

Undead 1041

Chapter 1041: Vision of Misery! (3)

Kenno had told Replicus and the others all that he had managed to learn after his assigned mission to the Bryne Family State. Among many other things, he had learned of Stylla's mysterious disappearance after she suddenly acquired the power to remove the curse that had hung over her father for a long time.

Replicus had found that odd.

There had been no explanation for this occurrence, which had been beyond his wildest dreams, but now, as he glimpsed the differences in the redhead; her more defined physical features, how she now spotted a pair of webbed wings behind her back, and her inexplicable level of strength that allowed her to face against a Herald...

'Is she... is she somehow now allied to that thing?' Replicus wondered in horror. 'Or is that thing the reason she became so strong?'

This development rocked him to his core.

What had really happened back then in Genhuis City all those months ago?

It seemed the only one with the other portion of the story – the missing piece – was Skullius.

Replicus gritted his teeth.

The odds were continuing to stack themselves against him, and the stakes kept rising. After Kenno told him everything he knew, the Penetrator had been inclined to try to help Stylla, return her Family jewel, the Harmonic Ember, and make Em-Sul and his goons suffer for what they did to the estate back then.

This, along with how he was constantly troubled about Ferex's whereabouts, had weighed on the deepest recesses of Replicus' mind.

Some of the answers he had desired were finally here, but he hardly knew what to do with them.

Wordlessly, the Penetrator clutched the Harmonic Ember in his hand tight and allowed himself to be smacked by the vicious gusts of mana-filled wind, and an odd wall of darkness that proceeded another crackle like lightning in the sky. The battle between the dragon and the Null existence, aided by Stylla continued.

"Keep calm socket hole! This isn't the time to give in to sentiment!" one of the thought phantoms he had summoned cried right as Replicus was submerged in the vile, ebony sea.

"Yeah! Remember, we need to get out of this alive no matter the cost. If we can do that... and re-merge with Skullius – perhaps after a fight as bitter as this one – we will be able to handle most things on this damned world, which should be a good thing, since we are going to need all that strength against Somanda!"

"Hurry! Inaction will only cost us. You're a skeleton dammit, stop caring for a minute or two!"

The loud choruses of encouragement in his head did help Replicus a bit. He had started to get crushed under how impossible everything he set out to do was, but his thought phantoms were right.

If he could make it alive from under these odds...

However, said odds were a little more treacherous than met the eye.

Replicus wrestled against the dark tides within the ocean. Harsh lights burned above the waters, and the searing heat that came with them was egregious.

The Penetrator had figured out why his Titan World Storm Penetrator abilities were all dispelled, along with Araeyn's.

It was because of that damned dragon.

The weird tilting of the world, the melting of the clouds; things he had seen and thought to be illusions, were the creature's – perhaps – passive effect on the world.

Every influence under a certain level was immediately crippled in the dragon's presence.

Replicus guessed that Special skills and below were quite weak against that overbearing power, which made sense considering the sheer calibre of the dragon.

The Emissary hadn't done justice in describing the dragon's power at all.

As for how Araeyn's [Grandiose Manifestation] ability was affected, well, it seemed that spatial abilities were likely to fail in front of the dragon as well, but there was some slight nuance.

Baddan's Territory persisted for a few moments under these conditions, while [Grandiose Manifestation] fell immediately.

A Territory was pretty much a spatial manipulation feat, and not just on the inside. What likely made Baddan's Territory last, was because Baddan had full control over his Territory, while Araeyn couldn't possibly be able to control an entire dimension. At best, he could manipulate a few elements of the Boring Mine Nova Star Course, not be deigned its complete master.

Replicus' sockets blazed even within the dark liquid.

All these factors were why he couldn't use things like Spatial Lightning, or warp into Stagnant Space which he already had a weak affinity with. Heck, he couldn't even store the Harmonic Ember in his spatial storage, and thus settled for having his armour hide it within itself.

'I can't use [Unbound] on the Ember either. Even that skill is being restricted here... ' the Penetrator thought.

His use of the Ember was stalled. He had wanted to upgrade it right after acquiring it to maximise his gains, but...

'Dammit!'

For now, Replicus resolved to find his team. He could sense them through their Granted Armaments.

They were moving.

He swam as fast as he could as the sea flipped this way and that. Within the dark waters, he noticed a great many things. Struggling humans, struggling fish and struggling beasts. The latter made a desperate attempt to swim deeper into the ocean, fleeing from the presence of an infinitely more monstrous problem.

Replicus weaved through them all. They didn't see this as a time to attack, after all.

Soon, the Penetrator noticed a familiar coat of fur above the sea. A large beast with a long tail was running on the air while mounted by multiple figures.

Replicus immediately launched himself out of the water and clutched onto the beast's foot.

He then hurled himself onto its back where several eyes shot towards him.

At once, Replicus' socket flame fluctuated between bright rage and soft fury. Only one among the three in his direct line of sight felt the pain this subtle sign expressed.

Baddan looked quite heavily injured. The series of lacerations and gouges on his arms and chest told of the coarse ordeal he had barely managed to struggle through.

Grim's shaggy body also depicted his tribulations through the numerous singed or outright scorched spots on it. His front leg was mangled, but he powered through the pain, using its ability to use the air as a foothold to move away rapidly from the thick of the conflict in the skies.

Pherdanta seemed to have sustained the least amount of damage. She was bleeding profusely from her hands and face with the cause unclear, but of course, she could care less about her own minor injuries.

After all, the one nested in her arms had it far worse.

The sight of Allora with her waist a few grams of flesh away from parting with her torso, leaving her in two halves, was quite harrowing to say the least.

Chapter 1042: Vision of Misery! (4)

Four days.

Four days had passed since the BoneTender had ventured to that land separated from the rest. The land to the far North.

The quest, for the Existential Parallels, as Serenity had once told him, was singular. Rich worlds, imbued with cosmic nutrients through their histories; through their tales and components crafted by geniuses among accomplished Ordinaries – Deities – were the target.

They had always been.

And for this world, after the BoneTender had learned as much as he could from his new companion, he had determined that the best place to search for what he needed, was a land that claimed to be oldest and held almost as much mystery as that other island to the far West. One that was bordered by a barrier even the BoneTender couldn't break, try as he might.

It had taken him a little while to get used to using the body of the Null Devil King, but the BoneTender could say with confidence that the last four days of battle with a most interesting dragon, had helped him hone his movements in the late royal's corpse.

Jerthrax, the Vision of Misery, was an especially powerful creature with potent Divine energy coursing through its bones and flesh.

The dragon was bold and keen. He had rushed to meet him before he even set foot on that land to the North, and their long battle had begun without any exchange of words.

There was only intent.

The conclusion didn't seem anywhere in sight. At least not yet, but the BoneTender was not too worried.

The tough shell of the dragon – its scales – was finally starting to crack. The scales were incredibly tough, unreasonably so. It seemed as though it would take a few years to break them with the BoneTender's current arsenal.

But he was patient, despite his intrigue waning with every passing minute.

Though, this wouldn't remain true for long.

The darkness in the BoneTender's sockets honed in on a familiar figure that teased the same kind of energy as him below.

'Oh.'

At the BoneTender's slight shift in attention though, Jerthrax's keen senses noticed. His vibrant turquoise eyes locked in below at what was so outlandish it could dare drag his opponent's focus from him.

Replicus knelt by Allora.

She looked terrible.

Her nearly split body leaked blood in dangerous volumes, her organs hanging out loosely from the torn edges, nearly spilling onto Grim's coat of shaggy fur. Her spine could be seen, both severed and shattered.

What was worse than the look of her atrocious wounds, was how she constantly convulsed with her eyes and mouth hanging open. Only the whites of her mortal sight could be seen, with dark blood vessels spreading around them.

Allora... was alive.

Unfortunately, that wasn't exactly good news.

"She did her part well, Master," Pherdanta said with a heavy voice, and a face that was masked by sullen shadows. "She kept herself hidden until she felt she could exploit the moment to its fullest. But...I messed up. Em-Sul had an unusual ability – probably part of his Class – to replicate the effects of other weapons that touch him.

