

Undead 261

Chapter 261: Against Fishes and Waves

...!

'Am I... underwater?' Skullius questioned himself as he felt himself getting swept up this way and that by the waves of violent water current.

The waters which had spontaneously appeared with the glow of the purple eye on the forehead of the man-carp were tinged with a dark hue that was hard to see through.

Such a visual detail wouldn't normally oppose the efficacy of optical sight for someone like Skullius, but there seemed to be thick jets of mana infused within the water, making it unnaturally dark in the waters.

Skullius sought for his mental link to Red Rage and found the Apostle to be behind him.

No. That wasn't right.

He was sinking, behind him, probably because of the armour that he was wearing.

'What the heck happened? Were we transported some place else?'

Skullius wiggled his limbs, feeling the powerful currents wrestle against his attempt to direct his body to another trajectory.

What was with these currents?!

They were just too powerful and unusual!

WHOOSH!

A wave blasted through, smacking Skullius in the face and as it did, the Discount Human felt turbulent disturbance in his core, a disorientation he wasn't used to experiencing diaallowing him to properly hone his mana!

His [Elevated Mana Manipulation] could vaguely sense that he wasn't alone and that was just about all he could do.

Nothing else.

The Discount Human wasn't used to being underwater, or worse yet, battling underwater.

Thankfully, he wasn't used to breathing consciously either, so he didn't start inhaling water like it was a Friday.

Twinkles of lights shone only to be extinguished by the dark waters in the distance, flickering in the dark while producing muffled booms!

Skullius didn't know what that was, but it gave him an idea.

Around him, spots of light began to appear, like small stars in the evening light.

They began to move around him in every direction from which he sensed the slight bursts of activity with his [Elevated Mana Manipulation].

This was his use of [Just Light] which he still hadn't made much progress with even when he tried spamming [Basic Light Production].

The skill hadn't even reached level 5 after his constant attempts, let alone advance a rank in his affinity towards it.

Fortunately, the light produced was just enough for him to be able to see clearly the figures of Tulnas, Gertreld, Ginie and Natalika that were moving around the water.

Natalika was sweeping her feet as she sought to get away from one of the large carp that swam quickly towards her.

Around her, a bright encirclement of mana could be seen as she would ward off the attacks from the carp with it and not with her sword.

Skullius noticed how Natalika was having quite some difficulty manoeuvring in the water and this seemed to be a trait of the water itself rather than Natalika's own impediment.

Ginie was also facing the same along with Gertreld as they seemed to be trying to swim away from the fish while passively attacking and focusing on defence.

Far off into the distance, the luminous lights showed the figure of Tulnas as he floated in the water while starring down the carp which had the purple eye on its forehead as well as two others that swam around his lone armoured figure which looked imposing.

The other eyes of the creature remained on Tulnas who didn't seem fazed at all and it was obvious that it really took him seriously, considering him a genuine threat.

Skullius looked closely at the carp that the Guild leader was facing and wondered.

'Did that thing use some form of teleportation? Or did it summon some kind of Territory? No, that can't be it. It can't be able to,' Skullius thought.

The lights that Skullius spread caused the giant fish to turn their eyes towards him menacingly.

His presence had been largely ignored because in terms of presence, he was vastly weaker than the others, this including Red Rage as well.

The two that were swimming around Tulnas suddenly stopped and pierced through the waters as they rushed towards him!

...!

Skullius tried to skim through his arsenal to find the best way to defeat these things but unfortunately, because of the mass of mana embroiled in this water, constantly disturbing his

cognitive abilities, Skullius found that skill activation was difficult as the currents constantly broke his concentration.

For the others, it wasn't that difficult as Skullius could see for himself but even harnessing mana around himself was no small task under these conditions!

BAM!

A muffled smash echoed in the waters as Skullius spun for quite a bit against the deadly currents!

He had barely seen anything before he was struck!

Worst of all, the carp wasn't done!

This time Skullius was smashed and flew away so quickly that he couldn't even tell how he had beaten!

'Dammit! I thought I'd evolved [Elevated Mana Manipulation] to not get into situations like this anymore!' Skullius thought as he spun and whirled in the water.

BAAM! BAM!

The carp swam with glee as it rushed up to him and toyed with its prey!

It darted back again, seeking to bash Skullius once more but a fast, shiny figure smashed into it, slightly pushing it away.

What appeared before the carp was an armoured figure holding onto a double-edged sword which had a white blade and blackish red hilt.

Skullius opened his eyes to see his Apostle floating between him and the carp.

'Red bro...'

Red Rage had a blue light around his body and as he floated, he got into a sword stance.

'He's using Null Life Essence instead of mana! Brilliant!' Skullius thought as he watched his Apostle daringly defend him.

The effect of mana disturbance was probably the same with the Pelvis Boar-Man and it seemed he had opted to switch to Null Life Essence!

At the same time, Skullius sensed the essence that covered his spatial storage ring vanish.

He couldn't complain about it. In fact, he began trying to overcome this hurdle to access his vast pool of tricks.

The carp that was facing Red Rage suddenly shook in the water.

Explosions of mana resounded in the water as other battles were echoing in the distance, Skullius not diverting his attention to anything but the battle about to happen before him.

The over-confident zeal of the giant carp that had been bashing him consistently vanished as it started to grow a bit bigger, its scales turning into a darker shade of grey, while its gills and fins released concentrated mana!

Its head bulged as the mysterious purple eye appeared on its forehead, gazing menacingly at Red Rage!

The water bubbled and danced as if it was boiling around the three meter long carp, a whirlpool starting to rage behind the fish in a terrifying manner!

The Apostle didn't shy away from the display, its armoured mass darting forward to the bubbling and whirling dark waters...

Chapter 262: Tag Fishing

The water bubbled and roiled as the purple eye on the forehead of the carp that Red Rage faced seemed to induce some sort of effect on the waters in a rather turbulent manner!

Red Rage was pulled in as the water behind the carp formed a vortex that drew everything in, sucking in the Apostle who was covered by a light blue glow which only his master could see.

The blue glow around Red Rage became more intense as he was drawn in by the whirlpool, the Apostle raising his sword as he sent his intent to Skullius who was panicking behind him.

'Huh?' Skullius thought as he comprehended what the Apostle intended. 'Prepare for what?'

As he asked the question in his mind, something flowed with a light pulse around him, a coil he was familiar with covering his body!

Null Life Essence!

But...

'What's this for?' Skullius questioned as he looked at Red Rage who was pulled over, reaching right before the carp that was inducing the growing whirlpool!

The Apostle had shared his Null Life Essence!

Red Rage's body suddenly blazed with thickets of mana that washed over his body and the sword that he held, and in the next moment, the Pelvis Boar-Man swiped diagonally at the stationary carp!

The waters bubbled as a thin blue line traced the movement of the sword's edge in a split second!

..!

Skullius narrowed his eyes!

He recognised that move!

This was one of the more intricate sword moves he had seen back in the Tremur Forest!

This was Shirota the Foul Goblin's sword technique!

But wasn't that related to Mist Swordsman advanced class?

Wait! How was Red Rage able to use mana for this skill in the first place?!

Barely a scratch appeared on the carp's scales and it grinned, seeing that the damage done to it was dismally dismal!

However, Red Rage didn't stop at one slash despite the failed attack. He swiped multiple times at different angles, the white sword raging around the figure of the carp which still floated in place while maintaining the whirlpool behind it!

Scratches appeared on its scales, some overlapping each other with no definitive damage in sight.

Yet...

Red Rage slashed one more time, with his strike conjuring a unexpected effect!

