

Undead 351

Chapter 351: Exploration

The deep waters accepted three bodies that dived within them with full caution applied.

Upon entering into the waters, the Null trio were immediately struck by a vicious wave of greatly condensed mana on their bodies!

Palpable thickets of the energy had integrated themselves into the vast waters all around, making each movement of the sea quite literally like a heavy storm that the three had to struggle to swim past.

A rather troublesome experience.

'Such thick mana! There's even more in here than outside!' Skullius remarked with shock and awe.

If the outside mana was rich, then he didn't know what word to attach to the mana mingling with waters abundantly.

Skullius, Red Rage and the Hound immediately began their descent but the Discount Human was not quite proficient in moving swiftly within the aquatic waves.

Seeing this, the Pelvis-Boar-Man's body pulsed with the radiant blue energy of Null Life that burst outwards, expelling the water and leaving only air as it created an expansive sphere that covered all three protectively.

The sphere gave Skullius much needed stability as with this, he became much more comfortable while dropping down with his Apostles.

He looked at Red Rage and nodded with approval but deep down he was lamenting his inability to manipulate Null Life Essence. He could be utilising it like this himself but that didn't seem like something he was even remotely close to achieving.

This made the Discount Human wonder if perhaps manipulating Null Life Essence required a formula that much different from mana.

Fortunately, the trio could still see what was beyond them despite the barrier of Null Life Essence, as meters away, the waters kept rippling as if it was being heated, phenomena akin to mirages wrinkling its surface.

Also...

"Watch out!" Skullius warned, Red Rage and the Hound instantly raising their guard!

Before them, swimming within the waters, were different assortments of fishes with their common organs revealed - fins and gills.

From what looked like sky blue coloured bream to luminescent gold pike, these fishes swam without minding the trio within the large sphere as if they didn't even exist.

Skullius narrowed his eyes as he watched these creatures merely pass while enjoying their natural habitat.

"They are not going to attack?" Skullius questioned himself. Did he overreact?

His experience with fish was not very pleasant.

He had first met the creatures when he was with Tulnas and his ladies, the once innocently swimming fishes turning into large beasts that attacked them with extraordinarily power.

But now, as he sensed around these fishes with his [Elevated Mana Manipulation], he didn't feel the edgy presence of Primus energy within them.

They just seemed like ordinary creatures.

It only took a moment for Skullius to evaluate these creatures as harmless after to not pay them any mind.

Different variations of them swam around the three, some looking vicious while others were extra cute, invoking... strange feelings within Skullius.

His mouth suddenly opened as he analysed these creatures, him uttering words he didn't expect to.

"She... liked fish too, didn't she...? Hmm? What am I saying...?"

The Discount Human shook his head to rid himself of all these thoughts. This wasn't the time. He needed to be fully focused. This place wasn't clean as of yet.

The lower the three went, the thicker the mana around them became which made Skullius especially wary and excited at the same time.

With this much mana, if he could constantly absorb it, didn't that mean...

'Of course not, tomato flinger! If it were that easy to forge a higher level core from just having an abundance of mana, the whole world would be full of purple core experts! Condensing high level cores requires finesse... and talent!' Sila responded to Skullius' thoughts.

The Discount Human could only grumble. He had thought this was an easier way out. Perhaps seeing all those blue core combatants since arriving in Aigas made him think that it was easy to reach that level.

Then again, was Sila implying that he wasn't talented?

The Discount Human bickered with himself and Sila for a bit before, after twenty more minutes of the increase in the quantity and quality of mana, the bottom of the sea started to become visible. Or at least what he thought was the bottom.

Tall structures began to appear in the vision of these descenders.

Hundreds of them.

They were crude, bulb-shaped buildings that rose from the sea floor to reach great heights.

They looked to be made of a substance like mud, algae growing over the sides and top with a strange blue glow that vividly highlighted the locations of these structures.

Their clustered arrangement had a sort of soothing effect as it somehow heavily emphasised how close a community the Terrors had built for themselves.

Large poorly gouged out holes could be seen within the bulbs of these structures, obviously being the entrances to these...homes.

For creatures that were that violent in Aigas, they really seemed to have a peaceful lifestyle, even going as far to create such a close knit homestead.

Or rather, it seemed most Cluster beasts changed their character when they met anything outside their environments.

That seemed to be the trend.

Skullius and company swam towards one of the larger bulged structures and entered via the entrance.

Nothing of note could be found inside, there only being an empty space that concentrated the surrounding mana within the confined space.

'Interesting...' Skullius thought.

