before chanting:

"Grant me the chances!"

Immediately, two disks, like steel plates appeared over his head, one twice the size of the other.

Grim grinned, and in order to match the energy the Sky Watcher had, he called the name of the beast he would be assuming this time!

"Paradon Parody."

Just as his body started to bulk up, his Granted Armament receding to make way for his enormous size, Allora let her infinite mana gush out wildly from her mana core, which Grim had damaged before the short briefing minutes ago!

The mana, in all its vibrant, white intensity flooded the sky, creating a pattern similar to a field full of fallen autumn leaves, only, their colour being stark white.

There was an eruption quite like that the sound of thunder at the same time, and Allora, the source of the burst of mana seemed to breathe out from her nostrils a fittingly infinite amount of air.

Her hair attained a dull glow and her eyes became radiant white.

The fingers to both her hands locked together, and she then let out a devastating scream!

...!!!

Rather than a scream, it was more apt to call it a cry.

It was nothing short of disturbing.

It seems to crawl rapidly through space and smash into its target where its effect got amplified to the point where it could sink into the bone and fracture it!

Many were affected.

Yet many also resisted.

It was a decent technique at best.

That's what powerhouses like Eaniss had in their thoughts as they looked up.

What was this sonic attack supposed to be exactly?

However...

This was just the prelude.

It was natural for keen eyes to expect that after Allora's less-than-musical-attack, the others would show their hand and expose the main attack.

...But it was still Allora's turn.

She was forty-five meters from the sea when she set loose another stream of air from her mouth and...

...!!!

Everyone on the battlefield saw the image of the tall, wiry-looking Unlimited flash within their minds, and when that happened, all except for a few who recognised and countered the nature of attack were smitten by a force that momentarily caused their minds to lose touch with their bodies!

A mental attack, and an outrageously powerful one at that!

Warding Pride stumbled and knelt down as the world, for but a second, spun. She had felt a numb sensation just now but it quickly dissolved in the next instant.

Something similar happened to most of the other Faction Leaders, and even Eaniss and the Bishop had felt a little dizzy.

Em-Sul, however....

The man wore a nasty look on his face just as he staggered back.

His eyes twitched and turned bloodshot.

"Fools!" he growled into the sky from the deck of Eaniss' ship, much to everyone's surprise.

Everyone, except Allora.

She wore a huge grin, and then cried to her allies while pointing at the ship that was in the lead!

"He's right there!"

Instantly, Baddan and Pherdanta's eyes snapped in the direction of Eaniss' ship.

So that's where he was...

Just as Replicus said. If they had come in with prior misconceptions...

Right then, the growing bulge that was Grim exploded into a mass of flesh and bone that rapidly wove and segmented into a huge sturdy beast!

Spots of dark crimson fur sprouted from it until they turned into a heavy, shaggy coat that was almost half as thick as the beast's individual limbs!

A grating growl shot from the newly formed creature's maw which was attached to a thick, lumpy face that looked much like of a tiger.

The beast had four limbs, all of which, while the same size – muscular and bulky – looked as though they belonged to different creatures, same with the tail which was roughly fifteen meters long!

BOOOOOOF!

The beast landed on the ebony sea, splashing hideous volumes of the poisonous waters into the air in a confounding tide!

A few ships were pushed back, and some were washed by the unclean water.

The sea, which had been calm all along suddenly turned chaotic again, all around the figure of Grim, no, the Paradon Parody, which surprisingly didn't sink, but remained with half its body exposed over the surface of the water with its fur sizzling from the corrosion.

Pherdanta, Allora and Baddan had clung to the beast before it landed, and now they stood comfortably on its back looking at the swaying fleet.

Pherdanta slashed the air with her white scimitar and deadly whistles from her blade transcended distance to leave visible marks on Eaniss' ship.

As her ship bobbed up and down, Eaniss curiously stared at the group a fair distance away.

She didn't know what their aim was, especially without Bright Storm among them, but she found herself quickly losing interest.

Em-Sul behind her was seething for some reason, likely to do with the slight inconvenience just now, but she didn't bother to ask for details.

Aurolio raised a brow at the sight of the four.

"What now? Are they trying to take us all on?" he sneered.

No doubt, everyone else that looked at four wondered the same thing.

What was this? A scare tactic?

...

What happened next, however, made everyone turn tense and take this matter all the more seriously.

It was Baddan's turn to let loose a jet of air from his nostrils.

He gathered his hands and made a simple gesture with his hands.

As he did, an unbelievable amount of mana stormed from him and rose up into the sky!

If the Factions thought its volume was impressive, then its density was almost god-like!

It was even more daunting than Allora's flood of mana just now.

The Sky Watcher looked ahead and then spoke in a loud voice.