Blood gushed from the carp like a stream in the water in a wondrous aesthetic, rushing over to Red Rage's sword as he slammed into the carp from the draw of the whirlpool!

...!

The carp was alarmed as it saw its blood bursting out from nowhere in particular while travelling over to the Pelvis Boar-Man, covering his sword!

The red hue of the liquid that was traceable even in the dark water covered the white of the blade, tinting it with the respective colour as it then blazed with power!

Skullius who was pulled in to reach the carp was also shocked by this, but then, it hit him!

Two things hit him actually!

This effect was from the sword that Red Rage used!

Furthermore...

Skullius almost facepalmed!

'I didn't even notice! Red Rage you magnificent son of a sockethole!' Skullius bashed himself before taking action joyfully.

He couldn't believe he hadn't realised it until now, even though it had happened a little less than seven seconds ago!

Mana poured from his core as he neared the carp's enraged face.

A bright glow started to appear with a reddish tint that almost overtook the dark scape littered with lights that the Discount Human had created.

Yes indeed!

He could use mana!

Ever since the Null Life Essence had covered his body, the disturbance from the currents of water that hindered his mana manipulation had ceased, but he had been too absorbed with Red Rage's actions that he completely overlooked it!

A flaring flame burst in the water, instantly superheating it as bubbles raged all around him!

Skullius was using [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy]!

The sphere that formed between his hands continued to redden and threaten to blow everything to oblivion!

The carp noticed the threat as it set to retaliate while still holding its position, but Red Rage acted quickly, slashing with all his might while using the reddened sword!

The carp which had been preparing to move suddenly screeched horribly, suffering damage that no one could see as it trembled violently!

Blood pooled from its large mouth as it screamed and unfortunately, the red liquid rushed over to Red Rage's blade which once again pulsed with strength!

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[Blood Seeker's Fang]

-Rare-

A blade forged from the fang of one of the four Null Badubs, the <\*\$#!> of the Null Verse.

-Defense-

2500

-Durability-

3463/3700

-Special Effects-

- +20% speed
- Absorbs blood to enhance durability

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[Skill: Chance of Blood]

Every slash has a 10% chance to draw blood from a target without drawing any wounds on their body.

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[Skill: Blood Lover]

After absorbing a target's blood, the sword will gain the ability to do 25% internal damage on them.

-Caution-

Overly powerful opponents are exempt from the effects of the sword.

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The carp trembled with rage and its purple eye sparkled!

The whirlpool behind it suddenly stopped and the creature seemed to finally regain the ability to move again!

However, it was too late as when it set to push against the waters to attack Red Rage and Skullius, a scorching ball of red flame blitzed through the water while generating hot bubbles!

Red Rage took the chance to push back and evade the terror that was about to ensue and surely...

BOOOM!

The water boiled as a sensational explosion emerged!

Shockwave upon shockwave rocked the waters, lighting up the liquid space over and above what had already been done by Skullius with the [Just Light]!

Natalika, Gertreld and Ginie glanced at the explosion that spread out shockwaves which reached even them from a distance and all three of them knew...

It was probably that spell they had heard about!

Strangely, Tulnas and the shorter carp were still in a stare down.

They didn't even flinch from the muffled noise that emanated from the explosion.

The bright reddish orange light painted their faces as they floated, Tulnas actually smirking as his eyes shone with intrigue.

Raging bubbles could be seen as the remnants of explosion continued, large bubbles continuing to appear and even coagulate right where the explosion had been!

Skullius who had drifted away narrowed his eyes.

Something wasn't right.

He hadn't seen blood or any a notification confirming the creature's death.

Also, as he focused closer, he found that the turbulent bubbles actually started gathering around where the explosion had occurred, dark purple energy being spotted around the phenomenon!

The whirlpool that the carp had conjured was still visible and it seemed to be instigator of this weird effect!

Spots of light in a circular shape also appeared tracing the silhouette of the purple eye that the carp had from the darkness!

...!

Skullius was alarmed as he felt something dangerous about to come flying his way!

Before it happened, Skullius activated the skill from his armour, Fleeting Ghoul's Adornment, called [Bolt through]!

As he did, his body turned illusory, becoming semi see-through in appearance as a visual effect of the skill!

At that moment, a bright ray of a blinding light blue hue shot towards Skullius with an eerie sound one would only hear from something speeding within liquid!

The thick ray of liquid passed right through Skullius' abdomen as if he didn't exist at all!

However, the Discount Human noticed wisps of a fizzy red liquid leaking from his body as the ray passed through him!

'I'm bleeding?' he thought as he watched the ray of light finally vanish. 'Wait... [Bolt through] can't defend energy type attacks!'

Skullius hurriedly looked at his belly where the bright flash of light had hit only to find that there wasn't as much damage as he thought, just a large burnt spot that had half-molten flesh!

It wasn't a gaping hole as he had suspected.

'Could it be that the attack wasn't fully made of energy but water too? That would explain the bubbles.'

If that was the case then he could confirm that [Bolt through] had partially defended him.

A rush of energising power ran through his body as the Discount Human used [Luminant Healing] to quickly recover, his eyes looking ahead.

The carp he had blasted with [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] was uninjured at all and it swam a few quick laps around Skullius and Red Rage who started to surge with power.

'Don't! Save it for the real enemy!' Skullius commanded as he noticed that the Apostle was about to use his main heavy hitting technique.

He remained vigilant as he tried to gauge what the carp's next move would be.

'What was the point of that whirlpool?' he thought. 'Did it really only have the effect of drawing us closer?'

It was quite peculiar how the carp used its ability to forge a whirlpool to merely draw them in and then....what?

Or, perhaps was a requirement to fuel the large light ray attack!

That made more sense!

In the midst of thought, Skullius noticed something quite peculiar.

The lights he had positioned all around for more visual clarity hadn't moved at all.

Despite the raging battles taking place in the waters, they remained rooted in place!

'I haven't seen that function before,' Skullius thought, getting side tracked a bit by this finding.

However, he turned back his attention to the carp which once again squirmed and created a massive whirlpool behind it where Skullius and Red Rage began to get drawn to!

'Damn it! It's probably prepared for our attacks now. Even if it can't move when creating a whirlpool, it might just attack before we get close enough,' Skullius thought as he creased his brows.

His hand went to his sword as it was the only attack he had left to use, though he didn't know the full extent of its capability and what it could actually do.

His other skills drained too much mana and he was saving it for after this.

Even if it wasn't ideal to use a sword in the waters, he had to try.

As he draw the sword by the hilt...

The waters thrummed, as a certain man finally took action...

Chapter 263: When The Giant Bubble Appears...

Natalika swam this way and that, trying to muster enough mana to supplement her swimming through the vast waters that impeded her proper mobile capacity.

She couldn't afford to put more of her energy into mobility when she had a vicious carp with a mysterious purple eye that was chasing after her.

'Should I use my Full Body Aura?' Natalika thought as she gripped her sword while swinging her feet to move in the dark waters. 'Now that I think about it, this set up must have been created in order to bait invaders into use techniques like Full Body Aura so that they exhaust their powers before facing the real threat.'

Her analysis was based on the heavy currents that demanded especially powerful applications of mana to break through if one sought to even get a chance at beating their opponents.

However, she wouldn't fall for it.

Using her Demented Blindsword technique in the water wouldn't be ideal unless she used her Full Body Aura as from her view, her strikes wouldn't be quick enough with the fish in their element.

'Tsk. I can't call myself a perfect swordswoman when I'm still not flexible enough to handle spontaneous situations like this,' she thought begrudging, evaluating herself as inflexible.

She was glad that she didn't sense anyone using any high level techniques, save for maybe Skullius who caused the huge explosion earlier as she didn't know how strong the technique actually was.

