

Undead 1231

Chapter 1231: Extra Hands

It was clear that Replicus didn't buy any of the cryptic diction Erlton used. He remained suspicious. Because of that, Yuyui immediately leapt forward to make things a little clearer. She, after all, had been with Erlton, Azila, Soidon and Dellan during the battle between Skullius and Replicus.

"They really aren't enemies, master. I was watching your fight with them. The blondie is a Herald," she explained.

Erlton grunted as though constipated, but he appreciated Yuyui's intervention. Because of it, he sensed the suspicion in Replicus wane. The same was true for Elita.

"I must have really gotten rusty with the basic powers of Aigas then," Elita said with a disappointed look on her face. She scratched her neck. "I can hardly detect any Divine energy from you."

"I can," Replicus said. "I should have guessed you were a Herald. My first guess was that you were a Priest."

Priest was the only Class on Aigas that came with free control and generation of Divine energy, though for the most part, practitioners would only start with the ability to handle the lowest form of Divine energy, Primus.

"I don't have the luxury of fully expressing my powers like Jerthrax or Aingor. I'm usually travelling among the commonfolk of Feinheath, after all, and thus I have to keep my energies in check. I've grown used to this practise, perhaps a little too much so," he said with a small smile. "But I am indeed a Herald. Least among those that remain."

Erlton then turned to Elita. A complicated look appeared in his eyes.

"I didn't think I would see you again, Champion Elita. I had plans to scold the Purity for what they decided, but before I knew it, you had left. Now you have returned as a—"

"Indeed. I have returned. There are matters I have come back to deal with," Elita cut him off sharply.

Erlton became silent.

"And who are you?" Replicus asked the man next to Erlton.

Soidon looked to the Herald as though for help, and when he didn't receive any, he stuttered.

"I... I don't think I can recount my story a second time without proper context. I'm not sure if it would even benefit you," he said.

"Oh, it would," said Erlton suddenly, his face looking pale. He was looking from Replicus to Skullius continuously, and his face grew increasingly grave. "I couldn't tell before as I was merely looking through a screen, but now that I am up close..."

"You are the same...person?"

Elita turned and looked at the Hybrid Luman body, her expression unreadable.

Replicus raised a brow.

Because of Yuyui 'vouching' for Erlton, he had assumed that the Herald was up to speed on what was going on, but it seemed he wasn't. All he and Yuyui had shared was apparently that he (Erlton) was a Herald, and that Yuyui was allied with Replicus, the tall, four-armed monstrosity.

In Erlton's defence, he hadn't gotten much of a chance to ask Yuyui too many questions especially with how absurd Replicus and Skullius' battle became with time.

How was he supposed to ask Yuyui Replicus' identity when he was watching Skullius rip through time with his sword and later with his finger?

How was he even to assume that the two powerhouses were the same being when they seemed to hate each so much?

The 'wrong idea' that Erlton had referenced was how he and the others (Azila, Dellan and Soidon) had mistaken Replicus' role. After seeing how he actively made it so he attacks didn't harm anyone

but Skullius, they had slowly started to revise and recontextualise the nature of the battle they had been watching. Perhaps Replicus wasn't the bad guy.

"I... I see," Erlton said and he took a deep, ragged breath.

"What exactly are you here for?" Replicus asked.

The Herald spared one short glance at Skullius and then spoke:

"It has been a long time since I've heard directly from Suzamete. The last time she gave me a direct message – and it was a vague one indeed – was before the incident that occurred in Eofel," he said and gave Elita a knowing look.

She would know. That was when she, Red Rage and Skullius were forced to endure Fulina's Faithful Message Undeath.

Of course, because of the circumstances, Erlton wasn't sure if Replicus was there or not. He wasn't sure if Festos was real or not.

"But I received a command from Suzamete mere moments ago. I assume Aingor did too. I know of the coming chaos," he said and looked at the fixed drapes of time. "I know of the Carven and the enemies from the past. I had been trying to enlist the help of guardian beasts from various Sacred Forests, but doing so alone wouldn't do. So, I asked a guardian of the Tremur Forest, Karima, to act as a medium.

I felt that the beasts would be more inclined to listen to other beasts. In light of the state that Aigas is in now, Karima agreed to help me. He will travel across Feinheath and enlist powerful beasts to assist in fighting the Carven. But this isn't enough."

Replicus nodded.

"Yeah, it's not. But it's a start," he said.

The strategy was solid.

As limited as beasts were, their help would be indispensable in the coming fight. Replicus knew there were deep, monstrous powers hiding all over Aigas, in its forests and in its seas. (That weren't Cluster beasts.)

Now was the best time to utilise them.

"I assume Suzamete instructed you to help me," the Progeny said.

Erlton nodded.

"And I also assume this Aingor you keep referencing is the Herald tied to the Severed Union."

"That's right."

"The Severed Union?" Elita asked, surprised that there was more she didn't know.

"I'll explain later," Replicus said to her. He then contemplated for a few minutes and turned to Erlton. "So this means we have the power of the beasts and that of the Severed Union at our disposal for this."

"It would seem so," the Herald confirmed, somewhat uneasily.

Yuyui's hand suddenly shot upward.

"I wouldn't mind joining a team with the beasts! Bubbles wouldn't either!" she said.

"I know, but we need to plan this out thoroughly," Replicus said while Elita shook her head, confused.

Who was Bubbles?

"I appreciate the help. For now – and I hope we have that much time – I wish to recuperate for a little while and then I'll return with my forces to clear this whole mess. In the meantime, I hope you can handle everything with the beasts and this other Herald. I'll address them all when I return."

Erlton was a bit stunned.

He was surprised by the fact that Replicus appreciated his help.

Was he and Festos really the same person?

The latter was too arrogant and haughty. He would have never said thank you, at least with as much meaningfulness as that which Erlton felt in Replicus' words.

Beyond that, he was still processing why Suzamete was entrusting Aigas' fate to this creature. Where did the trust come from? Was it even trust?

"Right. Hopefully that goes as smoothly as I hope," Erlton said, and then slapped Soidon on the back. "Please take this man with you, though. The information he has... I feel YOU will take it to heart and find it extremely useful."

Soidon sighed.

He couldn't help but feel betrayed.

Was he really going to have to introduce himself as a Repented Lich again?!

Chapter 1232: Fate of the Angel

Soidon felt out of place.

Erlton had left him behind immediately after advising Replicus to keep him. Now, perhaps because the group before him wished to hear his tale once they had settled elsewhere, they continued to talk among themselves, ignoring him. It almost seemed as though he didn't exist.

The former Lich sighed.

To think he had once been hailed as a respectable Arch-Lich with a force of ninety-thousand Doom Knights.

What kind of fate was this?

First, Soidon had explained his situation to Skullius, hoping that he would be intrigued by it, but the Hybrid Luman had openly declared that he didn't give a rat's ass about any of the shocking details he had revealed.

Said Hybrid Luman was now standing frozen behind the four-armed creature, the lime-haired girl in a starry armour, and the beautiful, muscular, dark-skinned woman with the pink and gold sword strapped to her side.

Soidon sighed again.

"Ah, that's right," Replicus suddenly said aloud. "I almost forgot about that thing."

The Progeny recalled that he had left the Stolen Angel in the great smoking crater after he and the others were invited into Suzamete's domain. He had left it trapped in the effect of the skill [Cold Time] because he was wary of it turning against him despite his control over Skullius' body and soul.

The Progeny still possessed those fears.

"Elita, Yuyui, I'm going to be counting on you," he said to the two women. "I'm going to bring something here. It might turn hostile. I'm not exactly in a state where I can handle it easily, so don't count on my help. Yuyui, you've seen what it's capable of. Be on guard.

Of course, I'd prefer it if you didn't destroy it."

The two women nodded. Elita wasn't sure what exactly Replicus was talking about but Yuyui was. Indeed, the Stolen Angel was a great challenge to fight against, especially since it had access to Skullius' skills and his 'trick'.

Oddly enough, it was the reason Skullius had been able to use that 'trick' continuously. Skullius was limited to using it only once at a time, but the Angel could use it as well, and in the context of the Creed Skullius had made, it counted as another individual despite him and it being one and the same.