"Majestic Territory, Reign of the Unending Exigencies."

Chapter 1026: Mash of Domains!

One thing was apparent in that moment.

What was standing on the red, shaggy beast with entirely black eyes and a mane of whitish silver fur that acted as its hair and beard, was not human despite looking like one.

It was a beast.

That in itself was only odd, and not frightening at all.

However, the towering, billowing waves of dense mana, as well as the methodical manner in which they surged, merely seconds away from transforming into something wondrous and fatal, was the terrifying part.

A Territory was coming.

A Territory from a beast.

This was especially harrowing because beasts, as the original users of Majestic Territories, did not need to use Creeds for their activation. As a result, they tended to be, not only better at using them the older they were, but also faster during the activation.

Worse yet, the active Territories of beasts tended to be much larger than that of humans.

"Majestic Territory, Reign of the Unending Exigencies."

By the time the suspiciously languid voice of the Sky Watcher came, all those who could, expelled their Territories in response!

Warding Pride.



Em-Sul.

Mad Bishop.

Even Eaniss.

Baddan wore a dashing smile.

His raging mana, in the morsels of time that followed, turned into a massive sphere of solid white Nitros, quite like paint that exploded outward!

Before it could engulf everyone within it, though, a similarly globe of potent Nitros rushed to meet it, stalling its momentum. Then another came and then another.

Before longer than a millisecond, twelve bloated spheres of Nitros – with varying sizes – were bashing against each with huge hot sparks flying where they met, pushing each other for control!

It was quite the sight!

The Reverse Clusters in the vicinity were eradicated by the combined power of the Territories which bombarded the space around!

Mirages and distortions erupted, devastating the sky and the sea alike!

The ebony waters were whipped back, or perhaps incinerated, leaving a huge empty gap between the globes of unformed Territories and where the surviving waters persisted below!

It was a spectacle!

Very rarely was there ever a circumstance where so many Territories clashes like this.

And when they did...

BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOM!

The globe-like Nitros balls shot trails of colour upward at the same time, some of them depicting well-refined environments and some only showing singular stretches of colour with vague artistic details!

The streams of varying designs were also packed together as they soared upward, clashing, but...

PWA! PWA! PWA!

Quite like glass, a majority of them began to shatter, and in turn, the globes from which they originated cracked horribly as well!

What exactly was happening?

Well, when Territories were expelled at the same time, and collided, their Primary assault functions automatically measured against each other.

In such a case, having a Primary assault function based solely on 'hitting hard' with raw force gave one the advantage, even if their Territory as a whole was inferior!

Such a Primary assault function could simply wallop that of an opposing Territory which would in turn deal direct damage to the caster of the opposing Territory!

And such was the result...

The individual scores of colour were representations of different Territories' Imaginary GeoScapes. They carried the Primary assault function of the Territory and matched it against the others.

Those that were overwhelmed, shattering in the process...

"ARRRRRGHHHH!"

One of the twelve globes below the streams of GeoScapes cracked and dissolved, leaving behind a great vessel atop of which a man with spiky hair could be seen screaming at the top his lungs!

Every bone of his on the right side of his body was turned to dust, blood and cuts marring his flesh and his armour!

Immediately, he and his Faction sank below, where the ocean the vessel had been sitting on had been.

Several more such scenes showed as more of the Territories lost in the contention of Primary assault functions, many falling to the depths of the depressed sea; dead or even alive.

Baddan held strong.

Eaniss held strong.

Em-Sul held strong.

And Warding Pride as well.

The clash continued, much to a certain Penetrator's amusement.

"They executed everything perfectly. I really should reward them. Hmm. Isn't that twice I'm saying this now without delivering?" Replicus called himself out.

His crew had performed outstandingly on the first phase of the plan.

One. To use Allora's significantly improved mastery of Mind casting to find and taunt Em-Sul if she could (just because).

Two. To use Grim's resilient beast form as a platform to land on.

Three. To mark where Em-Sul was so they wouldn't lose him after the chaos that ensued.

Four. Have Baddan incite a massive Majestic Territory clash that would eliminate the riff-raff and force the enemy to lose a sizable chunk of resources – Creeds.

Four was only possible because Baddan was a powerful Cluster beast of the fourteen Tier with a stable and unusual Territory which he expertly incorporated his new technique into. And this was only possible because he had incredible talent that had befuddled even Replicus.

"Hehe..." Replicus chuckled behind the starry helm which shone from polish, reflecting on its surface the outline of clouds above him.

Because he had assumed his Penetrator form, the darkness he had conjured for the ship dissipated as he had no control over it in this state.

Instead, he stood over a mass of dark clouds with Thrill on his left and Araeyn on his right.

"You people...!" Thrill spoke while shuddering in express horror.

The luminance from what was happening below dyed all three of them.