Fortunately for them, this is was the perfect time for Tulnas to intervene, one of the many ideal situations that he mainly shone in.

Luckily for her, her Guild leader decided to make a move right then.

She felt his energy thrum through the waters and prepared, for Tulnas was eerily good at turning the situation to their favour, a great team player.

In the next moment, a water bubbled floated over to her as she vigilantly faced her foe.

Natalika recognised Tulnas' mana signature on it and allowed it to reach her and when it did, it popped when it arrived near her ear and...

"When the giant bubble appears, attack. And don't be too surprised by what you see when you look up," a voice leaked from the bubble and entered squirmed into her auditory canal.

Natalika smiled with an eager craze.

It was just as she had thought, though the second sentence brought her to briefly question what Tulnas meant.

The same message was transmitted to the others, excluding Skullius who only noticed Tulnas' energy spike.

The Guild leader who faced the shorter carp gathered his mana around his body which made the carp he faced draw back with caution.

It instantly decided to act, churning all its mana as the eye on its forehead glowed so bright that it tinged the waters purple!

'I see now. I've fought some of the Evenfall members in the past but I didn't think that they could actually cause assimilation of Primus into lesser beings. Perhaps they can even use it outside of blessings. Ha! All that is irrelevant for now, though...' Tulnas said as he finally completed his assessment, voicing out his next words through the water.

"Unfortunately, in terms of elements, I have confirmed that I'm truly a bad match-up for you..."

The carp felt the immense amount of threat in Tulnas' words and acted fast, the surrounding waters roiling as they pressed against Tulnas' lone figure.

Litres upon litres rushed towards him and formed a spinning cyclonic pressure pool of water that sought to crush him under the liquid's collective weight!

DUUUM!

A shudder of the waters was heard as they all drew towards Tulnas, visibly thinning out everywhere else!

Skullius who was in the distance was shocked by the scale of the attack as the immovable lights he had conjured made it clear what was happening beyond his position.

If he was to face this same attack...

Gulp.

He could only swallow this thought.

The waters continued to press against the figure of Tulnas which became indistinguishable from the dark waters with time and even then, the carp that facilitated the attack didn't stop.

That was until, it saw a large creature suddenly bloom from where it had been pounding its target with vast pools of water!

A trumpet was heard clearly from within the middle of the gushing waters that continued to assault Tulnas as the large creature seemed to continuously increase in size until it became twice as large as the carp that it faced with menacing eyes!

A massive illusory elephant appeared!

It had light blue lustre with a starry design within the thick of its bison-like shape!

A freakishly long and thick trunk hung from its face with rings of text around it in archaic rings of light gold hue, upturned tusks visible from the sides as they glowed with a white light that seemed to be as bright as a full moon!

Its gaze was sharp, its two stern eyes holding the same bright sheen of the tusks as they locked onto the carp that immediately seized its attack and drew further back, seeing as the giant before it was not affected in the least by its assault!

"Glub gah gluuuuub (WHAT THE HECK)?!" Skullius tried to voice in shock as he saw the massive creature.

What the heck was that?!

Right before the large elephant, the figure of Tulnas became clear as his languid expression made the carp even more panicked.

The Guild leader raised his hand and swiped in a normal gesture.

On cue, the elephant raised its trunk and blew out within the waters, a visible bubble opening up from the end of its trunk and expanding so fast as it resisted the remnants of the carp's attack that within a few moments, everyone, including Skullius felt a breath of fresh air gently lick their faces!

A massive sphere of free space appeared with everyone finding that under their feet, a chunk of frozen water could be found for their continued suspension, with hundreds of other floating frozen water slates and chunks sprinkled EVERYWHERE in the free space for their mobile convenience!

If one looked to the sides, they could see that they were in one massive bubble that separated the waters, its top seemingly reaching the surface of the water, giving a glimpse into the outside space.

...!

"So that's how it is...!" Natalika was the first to speak before realising that this was exactly what Tulnas meant by his last sentence.

Everyone shared the same expression as they looked up, especially Skullius who gaped widely in shock.

So all this time...

That's what was happening?!

They had all been...?

Chapter 264: Turning The Tide!

Indeed.

They had all been shrunken down!

Tulnas hadn't been wasting time while staring down the carp.

He had been analysing everything about and it had been doing the same as it felt that this man was different from the others.

Tulnas had been the first to notice that these creatures gained an extra boost to their abilities from the purple eye they sprouted on their foreheads.

In truth, extra boost, as the term, was a heavy understatement.

It was a massive boost and in the case of the carp he faced, it seemed to have gained a unique ability on top of this, no doubt the mutation caused by the Primus it continuously absorbed to hide the location of their enemies.

The unique ability to shrink all living things within a certain range down to minute sizes!

Tulnas didn't know the duration for this ability or its full scope, but he did know it was extremely potent as it even affected the amount of efficacy of everyone's mana!

It was no doubt a high grade Special skill!

The fish seemed to also have telekinetic abilities that it used to pull everyone into the waters after shrinking them at a speed that was so fast, Skullius thought it was teleportation.

However, he hadn't figured out everything about this fish as the mystery of why it had shrunken itself too was still at large.

Still though, with his manifestation of the beast behind him which changed the battlefield, the powerful carp seemed to react quickly as it used its telekinetic powers to make all the other carp float and avoid falling prey to the nearly two hundred meter drop before they fell back into water which was plenty of time to get killed!

The fishes flew as they looked around in confusion.

Skullius who was still looking up, saw a massive hill in the distance from the gap afforded by the bubble they were in, along with the clouds which looked so absurdly large that it seemed unreal.

It was impossible to fully wrap his mind around how such a thing was possible without stacking a massive amount of power leagues away into a skill.

'No wonder the water felt so strong and dense. It's all because we were made tiny!' he thought.

"Fascinating," Gertreld said as she looked up for a few brief moments before cracking her gauntleted knuckles and flashing a classy smile as she looked at her opponent who had been having fun while chasing her in the waters. "My love said to not waste this chance by taking note of meaningless things. I shall happily oblige!"

In her battle dress, Gertreld bolted ahead, her figure becoming wrapped in a blanket of bright mana that made her look a divine Knight!

Beautiful in all her rapid steps as she ran!

She scaled over many the hundreds of ice chunks which exuded a thin frosty mist and towards the carp that barely registered her speed in its eyes so fast, that her travel only lasted for a brief second, her gauntleted fist sinking into the carp's forehead in an grimace-worthy overhead punch!

Weirdly, as the punch connected, slamming an intense downward force into the carp's skull and flesh, a peculiar effect overwhelmed the creature apart from the crisp, resounding noises and distorted shockwave of force!

It wrinkled as the pounds of strength chubiribg Gertreld's fist ran through it, making the carp grow shorter and.... uglier.

This was the Form Using technique exclusive to Gertreld, Classic Bombshell Beauty!

Few could actually appreciate what an ugly fish looked like but a vividly painted image of such would be hard to describe as the main takeaway was how the fish grew quite a few inches shorter from the resonant force of the bright figure's assault!

The carp flew down at an astonishing speed while screeching as its eye bled, bones having cracked from where it had been bashed!

"You still have to grow SHORTER than that!" the lady said before she dashed after her opponent using the frozen slates, overtaking the carp which flew down at an immense speed and launching an upper cut into its face which produced another resounding noise as the creature pitifully cried and turned uglier, slime oozing from it as it also lost its length!

Gertreld giggled unnervingly as she bolted at unnatural speeds and started playing pinball with the fish, watching it turn unsightly and short!