After confirming that the two ladies were ready, Replicus dispelled [Cold Time] on the mobile Attegoth and had his Hybrid Luman body bring it to their location.

As soon as it appeared, the atmosphere seemed to change. Everything seemed to turn tense.

Elita frowned.

She was unnerved by the thing. Sure, she had seen it while it was trapped in the cold cage of time earlier, but she hadn't believed it possessed such a chilling pressure.

The Angel, looking to be made entirely out of glowing vines that condensed into a bulky, humanoid figure wrapped under a soft shawl which hid part of its head, stood at an impressive height. Its four arms and the [Heart of Revelation] shining it above it made it even more formidable-looking.

Its orange eyes flashed as it appraised everyone before it.

When these eyes reached Soidon, he flinched and drew back.

It disregarded him though, and instead focused on everyone else, Replicus in particular.

'Those eyes...' Replicus thought.

It was because of these eyes, extracted from the Grinning Jester Fox, Dellan, (as one eye before) that the creature had been able to copy not only Replicus' four arms, but his brand of physical properties: Dual-Concept Tracing Impact, Blizzard Motion, Deviant Trigger Build and more.

These particular attributes had been particularly nasty for Replicus to deal with when he was ensnared in Skullius' Territory, Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon.

Unlike him who had many ways to mitigate damage, however, Replicus was particularly worried about what would become of his friends if they got hit by even a single one of the Angel's strikes, especially if it used the [Heart of Revelation] at full throttle first.

There was a chilling pause.

Yuyui was prepared. An eye with an arrow as a pupil had already appeared on her forehead, and a vicious volume of purple quality mana was pouring from her.

Elita's Divine Blessing was in full effect, a greenish-gold hue coating her fists.

What would happen now?

Would the Stolen Angel submit as Skullius did?

The answer was revealed an instant later.

The mobile Attegoth opened its mouth and with Skullius' voice, it said:

"DHYIESMYK BLACK."

The creature slid into the darkness that exploded from behind it, and disappeared from view.

Replicus and company were left stunned.

That was not what they had been expecting.

"Well, that solves that, I suppose. For now," Replicus said with shrug. The tension immediately faded.

"That was anticlimactic," Elita said, deactivating her Blessing.

Yuyui breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad we didn't have to fight it. Even Master wasn't able to kill it," she said.

"I could have. At least with my Territory," the Progeny said with a shake of his head. "But that thing holds all of Skullius'... my skills. Destroying it would lead to me losing all the Insurgent Magnus skills."

And indeed, that seemed to be the case. But also...

'Hmm, but maybe I would be able to get them back using the Fruit of World Myths – the thing that granted me the Insurgent Magnus Class in the first place. I really should try to understand that thing a bit more.'

The Fruit of World Myths was still an oddity to the Progeny.

What made it even more vexing to him was that during his battle with Skullius, the Hybrid Luman had given [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] offensive properties through the ring he had been wearing.

Yet, given that Skullius had been infected by Fulgardt's WILLS, wouldn't he know how to make the two elements more deadly without the help of some other trinket he found elsewhere?

Did the Fruit of World Myths not have the power to merge [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] or did even Fulgardt not understand it well enough to do so?

How curious.

Oddly enough, Replicus recalled that Sila had been able to use the Fruit of World Myths back when he took over the Discount Human body. Of course, the piece of soul had only used it prevent Skullius from returning to his body while he was in control, a rather simple feat that even Replicus could do, but still. Perhaps the Tower general could help him with some insights.

'Once I get all of Skullius' memories, I'll probably learn a lot more anyway,' Replicus thought.

A soft light came hurtling down from the sky. Before it landed, it decelerated and its luminance dwindled a fair bit.

Soon enough, three individuals were revealed.

Replicus breathed a sigh of relief.

Chapter 1233: Explaining Everything (1)

Theurien and Silrat had looks on their faces that suggested that they had been told to expect something outrageous.

And indeed, Red Rage had told them to not freak out when they arrived at their destination.

"Festos?" Silrat was the first to speak, a strange look on his face that melded somewhere between befuddled and bewildered. "Is that really you?"

"In the flesh," Replicus said with a warm smile.

Theurien had no words. He looked between the Hybrid Luman body and the Progeny with a pale face.

Silrat felt a more familiar presence from Replicus' response and expression than from what Skullius had shown him several minutes ago and dragged them into his Territory.

"What in the world happened? What happened to you? I-I can't even wrap my head around—"

"I know, I know. Believe me, I know," Replicus said. "It's a long story and I'd rather tell it to you all in a safer place than this one. For now, I'm just glad you managed to survive."

Theurien finally managed to regain his wits.

"Right," he said and his hand trembled. He gazed at it with such intensity that one would have thought there was gold in his palm. "I've never felt more afraid than when you... that other... that thing... whatever it was, appeared. I can hardly recall what happened until just a few minutes ago."

Replicus was sympathetic.

"I can imagine."

The fact that he almost didn't manage to save these two weighed on Replicus. His heart had been in his foot the entire time Red Rage was absent.

But thankfully, despite what manner of damage Skullius did, he didn't end up killing their friends.

"For now, let's get out of here," Replicus said. He turned to Yuyui.

A large ivory key appeared in the Progeny's hand and the lime-haired girl softly pried it from Replicus' limp fingers.

With a wide smile of anticipation – as she knew how everyone was going to react to what was coming next – she took a few steps forward and pushed the key into the empty air.

At once, Ju'wtte streaked from her forehead, where the Stark Constellation was branded, and rushed towards the ivory key, activating it.

There was a loud groan, a spike in the sheer quantity of threads of Ju'wtte spilling from the key, and then a vast set of double doors appeared!

There didn't seem to be an end to them nomatter where one looked. Great eyes and tusks protruded from them, spelling the nature of the one who had created them.

Silrat and Theurien plopped to the ground, flabbergasted beyond reason.

To them, who hadn't experienced even a fraction of the absurd things everyone else around them had experienced – be it encountering dragons, tens of odd realms far removed from Aigas, and even fighting Deities – this was quite a hefty way to start their induction into things beyond the grounded lifestyle they had lived up till now.

Elita was surprised, but not to the point of being shocked. There was a lot of interest in her eyes as she looked at the doors.

Soidon was floored but not for mundane reasons. Even though he had renounced Undeath a long time ago, he could feel the pressure of a power that contradicted his, and it was far beyond the level he had been at as an Arch-Lich.

So, this was the kind of power the four-armed being he had watched fight controlled!

The great doors growled as they opened, a brilliant radiance expelled outward.

Yuyui grinned smugly and then rushed to support Replicus.

"Let's go in," the Progeny urged, and he and Yuyui led the way. Elita followed.

Red Rage encouragingly helped Silrat and Theurien up before giving Soidon a light kick to persuade him to follow along everyone else.

As soon as the group entered, the doors vanished.

On the other side, they all appeared in a limitless space preceded by a long, winding paved pathway made of a glossy material that seemed to be a mix of gold, glass and emerald. Around it was dark grey dirt that rose and fell into hills and dips while following the branching pathway, leading to various spots within the Empyrean Bosom.

Yuyui tapped the pavement with her foot, and Ju`wtte streaked out of her forehead, ran along the paved path and attached itself to everyone's feet. At once, the group was whisked along the path at shocking speed and they appeared in front of a vast building in the next instant.

The transition, or rather, the movement, was so smooth that it hardly felt real. Silrat fondled himself as though expecting bits of him to be missing. Theurien would have done the same if he wasn't absolutely stricken in awe by the design of the great structure before him.

It was the Empyrean Hatcher, a massive, dark grey, egg-shaped building with strokes of yellowish-red across its face that seemed to depict a plethora of olden stories in writing and pictures. Above it, there was a limited, purple-blue sky with mammoth-shaped clouds floating around, an odd light from this sky illuminating its features.

Yuyui and Replicus led the way into it, but before they reach the entrance, several human-shaped, doodle-like entities made of Ju`wtte (Strawlers) rushed out, some standing at attention and others wrestling Replicus from Yuyui.

Elita and the others gazed at the Strawlers with interest as they followed Replicus' lead.