The moment Allora showed herself, she was immediately attacked with a sword slash she couldn't see."

Indeed, Em-Sul's powers as a Shifter were rather bizarre. He could transform into magical artefacts and even embody their special traits. While in the form of the golden armour, he had been able to replicate the nature of the sword attacks Pherdanta sent his way.

Replicus' socket flames dimmed.

So that was what Em-Sul could do.

"Allora managed to heal with her Granted Armament, but she couldn't utilise the element of surprise anymore. We had to gang up on Em-Sul from then. It didn't work well. He was too strong. He seemed to have an infinite store of weapons and tools that he used in tandem with the Harmonic Ember and we didn't manage to land meaningful hits on him at all. Still, Allora was our best bet.

We...we switched our strategy. Since she was the most versatile out of all of us, we shifted to making her stand out so that I could sneak on Em-Sul and steal the Ember. This didn't work either. In the end, when I managed to reach Em-Sul from behind, he noticed me at the last second, somehow.

I don't know how she did it... but right when I was about to get cut down by one of Em-Sul's artefact, Allora took my place, got close to Em-Sul and grabbed the Ember as he cut through her."

Pherdanta seemed to shatter with each sentence of her narration.

She had been confident that the part of her unique Advanced class that made her unnoticeable as long as she didn't interact with her target, would allow her at least a split second to nab the Ember, but she had been wrong.

The conclusion she came to as to why she failed, was that since Replicus could notice her presence at all times, it wasn't impossible for people stronger than him to notice him too.

That didn't make her feel any better though.

"Granted Restoration won't work?" Replicus asked.

Pherdanta shook her head. The Granted Armament's ability to restore its user to full health, wasn't working.

A sombre silence came and lingered.

Grim's desperate attempts at dodging the fiercely twisting environment were rough, but they couldn't have bothered his riders at the moment.

What was even more unnerving than the fact that Allora was still alive, was the fact that whatever Em-Sul used on her was making her feel the atrocious agony of death indefinitely.

She couldn't speak.

She couldn't think.

The thought burned the Penetrator.

He could choose to kill her, and set her free, but...

"What happened with Em-Sul afterwards?"

Pherdanta's face hardened.

"Before we took the Ember, it seemed to constantly be covered with mana. He was using it, probably for something other than the endless attacks he rained on us," she said.

"Indeed. I have a very bad feeling about what he wants or maybe... has already used it for," Baddan chimed in finally. He had been the first to engage with Em-Sul before he had been left with that treacherous Mage.

"I see..." Replicus said.

That made sense. Em-Sul must have had a goal in mind with the Ember. Perhaps he didn't even see this as a loss since he probably could only use it once on himself, just like Stylla and her Family.

Dammit!

Was it possible to retrieve whatever it was that Em-Sul used on Allora and save her? Was the difficulty even harder now, if as Baddan said, Em-Sul had already succeeded in using the Ember already?

How long would Allora's mind last for under all this pain?

Just as he thought this...

...!!!!

The Penetrator and his subordinates felt the waters around them explode, and everything in their sights was thrown wildly in every direction.

A wall of massive, stone-like scales was the first thing to register in their eyes after the initial chaos, and immediately, the breath left their bodies.

Everyone froze.

From up close, Jerthrax was infinitely more terrorising to the soul just by his looks.

The Vision of Misery had dropped from the sky like a star, and right now, his mountainous face was facing them as they were bordered on both sides by his enormous wings!

The blue from the beast's eyes was like the bright lights from countless lanterns, and the burn he snorted from his nostrils was as inevitable as death itself.

Grim immediately caught on fire from it, roaring in pain, as did Baddan, Pherdanta and Allora.

...!!!

To say Replicus was alarmed, was an understatement.

He couldn't even think of what to do at that moment as the pressure of the most powerful Herald pressed against him.

"HAVE YOU COME TO AID THAT INCARNATION OF EVIL THAT REEKS MUCH LIKE YOU?" Jerthrax asked threateningly.

His voice caused Replicus' bones to erupt from under the Hollow Dusk Prison, popping at different sections like fireworks.

The Penetrator hadn't even heard what the dragon asked him, and he could only crumble over the waters that somehow became solid, holding him and the burning bodies of his people.

On instinct, Replicus had his stores of Null Life Essence pour out to engulf Grim, Allora, Baddan and Pherdanta, shielding them somewhat from the heat while his armour began to melt.

His socket flames shone bright, brighter than ever before, in fact, but...

"YOU NEED NOT ANSWER. IT MATTERS NOT ANYWAY. IT IS BEST IF YOU PERISH HERE. EXALTED SUZAMETE WOULD HAVE SEEN IT THE SAME."

As Jerthrax's voice came with inevitability, so did the highlight of dawn's orange radiance burning from his dreadful maw.

Chapter 1043: Timely Silhouettes

If there had ever been anything in the world that Replicus could have identified as inevitable, it would be the burst of incineration that devoured everything as it barrelled his way.

It wasn't a flame. It couldn't have been.

Whatever spewed from Jerthrax's mouth after declaring that he did not want another anomaly on the battlefield, that Replicus' existence was better served... less than null, was beyond the concept of fire that Replicus knew.

It was like his time and his fate were pulled towards where the burn from the dragon was going to destroy.

The goal, after all, was total destruction, leaving, beyond a shadow of a doubt no traces of Serenity's champion.

The Penetrator didn't quite understand what was currently going on. The voice of the dragon had mangled his thoughts, his ability to comprehend the situation with nuance, gone.

What was left of him as his bones shattered by the second, was a strong will to try and protect his loyal subordinates. He spread out his arms as the wall of vicious scorch came, slow yet fast and unavoidable.

The Null Life Essence he dispensed continued to funnel out of him without completely flowing out in its entirety. Perhaps the Penetrator hoped to be able to use morsels of it on himself too, but what good would that have done?

None.

Everything became too bright for anyone to gleam anything.

There was only hot and hotter.

Anyone who might have been anywhere near the vicinity, was sure to be erased even without coming into contact with Jerthrax's breath.

The dragon did not hold back, after all, he had been taught by the last of the governing Deities about unusual existences bred outside Aigas; creatures born from different flavours of the word 'death'.

They would not die so easily.

They were not to be underestimated.

They were not to be allowed to mingle wantonly with the precious creations of the Deities.

As such...

The torrent of divine heat burned and burned farther; wider.

The clouds seemed to melt completely at this point, and the world on this side – a portion of Aigas split from the whole three days ago – seemed to tilt even more unnaturally while trembling furiously.

...

Within the straight fury of the immense power, Replicus... regained his thoughts.

The first thing to hit him was explosive fright, panic and rage.

Where was he that was so bright?

He could tell the blinding light was all danger given tangible, scalding form, but...

Was... was he... alive?

Why was he not being ground down, melted or disintegrated?

Surely, that was the fate that awaited him, killing all his aspirations and dreams, right?

In the face of unceremonious might, all his goals could only be incinerated without a trace, right?

That was the reality on the side of the world, right?

The Penetrator's sockets turned to his right.

The fierce, divine conflagration...arched around him.

He looked to his left.

The bright death avoided him.

He was untouched.

'How...?' he questioned himself, his thoughts and senses lagging as though they had just gone through a fresh reboot.

His sockets then faced ahead, powering through the fiercest ongoing highlights.

There were three silhouettes before him.

Two of them were rather tall, but the one in their middle was rather short by comparison.

This particular silhouette, so dark it might have been liquid darkness because of the radiant light, was hunched forward, its arms trembling.

The grand fiery highlights bashed against it, but couldn't continue past it, towards Replicus.

What?

Someone was pushing against ALL THAT?

'...'

Replicus tried to make out who these individuals were.

Muffled voices teased him, forcing him to strain his senses in order to hear what was being said and:

"Hold it."

"I can't!"

"I said hold it! Just for a few more seconds!"

"I can't do it anymore! I'm still fresh at this! You should be petting my head at what I've already mastered so far! Are you seeing this?! Are you seeing what I'm doing?! You are supposed to be praising me right now!"

There was a pause and huffs of air, which Replicus wasn't sure was available in meaningfully vital doses within this heat.