Natalika also didn't waste this opportunity as after taking in the fact that they had been miniaturised immensely, she immediately drew her sword and attacked with a sharp killing intent that oozed from her encirclement of mana!

'Demented Blindsword Technique, Sharp Step Kill'

Natalika's advancing figure warped as her entire image became something akin to an elongated mash of colour towards the carp, instantly reaching the creature which instinctively dodged to the left!

However...

SWISHHHH!

The warped image of Natalika which looked as if it was spanning countless timelines had already slashed its sword, the carp's arm getting ripped off as it barely evaded death!

The carp's purple eye flared with light as the creature bulked up to almost double in size even as it screeched in pain, its remaining arm launching a clumsy punch that still reeked of immense physical might towards Natalika!

The woman's image vanished as she moved like a light breeze, appearing on the creature's large scaly and slippery arm that catapulted the terrifying punch, her striped sword arching in another graceful slash as she softly announced...

"Demented Slash."

The extremely sharp edge of the sword was brought down vertically towards the creature whose third eye constricted in fright, but contrary to its expectations, it wasn't split in half by the blade's clear downward descent!

Instead, a lateral incision rang from one side of its torso, through its arm onto which Natalika stood on and over to the side of its body!

Right then, it was split in half from the middle!

Blood spewed as the creature looked at Natalika in terror, its body preparing to spill all of its mana to her.

Ginie had it the easiest, as right after Tulnas spread the massive bubble, she had been able to toy with the creature before her without much effort as its mind wasn't protected as much as she had thought!

Skullius on the other hand had taken a lot longer to fully take in the fact that he was smaller now, and it was only when his floating enemy barrelled towards him that he focused as he stood over a chunk of ice.

'Alright. I'll save my mana for [Perfect Night Domain], [Bead of Malevolence] and 'Radiant Awakening' later. For now, I might as well get used to this. Surely it can help me cut down this thing, right? Besides Red bro is here,' Skullius thought as he gripped his sword.

The golden hilt was pulled as he focused on the sword technique buried within him and the sword.

The moment the blue, curved blade showed from the sheath, Skullius felt his auburn hair rise with all his might exploding as mana literary burned from his core in response to him merely releasing the intent to slash!

The vibrant waters a distance away quaked and everyone felt the chilling presence of the sword as the Swindling Death Dance was finally used...

Chapter 265: Swindling Death With Each Strike!

Phewwww...

A hot breath spewed...

The Arma Using category was vastly different from the Form Using category.

Classes were mainly chosen by having one's prescribed Direction take charge in determining what would be the best path for them.

Once that was taken into account (for those that cared enough for it), one simply needed to start working towards the aspects of the class and their abilities would be shaped.

Arma Users cultivated mastery in weapons.

That was a shallow description still, as the true mastery of any weapon lay in inflicting one's combat philosophy onto said weapon.

Habits, mannerisms, trust - these were entrusted to the weapon and how one handled the object was very indicative of themselves when they chose Arma Using either as a class or when Class Branching.

As Skullius pulled out the sword from its sheath, the curved blade whistling as it slid, he felt a familiar sensation overwhelm his body and soul!

Still, regardless of the chilling sensation... he couldn't stop himself from taking out the sword and slashing down with it towards the carp he was facing!

It felt natural as when he sliced through the air with the curved blade, a horrifying power bellowed out like a mad beast, rampaging with a confined mystery!

Yet, despite the mad power, Skullius didn't panic... because he was very, very familiar with this feeling...

This unique sensation spread as it caused goosebumps to appear over everyone's bodies, their very souls quaking from the mere instant that they tasted this feeling!

Death.

Skullius felt all his strength get pulled in as he slashed, his entire stamina pool, his senses and all sinking into [Demion's Dance] as the skill [Epic Memory] showed its capabilities!

The carp that had been barrelling towards him from the air immediately opened its eyes wide as it tried to bring itself to a halt, but unfortunately, Skullius' slash although ten inches away carried the potency wrought by those who played with death on a daily basis!

Also, a portion of the strength in the sword was not Discount Human's, but still, as little as it was, it was enough to end the creature's pitiful existence!

Phewwww....

Skullius breathed out as he sweated, feeling that in this one instance, he was holding death in his hand....

WOOONG!

A serene ambience echoed as the curved sword left after images in its vertical trail!

The result started by showing itself to the bubble wall in the distance which expressed a clear incision from top to bottom, everything that was in Skullius' line of sight getting split in half as above this fact, a reeking air, almost visibly tainting the atmosphere pervaded!

The carp at this point was no more than a cleanly sliced fish that was closest to the sensation of death that Skullius exuded, promptly falling to the depths below.

Skullius collapsed to the ground as he unconsciously took in deep breaths.

He sweated hard as he quickly dropped the sword on the cold slate he stood on.

His eyes were wide open and his mind turned chaotic.

The rough breathing turned into raspy breaths as Skullius felt himself grow a bit heavy, a sensation that represented that he was very tired.

'Death.... I was really handling death... in my hands...' Skullius thought as he gazed at his shaking right hand. 'That was extremely... dangerous... but....

I liked it!'

The Discount Human smiled.

He hated to admit it but he sort of missed the sensation of being around death energy in Deadmanland.

Though this was different!

It seemed that [Epic Memory] drained him quite a bit and for now, Skullius estimated he'd only be able to use three attacks before exhausting his stamina, with each strike being similar to this one, where he felt like could actually die at any moment.

Who the heck made this sword?!

Skullius looked at the curved blade at his side and gripped it, sliding it into its sheath without a word.

He looked and saw Ginie, Natalika and Gertreld staring at him with curious and apprehensive eyes.

They had felt that chilling sensation and it had drawn more than just their attention.

Further away, the remaining carp drew back as all its allies had died miserably while it had been trying to keep them afloat while facing Tulnas who had the hazy large figure of the starry elephant behind him.

He hadn't attacked yet as he knew this carp had something else up its sleeve and it was best not to rush the fish as it dripped of a vast amount of Primus energy.

"What will you do now, Mr Fish?" Tulnas asked with a confident look in his eyes.

The carp looked enraged as its large mouth produced a popping sound.

Its body became engulfed in the purple mist of Primus as it looked to churn it all out into one single move, an outrageous amount of power coiling within it to produce a shocking effect!

The fish was backed into a corner and now, it had to go all out with everything it had.

However, it wasn't stupid.

Just as it had known to immediately attack with its desizing ability before everyone could react, it also knew that it would have the advantage if it tweaked one minor detail about its Special ability using its vast pool of Primus energy.

Its body buffed up as its arms turned thick, its height rising along with its girth and mass!

The carp screeched as its circular eyes bulged!

Its body outgrew the space inside the air bubble that separated the dark waters as it grew to its original size!

Skullius watched in marvel.

This bastard had turned himself back into his full size while keeping them minute!

It's Special skill allowed it to desize everyone in the area including itself, a troublesome condition that it was to abide by. These kinds of conditions were the case with most skills at the level of Special and above, to make up for the absurd effect.

However, with its vast Primus energy, the fish had cheated this condition.

As the water splashed with its explosion out of the liquid's surface, the fish looked down at the tiny six who were standing on frozen slates with its gleaming eyes, its third one moreso.

The fish didn't waste a moment as it immediately got ready destroy the small figures below it.

What made this situation extremely perilous was how the group was not only shrunk down in size but even their powers were limited to their diminutive scales.

There was probably no way to retaliate and as Skullius questioned what he could possibly do in this situation, he found that he was lost for any viable answers.

The three ladies raced close to Tulnas who looked up at the shining eye of the carp that seemed ready to release a final attack and awaited his orders if he had any.

They had full trust in the man and the look on his face gave them even more assurance.