They couldn't utter any words. There was too much to process. There were so many places in this vast place that beckoned their attention, but of course, now wasn't the time to give in to curiosity,

The interior of the Empyrean Hatcher – the First Layer, at least – consisted of massive black tiles with sprinkles of white, a very high ceiling with an assortment of dense murals, and many – hundreds upon hundreds – stairways rising upwards into what looked like dancing, suspended spherical rifts.

While everyone was gaping in awe, Replicus dismissed most of the hundreds of Strawlers on standby around them, and then said:

"We'll get a place to discuss everything we need to for now. Someplace relaxing. And uh, welcome to my home, I suppose – though there is someone up there who would skin me alive for saying that."

Everyone except Yuyui and the Hybrid Luman body barely heard what he said.

Replicus sighed.

Feeling that strength had returned to one of his fingers, he lifted it and Ju`wtte sparked from its end.

One of the rising stairways leaned backwards along with its great rift and delivered itself in front of him. Now Replicus was facing the pulsing gateway into one of the many resorts on the First Layer of the Hatcher.

"Come along."

Replicus was the first to sink into the rift and he appeared in what looked like a large flower-field. There was a pleasant smell from the many types of flowers – some large, some small – and the ground underneath his feet felt soft and hairy.

Of course, this was because where he was now wasn't exactly a flower-field.

The great, gently flapping, thin and colourful wings on either end of his sight announced what exactly this place was: It was the back of a particularly large butterfly. Sprinkles of glittery star stuff

fell on Replicus and the other riders from the wings – who had just arrived – and soon, Replicus felt himself relax.

The tension he was feeling was washed away.

The same was true for his guests.

Elita felt her tense muscles almost turn mellow. Theurien and Silrat whose minds were racing from being plagued by a variety of emotions, calmed down, somehow coming to disregard the fact that they were on a vast, airborne butterfly.

Even Soidon cooled off.

Nine Strawlers emerged from among the flowers and started setting up large cushions and tables. Some brought different, cool juices in large glass flasks, and others brought various savoury and sweet foods.

Soon, everyone was seated, each on a very, very comfortable cushion with multiple small tables surrounding them where delectable edibles were placed in gross abundance.

It was only then when Replicus spoke:

"Now, let me explain everything."

Chapter 1234: Explaining Everything (2)

"You're... you're actually serious," Silrat said as the biscuit he had been chewing slipped from his fingers, a dumbfounded look appearing on his face. He had settled comfortably into his cushion while listening to Replicus' narration, but now, he sat bolt upright.

"Yeah. I'm serious. I don't look it, but I was an undead minion at one point. A miner," the Progeny said.

Theurien barely managed to sip the fresh, cool beverage in his glass, an odd smile on his face.

He pressed his temples.

A series of questions and emotions burst forth from his mind, threatening to overwhelm his mental faculties, but right then, a cool, calming sensation floated through him. The glittery bits falling from the wings of the giant butterfly they were riding, caused all his tension to wash away.

He and Silrat sighed and they once again pressed against their cushions.

Silrat rubbed his chin vigorously. He had no words.

Of the people here, apart from Elita – who hadn't shown any reaction to the revelation by Replicus just now – he had known Skullius the longest. As a Discount Human, Silrat had always found Skullius odd.

He was odd looking.

He had odd catchphrases.

He had odd companions in Red Rage and Ferex.

But the former Guild Association Head had always chalked this collection of oddities up to quirks of those who were talented.

And indeed, Silrat had believed that Skullius was simply a talented Mage back then when he made a Tie of Exchange with him. Tulnas, the Tamer from Inhone City, leader of the Harem Guild, had also noted how 'talented' Skullius was and ignored how weird his speech patterns – and also his face – was.

Silrat had then spent much of his time with the Discount Human, the two allying themselves with Stylla Bryne who wanted Skullius to participate in the Premium Age Royale in order to find a way to save her father, Theurien, who had been cursed.

Never in the months they grew to be partners, and then friends – after Skullius got rid of the UNCoddled curse – did Silrat ever imagine that he was pals with a former undead minion.

On Aigas, because of the days before Jiggorrhax repaired the Rules, when many undead roamed the land, pillaging and destroying, Undeath was not seen favourably. Skullius had learned of this first hand in the Tremur Forest.

Theurien gave a deep sigh.

"Maybe... maybe my mind simply can't wrap my mind around this," he said. "You were under an Arch-Lich and you managed to escape?"

"That's right," Replicus confirmed with a sigh. He knew he had to be patient with these two and explain every detail little by little.

The strength in one of his arms had finally returned... to a modest degree. He raised it, as everyone (Silrat, Theurien, Elita, Yuyui and Soidon) watched.

He then used Maximum Catalyst's Reversion on the arm, and it changed from being a full, fleshy arm of ebony hue and ceramic texture, to a small (proportionally) skeletal arm that had a faint signature of Undeath!

...!!!

Everyone was surprised. Even Elita.

"That's Undeath energy!" Soidon exclaimed.

"This is just an application of one of my abilities. I can devolve and evolve any part of myself and others. Since I used to be an undead – a Moronic Undead – I can access the state I was in back then. This doesn't apply for very long though, probably because Undeath is a power beyond the means of Maximum Catalyst," Replicus explained.

Though pretty much no one fully understood his last sentence, his elaboration on what he had just done remained clear. Better yet, it helped Silrat and Theurien get a better handle on what Replicus was saying about his origins.

"I may have been cut off from Undeath, but I'm not exactly free. I still have ties to the Lich who created me – or rather, abused my soul. And I suppose, that is pretty much a direct reason why the whole situation with this other me exists," Replicus said, glancing at his Hybrid Luman body which was being tended to by the Strawlers a short distance away among the flowers.

He restored his arm to its original state.

With that, he gave a summary of events and reasoning for his actions from when he arrived in the Tremur Forest: How he met Eobald, the man who gave him the Universal Gate Key to the Labyrinth of the Yoke; how he then met Benzard, Denille, Irlen and Reon; how he got cursed by Somanda with UNCoddled; how he entered the Labyrinth; how he met Sila (he figured he might as well tell everyone); how he met the Arch-Luminant Dezrael; how he met a bunch of crazy powerful experts in Fulgardt's Hall; how he met Sause; how he saw Fulgardt's corpse; how he got Fulgardt's legacy and how made a Tie of Exchange with Sause where the Giant would help him reclaim his soul from Somanda in exchange for helping him exit the Labyrinth.

After he explained this, Silrat and Theurien were already feeling bloated, as though the information they were fed was too much for their brains and was thus making for their stomachs.

Even Elita was a bit stunned that when she met Skullius, he had already experienced such things.

Replicus continued, explaining how he met Elita after exiting the Tremur; how they parted – with him thinking she died as a result of the UNCoddled curse; how he got to Inhone City partnered with Tulnas and his Guild to help stop the Evenfall cultists, thereby meeting the man who would lead the Evenfall in the future – Guissepo; how he met the masked man for the first time and faced off against Somanda who was possessing the treasure SoSei.

Silrat and Theurien were gobsmacked. They visibly sweated.

The Progeny felt a bit sorry for them. He hadn't even gotten to the crazy stuff yet.

Replicus went on. He told of how he went to Harifrast City and got his core destroyed as a result of Sila's possession; how he recreated his mana core with better standard, and how he found the Temple of Unlusted Tears where he met Yuyui through Sila's guidance.

"I see," Elita said as Replicus reached this point. She looked at Yuyui. "I never would have pegged you for someone with a Hidden Class from that wretched band of women though. I've read about them. The Order of the Trodden Rose, they called themselves. Those twelve women gave the Purity a hard time back in the day."

"They slaughtered so many men during their time – even powerful experts – that many women were motivated to rise up, take arms and fight, claiming Classes that were – in that time – said to be reserved for men.

Apparently, in that time, four Paladin Champions were killed by these women, and their replacements were all incredibly driven women, some of whom played a great role in driving the Trodden Rose into the ground."

Yuyui gave a strained smile.

"We still have their Temple, you know?" she said sullenly. "The proof of the evil those women did was all over it. I had to get rid of all the bodies at the entrance and scrub it clean, otherwise it didn't really feel like a place I could stay in."