Replicus' sockets flashed brightly.

"You should probably look away if you think this is as crazy as things will get."

And he was right.

The real show was just about to begin.

"Araeyn," Replicus said, and the pale, ghoulish Apostle to his right moved.

He leapt from the cloud and dropped straight down like an arrow, greaves first.

He had no semblance of emotion on his face, but deep within, buried under layers of growing insubordination, he was interested in using this ability of his for the first time.

An ability that was the core of what he was.

The Astute Duke of Transversal.

The radiance from the struggling powers below illuminated the Apostle, highlighting him with more and more brightness the lower he went.

Before he landed, a long red sash, his Fond Calamity, appeared and acted as a platform for him to stand on.

Then, a skill churned within him.

[Grandiose Manifestation]

...!!!

As soon as it was activated, everyone felt it.

After all, a piece of Aigas – one where the Territories contended against each other – transformed into a whole other dimension entirely...

Chapter 1027: Boring Mine Nova Star Course!

It suddenly became hard to breathe.

It suddenly became hard to see.

The degree of control that every other Incandescent Stager had enjoyed while holding on to the gushing might of their Territory lessened, as something extraordinary that happened outside the skirmish of the magical domains changed their priorities.

They couldn't have seen what happened just now, but Replicus had, and his sockets flared madly with excitement.

Once again, all was according to plan.

Right when Araeyn dropped and nearly fell on one of globe-like balls of Nitros, he activated [Grandiose Manifestation], and immediately, space was stretched like rubber seemingly by an unseen pair of divine, Null hands.

~~~

[Grandiose Manifestation | Lv.1]

Information passively rendered into the head of the Astute Duke of Transversal; star scapes, bizarre regions, climates and atmospheres from the wide expanses of the Null Verse, can be transposed onto an area of 50,000 square kilometers in any world, temporarily.

Mana Requirements: 100,000 NLE points

Duration: 15 minutes

Cooldown: 5 hours

~~~

All the times that Araeyn seemed to be dazed, looking over into the plain distance while ignoring tense events and casual ones while on Replicus' ship, details of random regions within the Null Verse were being passed into his mind.

With but a wish, using [Grandiose Manifestation], he could then manifest any space from the Null Verse that he fully recognised and paste it onto wherever he pleased!

...

The clouds elongated on the bluish canvas of the Aigas sky, the ebony sea widened like a terribly adjusted aspect ratio, and a brief, impact noise, quite similar to how paper sounded when getting burnt, ensued.

All was affected.

All except the living things – mostly.

Then, in the next second, the calm, forgiving skies past the Central Boundary, as well as the horrors of its sea vanished.

Their pressure and presence was stripped, replaced by... nothing.

Those who could afford to send their extra senses outside their Territories, were flabbergasted.

It seemed that this battle has shifted locations.

Now, it was taking place around millions of stars... within an endless, dark vacuum.

Endless dots of varying shades of piercing blue light could be seen everywhere, some close and some very, very far. Or maybe this was simply a size difference?

It was difficult to tell and too trivial a matter to consider.

What mattered, was that the remains of the Severed Union on this side of a cleaved Aigas, were drifting in unfamiliar Territory. Somewhere foreign and... mute of any sort of feeling.

Eaniss frowned.

The darkness outside, illuminated only – and with great difficulty – by sparkling, distant forces, almost intruded on her bundled Nitros!

It was uncanny.

She could see a print of black on the wall that made her unformed Territory.

'Vexing...' she thought.

Warding Pride and Em-Sul saw and felt the same.

Other than the darkness, there was also a lack of air. It seemed that whatever sustainability was offered by their Nitros was barely enough to save them from the atmosphere outside.

Things could get worse if they chose to dispel their Territories!

'Damn you, Bright Storm!' Warding Pride thought as she gritted her teeth.

Several other Territory users cursed Replicus and his Unlimited. They truly seemed doomed.

Little did they know, they were in much more trouble than they would have thought.

After all...

Baddan's grin grew so fierce that his face became unrecognisable.

His Nitros ballooned to thrice its former size and knocked against those of his remaining contenders!

...!!!

Everyone was shaken!

What was going on?!

Why was his Territory suddenly getting stronger?!

Above the clash, Replicus who was still perched on a thundercloud with a petrified Thrill stretched his arms wide on both sides of him.

Notifications rained in his sight, giving him blissful news!

[You have been dragged into the Boring Mine Nova Star Course!]



[The dense Null Life Essence that makes up this environment favours you]

[Your Null Life Essence reserves are forcefully amplified by 300%!]

[Your stats are augmented by 140%]

[The performance of any and all Null Life skills and Null Life related artefacts will be increased by 250%]

The Titan World Storm Penetrator immediately became decked in circling arcs of thick, bluish white Levin that threatened to vaporise anything that touched it!