'Indeed! The mana is naturally coagulating into these spaces, magnifying its compression!' Sila pointed out with hints of excitement.

Red Rage's sockets twinkled as he saw this phenomenon. It was perfect for his training!

Skullius had the Pelvis-Boar-Man shift them out to other bulbs, discovering nothing else within the first few.

In the next one they ventured, something caught everyone's eye.

A larger space could be seen as the bulb in the structure was relatively large, accommodating the things within it.

Within said space, hundreds of glowing gems that looked like bright diamonds could be seen clustered around head-sized eggs!

Chapter 352: Meaningful Rumours

So many eggs!

Light spots could be seen over their off-white shells of the eggs as they lay stuck between the many gems that glowed luminously in clumps of tens.

On top of the many eggs and gems that were sprinkled all over the floor, Skullius and the others also saw four large octopi that stuck themselves to the wall in different directions, their bulbous heads wobbling as they seemed agitated by the entry of the invaders.

Their natural colour was grey with blisters growing over them, but as they laid smothered to the walls with their eight tentacles, their shade suddenly turned to a nasty blue with the mana that was filling up the space shivering and speeding towards the tops of their noggins!

There was no need for words!

All three Null Lifeforms instantly discerned the danger and the first to act... was the Hound.

Since it wasn't equipping its Spirit Walker's Hide over its body, the many tendrils of Demon Thread that covered its body easily spun and shot outwards, forming four clawed arms that burst through the thickened waters that subtracted from their speed and gripped the heads of the octopi!

Almost instantly, it pulled on all of them, but two of the octopi managed to shot condensed beams of bright mana mixed in with a special corrosive poison that blasted apart the extended arms of the Hound, melting of the Threads to then set themselves free!

The Hound didn't mind this though, as it went on to devour one of the octopi it had caught and for the other, its eyes flashed as it activated an ability outside its racial spectrum!

[Spirit Touch!]

The eyes of the octopus that was firmly held in the receding palm of the hand of Hound lost their colour in response to the skill activation, as it seemed to have been affected!

Almost immediately after, the octopus' head bulged as it drew on the mana within the waters, the Hound releasing it back into the water!

The creature swam with its tentacles and then instead of seeking vengeance towards the Hound... it pointed its head towards one of the octopi on the wall and then...

FWAASH!

A continuous stream of energy gushed out of the creature's shiny head where mana seemed to be naturally drawn!

The attack hit the target smack dab in the head, the new ally rushing towards the other octopus while the Hound finished off the one that had just been hit.

'Woow... he's pretty efficient,' Skullius thought as he saw the last octopi being quickly dispatched. 'That must have been [Spirit Touch]. It really gives him the ability to control other creatures' bodies huh?'

'Treacherous!' Sila remarked, referring to the Hound.

He still didn't understand what powers Skullius had as all that was hidden from his access, him being told only what Skullius required him to know for his own good. As a result, he could only continue speculating that this was an undead carcass brought to life.

Indeed.

From the mutation that the Hound had gotten, it had acquired a soul related ability and one that was geared towards physical body manipulation.

Quite handy.

'So those things were guarding these eggs...' Skullius thought as he floated within the Null Life Essence sphere towards the line of gems and eggs.

Even for someone like him, it was easy to identify that these eggs contained the next generation of Terrors but he was less impressed with this.

He turned his sight and reached in to touch one of the gems and upon contact...

...!

Mana!

Compounded mana was stored in these gems!

Just like....in Deadmanland!

Skillius shivered intensely.

What an unexpected discovery that took him back to weeks ago.

He silently cursed at having found such a thing but obviously, he didn't mean it.

Besides the deja vu, these mana gems could be a very useful resource if he used them wisely.

However, he didn't even know the proper way to use them.

'Maybe having lessons from an actual Mage is more useful than I thought. I have many resources but I can't use many of them,' he thought.

Skullius then turned to the eggs.

"Let's burn these with fire," he said as he raised his hand to obliterate the eggs.

Suddenly, Red Rage flashed before his eyes and protectively extended his hands, clearly defending the eggs!

"What the heck, bro? Why are you getting in my way?"

Red Rage sent his intent to Skullius.

"Of course I know that... Wait what?! You want to do what?!"

Red Rage reiterated and emphasised.

Skullius wore an ugly expression as his mouth gaped for a few seconds from what he had heard.

Seriously?!

Present time...

The Discount Human subconsciously took in a breath as he felt the magnificent heat of the bath water sooth his cosmetic body.

After paying the fee for taking a regular bath in the public pool, he had found himself a spot within the colourless waters that had bursts of steam dancing over them.