Replicus understood how she felt.

When he first entered the Temple months ago, the sight that greeted him in what was called the Slurred Grounds, was a mockery to all things male. Even if he had only been a fake human back then, he had felt sick looking at it.

The Progeny continued his long tale.

For now, he didn't bother to explain what Null Life was and only put an emphasis on his ability to acquire a human form for 24 hours. He felt it would be too heavy of a concept to deal normal people along with all the narration.

Replicus didn't explain much to do with his activities in Genhuis City as Silrat would have known and told Theurien all about the important bits. He did however, explain how he had intended to get help from the Purity to get rid of his UNCoddled curse.

He explained how he had been given a mission by a Priest to go to Evic where he met Kenno – whom Theurien knew from when he was sent to the Bryne Estate by Replicus – and his gang, defeated them and recruited them.

After this, he then explained what might have been his favourite moment of all.

"Because Yuyui managed to steal the Brilliant Dent – sorry, the pouch – from the Grand Priest, I was able to use the Divine energy stored in one of the artefacts it held to get rid of my UNCoddled curse," the Progeny said and he looked at Yuyui who blushed.

"Because of this, I was more easily able to enjoy the company of the people around me, and they didn't have to be wary of being roasted alive for helping me. It's only after getting rid of this curse that I managed to truly grow strong. And perhaps this was when I started to value relations genuinely."

Yuyui grinned broadly. The moment Replicus referenced was one of the few times in the past when she had proven useful, and to hear that her efforts created Replicus' favourite moment...

It made her truly happy.

Replicus turned from her and his face suddenly turned grave.

"I made a decision on the same day I overcame the curse, however. I chose to split myself with a power I had acquired long before. I was desperate to increase my rate of growth. That, as I realise now, might have been a mistake."

Chapter 1235: Explaining Everything (3)

Replicus didn't have access to Skullius' memories, so he couldn't have explained in detail what Skullius had done after this. He only explained the details of his own journey after he took Yuyui and Ferex, met up with Kenno and started on their path to become part of the Severed Union.

He explained the workings of the Severed Union, about the Factions within it and the Immortals, whom he revealed to everyone to be tied to the third Herald on Aigas. He had heard Erlton call this Herald, Aingor. (It went without saying that Replicus explained to Silrat and Theurien what Heralds were.)

Replicus then explained how he got a certain Diviner named Riba from the Severed Union to predict the future for him. He had gotten two revelations from the little man: one related to Skullius being possessed by Fulgardt's WILLS, and another which he didn't tell anyone yet.

At this point, Silrat stopped him.

"I can't imagine what caused him... Festos to change like that happened before the Premium Age Royale. A few days before the actual Royale began, he used some kind of dust on me and had me vanish from the face of Aigas. I don't think I existed for a while. An Arch-Mage I met after I revived explained that to me," he said sombrely. "You... your other self cared enough for me to protect me."

Replicus smiled.

"I don't doubt that," he said, and it was true. Before being possessed, Skullius was no different from Replicus. He had cared for the values he had been cultivating along his journey.

That said, with Silrat's explanation, Replicus finally understood why for a while he had gotten the feeling that someone was missing from his cache of memories.

The object that Skullius had used to temporarily postpone Silrat's existence in order to protect him from the Premium Age Royale's final stretch, had caused everyone and everything to forget that the former Guild Association Head had ever even existed!

It was a hefty price, but Silrat did in fact survive where he should have perished alongside everyone else in the Royale Venue.

Soidon suddenly coughed.

"Ugh... I might know a few more details about this," he said meekly. Everyone turned to him. He took a sip of a maroon juice. "Erlton and I went to Opungale after this Premium Age Royale concluded. This ma-, ahem, you were bedridden and your soul was in terrible shape. Apparently, you had transformed into a dark creature and had battled a man by the name Rayn."

Elita's brows shot up.

"Rayn?!" she cried.

"Y-yes."

Replicus rubbed his chin, but shook his head.

"I have a good idea about what happened with Rayn and the masked man. There's no point in speculating. I can get the memories later and confirm, but this is not really important at the moment," he said.

Elita still looked surprised, however.

Everyone in the Purity, especially the Paladin Champions, would know who Rayn was, after all.

He had returned?

After everyone settled, Replicus went to explain how the Emissary of the Immortals had informed the Severed Union about Boron's rise and the intent of the masked man; how he had charged the Factions of the Severed Union with capturing the masked man before he reached Edagon; how the masked man had split Aigas; how the battle against the necromancer went and ended (Replicus deliberately avoided mentioning Caxellac, the BoneTender and Stylla); how he had met with Sause and got the expansion on Aigas' lore: the Eternal Drakkens, the fate of the giants and all.

Theurien and Silrat gaped for the umpteenth time when Replicus confessed to killing the Herald Jerthrax so that Actuass wouldn't get the dragon as an undead summon.

They had nearly collapsed when he mentioned going into Suzamete's domain for the first time and finding out that Actuass was actually the son of the Deitess of the Sky.

Their view of the tall, four-armed being before them suddenly changed again.

To think he had fought dragons and argued with Deities!

Elita shared some of the surprise that plagued Theurien and Silrat, but her takeaway from Replicus' narration was different from theirs.

"No wonder you don't like her," she said, her expression turning dark. "If I'm being honest, you've managed to knock down my respect for Suzamete down a peg as well. If she knew her son was going to kill so many people, she could have stopped it; whatever plans she had to use her son's actions to quell a threat far into the future can't possibly justify the death of so many.

I feel she might have exercised human emotions there."

Oddly enough, Replicus wasn't sure. He was torn.

In a way, if it weren't for Actuass splitting Aigas, Caxellac's Serene Grace might have caused a lot more damage. Heck, he might have failed to stop it when it dismantled all of Aigas' Rules, leaving the world as a dark mix of Stagnant Space and the great void.

To achieve this kind of power, Actuass needed the Premium Age Royale to resurrect Rayn and steal his soul, strengthening his own.

In that way, perhaps Suzamete was right in keeping Actuass alive for future threat's sake.

But was there only one version of the future?

Replicus didn't voice this opinion though.

He went on to explain how his battle with Skullius had gone, detailing everything Skullius believed while carrying Fulgardt's WILLS, and the end result.

There was a pause after he was done.

Evidently, it would take a lot of time to process everything that was just said.

Silrat then looked at Replicus with concern.

"You are going to merge with him..." he said as he glanced at Skullius, "...right? What makes you sure that after you do, Fulgardt's WILLS, in whatever manner they took over your original body, won't overwhelm you too?"

Replicus smiled warmly.

"I don't think I'm lacking in will and resolve against Fulgardt's own WILLS. When he took over my other self, I believe he (Skullius) was in a vulnerable state. His soul was damaged, as uh... Soidon said," he explained. "Besides that, I hypothesised that what led to my other self losing to Fulgardt's WILLS was how reliant he was on the Immoral's powers. That was how the WILLS grew in him.

As for me, I don't have such a weakness and neither does my body. On top of that, when we fuse... I expect something phenomenal is going to happen to both sets of my powers."

There was a hint of certainty and anticipation in Replicus' voice that made Silrat's concerns falter.

If Replicus was that confident, then he was probably going to be fine. He had, after all, defeated Fulgardt's scheme already.

What Silrat didn't see, however, were the hints of doubt Replicus carried behind his eyes. It wasn't because he was actually wary of Fulgardt's WILLS prevailing, but because his phantoms and Serenity didn't back him up.

They were still eerily silent.

What in the world was going on with them?

After reassuring Theurien and Silrat, Replicus turned to Elita.

He knew that everyone was still mulling and masticating all that he had explained, but he had questions of his own and not a lot of time.

There was still a time crunch, after all.

"I believe it's your turn," he said. "You said you had a reason for coming back to Aigas, and it seems to me that it had nothing to do with saving my life."

Elita nodded and sank deeper into her cushion.

She looked upwards, where the sky was as bland and blue as ever.