Null Life Essence even bellowed in excess within his hands involuntarily and his eyes sparked with deep lights that promised nothing, but a severe conclusion!

'Another step cleared,' Replicus thought.

As the notifications had explained, he was currently enjoying the benefits of being on home ground; a Null space.

In a way, Baddan was experiencing the same. A lesser sort of boon when compared to the Penetrator, but a boon nonetheless.

As Baddan's technique, which involved him summoning six Null beasts, was incorporated into his Territory; making up the Primary and Second assault functions, his Territory was emboldened!

The force of its expansion, and the sudden augmentation of its Primary assault function led to it overpowering not one, not two but all the Territories it had been battling against!

The stream of coloured light over his Nitros expelled multiple rays of unseen energy that shattered those of his enemies and directly dealt damage to them!

Eaniss, Em-Sul, Warding Pride and the Bishop were smacked with no small amount of hurt!

The attacks felt like long, ghostly blades that couldn't be hindered by armour cutting right into their chests and piercing their hearts with a cold, sharp and poisonous edge!

...

This would have ended most combatants, but sadly, it wasn't enough for these four.

Their bubbles of Nitros shattered immediately with the simultaneous defeat of the four Incandescent Stagers, revealing their vessels which floated in the dark space, and their subordinates.

Of course, because the unformed Territories were what had been keeping most experts safe, the majority of regular riff-raff fell prey to the greedy conditions of the Boring Mine Nova Star Course.

Several turned to a pale shade of blue and floated off the ships' deck, fazing through the golden umbrella-shaped barrier as though it didn't exist!

Worse yet, their souls leaked from their bodies and were sucked far into the collections of stars at transcendent speed!

This phenomenon, which, hilariously, was simply a result of being exposed to too much of the variant of Null Life Essence in this place, almost killed all the Masters present in an instant, but most of their Leaders acted in time.

Warding Pride vomited blood from the damage she received from Baddan's Territory, but promptly salvaged her situation and that of her subordinates with a peculiar artefact.

The Bishop completely ignored the blood staining her robes from her left chest and cackled crisply before using Creeds to replenish her exhausted mana.

Em-Sul summoned an object that looked much like a dumbbell, grasped it in his hand and somehow recovered immediately.

Eaniss was the only one to remain without showing any signs of pain or visible strain to either her body or her clothing.

She, like the Bishop, muttered a Creed, and restored her mana instantly while giving Baddan a curious gaze from below.

Baddan couldn't see this of course.

His eyes only stared at the mark left by Pherdanta's sword.

'It's this ship,' he thought.

That was the target.

And thus...

His Nitros expanded voraciously and rapidly.

It reached into Eaniss' ship, but upon invading its golden embrace, it simply pushed the woman adorned in a vast ribbon away, and devoured Em-Sul alone.

Once this was done, Baddan's Territory was established.

The GeoScape was formed.

Now Baddan, the enemy, and of course, Grim, Pherdanta and Allora stood, facing each other.

Chapter 1028: How Cold of Y'all

Replicus was thoroughly pleased.

Not only had the plan come together in such a splendid fashion, his subordinates seemed extremely motivated, a fact he hadn't been sure would be the case since he explained what he wanted to do a day prior.

He was confident Baddan would be up for a challenge, as he had a sense of pride about him that went against the very idea that he was seen as lesser.

Replicus had seen that anguish in the beast when he explained the nature of Clusters, where the Sky Watcher was born.

The rest – his Unlimited – he feared for them because he knew that they thought they were in over their heads. Maybe not Grim, but Allora and Pherdanta were constantly worried about how they would perform against Faction Leaders and their older and more experienced forces if the goal was to challenging everyone all at once.

Beyond that, Replicus having to tell them that the battle was going to take place... well, in another dimension far different from Aigas, had him considering whether or not he should prune or give a time-out to his more... human partners.

Fortunately, that never became an exercised option.

As Replicus watched the successful entrapment of Em-Sul, his worries lessened.

Those four just had to be clear on their task.

This wasn't about beating a Faction Leader, especially one like Em-Sul.

This was going to be difficult to do, even if Baddan had him in his Territory.

All the four needed to do, was to nab the Harmonic Ember from Em-Sul and get the flesh out of dodge.

Meanwhile, Replicus, Araeyn... and maybe Thrill, would face the remainder of the Factions.

And right now...

"Has this gotten entertaining enough for you Eaniss? I fulfilled your wish. Perhaps I even went a bit overboard," Replicus said.

His voice travelled well within the dense, unlimited darkness, reaching Eaniss and the others whom he couldn't see still because of the golden barriers.