"Interesting. If I had one more slot I'd probably add you to my collection," Tulnas said as he then turned to the large figure behind him of the starry blue elephant. "That's as far as our dear Mr Fish goes. Finish him."

The bright eyes of the elephant shone bright with a zealous lustre as immediately after, the waters around rumbled.

All the waters!

The carp was shocked to see the water in the vast body of water, in the entire lake rumble!

FCH! FCH! FCH!

...

The water instantly froze, hundreds of ice spikes with a crystalline beauty appearing from the water and impaling the carp mercilessly all over its body!

Chapter 266: The Seal

Blood oozed, dripping into the dark waters as the large body of the carp overhead stood still, the light in its eyes having died down.

Its entire body save for its head was pierced by large ice spikes that looked rather extraordinary under the sun but their victim couldn't appreciate it.

Just like that, this powerful monster was killed off.

It seemed a little disappointing that it had only amounted to this much after all that Primus that it absorbed.

Of course, this wasn't anyone else's view other than Tulnas'.

With the carp's death as it was steadily held up by the spikes, the group felt changes over their bodies, their masses bulging up in an instant as soon, they all popped out of the water, returning to their original sizes!

As they appeared, they saw that they were near land, at the shallow end of the lake.

Skullius looked around and sighed in relief.

The nightmare seemed to be over.

He hoped at least.

His eyes turned to Tulnas who still had the massive elephant behind him while he looked down at the waters with his eyes squinted.

The creature's unique appearance was still causing Skullius to marvel and appreciate now that the tense situation had subsided.

Gertreld saw Skullius' confusion and giggled while Natalika walked up to the dead carp.

The giant hazy elephant floated a meter above the ground with its figure imposingly radiating extreme power.

Ripples emerged over the waters even as it floated above them, as this depicted its undeniable authority over the element.

"What is that?" Skullius finally voiced to sate his curiosity. "Are you some kind of Summoner?"

Tulnas turned to Skullius from his investigation of the waters.

"Oh, please don't assume something so distasteful. Naming me a Summoner could get me hunted down, you know?" Tulnas said as he flashed a smile. He then turned to elephant behind him and caressed its trunk which coiled. "I guess its also my fault for not properly introducing my abilities."

"I'm a Tamer."

Skullius cocked his head. With all the knowledge he had absorbed, he knew quite well about Tamers, though what Tulnas had said about Summoners was new to him.

Tamers were a respected class in the Energy Forming category.

They had the ability to tame beasts and turn them into their companions that fought with and for them.

The process of taming wasn't easy though, as unless one had the additional miraculous ability to sweet talk beasts into a lifetime contract, they would never be able to tame them.

To tame beasts one had to indulge them with intricate tapestries of intertwining energies that would appeal to the beast. When the beast was attracted by the right tapestry of energies, one would use this tapestry to imprint a contract in their souls.

For this, a unique sensitivity to energies was required.

Of course the process of imprinting a contract was easier with less intelligent beasts as the more intelligent ones tended to resist.

"This is the Aquatic Starphant. It's a name I came up with myself for his species. I call him Alpat. He was a Cluster General in a blue Cluster. Tough bastard to beat. But...here we are..." Tulnas said with a smile.

Alpat nudged Tulnas lightly as its bright eyes showed a subtle gentleness.

Red Rage poked Skullius who turned to him.

The Apostle then nudged Skullius gently but the Discount Human wore a horrifying face full of murderous intent which prompted Red Rage to take a few steps back.

Skullius shook his head and turned back to Tulnas.

"How the hell was... Alpat able to pull that final move? I mean... weren't all our abilities limited because of our sizes or was I the only one who was affected by this?" he asked.

Tulnas smirked at the question.

"No, you're right. We were all affected. It's just that Alpat here has the innate ability to control all nearby water in their entirety at a basic level. Changing shape and state. Its a no mana cost affinity of his. Higher level Cluster beasts usually have such odd absolute abilities.

Of course, distance dictates his efficiency but that's another story. <Sigh>. You sure like to draw information from me Festos," Tulnas said.

Natalika walked back to the group holding a large purple eye that she had taken from the dead carp.

She had figured that since Tulnas hadn't obliterated its head, he was interested in this.

"You wanted this, right?"

"Ah, thanks," Tulnas said as he handled the object, giving it a few glances before pulling it into his spatial storage ring. "There's something under the water. I assume we'll have to break it in order to get to our target. Alphonse, clear the way."

The large elephant blew from its trunk in acknowledgement before floating away from the group.

It quickly reached the centre of the waters where over the section it hovered above, violent ripples of water pulsed as suddenly, in a circular motion, all the water parted and rose up simultaneously!

The massive water body had settled flooded upwards in its entirety and a few seconds later, partly dry ground was revealed under the swirling waters that Alphonse extended his trunk to, pulling them into his expansive both with an insane suction!

The body of the creature showed no reaction from taking the massive amounts of water at all.

Tulnas led the group to the very centre of space where he crouched down and touched the ground.

In his advanced senses, he could clearly sense an expansive formation where Primus leaked excessively.

A magical construct was erected, barring entry to what was underground.

A seal of sorts.

The ladies could sense it, but not as well as Tulnas could while Skullius could vaguely detect the presence of the energy.

'So far, it's appearing as if this was just a mistake. Those bladed monsters, even these fish and this construct. Is this a ploy or did those guys really slip up, allowing us to find them?' Tulnas thought.

The application of Primus energy was different from the way it appeared on the creatures that they had been fighting which was the basis of Tulnas' theory to begin with.

"There's a magical formation here that's blocking our entry. I'm guessing that even if we dig from another position we'll still have to deal with it. It looks to be made of Primus energy, which complicates things a little but hey, we have a Mage in our midst," Tulnas said with a smile.

Everyone's eyes turned to Skullius who looked at the ground with a puzzled expression.

"Seriously?"

Skullius had been made known what Primus was after their battle with the Ghouls and he was quite intrigued by the idea.

However, he didn't know if he could solve this magical construct.

He wasn't actually a Mage, after all.

"I can't sense the Primus energy very well..." he tried to give an excuse.

"That's fine. I'll show you where the concentration of Primus is strongest, and then you can do your thing."

'Damn it!'

Tulnas led Skullius to a spot near the centre where he then pointed at an indistinct patch of dirt on the ground.

"This looks like where most of the energy is coming from. If you can disrupt the supply to the construct, I think we can then pass through."

Skullius took in two deep subconscious breaths.

This was intense.

Could he really do?

No, that was too optimistic!

What was he even doing?!

What could he even break apart such a thing? Wasn't this made by a genuine Mage or something?

Wait! Wait! If he could use that...

"Let me try this..." Skullius said before he extended his hand at the spot where Tulnas pointed him to.

A stream of [Evil Darkness] poured from his hand and jutted over to the ground.

Everyone paid attention as they were especially curious about this unique power that they weren't familiar with.

'Maybe...' Skullius thought as he sent the darkness over.

The pure black that seemed to want to reconstruct reality to its liking touched where this construct supposedly was and a shocking visual peculiarity occurred...!

Chapter 267: Awaken!

The stream of [Evil Darkness] poured from Skullius' finger only to start spreading over the ground as surprisingly, it started to outline what was the invisible construct that Tulnas had mentioned!

Skullius didn't use much of his [Evil Darkness] but the result shocked him.

A massive magical seal that spanned over the entirety of the depression where the lake had been was seen, tinted in the darkness of the [Evil Darkness] that was released.

'What's this...?' Skullius thought as he looked over at this development.

He didn't think that the amount of darkness he had used could span over such a large distance.

Gertreld and the others marvelled at this while Tulnas narrowed his eyes.