'Who are...?' he thought.

"I'm letting go! I can't hold it anymore!"

"Hmph! Lazy."

"That I am!"

An instant later, Replicus felt himself get tackled and then...

The world hissed all around him before immediately going silent.

Suddenly, the catastrophic heat and the insensible changes in the surroundings were no more.

There was a light cool now. Well, at least compared to what he had been up against, this might as well have been a trip through winter.

The Penetrator had been transported elsewhere. Somewhere so very far, that it was free from the tumultuous turbulence brought on by Jerthrax. His body was laid on a strange, pale piece of silk that floated over the ocean and bore his weight, and that of someone else.

His body, which was still broken, twitched and he turned his head.

Even his socket flames needed to adjust themselves after the exposure to the rough light, and thus, when a dark figure leaned into his sight, it took him a few seconds to see who it was.

"Yuyui?"

A girl with long, lime green hair that curled at her shoulders, came into view. She smiled radiantly... and rather stupidly, while blowing into her hands which were smoking and sizzling furiously – and maybe tantalisingly. She had a childish face with full cheeks and lips that expressed an astonishing degree of youth.

Her bangs covered one of her eyes, unusual eye that gleamed through the lime green strands. The other, exposed eye showed immense relief.

This girl then threw herself on Replicus' red hot armour while crying, "Master!"

Replicus was stunned to say the least.

He silently stared at Yuyui... as she quickly screeched and withdrew from his armour after being burned by it.

"How...?" he began when he noticed the two figures beside the girl.

"To think this is the same person who bested me back then. I don't know whether to feel ashamed or repulsed."

One of the two spoke with a haughty tone imbedded in an inhuman, sonorous voice.

It was another familiar individual to the Penetrator. Once he saw the helmet that looked like a large, white cap reaching up to the bridge of the feminine figure's nose, tassels attached to the back of it, he instantly remembered this Spirit Guardian whom he had beaten up quite badly back in the Temple of Unlusted Tears.

Bassbion.

To her right was another Spirit Guardian, the less abrasive of the two. She had a slightly plump body and a motherly air about her.

She simply smiled at him without a word.

"We arrived just in time, right?" Yuyui said while giving a quick appraisal to Replicus' body. She tried to hide it, but she was rattled by the state her Master was in.

Replicus would have smiled at her if he could.

He would have patted her shoulder if she wouldn't wince at the heat his armour was giving off too.

He looked around him.

On the silk cloth he was laid on, he saw his subordinates sprawled on there too, some of them groaning and turning.

A sigh of relief left his mouth, and then he said:

"Yeah. You saved us Yuyui."

The lime-haired girl's eyes glistened and the smile she had been wearing turned even more stupidly wide.

She sniffled.

Replicus groaned, trying to sit up.

"On that note. How in the world did you even get here? What did you do?"

Immediately Yuyui wore a smug look and showed her right palm.

There was an eye in the middle of it.

"I finally awakened my third eye!" she declared proudly.

Chapter 1044: Moving (1)

Radiant stars appeared all around the group, summoned by the Penetrator through [Brilliant King's Adoring Stars]. They shot bolts of Levin that swam through him and rejuvenated both his shattered bones and his partly molten armour.

The Null Life Essence Replicus had dispensed while keeping it tethered to his body also slowly slithered back into him at his will.

"The third eye, huh?" the Penetrator said as he started to rise and stand over the odd silk sheet. His socket flames burst with a greater degree of liveliness than before. He looked at Yuyui's palm.

Within it was an eye with dark sclera, its iris spotting an ice blue hue.

Replicus was a little confused.

Wasn't this just Yuyui's Eye of Dispersal?

The green-haired girl, more ancient than she looked, possessed a Hidden Class called the Pinnacle Occuluthon.

As far as Replicus knew, it was a Hidden Class forged by a cultish group of twelve powerful women from millennia ago, from Fulgardt's time; the Order of the Trodden Rose.

The cult started in response to the intense rise in misogyny when the terror Fulgardt inspired became too deep, causing already established forms of social evil to witness a new high.

Of course, this 'just' movement turned into an unhealthy obsession that merely replaced the oppression of women, leaving many settlements on the continent of Feinheath littered with the desecrated corpses of boys and men, most of them innocent.

After these twelve women were driven back by authorities in that time, they, of course, combined their efforts to create a legacy for someone who would inherit their will one day.

They guaranteed that that certain someone would have a lot of options against whatever stood in their path, thus the birth of the Diverse Oculus; a power that offered 12 eyes, each with different, overwhelming properties.

Unfortunately, for the Oder of the Trodden Rose, the one who inherited their powers, was...

"Oh! Sorry about that! It's this," Yuyui said, revealing her other palm, which had an eye spotting an iris that looked distinctly like a purple arrow. "It's called the Eye of Moving."

Replicus tilted his head.

"The Eye of Moving?"

"Yu?" a sluggish voice came from behind, interrupting the conversation.

Grim was the first to recover out of the other three. He had reverted back to his human form, and he, for the most part, looked stellar. Since they were out of the hazardous part of the battlefield, the area dictated by Jerthrax's invisible field of oppression, he was able to use this chance to activate Granted Restoration, healing his wounds.

He looked at Yuyui with a befuddled expression.

Yuyui gave the Unlimited a big smile.

"Why do you look so surprised? Are you impressed that I travelled halfway across the world – actually more than that – to save your furry butt?" she said with her chest pushing out from her odd gear.

Grim didn't even know what to say.

Thankfully, Pherdanta and Baddan rising while healing themselves, covered for his stunned silence. The former healed in the same way he did while Baddan used the healing potions Replicus had provided him since he wouldn't accept a Granted Armament of his own.

Pherdanta expressed the same degree of surprise.

"You are the one who saved us?" she asked with a sincere and thankful tone that turned Yuyui a little humble.

"Well, yes. It wasn't easy though. I think Master played a huge role too. You were already burning by the time I arrived. You might not have made it if Master didn't do... whatever he did," the green-haired said.

Of course, she couldn't perceive the Null Life Essence that had wrapped around the four, preventing them from dying instantly from the dragon's breath.

Pherdanta turned to Replicus. She did vaguely remember Replicus spreading out his arms before their fuming bodies. This thought made her feel both touched... and disappointed.

"Yuyui," Replicus suddenly said.

"Yes, Master?"

"Do you have a way to save her?" the Penetrator said while crouching by Allora's body.

In truth, Replicus had a lot of questions for Yuyui to satisfy his curiosity about the immensity of the feats she had just displayed, but the thought of Allora going for long and longer while bearing undeserved agony because of the burden of a mission he had placed upon her, threw his extraneous inquisitions away.

Allora looked much worse than before. She was still convulsing while her eyes were rolled back, but her body might as well have been a log that had barely survived the fiery tenure of a bonfire at this point. Thankfully – or perhaps otherwise – it seemed being roasted alive paled in comparison to what she was going through.

Yuyui hurried to Allora's side and wore hesitant look.

Replicus, on the other hand, turned behind him, towards Bassbion and Yagrina.

He had asked Yuyui for help, but he intended to extend his inquiry to these two.

"Hmph. So, this time you understand what we are," Bassbion said as she folded her arms, which produced a tin-like noise with her white plate armour. She noticed Replicus' strange gaze. The purposeful hole in the middle of her cap-like helmet seemed to mock the Penetrator.

Replicus had never interacted with these two. He had last spoken to them as Skullius, back when he reached Genhuis City for the first time. Bassbion seemed to have noticed this difference between him and the old Skullius.

Replicus nodded.

"You are Spirits. Can you discern what kind of damage she's taken? Does it have to do with the soul?" he asked.

Bassbion said nothing, while Yagrina squinted her eyes at Allora's body.

"No. Her soul is fine. It's her flesh that is being tormented. Whatever harmed her refuses for her body to heal and instead, keeps it in a state where it causes its owner tremendous pain. I'm afraid she can't be healed through conventional means," the slightly plump Spirit said.

Bassbion scoffed, her unsavoury intent directed at Replicus.

"How unrefined. For someone with such a damaged soul, it is unpleasant to see that you struggle to identify things like this. Have you learned nothing since?"