He knew they heard him, though, because an instant later, the umbrella-shaped shield to Eaniss' ship receded, revealing her voluptuous figure teased by her odd dress.

A comfortable coat of Nitros danced around her fighting off the fatal atmosphere which would kill her in a few hours if she tanked it head on.

Sadly, the Head Faction leader couldn't reply.

Unlike Replicus who could sent his voice through the Null Life Essence drowning the space, she couldn't, and she knew she couldn't despite not sensing the essence.

She simply gave him a cold, amused gaze accompanied by a blush.

There was someone beside her who could render a retort, however...

"This is the best thing to happen since we took off on this dreary journey!"

Aurolio wore a bright, borderline demented visage as he called aloud.

His white hair seemed to stand on end, his eyes flashing with excitement. A bit of colour even seemed to plaster his corpse-like skin.

Unlike other Masters who needed to be shielded by their Faction Leaders, Aurolio was capable of protecting himself.

Voided Death Essence spikily stormed out of his body, contending against the abundant Null Life Essence!

No one else aside from Replicus could tell, but the Null Life Essence was pooling around the pale man hostilely, and thus he had to defend himself more than the others.

"I'm glad you think so," Replicus said to the pale man.

'Strange,' he added inwardly.

Now perhaps there was more benefit to this than he had initially thought.

Perhaps he could discover what exactly Aurolio was hiding about his interaction with Skullius through this place.

It was probably going to be much easier since Aurolio couldn't harm the Penetrator due to the Tie of Exchange he seemed to have made with the original Null Lifeform.

'Heh.'

Replicus looked past Aurolio.

The Mad Bishop could hardly contain her excitement. She was visibly trembling while looking straight up at him.

The Penetrator knew exactly what was on her mind.

"Let's finally get this over with, Bishop. We're in range, right?" he said as the cloud he stood on dropped in altitude until it was fifty meters away from Eaniss' ship.

The arrangement he had made with the Bishop.

One where they would fight once within fifty meters of each other, was still in play.

The Bishop nodded eagerly to Replicus' inquiry.

Replicus' sockets flared.

His gaze then shifted to another ship from where he felt a glare pierce through his starry armour. It came straight from none other than Warding Pride.

"Looks like everyone wants to fight me. How cold of you all," Replicus said. "Fine. But how about we change the venue a bit, hmmm? Araeyn, if you will."

At once, the Apostle, while riding his Fond Calamity, activated another one of his skills!

[Dimensional Submission]!

In addition to being able to superimpose a region of the Null Verse on top of any place in another world, the Astute Duke of Transversal, was able to control this superimposed region as he pleased!

Araeyn stretched out his hand and strangled the void of Null space as though it were tangible.

He then pulled, and...

...!!!!

Even Replicus was surprised by the godly restraint and motion that dragged him from where he stood and pulled him elsewhere!

The abundant stars littering every direction turned into tangling, lengthy lines in his vision, representing the unfathomable distance he travelled in only a few seconds only to then slam on a scorching hot ground with his greaved feet!

'You could be gentler, you know,' Replicus thought.

He steadied himself.

He had landed with his knees bent to ensure that he didn't possibly break his legs from the force.

That wouldn't do, even if he could heal himself easily.

That would be bad for showmanship.

He looked up.

The epic ceiling of stars was still visible, only marred by pale blue wisps of heat.

Replicus had, after all, landed on a star.

Freakishly hot fumes rose from the gigantic mass of vibrant turquoise below him, expelling vigorous powers that went beyond just 'hot'.

It wasn't at all like standing on the sun, it was more like being lost within the core of the sun itself, which for most, would have spelled death long ago. But for Replicus, it was refreshing.

The Hollow Dusk's Prison, his starry armour would have been incinerated long before he landed, but because it had the ability to bond with Replicus' body, making it and him one and the same, it survived.

Thus, the Penetrator maintained his Majestic appearance over the star, barely visible through the ripping heat and the distortions it caused.

He took a step.

'This is not even fire. It's another form of Null Life Essence. Interesting...' he thought.

Because he couldn't access information about the regions of the Null Verse from Araeyn, he was just as surprised as everyone else when he appeared here.

He had only instructed the Apostle to bring them somewhere he and his subordinates wouldn't die instantly.

That wish had only been half fulfilled.

Nevertheless, this was a bigger boon than expected.... again.



To fully take advantage of it, Replicus donned the [Nullmancer's Royal Raiment of Acclimation] and activated [Epiphany] as well as [Greatest Null Weaver].

Before any results could register, however...

BOOOOM!

BOOOOOM!

BOOOOM!

...

Multiple ships hurtled through the still void of space and crashed onto the star with considerable oomph!

Replicus watched chunks of glowing hot rock, large and small fly up, dark and light fumes alike hissing everywhere from where the crash occurred.