"I'd wanted to come home for a long time, but often, I was reminded that if I did so prematurely, I wouldn't be able to change anything, to effect any change. I was weak," she began. "My goal... I struggled with it for a while. I've struggled with it for a long time actually."

She gave a mirthless laugh and then looked at Replicus.

"I came back to destroy the Purity," she said.

Chapter 1236: Explaining Everything (4)

It was Replicus' turn to be shocked.

Destroy the Purity?

What in the world inspired Elita to such a goal?

Replicus withheld his momentary instinct to judge, however. Knowing Elita, at least the Elita he had met back then, he was sure she hadn't suddenly turned into an unreasonable, vengeful heathen with a boner for chaos.

Elita looked at him and smiled.

"I'm sure you realise this isn't an objective fuelled by some personal vendetta," she said. "However, it does have a lot to do with me and the Deities."

"...I'm listening," Replicus said. Everyone else was too.

Elita sighed.

"I'm a Cursed Blood. During the Second Grand War, the Deities fought Fulgardt by inhabiting vessels from the Purity's Knights and other powerful combatants. The volunteers had to use Creeds and willingly accept the consciousnesses of the Deities for them to become vessels.

Unlike Rayn who was born to house the powers of the Deities, though, the rest would perish sooner or later after holding the powers of our makers."

Elita paused meaningfully and then continued.

"There was another price for becoming vessels, other than guaranteed death. The lineage of the vessel – everyone tied to them by blood – would be cursed as well. Most would die within a year, and for those that didn't, sicknesses would be drawn to them, and they would become empowered against them, prompting cruel, agonizing deaths.

Very few Cursed Bloods survived, but over the years, the curse those of us born to the descendants of heroes received has evolved. We have learned to live with it despite the harm it beckons," she said in a sad tone.

She recalled when the Purity, while making no effort to sugarcoat their words, had told her that she wouldn't be looked upon kindly because of her Cursed Blood. The Purity preferred to keep all Cursed Bloods close, after all, monitoring their actions. Even though Elita had become a Purity Knight and then a Paladin Champion, she was walking on twine the whole time.

"I had read up and found that I am descended of a man named Logma, who was the first vessel of the Deities. He was a Paladin Champion and he had a lot of renown. Thankfully, the Purity never forgets those who have served. His accomplishments were what inspired me to strive to become a Paladin Champion.

Nomatter how harshly I was treated, I soldiered on and acquired enough merit to be recognized," she said.

Replicus' face remained impassive, but he felt a series of dark emotions welling inside him.

A Cursed Blood?

So, Elita was such a thing?

Back when they met, she had seemed invincible, indomitable; a model Paladin Champion.

"After I was saved by Quintess from your curse," she said to Replicus, "I was demoted from my status as a Paladin Champion and locked up. The higher ups in the Purity took the chance to call me incompetent because I had let you go. They even blamed me for what the Undead minions we had faced together had done to Eofel."

Elita's face contorted in rage.

"After a while, they shamelessly came to me and told me that how my friend, my sister, Revia, had been beaten by the masked man and kidnapped. They wanted to restore my status now, as she was missing. They couldn't afford to have two Champions out of commission. I refused. I wouldn't give in to their whims."

With the wave of her hand, a book appeared in her grip.

Replicus recognised it immediately.

It was a Book of Alignment!

It was the same kind of book that he acquired Null Life and [Flesh It Like You Mean It] from.

Aurolio also had a similar book.

"Revia was the fifth-ranked Paladin Champion. She was strong. For her to have been defeated, I knew it had to have been at the hands of a formidable opponent; the masked man had to be extremely powerful. I resolved to attain great power and look for her myself," Elita said, opening the book.

"I assume you received your powers the same way I received mine, Skullius – though your friends know you as Festos, I suppose. I was acknowledged by the Voice of Worlds, and was given this book, but I never deigned to use it until that very moment. I became a Voided Deathform. I had thought I'd get immense power quickly and be off to save Revia, but no. I was whisked away to the unknown instead."

Replicus narrowed his eyes.

"Hold on. I understand the desire to save or avenge a friend, but this sounds like a personal affair to me still," he said to Elita, "And I'm not sure it's aimed at the right target. The masked man is gone – at least in body and soul – and I don't think destroying the Purity accomplishes anything."

Elita shook her head.

"None of this is the reason behind why I want to destroy the Purity. It's all that I imagined would be necessary for you to understand my plight, Skullius," she said sincerely. "It's just all I saw with veiled, naïve eyes. I had a lot of time to reflect and analyse when Void took me away. I gathered all that I had seen, all that I had heard and I came to a conclusion."

"Skullius, I knew there were more Cursed Bloods other than me, but I barely recall seeing another of my kind for the last entire year I was here on Aigas. They disappeared one after the other, and I was certain they did not just keel over and die. But that's not all."

"The First and Second ranked Paladin Champions... I know the First ranked, Goldburn, was stationed at the Central Boundary – of course, you know that – but the Second? I never met them. None of the Champions knew anything about them. The only thing I ever heard spoken about them was how their Divine Blessing had to do with plagues. I didn't take it to heart back when I heard it then."

Replicus raised a brow.

"So? What does all this mean?" he asked. He wasn't the only one a bit lost to Elita's meaning.

"Let me finish," Elita said and she sighed and sipped directly from a pitcher of greenish honey. "There's one final detail I recalled."

"Alongside the popularity of the Purity back in the older days, there was a group that called themselves the Unnamed Keepers. They revered the Deities, but they preferred to serve them through the teachings of the Giants. They were the ones who taught people like my ancestor Logma how to become vessels. They gave the idea to the Purity, even though the Priests had denied it at first."

"Back then, the convenience of vessels was used against Fulgardt's immense forces, but what about now? The masked man, the Evenfall... I had long wondered when the Purity would want to settle these matters for good, and now there's Boron – another challenge they would want to vanquish," she said, her voice rising.

"Wait," Replicus said, frowning.

Finally, he got an idea about what Elita was trying to say.

"You can't mean..."

"Yes," the former Champion said, relieved that Replicus was catching on. "I believe the Purity has been trying to create a force of their own more powerful than a Paladin Champion for years now. They are trying to create a Divine weapon, one that utilises the properties of Cursed Bloods!"

Chapter 1237: Explaining Everything (5)

In all honesty, Replicus didn't buy it. Maybe it was because he didn't really have much information about the Purity and its current status quo, but still...

There were many reasons why the Purity could want to do something like creating a Divine weapon of some kind for their own use, especially with the threat of Boron to all life in the world. But did they have the means? They probably didn't have...

At once, Replicus' eyes opened wide.

"Oh damn..." he said.

Maybe the Purity did have the means!

Had he not just narrated the tale about how a Grand Priest Yuyui killed had been casually walking around with an artefact that had enough genuine Divine energy to purge the UNCoddled curse?

There were many Grand Priests all around Feinheath, and if one had such a thing, wasn't it reasonable to assume that others, and even the Higher Order Priests, had access to such power as well?

Priests in general, had the ability to naturally generate Divine energy. Their Class was the only one that allowed them to produce such energy, even if most started by utilising the lowest form of Divine energy: Primus.

But wait... what about the motive of the Purity especially when paired with the kind of Divine weapon they could create to eradicate their problems? Based on the timeline Elita had established, the Purity would have probably been trying to deal with the Evenfall – Boron's worshippers – and the necromancers.

To be fair, both these groups had been a huge thorn in the Purity's side – as Replicus had learned back when he was in Inhone City – but was that enough motivation? Wouldn't the Purity do things with the guidance of Suzamete in mind? This didn't seem to have anything to do with her.

Perhaps the Purity had been anticipating Boron's rise before it happened? They must have had powerful Diviners, right? Or did the Priests receive word from Suzamete that they needed to beware?

No, that didn't make sense.

Even Erlton the Herald said that Suzamete hadn't addressed him directly in a while. He had claimed that the last time she did, was when the Undead minion Skullius and Elita fought had wrecked Eofel. He had only been mildly warned about the chaos Actuass would invite on the world, most probably.

The Progeny took a breath.

"How sure are you about all this?" he asked Elita.

The former Champion stared him dead in the eye.