Replicus sighed.

As insufferable as this Spirit was, she was right. He did lack extensive knowledge of souls despite the fact that two of his biggest enemies seemed to understand them quite well; the masked man and Somanda.

The Penetrator had feared that Allora's soul had been affected by whatever Em-Sul used against her and thus decided to ask the two Spirits if that was the case.

His time in the Severed Union had led to him understanding what Spirits really were, though.

Aside from Bassbion and Yagrina, Replicus, as Skullius, had seen one other Spirit.

It was Sera, who had been Bek's beloved before she died.

Somehow, Bek, the Spirit Warden had managed to not only revive himself after his own death, but he had also revived Sera, though, by then she had become a mutated denizen of the afterlife, the Yormuness.

As Replicus understood it, Spirits were caretakers of the Yormuness. They received and tended to souls that landed within the layers of the Yormuness. He didn't know how the Order of the Trodden Rose had extracted Yagrina and Bassbion from their duties there so that they could be incorporated as aides into the Pinnacle Occuluthon's power set, but he had thought they had a solution.

He was wrong.

However...

"I...I think I can save her," Yuyui said with an intense fire in her eyes.

Replicus turned to the girl.

For a few seconds, the two exchanged no words and only kept staring at each other.

Yuyui seemed so determined that Replicus could hardly master the strength to ask how she could help. Seeing her so confident, or at least displaying such resolve to power through obstacles made him realise that she had changed quite a bit.

'No wonder I didn't recognise her presence until I saw her face...' he thought.

"Do what you can then," he urged her.

Yuyui nodded, and took a few deep breaths.

"Do you need help with anything?" Grim asked with a sombre tone. Yuyui smiled at him, and then her eyes avoiding his.

"I don't think you'd want to help for what I'm about to do. It might get messy. It's going to get messy," she said, and planted her palm, the one which Replicus recognized to hold the so-called Eye of Moving on Allora's chest.

A moment later, Yuyui removed her hand, and to everyone's surprise, on Allora's chest was a blue eye with a golden slit as its pupil.

That was...the Inhumane Eye!

Chapter 1045: Moving (2)

The Inhumane Eye?!

This was one of Yuyui's eyes, which Replicus knew to always be lodged in her left eye socket and constantly covered by her bangs. The green-haired girl had had this eye since the first time she met Skullius, and it was the one that gave her the supernatural ability... to not die. Well, to not die permanently.

In fact, when Replicus had discovered Yuyui in the Temple of Unlusted Tears all those months ago, she had looked much like a mummy surrounded by thousands of corpses that spotted similar features to hers. For the longest time, this had been Yuyui's defining trait, which, frankly creeped most enemies out.

During their journey, before Skullius split, it had been a common strategy of his to use Yuyui's immortality to throw off his enemies.

The fact that Replicus, as Skullius, had gone through all those times with this fact stuck in his mind, made him the most shocked to see that Yuyui could now share the Inhumane Eye with others!

The blue eye blinked while nested on Allora's charred chest.

Yuyui gave a long, long sigh.

Then...

"Bassbion, get over here," she called with a commanding voice.

The Spirit grunted and walked forward to reach Yuyui.

At first, Replicus was surprised that Bassbion actually listened to Yuyui's command, but then he recalled that, Bassbion and Yagrina were supposed to be Yuyui's companions. However, only after she acquired three of the eyes from her Hidden Class, was she then allowed to boss these Spirits around.

Yeah, that was what Bassbion had said that time.

Yuyui gave Bassbion an uncharacteristically stern look with her eye not hidden by the bangs.

"Be quick about it," she said.

Bassbion's lips curled unpleasantly.

"Don't insult my skill," she said as she reached for the long sword at her waist.

Replicus stared at the weapon.

Ah, so many memories. He had been on the receiving end of this sword before. In fact, he had copied a skill that came with this sword back then, back when he was forging his gravity-inspired mana core.

'What comes next is...' the Penetrator thought. He already knew what was about to happen.

Bassbion looked down at Allora's heavily wounded body. Her body was full of vitality, and most of it, strangely enough, was coming from the carved, torn and melted armour she wore, which seemed to still be functional.

With a sneer, she gripped the hilt to her sword, and as the weapon hissed out of its scabbard, it left a smooth, curved arc that sliced through Allora's neck cleanly, seamlessly.

...!!!

Pherdanta, Baddan and Grim were shaken.

Unlike Replicus, they hadn't yet figured just how exactly Yuyui intended to help cure Allora.

"What—" Grim began.

"It's alright," Replicus hurried to assure him and everyone else. "Trust Yuyui."

Pherdanta immediately calmed down, but it took Grim a few seconds to accept that Allora being beheaded, was somehow a good thing.

Finally, the tall, thin woman convulsed no more.

She had been relieved from the eternal torment with death.

Replicus' sockets blazed.

He had almost chosen to kill Allora before, and the scene playing out before him made him realise just how he might have felt afterwards, had he done it with his own hands.

The thought phantoms were right. He was a skeleton yet he was so livid with sentiment that it was, quite frankly, surprising.

'And now...' the Penetrator thought.

Yuyui smiled brightly.

From right beside Allora's corpse, a new Allora popped up from nowhere, looking rather new.

Pherdanta, Baddan and Grim were stunned, but not quite to the same degree as Allora herself.

Her eyes were bulging as she sat over the mysterious cloth that they were all riding on, and her hands trembled as she began to fondle every part of her, from her brand-new set of Granted Armament, to her face, which didn't look quite as ghoulish as it had looked when she was riding death's pain train.

"Uhhh..." was all the tall Unlimited could say as she then looked first at a Yuyui who was gesturing towards her with as much pride as a magician giddily displaying a rabbit popping from his hat.

Replicus sighed in relief.

"Welcome back, Allora," he said.

*

The next three minutes were saturated with nothing but surprise at what just happened for anyone who wasn't Replicus, Yuyui or the two Spirits.

Pherdanta was showing a rarely seen level of care towards Allora, making sure that she was really alright. Grim did the same while trying his hardest to look like he had his stool together.

Of course, the rapidly deteriorating corpse of the resurrected Unlimited was a little creepy to be celebrating around. Be that as it may have been, none of the Unlimited had seen it appropriate to get rid of it. Even Allora didn't know if she should...pay respects to it or something.

The one to get rid of it in the end, was Yuyui.

She casually kicked the corpse into the waters without so much as a flying flesh. Allora, despite how grateful she was, didn't know to feel about that visual. It was forever stuck in her mind.

"I didn't get to tell you this, but you did a good job. Despite the burden on you having been so immense, you still managed to pull it off," Replicus said when emotions had simmered down.

Allora simply scratched the back of her head.

Her face turned red.

From the encouragement the boss gave her before the attack they launched, to this...

She felt like she was riding too many highs.

"I was just trying to live up to your expectations, boss. Unlike everyone else, I felt I hadn't earned my place just yet," she said while avoiding the Penetrator's gaze.

Indeed, Allora had felt this way. That was why she had worked so hard to bolster her mastery of all basic Classes with her own during the last three days.

"Well, you certainly earned your place with this – even though you were already worth so much," Grim said with an encouraging smile and a slightly unnecessary powerful smack to Allora's back.

Baddan gave a nod of approval. He didn't have as deep of a bond with Allora, but he acknowledged her just as well and viewed her as a comrade.

The attention seemed to grow too much for Allora, and thus she decided to shift it all.

"The one who's really worth so much here is Yuyui!" she shouted robotically.

Unlike Allora, Yuyui shouldered the weight of the attention like a champ. She didn't shy away from it at all. She wore a smug, valiant smirk and puffed up her chest.

"How did you manage to transfer your eye onto Allora, Yu? It's only been four days since we left Deign. What changed?" Grim asked.

Yuyui gave a childish giggle and rubbed her nose.

"It's the Eye of Moving. Right?"

Replicus was the one to answer the question before looking at Yuyui for confirmation.

She nodded vigorously while showing off the eye with the iris that looked like a purple arrow.

The eye was now on her neck.