Groups of men who were also relaxing and conversing were sprinkled within the pool, having a good time in the steamy space that was split off from the women's bath and the reserved baths that were rumoured to hold... more 'exciting' activity.

Skullius didn't care for this however.

He merely used this relaxing bath to think over everything he wanted to while stroking the mini Hound on his head.

"He wants to raise those creatures as beings of Justice. Can you believe that?! That sockethole's lost his mind!" Skullius tactically exclaimed to not draw much attention.

He understood that Red Rage had his code of justice sponsored by his heroic race on top of the flaw that refused him of wanton murder but what was this?

Extended charity?

After who knew how long he planned to train for, Skullius hoped he would produce some pretty good results or else, he would still burn those things alive-ish...

Speaking of Apostles, Skullius had noticed that his Hound was beginning to develop a personality.

A rather overprotective one.

He thought that perhaps it was inspired by how he heavily praised the Hound for being quick to act when it came to defending him, but if he didn't correct this... that could be problematic.

'I should probably get him a name. Maybe that will help,' Skullius thought.

Defects aside, the four legged thing had already reached Level 5!

He didn't steal its experience after the Terror massacre which allowed it to overtake him in its terms of level.

'I'll catch up and start passing over all those Tiers to Tier 4. We'll see how strong I'll be then,' Skullius contemplated with barely veiled interest.

As he entertained himself with creating more templates for his growth, however, his keen ears drew in on a conversation between two men near him in the pool.

The art of casual eavesdropping seemed to have evolved within him since the first days of him arriving in Inhone.

"...exactly! That's what I said. Damn charitable types think helping every bum that walks by doesn't have consequences in the long run, but I say they should go back where they came from!".

"Right. This isn't a city that can accommodate many people at once. I hope they do something about it before we eventually have to share rooms in our inns!"

"I don't think it will reach that point. They say that there have been cases of people missing. These newcomers I mean. Someone seems to be taking them away. Mainly the injured and ill."

"Really? Isn't that simple cases of kidnap then?"

"No. Maybe people from the city have decided to take matters into their own hands by taking out the ones expected to die first. Can't say I blame them. I can't do something like that myself but I wouldn't mind some more breathing room in this damn town!"

Skullius who only heard this portion of the conversation cocked his head.

'The injured and ill, huh?'

Chapter 353: Just Find Her

'That's weird. It doesn't have anything to do with me, does it?' Skullius thought.

People were disappearing?

He hadn't seen any sign of distress, or heard anything of this sort until now, which wasn't too shocking considering he hadn't even been here for a day.

Also, it wasn't the locals' problem it seemed, as it was something only targeting the new entrants to the city coming in with hopes of getting healed and finding shelter.

Well, Skullius was neither sick nor injured and thus determined this didn't have anything to do with him. Besides, he would be leaving this town soon as he still had a stop to make as per Sila's direction.

Again.

'Hmmm...'

After having relaxed in the warm water for an hour, letting the heat tickle his muscle as he enjoyed this sensation, Skullius rose from the warm pool and got out.

He had enough. Frankly, he mainly enjoyed how the water made it easier for him to think.

He put on his clothes and exited the male area, walking through a long corridor that eventually lead to the main junction that separated the entire establishment into male, female and special services.

Along the way, he saw many people with satisfied smiles, some even spotting extra pleased grins as they sauntered with their chests out from the special reserved rooms within curvy women in tow. The opposite was also true.

'What are those socketholes smiling about?' Skullius thought as he went on with his business.

He passed the booth where he had paid for the bath and exited The Hot Swan, appearing in the street where the general populace was starting to thin out.

As the night was approaching Skullius thought that perhaps finding some lodging within an inn was a good choice.

But then, he decided against it.

There was something else he needed to do in the name of preparations for the Premium Age Royale and should things go haywire, he preferred to not be among factors that could screw him over, that was, people.

From where he stood, he could see large, white structures that stood over most buildings in the town.

Seeing their likeness in the shapes of humans, he instantly recognised that these were the statues erected around the temples and Harifrast wasn't an exception to this rule.

For a town of its calibre that accommodated many rich individuals, most of which who weren't local, having the Purity set up a temple here was a must.

Out of curiosity, Skullius waded through the streets and reached the location of this temple.

Much like in Inhone, a large area was cleared out solely for the temple with there being no building around it in a ten meter radius.

A gesture of respect and reverence.

Around and within the free space akin to a park near the temple, Skullius saw masses of people, most looking like the ones he had tended to in his shed.

Refugees, one could call them.

They seemed to want to appeal to the Purity for healing and charity.