Araeyn had brought the others.

Replicus would have grinned if he could.

His enemies exposed themselves one by one, with Eaniss and Aurolio in the lead.

Now, if the Penetrator could survive this...

No.

If he could endure it for 15 minutes or less...

Chapter 1029: Sneak Attack

Em-Sul looked at the strange surroundings with keen, appraising eyes.

He had been dragged in so fast. There had barely been any time for him to take action, as right after his Territory was crushed, sharp, piercing damage hammering into his chest, he hadn't quite had the chance to replenish himself with Creeds.

'How did this Territory suddenly get immensely stronger anyway?' Em-Sul asked himself while standing up straight, the dumbbell-like artefact in his hand gripped tight.

That too, had happened very quickly.

It was as though the Territory of the beast that was in league with Bright Storm was bolstered by some kind of divine influence; like a blessing that augmented all its qualities.

Of course, that wasn't the case.

Looking around, Em-Sul saw an odd, cloudy environment.

The Majestic Territory, Reign of the Unending Exigencies' Imaginary GeoScape was constructed out of dark blue clouds.

Figures that vaguely resembled trees, misshapen and lumpy because of what formed them, decorated the canvas of deep black that surrounded them.

Em-Sul was right in the middle of these cloudy shapes, though only the first line of 'trees' was truly visible to him, even with his enhanced sight.

The area he stood in, which was a plain full of long, cloudy, dark blue grasses could not have looked more ominous. Strands of dull light poured only within its circular mass from the heavy clouds above, which seemed to mask what might have been a blue sun.

Em-Sul sighed, and then he immediately muttered a Creed to replenish his energy reserves.

His eyes darted to the left, and then to the right.

His expanded sight might have been limited, but he wasn't so crude that he couldn't perceive vague outlines hiding behind what he could see of the cloudy forestry.

'They aim to sneak attack me, huh? Pretty good strategy considering that I can hardly sense anything within this place...' Em-Sul thought.

When all was said and done, it seemed his enemies were sure that this Territory alone wasn't enough to kill him.

It was good that they acted with that in mind.

The Harmonic Ember around Em-Sul's neck was suddenly engulfed in a white haze, and at the same time, the Faction Leader summoned what looked like a clam from his spatial storage.

...!!!

Right then, something moving at nothing less than the speed of lightning slammed into Em-Sul!

What was more impressive than its speed, was its sheer size. Whatever had suddenly charged out of the darkness was a fat, bulky monstrosity nearly ten meters tall and almost half as wide!

The creature was quite ugly; its face quite like that of an ogre, if identified according to otherworldly detailing.

Two long fangs protruded from its bottom lip, their yellow colour highlighted by the vibrant bluish white light gushing from its perfectly circular eyes.

Wart-filled ebony skin wrapped all over its muscular body, which was struggling to push against Em-Sul.

Indeed, the Faction Leader had reacted without much difficulty.

His body was coated with a thick, viscous Nitros that expanded two meters from his body, contending against the giant before it.

Em-Sul raised a brow.

'This much shouldn't be expected to distract me, right? They are not dense. This means...'

The Faction Leader turned, and in the nick of time, he managed to catch a glimpse of a figure adorned in a voluminous lustreless set of dark grey armour – helmet and all – covered with uneven lumps.

Floating above it, were two disks stacked on top of each other, with two steel balls visible on the topmost one.

This figure... had already reached Em-Sul's expansive field of Nitros unnoticed.

Em-Sul was surprised, but he didn't falter.

His arm snapped towards the armoured individual with vicious speed, and on its way... it stopped being a limb of flesh, bone and blood.

His arm from the elbow suddenly attained an additional meter in length, and turned into a standard silver steel gauntlet!

The individual in the lumpy armour attempted to decelerate and guard, but it seemed that he failed to interpret what his enemy intended.

As the Harmonic Ember attained a more blinding glow, Em-Sul's gauntlet hand flashed red... before shooting thick bolts of orange lightning that flew out haphazardly, ensuring that no direction within a twenty meter radius was safe to dive to!

A fair share of lightning smote the armoured figure, and worse than that, each hit swiftly melted a portion of the dark grey armament with ease!

Such heat!

Such power!

The armoured figure flew sky high and disappeared into the cloudy trees while oozing dark smoke.

The burly ugly on Em-Sul's other side was not exempt from the fiery, crackling attack.

...But it wasn't bested by it either.

The creature revealed, around its right hand, an agitating, warped influence, quite like a foul-smelling breeze that circled its fingers.

It then spontaneously shot its hand like a blur towards Em-Sul!

The Faction Leader frowned as he guarded.

He couldn't see what this strange influence he sensed was, much less understand it.

...And he would never be able to.