"Yeah! This eye is very handy. It allows me to define the movement of anything I want. I can make anything and anyone I want move as fast as I want. I can move my eyes and place them somewhere else, which makes them keep their properties while on a different person or object, and loads more! I even used it to travel all the way here!" she explained.

Everyone... was stunned once again.

Even Replicus was stumped.

In as much as he guessed that the qualities of this Eye of Moving were what saved Allora, he didn't know just how far its scope went.

"Defining movement?" he asked.

"Just as she said," Bassbion chipped in, seeming, for the first time, to express something other than bitter condescension. She seemed proud.

"Any description of the word 'moving', she can apply it to anything she pleases, which extends to the powers of her eyes as well."

Replicus shook his head.

Wow.

Just...wow.

That was...

Yuyui hurriedly waved her hands.

"It's powerful, but there are limits. Well, I guess I'm the limiting factor. This eye takes a lot out of me. I am not exactly strong outside of my Class, so I can't use it as easily as you might think. We actually left to come to you yesterday, but because I'm a little... weak, we had to make hundreds of stops along the way," she said, looking a little sullen.

"Besides, when it comes to me moving my other eyes to someone else, I can only apply their effects once."

Yuyui then turned to Allora and the others.

"So, yeah. Try not to die twice in the future."

Chapter 1046: Limits

'Limits?' Replicus thought. 'Well, that is a limit, but in the grand scheme of things...'

It was hard to think that Yuyui considered her powers to be limited just because of this. There were probably more stipulations because of the variety her powers gave her, but those paled in comparison to what she was gaining.

She could pretty much revive anyone she wanted. As Replicus understood it, the Inhumane Eye was capable of bringing Yuyui to life AFTER she died, so even if Allora had passed earlier, Yuyui might still have been able to bring her back.

She had appeared hesitant at first likely because this was the first time she was using this... extension of the scope of her powers offered by the Eye of Moving, and even then, she had been determined to make it work.

"That is a very valuable card for us, Yuyui," Replicus said to the green-haired girl.

Yuyui rubbed her hands with a wide smile of pride on her face.

"However, I need to ask. How exactly did you get here? I get that this new eye allows you to move unconventionally, but not all kinds of movement are possible on this side of the world. Spatial manipulation is impossible most of the way," Replicus said.

Yuyui rubbed her chin.

"Really? Hmm. We didn't warp or anything. I guess it's kind of like running but without moving your feet when I use the Eye of Moving. Besides, we didn't really come here the way you think."

"How did you come here then?" Grim asked.

Yuyui wore an odd, straining face and then turned to Yagrina who understood what she wanted.

"You can't expect her to explain concepts beyond her," the Spirit said with a warm smile. "We travelled through a channel that encompasses all of Aigas and parts beyond. It's not easy to access for most people, even for us, but luckily, we have our ways."

A channel that encompasses all of Aigas and beyond?

Replicus' sockets blazed furiously.

"You used Stagnant Space?" he immediately asked.

Yagrina and Bassbion looked at him in shock.

"How do you know about that?" the latter asked with a scowl.

Instead of answering, Replicus' mind whirled, reaching several conclusions with the many varied debates that happened in his mind within a split of a second.

"If you two don't have the means to enter Stagnant Space yourselves, then..." he said. "Did you enter it through the Yormuness?"

Yagrina and Bassbion were flabbergasted.

How in the world had the Penetrator guessed something like this?

Unfortunately, it seemed only the Penetrator and the two Spirits understood the gravity of the subjects they were talking about. The rest didn't quite follow what Replicus was implying or what Yagrina had said.

Yuyui alternated her gaze between the two sides who strangely stared at each other so deeply and for so long that she thought a physical conflict might break out.

"Master, all I know is that Bassbion and Yagrina took me to a very strange place. Odd figures that looked like them. Some were very ugly. Some were very beautiful. The world seemed so big. There were some odd animals and a huge dessert.

Oh, then all of a sudden, we were out of this place moving through this unending field of darkness. It was scary. Even though I can move pretty fast with the Eye of Moving, it felt like I wasn't moving at all," she said, pouting a bit. "After a long, long, long while, these two then told me we had arrived and...here we are."

Replicus' sockets didn't leave the two Spirits during Yuyui's narration.

"I see. How exactly did you manage to find us?" the Penetrator asked, more to the Spirits than Yuyui.

Bassbion chuckled.

"You think you are something too special? We Spirits have a great affinity with souls. After the first time we met, I was never able to forget the shape and feel of your soul... Vile Filth," she said in a rough tone.

"Watch your tongue, ghost," Pherdanta stood and gave a nasty glare to the Spirit.

Yuyui rushed to a stand and gave Bassbion a similar look.

"Come now, Bassbion. You shouldn't disrespect our master's friends," Yagrina said to the helmet-wearing Spirit.

"It's alright," Replicus chimed in with a bit of amusement. "It's been a long time since you've called me by that name, Bassbion."

"You still deserve it, in my opinion," Bassbion said with a dark, mocking tone. "You have no right to stand over Yuyui. We know you have her under a contract. A powerful one. What kind of master needs to be saved by his servant? From what I can see, Yuyui is already capable of killing the likes of you if she so desired.

What makes you still treat her as though she is beneath you?"

Many emotions erupted at Bassbion's words.

Rage was the most prevalent as almost everyone disagreed with not just the content, but the tone in which it was delivered. Even Baddan felt a surge of fury at hearing Replicus being slandered like this.

Before any of these emotions exploded, however...

The clouds started to melt, and the sea became restless. It started to ripple as the temperature rose.

Figures moved in the horizon above, creating muffled tremors in the sky.

A strong, whipping wind sprang up on the group, almost throwing them off the unusual silk cloth they rode.

"Dammit. I thought we were a little bit further from all this, Yu," Grim said with a dark face.

"We are. Well, we were," Yuyui said, the boiling emotions which had been rising within her simmering down. The same was true from everyone else. "Master..." she then said before giving Bassbion a cross look, "...I thought you said the threat you were worried about was your other self. Did you fight him already?"

Replicus gave a sigh from behind the helmet.

Right.

Before he left – in light of the choice he had given Yuyui, about her leaving if she wanted to since she wasn't so wired for fighting despite her Class – he had told the girl about the vision he saw through Riba, the Diviner.

Replicus had only managed to see Skullius wearing a dark, sinister smile, but he had already formed a meaning behind the vision. Sadly, it was the scarier one of the two he saw at the time, even though the other concerned his ultimate goal.

As it were, since Yuyui's first experience meeting Skullius was when he was in his flesh form, she had developed a sort of 'attachment' to him as the Hybrid Luman.

She was biased against the Penetrator form, mostly because not only had it come as a surprise that her master was in fact a skeleton, it was also the form Replicus used when testing out the Distorted Gravity, Spatial Lightning and Stagnant Space on the stout mountain... while using Yuyui as a test dummy.

Because it was also established that Skullius would focus on building onto his flesh form while Replicus focused on the Penetrator form, it almost made it seem as though the two were two different people.

At least Yuyui saw it that way. Kind of.

It was because of this view that she had been so fired up and apparently worked so hard to earn her third eye. Though, it probably wasn't as simple as that.

"I guess I didn't really do justice in my explanation," Replicus said while pulling out the Harmonic Ember from behind the bulge on his armour. "That comes later. On top of having to fight a dragon, we also have to face the thing Ferex turned into it... and Stylla."

Yuyui's shook and her face lost a considerable amount of cheer and spunk.

"You mean...?"

"Yeah," Replicus said and placed his other hand on Yuyui. "We have a chance to save Ferex and redeem Stylla. It's nothing more and nothing less than that."

Chapter 1047: The Upgrade! (1)

Yuyui had never stopped thinking about Ferex. She blamed herself. She thought that if she were a more competent fighter, she might have been able to prevent Ferex from succumbing to his Flaw. They had both been weak back then, and Yuyui felt that only Ferex paid for it, and now Stylla.

Identity crisis had been Yuyui's greatest enemy since she was freed from the Temple of Unlusted Tears. She had struggled with getting to appreciate the norms of society, balancing her tremendous appetite, and of course, understanding what her moral compass was supposed to be.