Most of them could be seen with looks of terror from the trauma of the events that had led them to flee to this place.

For some, it merely looked like they were deeply apprehensive. Seeking nothing but security instead.

Surely though, the Priests and Priestesses did not disappoint.

Some could be seen leading the injured and ill one by one into the large building while others performed basic treatment outside with smiles and words of encouragement.

Skullius shivered once again.

One particular Priestess reminded him of the lady he had met when he first went to Inhone, likely a Priestess who thought he was a lost soul coming to commune for his Direction.

She had had a welcoming smile, a representation of danger.

'There's a lot of them. Good socketholes! Going near there will definitely trigger UNCoddled,' Skullius thought as he backed away.

Multiple other structure could be seen all over the town even from behind other tall structures.

So much was in this town and the Discount Human had to admit that his 'job' from earlier had hindered his exploration of Harifrast.

By this time, Skullius could also guess it wasn't just a normal population hub. Perhaps back in the day, it was something relatively important.

Maybe that was why Sila had brought him here.

Skullius removed the invisible duct tape over Sila who agitatedly grumbled as he was able to speak once more.

This repeated treatment brought him no small amount of angst.

"Why exactly are we here?" Skullius asked Sila.

'I already told you what to look for, tomato flinger! It's so simple but you're the one who's treating this like a vacation!' Sila boomed.

"I understand that much but what's the reason?"

'Hmph! You have secrets, why can't I have some of my own! We're only together out of circumstance! We're not sappy comrades!'

"Fine. In that case, I'll go do something else and get your thing done tomorrow, you sockethole," Skullius before shutting off Sila.

Ungrateful bastard!

Skullius walked back to the remote area where he had commandeered the shed, finding to his surprise that many had gathered around it, respectfully waiting for him to return.

'I should have guessed...' Skullius thought before emitting a sigh.

If he walked towards the shed, especially with his easily recognisable jacket, he would be swarmed and his objective at this moment, privacy, would be ruined.

He swiftly pulled out the Elimparidis Stone Staff and activated the skill [Jump] from it which allowed him to vanish from his spot and appear in the shed!

This feeling was too good.

It eliminated much of Skullius stress and with this being the second he had used it in the two days prior to this one to manage the charges remaining, he could confidently say he was pleased.

'Right. I should probably place this somewhere normal people wouldn't look I guess. If these people haven't even thought to open the shed door, it should be fine. Even if they find the staff I'll know.'

Skullius organised three broken planks around the staff which he rested on the wall in a dark corner.

Perfect cover!

He then touched the staff and vanished from the spot, appearing within the world within the Staff.

The heavy concentration of mana hit him and he drew it in with a sense of excitement.

He set his eyes over the vast sea beyond his view and grumbled.

'I hope you're being productive in there,' he thought, his mind turning to the image of a focused-looking Apostle that had carefully tended to the eggs back then.

This wasn't his destination for now, however as with the Hound which had been above his head leaping up and materialising into its full form beside him, the two headed to the landscape to their left.

The vast mountain ranges.

Skullius had explored every inch of the world days before and now he could confidently waltz over to the great mountains where a chilling cold (lesser than the one in Harifrast), prevailed over the blue, rising titans.

They differed in the shade of the colour blue, but ultimately stood tall with tufts of vegetation hanging on their sides like little hairs.

Others had ploughed edges with others hiding strange shapes and hollows within them, each of these being places that Skullius had scoured and found a great many things.

Of the many mountains however, one stood out.

One where baleful streaks of mana coagulated above like a cumulonimbus cloud that was too close for comfort, beams of spatial disturbances coiling within to create an apocalyptic scape around the mountain!

This was the birth place of the Elimparidis Stone Staff!

A mana marvel.

And Skullius had plans for it. But not today.

As much as the mountain stood out however, it wasn't the tallest mountain around.

Why was this significant?

Well, the Discount Human had discovered a peculiarity within this world.

Rules and laws that applied here.

For the sea, the mana compounded and congealed further with depth while for the mountains, it applied with height.

As a result, for most of mountains here, their tops had a whitish tip, a result of dense mana eroding the blue individuality.

Skullius rode his Hound and scaled one of vast mountains while keeping an eye on the short mount that birthed the overpowered staff.

The bursts of mana that formed its visage which was partially hidden from him by other mountains rocked him to his core but he wanted to use it in future.

If he couldn't learn space related skills from the Staff, then perhaps going there would help him, especially when considering the new skill he had as a Nullmancer.

[Epiphany].