Right as the bulky thing's speeding fist bashed against his Nitros... something unseen suddenly punctured Em-Sul's shoulder, leaving a gaping hole in it that sprayed blood to the ground!

...!!!

Em-Sul gritted his teeth, but his eyes maintained a keen sense of focus.

Unfortunately, no amount of steadfastness could have stopped three more holes from appearing on his body with explosive shocks each time; one at the very centre of his chest, another on his right side and the last on his left arm's elbow!

"This fat bastard!" Em-Sul thought with thinly veiled rage.

He leapt back, covering a vast distance in the plain... which seemed to deny him any option for leaving it; Em-Sul couldn't get near the line of trees.

Right as he grappled with this nearly discovered fact, something dropped onto him!

BOOOOM!

Em-Sul barely dodged the abrupt descent of the figure in the dark grey armour in a vicious stomp that packed so much power, it shook the entire plain!

The Faction Leader staggered and hissed in pain.

The quick roll he had done to escape being pounded into the ground had forced him to exert unneeded pressure on his wounds.

'These two... Both of them seem to be capable of rendering my Nitros useless for defence. Is this part of the Territory's Primary assault function?' Em-Sul questioned, but before he could try to find any answer, his instincts flared.

His head whipped behind him, and his eyes caught on to the figure of the hideous ebony giant which had streaked around him without him noticing.

It threw its arm sharply at Em-Sul again!

The Faction Leader, realising that he couldn't afford to attempt to judge the nature of this strange creature's abilities conventionally and dodge, decided instead to counterattack.

Unfortunately, just when he pounced at the beast, a crushing force blew into his back!

...!!!

Em-Sul's face strained with pain.

It wasn't just some ridiculously voluminous force.

Something else was at play.

He felt his flesh twist horrifically when a fist bashed against it!

While the agony the Faction Leader felt was formidable, equally as tenacious, was his will to dismantle all obstacles that took him lightly!

In a shocking display of both speed and ferocity, Em-Sul whipped his left hand – hanging from a thread of flesh as it was – and grabbed that of the armoured figure firmly.

The Faction Leader's eyes flared.

He then pulled with immense force, dragging the figure along as he lunged at the burly monstrosity on his flank, but midway through the action, he felt a tug greater than the force he was currently exerting.

The armoured figure resisted being dragged like a rag doll, and instead sent a left hook hurtling towards Em-Sul's face.

The Faction Leader felt the same odd influence he had felt from the ogre-ish monster waft from the armoured figure's fist!

Again?

What was this odd power?!

He desperately made to avoid it, but seven unseen forces blew multiple holes through his body with merciless impact!

The large, burly monster he had turned to had finally landed its attack, and it seemed fatal.

In the next instance where Em-Sul seemed to almost fade out of unconsciousness, the armoured figure shook his arm free from of Em-Sul's grip and made to grab the spherical gem around his neck!

Chapter 1030: Evening Odds...Or Not

Em-Sul looked as though he had encountered a particularly angry – and particularly large – porcupine and engaged in rough game of wrestling with it.

The bloody holes he spotted could be seen even on his neck, spitting out blood like fountains.

It was a wonder how he was still conscious, and far from unsubscribing to life yet.

It was also a wonder how he managed to avoid getting the Harmonic Ember stolen from him when Baddan's hand was less than an inch away from snatching it.

The Faction Leader's body – to quite the surprise – abruptly transformed into a full set of strangely disproportionate golden armour that was unnecessarily tall!

A vengeful presence exploded from it, full of vicious life, in stark contrast to the dreary air that Em-Sul's torn flesh had presented.

This set of armour had no perforations made by mysterious attacks. It was full, sturdy and glossy, standing at three meters in height.

The narrow, horizontal visor on its helmet exposed the empty and full duality of what lay within it.

The armour was indeed protective gear... but it was also an autonomous body.

One of the Mythical+ grade!

Baddan found that he missed the chance to nab the Harmonic Ember when its altitude rose with Em-Sul's height just now. That single instance permanently cut off the opportunity for him to simply grab what he needed before everything spiralled into high hell.

And now, at the beginning of high hell, Baddan and his least favourite Wild Exigency, Warpish Fuggu flashed a distance away from Em-Sul.

A firm silence temporarily took hold over the plain.

Baddan couldn't help but wonder which of the many Classes Replicus had explained to him this foe had.



His abilities were rather... odd.

How could someone turn into a full set of armour, one that exuded such a frightening presence?

Baddan saw it fitting to compare this to Replicus' Hollow Dusk Prison calibre-wise.

At the same time, Em-Sul wondered just what was the deal with this Territory. What exactly was the Primary assault function?

Only after figuring it out would he be able to find a way to counter it, and whatever that method to counter was, it needed to be less reliant on physical power. Well, at least for him.