Ginie's heart palpated as she was dying to ask Skullius to show her what he knew about Magecraft so that she could more but she knew it was way too risky.

He eagerly waited for the result as it could possibly answer his quandary. Quandaries to be exact.

Soon, sparks echoed out as the magic seal which was traced by the darkness shook, emitting small bursts of light.

PTSK! PTSK!

Tiny sparks flew as from one section of the expansive seal, a crack resounded, showing a broken section of the seal!

...!

Skullius could see the effect of his [Evil Darkness] shattering the seal as if it was nothing which made him gulp.

PTSK! PTSK! PTSK!

The resounding sounds of shattering akin to glass echoed as the dark coloured seal broke entirely, the dark colour it had vanishing as a wild rush of Primus rose up, darkening the atmosphere as it left the formation!

'I didn't think it would work that fast! Wait! I didn't think it would even work!' Skullius thought while his mind turned back to the reason he had even decided to take up this task of [Evil Darkness] to test the waters in the first place.

Back when he used [Perfect Night Domain], he had seen the purple mist that the Obscene Stalker Ghouls emitted get suppressed.

The last one which had suddenly sprouted the eye at end was an outlier but he had thought that since he had managed to do something like that, perhaps he could do it this time.

Tulnas narrowed his eyes.

His intrigue was beyond peaked. A dangerous light flashed in his eyes.

'This is way more terrifying than I thought. I assumed this was an affinity towards the darkness element, but no. A mere element can't suppress such an application of Primus or even raw Primus in general. That must mean....' Tulnas thought as his eyes bulged for but a moment before he caught himself. 'Oh my dear Silrat...'

With the seal shattering into fragments that flew like dust, releasing the Primus they used, the ground became a normal patch of dry-ish dirt.

"Alphat, return," Tulnas commanded, the massive elephant that was overhead nodded its head and vanished from the spot.

The Guild leader raised his foot and stomped onto the ground, with his powerful step calling forth a rumble, as well as golden-brown sand with small sparkling blue spots to jut from the ground and slam down, breaking the surface apart!

Chunks of the ground fell down in a perfect arc, forming a massive hole in the ground.

The sand that had seemingly been conjured by Tulnas' stomp hurriedly rushed to grab the group and gently lowered them into the darkness underneath.

Skullius looked at this sand which had a unique signature about it which registered in his [Elevated Mana Manipulation]'s sense.

'Is this from another one of his tamed beasts?' Skullius thought.

The fact that Alphas had vanished into thin air instead of being stored somewhere made Skullius a little suspicious about Tulas only being a Tamer, but then again this wasn't a doubt backed by facts.

Besides the Tamer class matched his personality.

The group descended into the far darkness where even the sunlight couldn't reach even if it grew hands, the sand lowering them with the same fluidity as some kind of mechanic contraption from a distance advanced universe.

With every inch they descended, the group became aware of the thick bursts of Primus that leaked from below, becoming more and more prominent with the distance.

It took almost ten minutes to finally reach the bottom where barely anything could be seen.

However, that wasn't the highlight.

At this point, the Primus energy became almost as abundant as the air.

Skullius could feel it without straining his senses.

'I have a really bad feeling about this...' he thought as he looked ahead where multiple purple objects appeared from view, these objects being none other than purple eyes from different creatures that lurked in the dark.

Tulas grabbed the hilt to his sword as he looked ahead.

Ginie produced some kind of flare from her spatial storage ring which provided light, though she didn't need it because her natural sight could see through natural darkness.

But still...

She really hated the dark.

Tens of different creatures turned to them with intelligence as well as eager eyes that spotted only malice.

Tulnas grinned.

"Leave this part to me and recover every bit of your stamina," the Guild leader said as bursts of beautiful sand poured from his feet and coiled around everyone in a single ring that constantly revolved protectively.

"We still have some ways to go."

Thud!

"You could at least try to handle it with care," Fulina said as she looked at the middle aged man who had just dropped a corpse to the floor.

"You and I both know corpses need no care," the middle aged man who had tufts of short, leather black hair said.

Fulina sighed, unable to find a comeback to spare to this. She then turned to the man who stared at the corpse before them from behind his mask.

"Why did we have to wait this long to retrieve this corpse, Actuass?" she asked.

The man with the mask answered her without raising his head.

"This? Because our collusion with the Evenfall, of course. With them preparing the body of that Paladin Champion for their ritual, I figured this was perfect tome to handle that pending matter. Besides, our objective concerning this man is unable to travel. At least one of them is."

Fulina slowly nodded.

"That AND a giant creature was roaming around the place where this bastard was buried, destroying entire habitats just to feed its fat belly, so I had to be cautious. Powerful thing. A wolf. Hmm. Or was it a fox?" the middle aged man said while stroking his chin, reminiscing.

"Well... now we can conclude the matter entirely and learn what we need," Actuass said as he extended his hand over the corpse.

"Awaken, Eobald."

Chapter 268: Answers From A Dead Man

The corpse of the former Ideal Ark leader became engulfed in greenish-black flames.

A slightly pale skin tone was over the corpse but one would barely assume that it was in fact, a corpse if shown the body out of context.

Of course, the context itself was all but clear.

The bodies of powerful combatants were usually exempt from the usual speed of decomposition especially when they had begun on the path to Advancement and beyond.

The body had been covered with a black sheet as the armour that Eobald had worn had been taken by Skullius along with his sword.

The sword wound at his chest was still visible, giving a brief reminiscent tone towards earlier events in the Tremur Forest.

As the flames engulfed the body, it began to twitch and rise, standing on its two feet as the dark sheet over its body fell off, leaving it naked.

While this occurred, a dull light appeared from over the corpse of Eobald, something within this dull light, like a bright flare of green and white pouring into the corpse.

Crunching noises crackled from the corpse as its white eyes rolled, the irises showing as they focused to the masked man in front.

The four of them were within a well lit room devoid of furniture but fitted with good flooring and walling, an awkward space for conducting such an activity.

"A...Actuass...?" said Eobald with a stutter.

"Why are you so sluggish when your soul was safely stored in the Outworld Attic? Besides, you've twice before this, so how are you not used to it by now?" the middle aged man said with the folding of his hands.

"Cyne..." Eobald said as he turned to the man.

A great detail that no one knew about this group of necromancers was how they were taken into the belief.

It wasn't a matter of simply choosing to join the Green Neolists through verbatim.

At least it was so until Actuass came and changed the falling system of the Green Neolists.

One had to die first before joining and they would be resurrected, though with a portion of their soul missing.

Actuass never told anyone but his two most trusted companions, Fulina and Cyne where the portions of these souls were taken to.

However, this was the initiation still whether one liked it or not.

Once this was done, all members of the Green Neolists would be incapable of truly dying for eternity, except by the hand of a Divine being or higher.

If they died again after the initiation, the remainders of their souls would be kept in a place that Actuass called the Outworld Attic, a space he controlled and had the authority to manipulate everything within – the souls inside.

As such, a member of the Green Neolist could be infinitely resurrected provided the right conditions.

Of course, factors like eventual madness could be seen with weaker willed individuals.

"I.. I died..." Eobald said with a shaky voice.

"We know," Actuass said. "There's something I want to know, concerning your run with your former group and... your death."

Eobald lifted his head.

"I considered you a charismatic and smart man which is why saw potential in you. However, I never mentioned to you how I saw through your weak resolve when you joined us. You cultivated trust with the people of the outside world but ended up falling into your facade too deeply. How many people did you tell about us and much did you share?"

Eobald took in deep breaths under Actuass' hazel eyes which peaked from behind his mask which seemed to demand the truth.