Speaking of the Nullmancer, with the night having arrived, encompassing the time it took Skullius to scale this mountains, the Discount Human swiftly became the Penetrator, quickly removing his clothes so that they wouldn't get torn.

The Hound and his master reached near the top of the mountain, but powerful howling winds obstructed their continued ascent.

Mana aggressively integrated into the winds, creating mini storms that whooped ass.

Going higher was risky.

Skullius sat himself down and started to absorb the thick mana.

"Alright bro. Let's get this over with..." Skullius said to his Apostle.

He was going to be a sort of battery for what was about to happen next and thus he needed the juice (mana) thickest.

The Hound which knew exactly what its master needed looked intently at Skullius while summoning the brown Spirit Walker's Hide which was covered in glowing markings, a certain ability being used at this moment.

"Use as much mana as you want from me. Just found out who the heck that little female is...."

Chapter 354: Into The Soul! (1)

What was the soul?

Many denotions and explanations had been written by many scholars, mostly Mages, Healers and even Priests, some with only slivers of truth while others were outright nonsense.

The truth was, this concept was controversial, not in the usual logical sense but in a hierarchical and natural sense.

Souls tended to differ for many people depending on the Stage of power one had attained and also on the components surrounding their birth – luck, talent, lineage and such.

It took many years for many to discover this but there were also things that were common or rather were found to be the fundamentals of souls, linking them to the body and how the duo worked together.

Then what was the soul?

The soul was an amalgamation of the information inbuilt within an individual.

How so?

It could be likened to a seed.

All the potential, talent and biological detail was carved onto the soul.

It was a source, or rather a carrier of the source of all things one would attain as they grew including a sense of individuality.

However, to better understand the soul, the significance of the body needed to be elaborated.

While the soul was undoubtedly important, it was nothing without a body.

The soul was a rather egotistical entity, taking the opportunity to control given the chance and rapidly spreading its information within a captive body.

Therefore, for all the detail stored within a soul to bloom, it needed ground for germination, for growth.

A body.

The body was the food of the soul.

For only when a soul met a body was it able to ignite the small details it held into power, an identity and tangible idea.

Only when within the body did the soul have the power to groom a core, structure a race and forge a limit – it could not create any of these on its own.

Given this knowledge which the mighty Skullius lacked, he wanted to have his Hound use the ability [Spirit Walk] to venture into his soul and find out who the little girl that always plagued him was.

This was something he had resolved to do right before the Galemonger incident and now, with the abilities that could potentially help him do just that, he was eager to get some semblance of closure.

Obviously this was a life he had lived, and this same life threatened to drive him to madness if he couldn't figure it out before....

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## Doomed Factor 2: Existential Crisis

Your distinct perception and absorption of mana throughout the years has caused you to start awakening what should have been lost a long time ago. If you fail to recover and remember this in time you will suffer a crisis of your own existence and descend into madness.

Time till DF2 : 3 months

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There.

Of course, Skullius had checked this out when the percentage of the Factor's completion increased through various series of soul damage from Somanda.

Because of how much the value soared in the Arch-Lich's presence, he knew that Doom Factor 2 was bound to have reduced the time he had left.

According to VOW, he had to remember everything about his past life to avert this, which required him to venture into Deadmanland and battle Somanda, something he was nowhere near strong enough to do.

But for now, Skullius was always thrown off by the girl he always saw, so he wanted to know who she was and her significance.

For this, he wanted to have the Hound venture into his soul and try to find clues.

He couldn't share the perception of the Hound but the creature was quite intelligent. It could bring him clues through various means when it returned, which was something he was hoping for.

Of course he was going to do this multiple more times in the future.

"Do it, bro," Skullius said as his four sockets flared.

It was better for him to be in this body for this, in his opinion, felt more natural to him.

The fact he had reverted back when the night came spelled out an important factor, that [Cosmetic Body] did not affect the duration of time he had in his Discount Human form.

It was still 24 hours and Skullius was actually glad.

The Hound nodded as it activated [Spirit Walk], the marks over its body beginning to glow with a bright sheen that eventually overtook its figure which turned into a streak of light that burst into Skullius' body.

Unlike [Spirit Touch] which allowed the Hound to control other creatures' bodies, [Spirit Walk] required the Hound to fully deck the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide as to venture into the soul seamlessly required a shell most suitable for doing so.

Skullius kept absorbing the chaotic mana around him while hoping that this exercise wouldn't screw him over.

It was unclear whether [Spirit Walk] was meant to be an offensive ability or just a utilitarian ability that allowed for things like this but Skullius crossed his bony, armoured fingers.

His mind drifted to the image he had seen in the ice, a part of him that was tethered to Somanda so firmly....