'Well, at least he is every bit as tough as that Territory struggle suggested...' the Faction Leader thought before flexing his metallic fingers which were individually glazed with Nitros.

His current form, was a result of his Advanced Class.

In general, Em-Sul had a rare sort of Class to begin with.

He was a Shifter, a type of Energy Former rarely seen among both humans and beasts.

Shifters' main traits revolved around mimicking the shapes of other creatures and objects.

Where Em-Sul differed from this description, however, laid in the fact that he was an Augmented Material Shifter; a Shifter that specialised in transforming into unique, magical artefacts and mimicking their properties finely!

His current golden form was one such mimicked artefact. The golden armour could intensify all physical impacts it received and add them as special effects to its arsenal!

Em-Sul let out a burst of hot steam.

"Why are you after this?" he suddenly said while facing Baddan, his thick finger pointing at the Harmonic Ember.

Baddan didn't answer.

Em-Sul expected as much.

His body creaked lightly as he shrugged and exposed the clam-like artefact he had withdrew before.

"Well, sorry to say, you've made me even more vigilant. That Bright Storm has you working a bit too hard. Are you on a payroll?" he said, and the clam opened, spitting out two streams of energy that coalesced into two human figures.

Baddan grunted.

More enemies?!

Indeed, there were.

One was a man with long grey hair and a moustache of the same hue, a sceptre with a black gem in his hand. His robes reeked of danger, as did his calm eyes.

The other was a freakishly burly man with intense red eyes and blonde hair drawn into a mullet.

Baddan noticed the depths of their strength immediately. They weren't quite as strong as Em-Sul; Baddan judged them to be a step below – Masters. However, that did not depreciate the level of threat they held, especially the man with the sceptre.

'A Mage. It must be...' Baddan thought, recalling once again what Replicus had warned.

When it came to Mages, it was wiser to disregard what Stage they bore, and be wary instead of their skill in Magecraft, after all, as Replicus had put it:

'Magecraft might as well be its own standard of power, like Stages...'

The Sky Watcher narrowed his eyes.

"Who spooked you, boss? I didn't think you'd let us out any time soon," the muscular man stretched as he asked Em-Sul.

The Faction Leader let out a hoarse breath that sounded almost mechanical given his current state.

"Don't let your guard down, fool. There is more than two enemies. I merely called you both to help me even out the numbers somewhat and – if you can handle it – dissect this Territory's effects?" he said.

"I see," the Mage said, his eyes pinned onto Baddan.

Em-Sul had stored his belongings as well as these two – the only members of his Faction that he brought on the voyage – within a special spatial artefact that could house living things before joining Eaniss on her ship.

Doing so had paid off more than he thought. If he hadn't decided to also have this pair stay in the artefact, they might have been left out when he was dragged into Baddan's Majestic Territory.

The burly man grinned.

"Yes, yes. However cool you want to sound when saying it, you do need our help, don't you?" he said as his body became engulfed in a potent Perfect Aura. "Now we sh—"

The words died in the bulky beefcake's throat, as he and the Mage almost missed the giant shadow that flitted through the air unceremoniously... and ripped an irregular chunk of the large man's body in less than an instant!

Em-Sul was the only one to keep track of the movement with a grim look on his face.

A massive canine with shaggy red fur layered with two variations of Perfect Aura had chomped out his man's entire left side!

Splits of sped time later, it landed a distance away and turned, bone and bleeding flesh stuck in its teeth, its eyes burning with malice!

Atop it, sat Pherdanta, her helmet on, and her large, red sword out. Above Grim's bold blue Aura which covered his entire transformed body, her own also mixed in with his, though, it also formed an almost perfect replica of Replicus in his starry armour above her.

This was the Swordswoman's Genuine Incarnation, a living type.

Em-Sul clicked his tongue as he watched the bulky man fall to his knees, his eyes rolled in vicious agony.

He hurriedly summoned the dumbbell-like artefact he had used to heal from the damage he took from Baddan's Territory when...

'Oh. A pity...'

He stopped.

The bulky man's blood rapidly turned from a deep red to a pale lilac colour in a matter of seconds. His flesh also became a light shade of mahogany.

Poison.

Em-Sul turned to Grim's ferocious appearance.

He didn't know what kind of poison was contained in that beast's bite, but it didn't look he could afford to waste his artefact's charges trying to see if the idiot who had been injected with it would survive.

Beyond that, there wasn't any time for such charity or mourning.

Pherdanta's sword set loose a chilling outpour of Aura, and that Aura rushed into the hand of her Incarnation, creating a copy of her sword for the Replicus look-alike.

As this occurred, Em-Sul and the Mage readied themselves while Baddan charged again with the Warpish Fuggu.

High hell fully commenced.