After the incident at the temple in Genhuis, where she killed a Grand Priest, her mind had been clogged, only to get clogged further when she lost Ferex...or rather, when she ran away.

This was what had kept her from growing.

The thought of that...thing, which she had fled after seeing what it could do from being here, of it being her opponent, was immensely harrowing.

Well, it would have been, if the green-haired girl did not see the look Replicus gave her with is flames.

Aside from Pherdanta, Yuyui was the best at deciphering how Replicus felt through his face. She felt his confidence and the whole-hearted assurance in his voice.

And because of it...

"Yeah. We will save them!" Yuyui said with a confident, stern visage. She didn't know if she wanted to learn more details about how Stylla was mixed into all this, but it didn't matter. She didn't know Stylla very well, so she didn't think about it that much. Neither did the rest aboard the floating silk. They were more surprised rather than curious.

Replicus would have smiled if he could.

'I guess this means she's not going anywhere. I thought living on a farm would do her well. Preferably one with many animals. Many, many animals.'

Seeing the girl like this truly warmed his heart.

Yagrina nudged Bassbion who didn't quite have anything salty to say when she saw the nature of the relationship between her new master and her master. It didn't appear to be something she could criticise. Replicus hadn't even responded to what she said before. This was unexpected.

The set of bones in question looked at his free palm.

'That thing's range is greater than I thought,' he thought.

What he was referring to, was the Jerthrax's anti-skill range. He had tried to activate a simple skill, but nothing happened.

Everything came under the oppressive behemoth's pressure once the environment changed. Things were even starting to tilt in Replicus' view.

"Yuyui," he said. "Can you neutralise the effect of the dragon's powers? We can't cast our skills freely when it's close."

Yuyui beamed. Every request she got from the Penetrator ignited her esteem.

"I'm on it!" she said before extending her hand outward.

On her palm lay the eye with dark sclera and an icy blue iris. The Eye of Dispersal. The squinting Yuyui did with her eyes signalled the effect the eye exerted on the surroundings.

The world seemed to shift back into the place. The clouds returned to normal and the sea no longer continued to heat up.

'Limits. Your powers aren't really limited Yuyui,' Replicus thought.

He had always known.

The Eye of Dispersal was able to disperse any supernatural effect.

The Penetrator had first experienced this when his [High Cosmetic Body], a Supreme skill – the highest calibre of skill there was – got disrupted before its timer was up. Normally, Supreme skills could only be casted with gold quality mana, but [High Cosmetic Body] had been in Replicus' arsenal ever since he came to Aigas, curiously. A benefit of the package he was given, supposedly.

Even a special case like this, however, was not tolerated by the eye.

With the Eye of Moving, Yuyui could now move the eye to any part of her body, giving her more options to use it than before, when it had been stuck to her forehead. This made her even harder to beat.

Perhaps the only limiting factor to her Eye of Dispersal really, was herself, as she had said. Yuyui hadn't been able to ward the dragon's breath entirely and for long, after all.

'Funny. The power she has is similar to what I'm trying to acquire...' Replicus thought with a chuckle.

Funny. Funny indeed.

"Hold on for a bit. I'll be quick," he said to Yuyui and focused on the Harmonic Ember.

It was finally time.

'First to upgrade it.'

The Penetrator immediately used [Unbound].

[What would you like to upgrade with 'Unbound'?]

"Harmonic Ember," Replicus answered the prompt.

[50,000 Null Life Essence points expended...]

At once, the black and white gem shone with a beautiful light!

It was changing.

As Replicus evolved to Tier 3, his Null Life Essence reserved evolved in capacity, allowing him to carry 24,000 Null Life Essence points, from 12,000. This allowed him to access further options for [Unbound].

~~~

[1-99] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option for basic upgrades to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity.

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[100] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option [Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 1000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

---

[1000] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option [Permanent Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 10,000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

---

[10,000] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option [Special Bonus Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 20,000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

---

[20,000] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option [Double Bonus Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 50,000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

---

[50,000] – Null Life Essence Points –

Gives the option [Temporary Max Evolution] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 100,000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

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[Locked]

~~~

Before this, Replicus had had access to the Double Bonus Random Upgrade because he could afford it, but when his reserves of Null Life Essence were forcefully boosted because of Araeyn's [Grandiose Manifestation] bringing them to a region in the Null Verse, he had unlocked Temporary Max Evolution.

Strange as it was, Replicus retained the immense reserves of Null Life Essence even after Araeyn's skills were disabled, which was a great surprise because he had been hoping to upgrade the Harmonic Ember while he was still in the Boring Mine Nova Star Course.

What he thought was likely happening, was that his capacity was going to go back to the normal 24,000, but the reserves he earned (that he didn't use up) would remain until he used them. After that, there wouldn't be any more boost beyond what he could carry; an effect of not having a core for Null Life Essence.

The guidance field depicted it perfectly:

~~~

[Null Life Essence : 52,000/24,000]

~~~

Once he noticed this unexpected boon, Replicus made sure he retained at least 50,000 Null Life Essence no matter what, which was why he ensured it all returned to him after protecting his allies.

'Temporary... I dread how long the Ember will last in its upgraded state. That must mean it's going to be a crazy upgrade. I bet the 100,000 NLE mark is where you get a Permanent Max Evolution. Heh. Stingy,' the Penetrator thought.

A moment later, more prompts showed up in his vision.

[Temporary Max Evolution has been determined]

[Evolution complete]

The Harmonic Ember's shape changed, twisting and whirling into something different while bathed in the light of Null Life Essence.

...!!!

The Penetrator's sockets flared.

Indeed, this wasn't a mere upgrade.

It truly was, an evolution...

Chapter 1048: The Upgrade! (2)

The Harmonic Ember was a gem that allowed one to combine concepts, and the meaning of the word concept seemed to remain as broad as possible.

This merging could be done within the body, which would limit the usage to a single instance, or outside the body. Replicus recalled Stylla saying that it was used once, the Harmonic Ember allowed all who were born with Bryne blood to create techniques based on combining all types of concepts.

This meant the Ember was useless to all that followed after the one who found it, at least when it came to enhancing their somewhat famous Twin Contrast Sword Technique.

This was later proven wrong – though Replicus didn't know – by Theurien, the current head of the Bryne Family. Not only had he deviated from the norm of only being able to combine two concepts within himself, instead doing it with three using the Harmonic Ember, the technique he created for himself was not even strictly a sword technique.

While Replicus wasn't aware of such a loop hole, he had thought that using the Ember as it was, was insufficient. Besides that, he had also been suspicious about whether or not the Ember even worked for people outside of the Bryne Family; perhaps a security measure the Family would have added in times past.

Learning that Em-Sul could use it just fine, triggered his caution, however.

Whatever stipulations existed where the Ember was concerned, Replicus decided to bypass them entirely by transforming the gem and moulding it into something better, something a little different.

Well, that was usually what happened with [Unbound], but...

The results were beyond his expectations.

The black and white gem grew larger.

It grew to the size of Replicus' head while still bathed in the blinding blue radiance, and attained an odd weight about it that made the Penetrator groan as he struggled to keep it in his hands.

Everyone simply watched in awe.

The Unlimited had seen Replicus use [Unbound] hundreds of times, and even while still being unable to sense Null Life Essence, they noticed that something was different this time around.

Yuyui's eyes glistened at the sight while her two guardians, Bassbion and Yagrina wondered what it is that was happening here. This was beyond their knowledge. They had yet to see something like this despite being in the company of monstrous experts like the Order of the Trodden Rose.

The Harmonic Ember's shape twisted in all sorts of ways after it became a larger crystal ball. It started to adopt a curious outline that looked quite like a spiral.

But no...

That wasn't it.

When the intensity of the light lessened... the shape of the Ember became even harder to discern.

A crisp halo shone from it. It exploded outward and smote Replicus' hand away, making him stagger back.

The Penetrator shook, surprised.

The new Ember refused to let him touch it.

It was comfortable, content even, hanging in the air like a domesticated star, giving itself more than a little sacredness and importance.

'Hopefully, this isn't a bad thing,' Replicus thought as his sockets blazed.

He had no idea what he was about to face, but it truly felt different.