"It's all conjecture, but I trust my instincts. My mind got a lot sharper, you know. At the very least, my theory isn't baseless. There's no organisation on Aigas – including this Severed Union you mentioned – that is as ambitious as the Purity. Believe me," she said firmly.

Replicus considered her.

"You're sure the anger you've bottled up for so long against the prejudice you received as a Cursed Blood from the Purity isn't what's leading you on?" he asked.

"I'm not that petty. I couldn't be, not after what I've gone through. I'm more concerned with the bigger picture. If the Purity and their ambitions have grown as great as I think... it won't be about me anymore, will it?"

Replicus narrowed his eyes. Elita was still looking at him with a steady gaze, almost as though to prove that she wasn't lying or hiding anything.

Everyone else around them seemed to have left the floor to the two, choosing not to add or subtract anything. They were content merely listening, after all, there was little they could add.

Well, Soidon seemed to think he had something he could pass.

"Maybe the lady has a point," he said somewhat meekly. Replicus and Elita turned to him.

"How so?" the former asked.

The former Lich sat upright.

"Erlton visited the Purity a while back, before the Premium Age whatever ended. He told me this in passing and never elaborated, but I think he did warn them about a crisis – don't know which one," he said. "On top of this, when we were trying to convince Karima to help us rally the other beasts, he spoke against the Purity."

"Since the Great Trembling began, the Purity hasn't shown its forces as much as one would expect. The Six Houses of Pelian, the Capital Service... they have been out and about, but the Purity hasn't mobilised much of their strength. Perhaps they have indeed been scheming something in the background."

Replicus wiggled the fingers of all his hands. More strength had returned to him.

"Is that so?" he said.

This was indeed a curious detail. A small one but curious nonetheless. It added to Elita's theory ever so slightly.

The Progeny turned from Soidon to Elita.

"What kind of Divine weapon do you think the Purity would create?" he asked Elita.

"I'm not sure, but I think it would take advantage of the fact that Cursed Bloods receive and empower all manner of illnesses in their bodies," she said. "I have never tested this – and I'm sure none of the other Cursed Bloods have either – but our bodies could perhaps play host to other kinds of afflictions that aren't common diseases. Evil forces, perhaps."

If the bodies of Cursed Bloods can enhance dark powers too..."

"I see," Replicus said. "And that Paladin Champion you mentioned who can control plagues, you think he might have a hand in this?"

"Possibly."

There was a pause.

The Progeny was starting to see some kind of validity in Elita's theory. Maybe she was right.

But if she was, did this mean that now there was yet another thing that needed solving on Aigas? Or did this even need solving? If the Purity was trying to create their own Divine weapon against Aigas' enemies, was that such a bad thing?

The way they were going about it was wrong, but the result – at least to them – seemed righteous.

Replicus sighed.

He didn't want to argue with Elita over her reason for storming down to Aigas right now.

Thus...

"Speaking of reasons why you returned to Aigas, isn't that Revia you mentioned another reason? You wanted to save her before you left, right?"

Elita's unwavering gaze finally faltered.

She retrieved the Book of Alignment into an unknown storage.

"I've had her on my mind, but honestly, I sort of lost hope the longer I was away from Aigas. If she was in the enemy's possession before I left, I doubted that the Purity could find her, especially if her captor was someone like the masked man. From the description you gave me of this necromancer, I don't see how she could have gotten out alive," she said.

"But I still intend to find out what became of her though."

"If there is any way I can help with that, I will," Replicus said. He moved his fingers more vigorously. Yuyui and Red Rage were entranced by their movements.

Replicus then gave Elita a sharp look and for a moment, it seemed as though he was about to say something. He turned away, however.

Now wasn't the right time. He turned to Yuyui.

A large, golden key appeared in his hand. He gave it to the lime-haired girl.

"I think the others have long served their detention after using the Timemould Mirror Box. Go and bring them here. Oh, and please tell them to bath first. We have guests," he said.

Yuyui wore a bright smile, took the key to the Warmoth's Treasury and vanished out of sight with a few Strawlers following after her.

Replicus then turned to Elita, Silrat and Theurien.

"I feel that sitting around and talking without end may get a bit too tedious. To keep things fresh while also saving time, I'd rather handle the many introductions necessary for what we must do while also preparing for my merge," he said.

"Yuyui has just gone to fetch the rest of my noble crew. In the meantime" – Replicus found the strength to stand, though with difficulty, and paced among the flowers towards Skullius' body – "why don't we hear your tale, Soidon? I feel like it should be very interesting, if Erlton's words are anything to go by."

And indeed, it was.

As Soidon narrated, everyone was stricken aghast.

Chapter 1238: Explaining Everything (6)

"I never would have guessed..." Replicus said as he struggled to balance his body, on his face a jarring frown. "Honestly, if you hadn't been with Erlton, I don't think I would have believed you."

"From what you told us about your relationship with Somanda, I wouldn't blame you if you didn't," Soidon said with a shrug.

Elita shook her head and emitted a muffled chuckle. She too could hardly believe the tale that had just been told, however much she wanted to believe that the legendary dragon Jiggorrhax had the power to cleanse an Arch-Lich.

"Wow, you even sound like a Repented Lich," she said.

Silrat and Theurien found themselves feeling a bit agitated. To learn that this entire time, they had been sitting next to not one, but two beings that had formerly been related to Undeath was a great blow to their common sense.

"Suddenly, my world of politics between Families and Houses feels so insignificant," Theurien mumbled under his breath.

Silrat patted his shoulder. He could relate more than anyone else here. He glanced at Soidon, hardly daring to imagine what the man had looked like before.

Replicus kept his gaze fixed on the former Lich.

"So, you were acquainted with Somanda?" he asked. He didn't show any particular hostility with the question, but Soidon could tell that there was a bit of venom lurking behind it.

"No. Arch-Liches aren't inherently social creatures. We... They are very secretive. They don't invade each other's privacy; they don't visit each other or ask about the other's day. Most interactions are born out of hostility or mutual interest. Alliances – which are usually very short-lived and end in backstabbing – are the closest things that Liches get to having positive interactions.

Even discounting this fact, there's millions upon millions of Arch-Liches in the Eminence's domain. Thus, I wouldn't know every single Lich personally," he said.

Replicus scratched his chin.

He didn't say it, but the fact that Liches seemed to all have names beginning with 'So-' probably didn't make things any better.

"I see. Millions upon millions, huh? Somanda ascended to Divinity not too long ago. How many High Liches are there?" he said.

Soidon was a bit surprised by the revelation. Replicus hadn't mentioned this in his narration before.

This Somanda had ascended?

"I wouldn't dwell on that if I were you. There's no point. I'm sure you are only concerning yourself with getting the other portion of your soul. That, while already extremely dangerous, is at least manageable – when accounting for the odds. If you somehow intend to contend against the full might of the Eminence, you'll find that it is no way inferior to that of Void and Serenity's treasure.

As an undead minion of the lowest rank, I'm sure you never travelled the lands much, so you wouldn't know," the former Lich said.

Well, Soidon was right.

Replicus didn't have any intention of vanquishing Undeath. Even Serenity never asked that of him, meaning it was likely impossible for him; perhaps for him alone.

"Fair enough," Replicus said and he stretched his legs, feeling more strength returning. Good. This was good.

He didn't feel vulnerable anymore. That was a very distasteful feeling.

The after-effects of using Implicit Evolution should have been much worse. When he practised with Serenity in the Timemould Mirror Box, using a small amount of Null Exp each time, he was usually rendered unconscious for a while afterwards. He likely didn't experience the same this time because he had immediately gotten a new body using the Embryotic Stuffing.

"You mentioned that entry and exit into Deadmanland has some requirements?" he asked.

"Yes – though I do wonder why use such a name for that place. Contiguous Sap is required for all motions in and out, and it is rather limited based on the ranks. Of course, I don't exactly have that anymore," Soidon said.

Replicus scoffed.

"So, there's no way to get into Deadmanland?" he asked.

"Well, I have a few theories that may or may not help. We could test them. Honestly, without Contiguous Sap... It may be difficult," the former Lich said nervously.

Replicus analysed every single gesture the man made.