He wondered what secrets would be revealed.

The Limitless Body Hound appeared in a vast stretch of space.

It looked around with its beaming sockets to behold bizarre sights and sounds.

What it saw a vast stretch of burning, crimson... waters?

A sea of blood-coloured liquid being razed by a ferocious flame that extended into the far distance.

The Hound stood unharmed over this sea as it watched everything apprehensively.

Up above, thick, dark green storm clouds constantly moved with bursts of lightning squirming in their builds, bringing split seconds of light to the darkened space between the sea and sky.

As for what the creature heard, it was the sound of loud voices that seemed to echo from a distant blotch in its view.

Something that seemed rather far, partly hidden by the fuming flames.

The Hound was attracted to that blotch.

That was most definitely where it needed to be.

To find clues, it had to venture there.

The creature burst ahead over the sea as it headed for this mark, travelling over this calamity as if it was the most natural thing to do.

It streaked over quickly to cover the distance as after a few seconds, what this blotch was became quite clear in its sockets.

It was... an island.

A massive island that was in the most pitiable of states.

It was from this island that the Hound heard the loud voices of multiple individuals and followed through with its journey.

However...

A thick bolt of blue coloured power flashed from the thick green clouds above and hurtled soundlessly towards the Hound which barely managed to dodge to the side before the mass of white slammed into its body!

BOOOM! FWOOSH!

A torrent of the bloody waters rose, the flames being scattered away as the lightning descended with its might!

The Hound which had retreated a distance away after the initial jump out of the way had the brown hide it had sizzling from the shoulder of its front right leg.

It had barely been missed by the shot and the power released showed how it could be one shot if it got hit.

As if this wasn't enough, something started to rise from the waters beside it, the flames parting to reveal a new figure.

A tall creature rose from the sea to stand over the chaos with its large mighty height and bulky mass that was entirely skeletal.

This skeleton behemoth stood with a darker than black hue that distorted reality around it over its humanoid bone shape, a luminously golden white light shooting from its sockets with a familiar glint.

This fiend faced the Hound and pointed its finger.

"A physical enemy this time...? Hmmm. Much easier to thwart than that annoying probing. Perish!" the skeleton raised his bony arm, in the sky, the green clouds amassing what could only be described as a calamitous bolt of blue power that silently surged and aimed for the Hound!

Right!

This wasn't lightning.

This was... Silentburn Levin!

Chapter 355: Into The Soul! (2)

The Hound was utterly confused.

This thing before it...

It had control over two of its master's powers!

The Insurgent Magnus powers and the Null Life powers through Silentburn Levin.

What was it?

Heck, what was this space?!

The creature apprehensively looked up where the bolt of Levin was about to fire.

Fighting here probably wasn't going to help but it barely had any chance to do anything in the way of communication before it was obliterated.

If it didn't defend, it would probably die.

While adorning its hide, it was difficult to manifest its Unliving Thread to its fullest potential and thus it opted for then next best alternative.

It opened its mouth wide and three scintillating lights appeared within the dark space, the red light turning solid as it was then chomped on by the Hound to generate an outrageous amount of power that nested in its belly and then fired up into the sky in response to the Levin that rained down at the same moment!

This was the skill [Lanterns of the Pure] in action!

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[Lanterns of the Pure | Lv.3]

The user moulds and weaves mana in three forms that represent a complete cycle of Rage, Repulsion and Recovery.

- Rage features an 30% increase in all stats for 5 minutes

- Repulsion features emitting a powerful beam of condensed energy that forcefully pulls apart anything it contacts

- Recovery features a complete healing of all wounds and defected parts of the body including the Spirit Walker's Hide and Unliving Thread to top health

-Caution-

Each light requires a 2 minute cooldown to recover its effect.

Mana Requirements: 500 Mana

Duration: --

Cooldown: --

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A red beam and a streak of Levin collided to create an outward expulsion of force that rocked the sea and the clouds above, a winner not bring decided by this one clash!

The Hound immediately backed away while the giant skeleton's sockets flared as it raised its hand again.

"You're quite strong, but I won't let you near that place with just that much power!" the giant skeleton said with a loud voice.

To it, the Hound looked small despite its tall mass, making it think this was certainly easier than having to defend from previous 'enemies' it had had to fight.

The Hound acted quickly.

This didn't make sense.

General reasoning told it that the thing before it wasn't actually an enemy.

If it possessed all of its master's powers, then...

Also, didn't it just say that it wouldn't allow any approach to the island in a protective sense? 'That place' could only refer to that island right?

In that case...