What Temporary Max Evolution meant wasn't quite clear to him. He had seen some of his skills reach 'max evolution', where they couldn't evolve further like [Bead of Malevolence], but what was a max evolution when Null Life Essence was involved? It was certainly different from the standard of this world, right?

Also, just how long was 'temporary'? Replicus estimated that it would, sadly, perhaps be the standard time for the basic upgrade offered by [Unbound]; five minutes. He hadn't used this aspect of [Unbound] since the Tremur Forest, but it seemed whenever [Unbound] said 'temporary', it wasn't going to be long at all.

'This is kind of like the Chubby Remnant Child of Polarity...!' Replicus reminisced.

Just when he thought this, the veil of intense light behind the halo around the new Ember shattered, revealing the winding body of a large serpent.

Its body was perfectly sculpted. The serpent was coiling in growing, wider arcs from its tail below to its three separate heads above, all with different features; varying lengths and breadths of fangs, differing thicknesses to their heads, dissimilar colourations to their eyes.

The whole thing was lathered in a shiny green hue, with vague, circular spots all over it that seemed to move around the fixed, winding body of the snake.

The most distinctive feature on this thing, however, was the band floating over its heads, which was also a small snake biting its own tail. Its body was a distinct shade of greenish-gold that rivalled the body below in beauty.

It was truly beautiful.

'Wow...!' Replicus thought.