He didn't trust him. Not one bit. He bought his story – as he had said before – only because Erlton 'vouched' for him. The Herald must have confirmed Soidon's identity. Well, at least he must have confirmed that this man was an Outsider.

So far, Soidon's explanations seemed to hold some truth, but Replicus wondered why he was cooperating. Did getting cleansed by Jiggorrhax's breath purify this bastard of all his earlier intentions of conquest?

No way. It couldn't be.

He recalled the vile manner in which Somanda revelled in his fetishes and desires.

Evil of that nature couldn't be forced to repentance by Divine flames alone.

Replicus resolved to find the former Lich's true motives.

He considered branding him with the Stark Constellation, but decided against it.

Not now. That could wait.

As long as Soidon was here, he had no option of leaving without Replicus' permission. In that sense, Replicus had time to truly consider his next steps. He was doing the same with Elita, actually.

Because the matter of Soidon's identity gave room for too much speculation and suspicion, Replicus turned to Elita, aiming to ask her about what it was exactly she had been doing outside Aigas when...

The gateway into this resort churned and several figures poured in.

Everyone turned to them.

There were seven in all, Yuyui included.

Every single one of them, quite like the lime-haired girl, wore an exquisite, starry armour with a six-pointed star branded onto the chest plate: the Granted Star Armament. Each version was different in a way that gave a lot of character to its wearer.

Elita frowned.

As the group moved through the flower-field towards their position, she again noticed that, just like when she first met Yuyui, she could sense nothing – absolutely nothing – about these people. She couldn't ascertain how strong they were with her senses.

She couldn't tell anything about their mana, or their Stage.

Of course, Elita could appraise them with her guidance field, but in her time outside Aigas, she had grown to know about Patronage Ranks. With a higher Patronage Rank, a user of the guidance field could give someone else access to the guidance field, and some of the ones she had come across could tell if they were being appraised. Most considered it rude.

If Replicus had achieved a high enough Patronage Rank, and acquired information about how to manually manipulate the guidance field, his subordinates would be able to notice her appraisal.

Replicus beamed at the group of seven.

He was happy to see them all and they were all happy to see him.

All of them were branded with the Stark Constellation on their forehead, and oddly, the Ju`wte-constructed mark sparked violently on all of their foreheads, mirroring their collective, similar feelings of relief.

Yuyui.

Kenno.

Pherdanta.

Grim.

Baddan.

Savast.

Kintar.

Five humans and two Cluster beasts.

Replicus looked proud.

He gave a formal introduction.

"Silrat, Theurien, Elita, Soidon... These are my most trusted, most loyal partners. They also happen to be the strongest forces in my Order," he said, a smile cropping up on his face. "To isolate their value from the rest – not that I don't find worth in the others – I dubbed them the Unlimited Stars. I hope you will treat them with sufficient respect."

Chapter 1239: The Unlimited Stars

"Masteeeeeeeerrrrr!" a certain oval-faced, laughably short woman with a bowl cut said with the broadest grin as she rushed towards Replicus and grabbed one of his hands. "I can't tell you how I am – with one hundred percent joy – glad that you made it back alive and unscathed."

Replicus narrowed his eyes.

This little, cunning menace...

Absolutely no one, not even Theurien and Silrat believed that she was entirely happy with Replicus return. There was something awfully unsettling about her small, ovular eyes and unnatural wide mouth.

"Kintar, I am a greater judge of character and intention than you give me credit for, you know?" Replicus said to her and turned to Grim. "What happened?"

The woman, Kintar, who was barely 1.4 meters in height, turned to Grim and her eyes widened, drowned in threat. An unspoken 'If you tell, I may have to murder you' floated from her.

Grim laughed, ignored and happily told on her.

"She was placing bets against you coming back completely unharmed with all the Stark Troops. Oh, and she didn't shy away from threatening them if they refused to participate," he said.

All of a sudden, a great hand grabbed Kintar's head, completely enveloping her dark blue hair.

"I'm starting to regret promoting you to an Unlimited Star. Heck, maybe I made a mistake by naming you my Deputy," Replicus said as he lifted her off the ground.

Kintar's limbs flailed as she cried out for Replicus to let her go, and all the Unlimited Stars – except Pherdanta, who shook her head – burst out into laughter.

Elita, Theurien, Silrat, Soidon and even Red Rage were dumbfounded.

Following Replicus' impressive declaration about these seven arrivals, they had expected a different picture. They had expected dignified, stoic warriors who didn't know what a joke even was. The current image, however...

Also, had Replicus just called that short woman his Deputy?

"Boss," Grim said, donning a toothy grin while gazing at Elita a little eagerly. "You haven't introduced us to your company."

Elita was somewhat taken aback by Grim's gaze. The young man was bold-looking, with rising white hair and vibrant red eyes. His grin exposed four sharp fangs that were astoundingly clean.

Grim's brand of the Granted Star Armament featured a thick mane of grizzly ebony fur around the shoulders and collar. Vicious, black claws could be seen protruding from the ends of his gauntlets. It was unknown whether they were his or the armour's.

"Right," Replicus said and he chuckled Kintar towards a very tall, lank, humanoid beast next to Baddan. The beast caught her.

He had a mostly human face, ensnared on all sides by a modest, starry helmet that concentrated most of its integrity over his head – where it produced seven luminous golden horns (part of its design) – thus leaving his three pupil-less eyes and hooked nose on display.

"Let me down, Brains!" Kintar cried as she struggled free from her fellow Unlimited's arms.

At once, the beast pulled Kintar into his arms again.

"I thought we agreed that that nickname had overstayed its welcome," the beast said, annoyed.

"Fine, fine! Savast! There! Now let me down!" Kintar yelled.

But the beast did not listen. Instead, he lightly threw Kintar up and kicked her like a ball over to Baddan.

The Sky Watcher, silver-furred as always, dark-eyed and adorned in a starry armour covered by a barely visible, oversized, silk shirt, caught Kintar with his knee and knocked her upwards. He then kicked her to his left (she let out an "Ah!") where Yuyui skilfully trapped her with her foot and launched her over to Grim. The fanged young man received her with his chest.

Grim yelled, "Catch, Brains!" and sent her over to Savast who glared at him and volleyed Kintar violently to Yuyui.

"Enough!" Pherdanta yelled, and Yuyui caught Kintar and set her down.

The dwarf moaned. Kenno patted her shoulder consolingly.

Elita, Silrat and Theurien were once again dumbfounded.

Replicus sighed.

So much for the hype he had attempted to build up for his most formidable combatants.

"Introductions," he said and pointed to Silrat and Theurien. "These are friends of mine. Family really. Legally. Theurien and Silrat. They have both played large roles in getting me where I am today.

And this," Replicus pointed to Elita, "is Elita. She is former Paladin Champion and is like me, in THAT sense."

The seven Unlimited Stars showed mild bits of surprise and interest. They understood what Replicus meant.

"She also has played a great role in keeping me alive more than once. Do treat her with sufficient regard."

Replicus turned to Soidon.

"You can call this man Soidon," he said. He chose to brief the Unlimited later on the former Lich's identity.

Soidon grew sullen.

'How cruel,' he thought.

The Unlimited Stars all suddenly assembled in a line and gave short bows to Elita, Silrat and Theurien.

"We are pleased to meet you," they all said at once.

The three guests were stunned. All of a sudden, these seven oddballs felt like a strict force that they should have never begun to see in any lesser of a light than that which Replicus had introduced them in.

"As for these seven," Replicus said and he began to introduce them one by one from Grim, to Baddan, to Kenno – who had gunmetal blue eyes and spiky dark hair – to Savast, a newcomer recruited from a dark-purple Cluster, to Yuyui.

When he reached Pherdanta, who still wore her black hair with green fringes in a pony tail and had her pointed nose ever at attention, he said:

"This is Pherdanta. She is the Commander of all my forces, whom I have dubbed the Stark Troops."

He then turned to Kintar.

"Last but not least is Kintar. As unseemly as it may appear, she is my Deputy – and indeed I understand how redundant her position seems at a glance. When I am absent, she takes care of everything on my behalf. Of course, she and Pherdanta only begin their duties today."