"I...I told them that I was a member of the Green Neolists and.... I also told them about the big plan... parts of it..." he stammered as he explained.

Fulina furrowed her brows while Cyne gaped in disbelief.

"Why in the world would you tell them that?! Had you already begun to go senile before your death?!" Cyne barked.

Fulina couldn't find the words to say to this as it was simply unbelievable.

Amidst this tension, Actuass remained calm, raising his hand to stop Cyne's outburst.

"How many people did you tell and how many are still alive?" Actuass asked.

"... All of the Ideal Ark members... when... I fought them... but... most of them are sure to have died..."

I used an Arcane Teleportation... Scroll..."

Actuass turned to Cyne.

"I did see a burnt patch in the Tremur but I didn't find any other bodies after following the trail from Eobald's body. Maybe they all died, but unfortunately, Direction has a way of screwing with us, doesn't it?" Cyne answered in a dangerous tone, his eyes turning to Eobald with deadly intent.

Actuass nodded as he remained silent for a while.

"Why did you tell them?" he asked.

Eobald wobbled and then faced Actuass with fear visible in his eyes.

"I... joined this cult because... I had reached a ceiling in my growth... I accepted your proposal because... I thought I'd get a boost to my limit. But...

after all the support you gave me so that... I could become a popular figure with a famous Guild... I... realised just how much I wasn't ready to let the world turn so dark..." he said as his breathing hastened. "I wasn't loyal to either side but...I know the world isn't a bad enough place to deserve your awful plan, Actuass... So yes...

I betrayed you... and I hoped one of them would at least tell someone who could do something about it..."

Cyne fumed while Fulina looked to have conflicting emotions.

"I see... I suppose you chose a side. I can't blame you for that. You're human after all. Belief is what binds us to sanity. Your choice unfortunately, can't allow you to remain with us, until a certain time when your eyes must witness what this world becomes," Actuass said before he placed his finger on Eobald's forehead, the man trembling from utter fear.

The greenish-black flames around Eobald's body began to recede slowly while the point where Actuass held Eobald's forehead glowed, signalling that his soul was about to be returned to the Outworld Attic.

"Last question. Who killed you?" Actuass asked.

Eobald first gulped before his soul churned out an answer despite his unwillingness.

"I don't know his name but... I gave him my crest before I let him kill me."

Actuass' eyes narrowed.

"Your crest?"

Skullius gaped at the chaos that was happening before him as blood flew everywhere!

'Why wasn't this guy just dealing with everything we were dealing with on our way here by himself?!' he thought as he saw the tens of corpses of powerful creatures with purple third eyes on their foreheads!

He, Red Rage and the three ladies were safely caged within a constantly revolving ring of sand while Tulnas was rampaging with his twin short swords cutting through the monsters like grass!

Chapter 269: The Real Enemy (1)

Tulnas threw one of his short swords forward as he bolted ahead!

It flew quickly, whizzing through the air with its silver sheen showing from the limited light that came from the flare that Ginie held!

The blade was received by a large lizard whose keen eyes saw the blade clearly, swiping its claws to knock it away, sparks flying from the short clash!

By the time the short sword which had been knocked away lodged into the ground, Tulnas was already hurtling a meter from the dark lizard in mid-air, his other short sword raised in his right hand!

The lizard quickly stood on its hind legs, responding to the attack with its own - the launch of its dark green tongue that oozed of potent venom!

It intended to kill Tulnas before his blade landed!

For this, it used the added boost to its strength from the purple eye on its forehead to enhance its speed!

Unexpectedly, Tulnas lightly flickered his short sword up an inch away from his palm, which puzzled the large lizard, but then... it understood why in the next moment!

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Three extremely accurate and powerful kicks slammed into the two sections of the side its abdomen in addition to the side of its face, crunches being heard as the swift kicks were delivered, shockwaves blowing from the other side of the lizard!

It had been too focused on Tulnas' weapon.

A stream of golden-brown sand darted in one extremely quick motion, cutting off the lizard's tongue which was millimetres away from Tulnas!

The Guild leader stepped on the lizard's shoulder, reached for the blade he had flicked slightly in the air and jammed it into the wincing lizard's head!

Several green tongues with a viscous liquid covering them shot towards Tulnas from different angles but the Guild leader avoided them with swift steps and darted around, grabbing his fallen short sword and delivering bloody injustice!

The flares from his swords reflecting the light were seen in the darkness as he dispatched eight more of these lizards without breaking a sweat.

The corpses of nearly thirty of these purple-eyed creatures lay on the ground in the confined and dirty space, dripping of blood.

'None of them has been as strong as that Mr Fish so far,' Tulnas said as he looked around, which lead him to speculate. 'Again, I get the feeling that this is no more than an tease in the guise of an actual powerful defence system.'

On their way here, Tulnas and the group had seen a variety of creatures with the purple eye; bats, large butterflies, boars, wolves among others.

The strange thing was, some of them were already dead with no signs of them engaging in combat with the others, or starving or anything.

Their bodies seemed strained, as if they had merely been struggling to survive.

This lead him to believe that someone may have just been testing how compatible different creatures were with this Primus energy and some were, while others weren't.

'Intriguing...'

"Let's move on," Tulnas said to the group that followed behind him.

Gertreld and Ginie showed expressions of awe and amazement at Tulnas' movements.

His Class Branching had been getting him great results.

His speed and power rivalled some top level Form Users!

Skullius who had also been watching looked jealous of the Guild leader.

'I'm still not that proficient in combat. I still have to rely on my more powerful skills to cover my weaknesses...' he thought.

After training with Oliviana, he had learned a skill that encompassed many aspects of hand to hand combat.

[Basic Combat Arts].

He had levelled it up to level 5 but it was not enough for him to exhibit even a sliver of the amount of power and skill that Tulnas was demonstrating.

The group continued forward with Tulnas using his blades to easily dispatch most of the creatures they faced quickly.

Most of them had blue cores while the rest had bright white ones.

As he saw this continuous trend of white and blue without the next colour in sight, he aired a question to Tulnas who had finished wiping out another small wave of the creatures.

His interactions with the other ladies had to be limited after all.

"Is it that hard to get a purple core?" he asked.

"Hmm?" Tulnas turned to Skullius. "Oh, yes. It's quite difficult to simply cross that gulf. Most individuals remain at the brightest blue core, failing to achieve the next level because of the difficulty."

Skullius nodded as he digested this.

"Then again, the blue core has several stages to explore so people just deal with that. You could say its more tolerable than handling some of the Tasks we have to deal with on the path to Stages. For instance, mercenaries in Inhone City prefer to go down the route of focusing on their classes and cores instead of following through with Tasks, myself included.

I'm still at the Advancement Stage after so long with a troublesome Task."

What Tulnas said made sense.

Skullius could understand why that was.

Though, for him, the Tasks hadn't been as hard for level 1 to level 9 probably because most hadn't been specific to him until just recently.

Tulnas suddenly stopped as he felt something off.

"Guild master!" Natalika said with a concerned tone.

"I know."

SSSHHHHH!

Massive amounts of golden-brown sand rushed to cover Tulnas and the group who were already in a ring of standard sand protection.

BOOOM!

Two magic formations exploded with a purple glow below and above the group creating a noisy and turbulent reverberation that seemed to shake the entire underground!

Flames roared with a vicious coil as if to eat even space itself, the heat they produced instantly devouring the hard earth and melting it!

Rubble fell from above while the ground kept crumbling and sizzling in the aftermath, the confined way which kept going in both directions being resized!

The moment when the dust and fumes cleared, a large monster appeared in place of the group of six.

It was a very large bear.