The Hound morphed its body, standing on its two hind legs as the ones at its front gained thick masses that gave it a humanoid appearance, much like a werewolf.

At the same time, it started to emit an energy it was sure would catch this creature's attention.

Null Life Essence!

"Hmmm?" the giant skeleton hummed as it halted on any further action.

It felt an energy much like the one it had received many days ago.

What was this?

The skeleton held off on releasing the Levin building up in the sky.

"Hmmm... little one. You have a familiar energy on you. Are you perhaps... not an enemy?"

The Hound clad in the brown hide waved its front paws in denial.

From its chest, a slit appeared, opening up a section of the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide.

Tendrils of Unliving Threads spilled from it and squirmed to form the dark blue image of a girl huddled against herself. It was more of an outline really.

On seeing the image formed before it, the giant's sockets which were lit up with the power of the purity from [Just Light] sparked with ferocity.

"Ah... I see. I should have recognised this from even your presenceless visage. You're a messenger aren't you? And seeking that no less?" the skeleton said as it then visibly relaxed and dropped its hand.

The Hound hurriedly nodded and then pointed at the skeleton with its claw.

"You're asking who I am? Hmmm..." the skeleton said as it seemed to enter into conflicted thought for a few moments.

"To put it simply, I am just a piece of will serving to protect that place."

The skeleton turned to point at the dilapidated island.

The Hound looked, finally getting a better visual.

The large island was far from desolate but every second that passed showed small chunks of the island breaking off and falling into the sea that roared in flame as if excited. Its entirety was cracked viciously, the whole thing looking to be seconds away from shattering like glass.

On the outside it looked like simple earthen crust with bits of green vegetation patches but innumerable spots of light seemed to lay scattered over its entirety along with a massive gorge that one could see almost splitting the island in half from a distance.

Within this gorge was a hollow light that kept dimming and brightening constantly.

"A sad sight, isn't it?" the skeleton remarked as it also turned to the island.

"It wasn't always like this. This used to be an intact land filled with so many twinkling lights, more appearing by the day. I was always here. No matter which way I looked, I would always find my gaze drawn back to this place. In that I concluded that I was the guardian of this place, forever tasked with protecting it."

The Hound morphed back into its wolverine form and sat down on its hind legs while listening to the tale. The hostility it had felt from the giant skeleton had faded only to be replaced by a calm sorrow.

"After a long stretch of time, wonderful things began happening some days ago. I received this power to call mighty beams from the sky, then shortly after, I gained the power to wield this strange darkness and light, no doubt added powers to protect this place. Unfortunately, even with this power, there were intangible wills that I could not stop from probing and damaging this place.

I could only obscure as much of this place as I could but that barely amounted to much."

The Hound nodded as it digested all this information.

Was this skeleton some kind of subconscious will that grew along with the individual?

The overgrown wolf raised its head and looked up at the green clouds.

The skeleton it could understand but what about this strange sky and contrasting red sea.

It jutted its head upwards, the skeleton being prompted to look above.

"Ah... this? It's the influence of the Lich. The clouds and the sea are the biggest problems here. They continuously erode that place and weaken its integrity by the day. My naive mind once thought they were here to protect, but...

they make this place very easy to invade."

Such a tragic fate.

The Hound shook its head in angst.

Its master was subject to this?!

This was even more terrifying than it imagined. No.

More than even its master could imagine!

It rose and started to walk over, nudging its snout at the island behind the skeleton.

"Right. I've rambled quite a bit. You can go to find whatever else you're looking for. She will be easy enough to find though, but just be careful with your steps, that place is awfully fragile since a few days ago..."

The Hound nodded before it hurriedly raced towards the island with quick steps.

It didn't take that much time to reach the place as upon reaching the shore which was purely scorched by the flame while the red waters distorted the sandy tone of the ground, the Hound saw the interlocking lines of cracks that stretched ahead.

Around the cracks was a vast field of scattered large violet flowers that held balls of light above their petals!

Within these lights came the numerous voices as well as blurry visions of images walking, conversing, laughing and crying.

These were...

Chapter 356: Into The Soul! (3)

The large skeleton looked back to the Hound that had reached to the shore of the large island, the golden white light in its sockets glimmering with strange emotion.

It was true, it had been there since the very start, but only for as long as it could remember.

As for its point of origin, that would be the day Skullius appeared in Aigas.

It was formed as a guard to Skullius' soul, in accordance to the rules of Aigas.

The rules of a world could not be so easily evaded, which was why powerful beings could not easily invade and also why even Skullius' Null Life powers created flaws to adjust to the world, otherwise they would be restricted entirely.