Elita hid her surprise at the last two introductions and greeted the Unlimited Stars, as did Silrat and Theurien. Soidon grunted unhappily.

Right then, Red Rage slowly raised his hand.

"Excuse me, Master," he said to Replicus, "I believe you forgot to introduce my valiant self."

"..."

Replicus looked at the Apostle, hummed, considered, and narrowed his eyes.

"Next time."

The Apostle lost a huge chunk of his light, dumbfounded.

Elita chortled and shook her head. Behind all the power Replicus now had compared to back then, she could still see his true self. Somehow, that authenticity bled into his subordinates as well.

At that moment...

[The effect of 'Rune of the FIRST' is imminent upon the target 'Festos Dawn']

[The target 'Festos Dawn' will now lose half of all abilities and stats permanently? Do you wish to proceed?]

...!!!

"What the... WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHIT!" Replicus cried suddenly, startling everyone around him.

Chapter 1240: Even In Death

For a powerful technique, or rather, Rune, like [Rune of the FIRST], it was disturbing how little significance it actually had in the arsenal of its users. Well, perhaps it was more apt to say that so far, it had never managed to permanently purge the powers of its targets during the battle, as was its purpose.

Caxellac had used it against Replicus, yet when the six-minute time limit the Progeny had been given to defeat the Null Devil King or else lose half his powers was elapsed, Caxellac had long perished.

Similarly, the thirty-minute time limit Replicus had given Skullius by using the [Rune of the FIRST] hadn't mattered much. The two's battle had ended in just a little more than a quarter of an hour.

The fact that the timer for this Rune ability was only just now chiming was a bit daunting to Replicus though, at least at first.

More than fifteen minutes had passed since he defeated the possessed Skullius. He quickly realised after the notification flashed several times in his eyes that all resorts in the Empyrean Hatcher lulled the sense of time; time moved a bit sluggishly within them, and it was almost too difficult to note how much of it passed.

(Likely an effect to improve relaxation.) Even the guidance field had been fooled.

In any case, the fact that Replicus was allowed to choose whether or not to proceed with the permanent destruction of a Skullius' powers was a blessing.

With imaginary tears in his eyes, Replicus declined the activation of the effect. The guidance field confirmed.

The Unlimited Stars looked at Replicus a little oddly. Hilariously though, this wasn't the first or tenth time their Master had suddenly gone into an inexplicable outburst.

The Progeny gave a sigh of relief.

'And I dared to say that I didn't care much if the Insurgent Magnus powers were destroyed earlier,' he scolded himself.

Indeed, he had told this to Skullius after using the [Rune of the FIRST] on him before they began fighting in earnest.

'I probably shouldn't delay this any longer. My strength is recovering just fine now.'

Replicus called for the Strawlers to carry his Hybrid Luman body.

He had been intentionally delaying the merging process. Somehow, he had gotten the feeling that allowing himself to fuse with his other self while all the cells in his body were greatly expended wasn't the best idea. Thus, he had been patiently waiting for his strength to return.

Looking at the Unlimited Stars and Elita, Replicus said:

"It's time. I'm going to the Second Layer to merge. It might get turbulent so be on the lookout."

The Unlimited Stars took the warning seriously as did Replicus himself.

He didn't forget what Suzamete had said.

Even she was convinced that the result of his merging was something she wasn't willing to mess with, which had surprised him.

"Good luck," Elita said with a small smile.

Replicus smiled back and nodded.

...Then he sent a message to all the Unlimited Stars secretly through their Stark Constellations; it was only two words.

"Watch her."

None of them responded openly, but they acknowledged the command.

Replicus then manifested in his hand a large green key. He threw it over to Kintar.

"I assume Yuyui gave you the other two keys," he said to her. "You're responsible for everything while I'm gone. Everything is at your disposal."

Everyone looked at the dwarf of a woman. Suddenly, her oval eyes turned creepier and colder, her face seeming to manifest an older, mature look. A dark smile crossed her oval-shaped face.

"Everything at your wish, Master," she said softly.

Elita, Silrat, Theurien, Soidon and even Red Rage felt chills.

This woman's presence was rather fickle yet stalwart. She seemed to be able to make people believe one thing or the other on a dime, and right now, everyone, including the other Unlimited Stars,

could not find a shred of a reason to doubt her loyalty to the Warmoth's Progeny or her ability to perform her responsibilities.

Replicus nodded, satisfied.

He exited the resort shortly with the limp Hybrid Luman and a throng of Strawlers.

Kintar turned to the guests. Her chilling expression from before vanished and she appeared younger.

"So, would our guests like to remain in this relaxing resort or do some exploring. I heavily encourage the latter," she said brightly.

Silrat scratched his face and turned to Theurien and then Elita. There was no immediate response from them.

"The latter, I suppose," Elita finally said.

"Greeeeeaat!" Kintar said, beaming.

A short while later, the group emerged in the First Layer of the Emphyrean Hatcher.

"Unfortunately, we can't explore the Second Layer of this humble building because, well, Master is using it, but there's no shortage of sights outside," Kintar said to the guests who all nodded.

Now that they had exhausted their intolerance to the ridiculous, all of them were able to retain more information from what they saw around them.

Elita looked up at the massive mural on the ceiling. It was astonishingly dense and difficult to comprehend – with all the pictures and writing – but she found something that was emphasized more than everything else drawn up there.

It was the image of a woman with a boundless presence illustrated around her in a vast white, messy mass. She wore a suit of armour coloured in blue, white and silver and seemed rather tall – or maybe it was the effect of the abstract yet realistic drawing style.

She was reaching for several smaller figures around her that were harder to distinguish from the multiple bits of text in a dramatic sort of way.

Elita grew very curious. She had to ask.

"Does that particular image have any significance?"

All the Unlimited Stars followed her gaze. Pherdanta quickly cast her eyes back towards their destination – the exit. Yuyui noticed, and a splash of cold sullenness fell over her. Grim fared no better.

"Ah, that's Allora," Kintar explained in a neutral tone. "She was part of us, one of the first to be granted the title of Unlimited."

Elita looked at the short woman gravely.

"Was?"

"Yes," said Kintar evenly. "She perished in the great battle against the masked necromancer. I was absent for that bout, but Master made sure all of us – our entire Order – was aware of every single detail of how and why it happened. It's not all gloom, though. Because of Master's exhaustive narration, we all know that she accomplished something supremely phenomenal before she passed.

If not for Allora, Master wouldn't have been able to put a stop to the necromancer."

Pherdanta frowned. Yuyui sucked in a sharp breath. Even Baddan twitched.

None of them were agitated by Kintar's narration. Rather, they were reminded of that dreaded voyage past the Central Boundary. Unlike most, they had been on the great, dark vessels the Emissary had provided.

Everything Kintar said was true.

Because Replicus had shared everything that happened during the voyage to Edagon, all the Stark Troops understood the significance of Allora's role despite how she had been a very fresh Unlimited at the time.

She had been the one to ensure that the Harmonic Ember was secured from Em-Sul, the Faction Leader who had had it taken from the Bryne Family Estate.

Because Replicus managed to retrieve the Harmonic Ember, he was able to gain access – through it – to Maximum Catalyst and evolve [Bringer of All] to its limit.

In turn, he was able to become the fearsome Amalgam – the conjoinment of Araeyn, Replicus and Red Rage – that contended against Actuass and Jerthrax splendidly.

With Maximum Catalyst, the Amalgam weathered through the Rule-Level attacks of the Herald Jerthrax and Actuass' vicious Majestic Territory. With the concept, he also managed to slaughter the dragon before Actuass could make it his minion, and use it to completely dominate the battle.

Better yet, because of the cumulative mana experience Replicus acquired after slaying Jerthrax, he was able to evolve into the Fourth Tier and gain enough power to defeat the Null Devil King.

Elita wore a bitter smile.

"She sounds amazing," she said.

"She was," Kintar said. "She was bold. I learned much from her before she decided she couldn't remain in the lower class of combatants with me back then."

She chuckled and her eyes turned into crescents.

"Now, even though she's gone, she's set a high standard for all of us Unlimited Stars. We have to outdo her by throngs upon throngs of deeds. Even if it means death."