His instincts immediately pushed him to use the guidance field to see what this gorgeous evolution could do. Surely, it wasn't just a worthless ornament, right?

~~~

[External Fragment of cdgawx jeryxd~~

Shf xdvs ahsebrncal ahdeneksy....

"Do not insult me."

...

Replicus nearly jumped back.

"What the..!!" he exclaimed in surprise.

It didn't help that a noisy explosion rocked the skies right then, making the sea start to churn and boil despite Yuyui's best efforts. Thankfully, calm was restored in the next instant when the green-haired girl exerted a better grasp on everything around her with the Eye of Dispersal.

...

"Uh..." the Penetrator murmured.

Not only had the guidance field started to crash and write gibberish when he tried to appraise the object in front of him, he also heard a voice in his head.

This voice came again.

"Do not look down on me, brat. Did you just assume I could not introduce myself?"

Replicus' sockets dimmed.

'Wait.. Is that the...' he thought.

"YES! You are talking to me. Why are you so slow? It's awfully clear!"

The Penetrator froze a little.

The object before him... was talking to him! From the looks of it, it was talking only to him as its voice really seemed to only exist in his head.

Trippy.

'Uh. Sorry. I have no idea what's going on here. This isn't usually how my interactions with... artefacts, go,' he said.

"You look at me as a mere artefact? Sure, seconds ago, I was, and in a few more minutes, I will be just that again, but for now, I'm your superior. Better yet, maybe your salvation," the serpent-themed sculpture, perhaps gem, perhaps entity, said.

Replicus didn't know how to reply. He simply said (thought):

'I'm sorry. Like I said, this is new territory for me. Shall we start over then? May I know your name your name and what you can do?'

The entity glazed in halo floated closer to Replicus.

"That's much better," it said, its voice even. "As you are the one who just pushed me beyond my limits and extended my consciousness, I shall oblige to your requests. I am the External Fragment of Realised Choices, previously known as the Harmonic Ember. I am an alternate progenitor of all controlled, harmonised, chaotic and structured energies.

Where everything related to such is concerned, I am your guide, and should I desire, I will gift you what you seek."

Chapter 1049: The Finest! (1)

A bold declaration had been made.

"...I am an alternate progenitor of all controlled, harmonised, chaotic and structured energies. Where everything related to such is concerned, I am your guide, and should I desire, I will gift you what you seek."

Replicus froze again.

A progenitor of energies?

No, an alternate progenitor of energies?

What did that mean?

Just what was standing before him?

Also, did it just interfere with the guidance field? He saw the text on the illusory guide get scrambled when the entity spoke.

How in the world did it do that?

Replicus' thought phantoms seemed to have been waiting to debate about all the capabilities of this new version of the Ember, because right when the introduction was made, they went ballistic.

"Bro! [Unbound] gave a crystal a consciousness! A consciousness! Wait, did it already have one? Strong and old artefacts are supposed to be able to talk, right?"

"Progenitor of energies? Damn it, be more specific! You said it yourself, you don't have much time! Replicus Prime, get to asking what the deal is with this twig!"

"Guys, the implications are insane! If this thing lords over all energies..."

Replicus quickly recovered and maintained a dignified set of socket flames. Thankfully, the buzzing of countless ideas and hypotheses around his head went unnoticed by the entity before him; by the External Fragment of Realised Choices. It was good that it couldn't hear some of the things his numerous hims were saying.

The notion of limited time with this entity was true. Thus, Replicus immediately engaged.

'Are you saying you can manipulate any and all energies? Even those from the Null Verse?' he asked.

Null Life Essence wasn't the only thing there was in the Null Verse. There were also different forms of fire, different forms of ice and the likes. Did this mean the Fragment was the original creator of all these energies? Wait, did it mean that it was tied to the Null Verse?

The sculpted entity did not reply immediately. But then...

"You are truly ignorant about how your powers work, aren't you?" it said, its tone unchanging.

Replicus concurred. He was. He couldn't debate that. However, he did want answers.

"The ability you used on me just now caused me to evolve and become something greater within my own bounds; those dictated by this world. That already is beyond the normal performance of this skill, correct? In my case, however, the evolution I experienced went past this.

After emboldening my previous parameters, it incarnated my existence into a fitting treasure within the Null Verse that possesses even greater powers, but within the same line of function. That treasure is what you see here."

...

Replicus... took a moment to process what the Fragment had said.

It was a lot, and it wasn't at all clear.

If he were any other expert, he may have asked a series of questions just to understand what had been said.

Thankfully, his thought phantoms did a majority of the heavy lifting where deep thought was concerned and soon...

'So, in a way, your grade and abilities were raised, and then you were turned into something from the Null Verse that works the same way, but on a far greater scale?' he asked.

"What's the point in repeating what I just said?" the External Fragment of Realised Choices asked.  
"But yes, that is correct."

Replicus shivered.

Really?

Usually when using [Unbound], the item he was upgrading would just be transformed into another one stronger from the Null Verse, and at random. What had happened with Temporary Max Evolution, was kind of the same at a broader view, but there was a difference.

'Doesn't this mean I can actually dictate what I want for once? The reason why the original item is augmented is probably to find a near exact match, which means the result is always very similar to the original. That must be how it works, right?' he thought, excited.

"I should emphasise how little time you have with me. If you wish to ask questions for the next four minutes and twelve seconds, I'm all for it, but do make sure that's what you want."

Replicus' sockets blazed.

Right.

Time was of the essence. Damn those overly curious thought phantoms!

Replicus was almost getting too curious about the object and not its effects.

But wait...

Replicus' null heart sank.

"Your time in this evolved state is limited, but what about your effects? Do they only last for five minutes as well?" he asked.

"Of course not. How would that be a valuable use of 50,000 Null Life Essence units?"

'Right,' Replicus thought in relief.

Of course, that made sense. The limit here wasn't the powers of the Fragment, but the time he was allowed with it. He would have to earn an indefinite time limit with evolved artefacts at the next stage of [Unbound]'s powers.

'Let's get to it, then. What can you do for me and what limitations are there?' Replicus asked.

The External Fragment revolved around him while his subordinates watched silently.

They didn't need much in the way of hints to see that the strange ornamental serpent and their Master were communicating somehow. Replicus' somewhat relaxed changes in posture also signalled that he wasn't in danger or anything.

The Fragment then spoke.

"Hmm. I'll be a little generous. Everything is up to me, for the most part after all. I am capable of accelerating the growth of any combination or configuration of essence or energy to its finest and most unique state. At the same time, I can merge countless concepts into one, given big enough sources of each to draw from. Of course, I can't simply make everything you want come true.

I can bless four of your energies to their definitive highs and combine them if you wish. That is my offer."

...!!!

For the first time since this conversation began, Replicus felt a burn of certain victory.

'Is that so?' he thought, but the raging flames in his sockets flared madly, uncontrollably.

This was something he had been looking forward to even before he used [Unbound] on the Ember.

He had wanted to merge Disruption and Lambent Phosphor in order to create an avoidable attack that disrupted all techniques!

What he was being offered was beyond that though. He could choose to merge not two, but FOUR of his learned energies, AFTER they had been bolstered to their limit!

'Accelerate the growth of essences or energies to their finest and most unique states.'

Just how much growth was this?

What did the finest and most unique state of Disruption, an already ridiculously powerful essence, look like?

What did that of Lambent Phosphor look like?

But wait.

There was something even better to be gleamed from what the Fragment had said.

'When you say any combination or configuration of essence... does that mean skills are included as well?' the Penetrator asked.

"Of course," the Fragment answered simply.

Replicus shook. His hands balled into fists as he struggled to contain his emotions.

This...

This opened a lot of avenues for him!

'Then...' he said, 'Say I want to augment and combine only three energies or essences... does that mean I can still get to augment one other configuration of energy, since it won't be combined with the others?'



"Sure," the Fragment said, though its voice was starting to depict a certain degree of annoyance. All these questions...

The skies thundered at that moment, and the huge shadows of the dragon Jerthrax swept over the surface of the water.

Immediately, Replicus felt a great tug and then he was once again somewhere devoid of the chaotic blasts born from the dragon's battle with the Null Devil King. Everyone was there with him, as well as the External Fragment of Realised Choices, making him wonder just how Yuyui 'moved' them exactly.

Unfortunately, the powers of the great Herald crept near once more, as though the beast knew where he was, and as though the only thing keeping it from reaching him was the detestable foes it was facing.

Surely, it knew he was alive.

'Yeah. I have more than one timer,' Replicus thought before turning to the Fragment once more. 'Please merge Disruption, Lambent Phosphor and Spatial Lightning.'

The six eyes of the Fragment immediately glowed bright.

"As you wish."

Chapter 1050: The Finest! (2)

What were known as essences or energies – other than mana and its derivatives like Aura and Nitros – were usually mutations that had mana entangled within them; spiced mana, as some referred them to as. When Skullius had reforged his mana core back when Sila destroyed it, he had learned the flow of Distorted Gravity by reading how the mana moved with the influence of it.

Many significant essences could be learned this way, and many couldn't, mostly because they were far removed from mana. In any case, the relationship an expert had with any essence was what was called an affinity. The higher the affinity, the better their understanding, control and production of said essence.

Replicus had more than ten affinities with different kinds of essences, but only used a few that were actually relevant.

Some of these few were touched by the invisible influence of the External Fragment of Realised Choices when the different coloured lights issuing from its three heads shone bright.

Replicus felt his requests be executed immediately, but his mind was racing. What were the results going to look like? Was Disruption going to change into something much, much different from what he had envisioned previously?

The guidance field, no longer scrambling like before, started on the process to give him an answer.

[Essence of 'Disruption' is being drawn in large volumes...]

[Essence of 'Lambent Phosphor' is being drawn in large volumes...]

[Essence of 'Spatial Lightning' is being drawn in large volumes...]

The Penetrator's body was being used to produce the essences he wished to be refined and merged.

Instant worry settled within Replicus.

He didn't have that much in the way of mana reserves to produce these essences because of the toll that one usage of Disruption on the Bishop's cathedral had taken on him.

It was in circumstances like this that Replicus realised how unusual the Insurgent Magnus class was.

It offered skills that allowed for the production of exclusive elements [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] in abnormal quantities and low cost. That simply wasn't possible in a short amount of time with the essences he had learned.

'Actually, I may not need to be worried about that after all...' Replicus thought and even laughed, creeping out the people behind him. If he could have grinned, he would have.

Ah, a solution to the current deficit in mana was there, wasn't it? His thought phantoms had helped him see it!

This solution would also improve his chances of surviving the battle ahead!

Since that was the case...the Penetrator allowed all his reserves of mana from both his cores to be used without restraint.

Large quantities of a grey lightning stormed from his body and towered around him while winding and crackling threateningly at the same time. The cost for this was easier to bear since he wasn't using it to travel to distant places.

Huge volumes of a deep orange energy that had about as erect of a form as a laser beam shot from his fingers. Without having a technique to target, the mana the Penetrator had was sufficient for this feat.

The same was true for the thick foggy light that was Lambent Phosphor. It oozed out of Replicus like thick clouds, and became the first to be sucked into the mouths of the External Fragment!

The other two essences were drawn into the other two mouths, and the Fragment's green body started to glow with a poison green hue... that inevitably drew unwanted attention.

...!!!

Replicus felt Jerthrax's blue eye settle on the Fragment, and then on him.

The dragon was far into the skies, but the Penetrator had learned that that wasn't exactly anything to be happy about. Distance seemed to be an option many combatants on this side of the world could afford to ignore.

'Dammit!' Replicus cursed.

Yuyui moved him and everyone else again in less than a blink, but he felt the attention of the dragon still, and then its voice.

"YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE ME A SECOND TIME."

Replicus and company shook.

He believed that.

When next Jerthrax pounced, he didn't know if Yuyui could do anything for him and everyone else.

But worse than that, Replicus felt another set of eyes looking at him. They were much less fierce and hell-like. Rather, they were cold, dark and chaotic.

He had been wondering why this particular party had yet to engage with him, but they were doing so now.

The eyes of the Null Devil King settled on the External Fragment of Realised Choices.

Replicus didn't like that look.

"Don't worry. For the next three minutes, I am no one's to claim," a voice suddenly spoke in his head.

Right.

The Fragment wasn't just some odd tool to be picked up anymore.

'Good,' Replicus thought.

Right then, the three heads of the singular snake suddenly elongated and came alive.

They ceased to be fixed sculptings and swam through the air to nail their fangs through Replicus' Hollow Dusk Prison!

The armour did nothing to protect against the Fragment. The Penetrator felt twelve fangs bite into his bones and inject three streams of cold venom!

No.

It couldn't have been venom, and the guidance field confirmed it.

[Essence of 'All-Encompassing Transubstantiation' has been received]

[Essence of 'Inexorable Unveilment' has been received]

[Essence of 'Complete Omnipresent Registry' has been received]

[Merging has begun...]

Replicus took a moment to appreciate the new forms of his learned essences.

All-Encompassing Transubstantiation was what used to be Disruption.

Inexorable Unveiler was Lambent Phosphor, and Complete Omnipresent Registry, was Spatial Lightning.

'Neat...'

Since these weren't skills, Replicus couldn't derive much understanding from them with the guidance field. He would have to take his time to understand them on his own, but unfortunately that wasn't going to happen.

These new essences existed in their separate forms only for a short time. They were already starting to get combined.

What was interesting, was that Spatial Lightning, Lambent Phosphor and Disruption still existed separately though. They weren't skills. They were essences Replicus could produce and control. He had produced a lot of each so they could be combined into an additional essence he had access to. The result of this merge would be imbibed into him right now.

Replicus expected that he would have a perfect affinity with the resultant concept as well, as a bonus. Hopefully.

And...

[A Rule-Level concept has been successfully forged!]

[Congratulations! You have received and learned 'Maximum Catalyst'!]

Replicus felt a dull, greedy surge of power deep within his bones.

He laughed joyously.

This was for the best.

He was very low on mana so the newly learned concept couldn't have exploded with vigour as it had wanted.

'Rule-Level. It's at the same tier as the Reverse Clusters that sped up and rewound time...' Replicus thought.

Eaniss had harnessed the power of those Reversed Clusters, so he knew how powerful their ability to influence time was.

'Maxim Catalyst, huh? Sounds dangerous... and useful. I like it.'

"I have committed. I trust what you have earned is satisfactory," the External Fragment said. "Now, what do you want to enhance last?"

Replicus' hand glowed with weak, purple quality mana as he activated [Sorcery of Essence], then he responded:

'Hold that thought.'

In the next instance, without taking even a moment to learn what Maxim Catalyst could do, and without taking a second longer to think about the risk, Replicus finely manipulated his mana... to destroy the shell of his second mana core.