Its entire body was made of golden brown sand with tiny, innumerable spots of blue.

Its build was like that of a polar bear with a large snout and a tint of black decorating its lips and outlining around its eyes which had a deep red glow to their pupils.

It sat upright with its arms wrapping around the space in what looked like a gentle hug, smoke and bits of glowing orange visible around its sandy body.

After it thought the threat was cleared, the bear moved its arms away, revealing the group of six who were safe from the explosion.

Tulnas looked up at the large bear with an appreciative smile.

"Thanks Big Bradd," he said as he patted the bears thick arm.

Ginie looked at the bear with twinkling eyes. She had missed seeing the big guy.

"Un, un! Bradd! Remember me?!" she said as she leapt up and down.

The large bear, in its sitting position opened its arms wide prompting for the girl to give it a hug, which she did happily, almost sinking into the sturdy sand of its large belly.

"..."

"This is a little too carefree considering we almost got blown to bits," Skullius said softly.

"It's fine," Natalika said as she turned her head this way and that, focusing her ears to different spots. "There's signs of activity a little less than half a mile ahead. Though I suspect there'll be more of these traps."

"It's nothing that Bradd can't handle. Right, Bradd?" Tulnas said as he sheathed his short swords.

The giant bear nodded with a solemn expression.

"Can we ride him?" Ginie turned to Tulnas and asked with puppy eyes.

"No. If we weren't deep into enemy territory, it would be fine but we need Bradd for protection. It's hard for him to protect us if we're riding him."

Ginie nodded, though a flicker of disappointment could be seen in her eyes. She quickly collected herself though as she knew this wasn't the time to be a brat.

The long walk continued with Tulnas making sure to pay attention to the marked distance that Natalika had spoken about.

BOOM!

BOOM!

Over the course of their cautious tread, they encountered numerous magic formations, set with explosive flames that were meant to completely destroy any traces of them appearing from the left and right, above and below or multiple on all sides.

Through it all, Big Bradd protected the group while shrugging off the sand that got too burnt from its body.

For Skullius, it was pretty good to be protected like this for once, instead of always having to defend himself.

Furthermore, he didn't need to worry about Tulnas turning into mush because of it!

How blissful life could be!

The seven finally reached the end of the passageway that spread out into a large dark spot where some activity could be vaguely seen from the distance.

Before even Tulnas could fully take in the sight, he heard a loud voice echoing through the cavernous space.

"There comes the extravagant and valiant heroes of senile gods, coming to reap the evil that hinders their divine Direction and spoils their rich lands," the voice said.

"What would a common villain such as I know, hmm? Riddle me this, young ones? Is this excursion worth risking your extravagant and youthful lives?"

Chapter 270: The Real Enemy (2)

A man appeared before the group's sights.

His large, honey coloured eyes poked at their faces and bodies from his head which was covered by unkempt black and purple hair.

He donned a simple dark shirt and baggy grey linen pants as he spread his arms wide as if to receive Tulnas and rest who vigilantly walked into the open space after the Guild leader had confirmed that there were no traps through his expansive could sense.

Behind the man who stood a few meters before them with a welcoming gesture and a smile, a large fire was raging with twelve robed figures sitting around it, strategically placed as they surrounded a complex formation that they fed purple energy stemming from their bodies.

Tulnas narrowed his eyes.

He felt streams of energy blossoming from the formation in a different manner from what he had seen, rising through the rough ground as they flowed to different locations.

Hundreds of locations!

'This is it...!' he thought.

Skullius and the others also felt it.

'Is this what's causing the Clusters?!

Indeed it was. Clusters were created by bundles of clashing energies.

Tulnas' theory had been correct yet heavily underexplained.

Bradd growled as its normally adorable face turned aggressive, feeling the menacing energy being expelled from the opponents before it.

Gertreld split from the group and started walking to the side while her keen eyes checked the opponents that she was about to face.

Natalika walked towards the other side, her keen senses taking in the structure of the entire area and matching her up against the opponents before her.

Ginie remained in place, taking deep breaths as she focused her mental energy.

There were a lot of intricacies about Mind Casting.

Physical strength could be cultivated through various means while mental strength could also be cultivated, making the normally intangible energy something that could actually interact with external matter.

The process was harder than when one built on their physicality though.

Bursts of transparent energy created quibbling waves over the space as Ginie utilised another one of her techniques from the Mage-Form Mimicking Art.

She, Natalika and Gertreld noticed the same thing under their sensory abilities and so did Tulnas, but he decided to test it out to be sure.

"Bradd..." he called.

VWUP! VWUP!

Two objects shot past the man with multi-coloured hair as they rushed towards two of the robed figures sitting in the complex formation!

BZZT! BZZT!

The two items which were actually plain spears made from golden-brown sand seemed to knock against an invisible construct that covered the group protectively, bits of lightning sparking from the collision!

"I see..." Tulnas said in a low voice.

There was some kind of barrier around the group of figures.

The man with purple and black grinned as he sat his open hands at his sides.

"Surely you should know that it won't be that easy," he said.

Skullius looked left and right at these ladies, Tulnas and the man before them warily, carefully concocting his own plans.

He noticed that the following fight might just be way out of his league but he was already here and he might as well gain as much as he could.

'Well. It certainly doesn't make me happy to know that I'm essentially alone in this. At least I've recovered all my mana though,' he thought as he expanded his senses to the limit.

In a battle like this, he could easily get taken out by something he didn't even see.

With his link with Red Rage who was also warily eyeing the opponents, he began to strategise the best ways to survive.

A spherical swirl of vicious, gusty winds burst beside the man in the dark shirt blowing his hair in all directions as well as his clothes!

From this, another man who slightly cocked his head as he saw Tulnas' group appeared.

His rather ordinary face would probably give one the illusion that he was some random fodder but that couldn't be farther from the truth.

"Ah, so they're here," he said, his brown eyes looking around. "They don't seem very strong considering they got past your rather stupid traps Guissepo."

"That's extravagantly harsh. But... of course! The traps weren't meant to be too extravagant, after all. If they were, these young heroes probably wouldn't have reached this place."

"Right..." the other man said exasperatedly. "So what's the plan? We just follow your idea and ignore Leader's orders?"

"Extravagantly so... Extravagantly~ so."

"You say that word way too much."

Tulnas furrowed his brows.

'These bastards are completely disregarding our presence. They are not even bothering to hide their conversation,' he thought.

Natalika, Genie and Gertreld became extra wary.

Frankly, they could tell that these two were no pushovers judging by their radiant blue cores and confidence.

'That makes them worth fighting...' Natalika thought as she burned with anticipation.

The man whose name had been announced to be Guissepo turned back to the group after receiving a shrug from his companion as a response to his enthusiastic statement.

Seeing that the group remained stationary, not acting immediately, Guissepo produced an unnerving smile as he spoke.

"Is the venue not to your liking? We can do this in another location I have prepared for this extravagant occasion. Care to join me?"

Tulnas scoffed as he raised his hand which made Bradd waddle to the front with its face turning fierce, an abundance of sand moving from the ground and swirling around the creature.

"Are you lonely or something? Go by yourself," Tulnas replied with a cocky grin.

The atmosphere grew a lot more tense as the man by Guissepo's side casually walked forward, his dark robes moving aside.

"In that case, let me invite a couple more people to make it an extravagantly more entertaining exchange..." Guissepo said.

From the formation, two figures with black and gold robes walked forward, reaching up to Guissepo. One of them was a man and the other was a woman.

...!

Tulnas noticed a leakage of profoundly concentrated energy from the woman and the man, and it registered in his senses the ridiculous amount of strength and skill they possessed.

One was a Mage, the other was a Summoner...!