As for the rule that allowed for this large skeleton to be formed, it was the same that dictated that every individual's innate self have some form of protection that could only be contended against by advanced forms of power, in particular Classes and Stages.

An example would be how Skullius' [Basic Evil Invasion] had to contend against the protection that an individual had on their minds before reaching success.

The various forms Skullius had to fight in an opponent's headspace with the exception of the Labyrinth of the Yoke which was made by a being who transcended such rules and allowed Skullius to avoid them entirely with the right conditions were an indication.

'It must be nice to be on the outside. I tire of trying to keep all this safe and failing miserably at it each time...' the skeleton said, a tinge of envy tangible in its voice.

Over on the island, the Hound took its first step, being ever so careful as to not cause a proliferation of the cracks.

One could imagine the image of a drop of sweat over its hide as it truly was terrified by the notion of being a danger to its own master.

It adjusted itself and took light steps while crossing over the sandy ground where the violets swayed and paid extra attention to its next step.

The Hound was heavily assaulted by the noises from the orbs as well as the faint visuals.

One of the small bright balls drew its attention and it carefully walked over, its feet dodging the other flowers around.

The Hound leaned in its head and focused on the orb.

On the sound.

On the sights.

Its luminous sockets were suddenly drawn in as the markings over the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide began to glow, its vision being pulled into the bright light before it!

...

"...Camila! Get down here! And stop with the loud music for crying out loud!"

Hmm?

The Hound felt a weird presence.

It no longer had a... self.

Instead, it was as if it was seeing through someone else's eyes.

Someone with... almond skin, on the hands at least as that was all it could see.

One of the hands held some kind of dark contraption in the palm which the Hound wasn't familiar with, dozens of what looked like buttons sprinkled over the object's surface.

What was this?

It was in a human body?

From the ears, it could hear some really loud noises that truly would have been annoying if it was bothered by such. Apparently, it was music.

As it focused ahead, it saw the view a bit distorted with a fisheye perspective that blurred everything at the edges after a short distance.

Unfortunately, it couldn't exactly control where it looked as it seemed that now, whoever it was seeing through was watching several men who wore matching clothes fervently chasing a ball and mercilessly kicking it to and fro.

All this was being seen through a large window which emitted a faint light.

"Uh... this little brat! I can't even watch the game in peace. The commentator has some pretty good lines. I don't want to miss it."

The Hound was forced to sense and discern the meaning of what the man was saying whenever he spoke, as the language wasn't familiar at all.

Hmmm. This person...

There was something about him.

Something familiar.

He felt... like the Hound's master.

His air and his overall presence...

Could it really be?

"Damn it! Screw this!"

The hands of this man pressed one of the buttons and the contraption before him turned blank.

The Hound found itself rising and walking out into an expansive place with trees and grass, yet not scattered in a wild sense.

The grass was neatly shaved while the trees were clipped of their lower branches.

A sun and a blue sky could be seen above, magnificently announcing its presence to everything around.

The Hound tried to force its vision up but the only thing this did was split its sight in two where on one hand, it could still see the forward movement of the body it inhabited while on the other, it saw what was directly above this individual.

A large beautiful... white cloud?

The floating mass sparkled and twinkled like crystal, becoming blindingly brilliant sometimes.

What the hell was this?

The Hound couldn't help but wonder if this was something conjured for its sake or otherwise.

It continued to float directly overhead, following with the movement of this man whom it assumed was its master!

Soon, the vision before it settled as this man crouched down, his sight being set on an elegant garden.

Multiple beds were erected in neat order, housing a variety of flowers that grew with their marvellous colours intact.

It was quite the sight.

The individual the Hound inhabited took in a deep breath, an emotion he expressed reaching the wolf which suddenly felt a heavy sense of sorrow.

The almond-coloured hands reached down and rustled over the flowers, leaning in after a while to take a whiff of the sweet scents.

"What a legacy you left, mom. I can't help but feel as if letting these flowers dry up would be the same as letting my memory of you die along with them. Haha..."

There was no joy in these words and the Hound could tell.

Several drops fell from its sight and landed on the petals of a pretty orchid but the hands before it quickly wiped away the tears.

"Woo there... can't water them with tears now can I? Let's get the watering can. Hopefully Camila didn't misplace it this time..."

The vision of this man rose and at the same time, the Hound felt itself being pushed away from the view as shortly after, it was right back in its body, staring at the faint images within the small light that began to replay.

The Hound shook its head lightly.

It still retained all that it had seen.

Quite interesting.

So these, as it guessed, were probably its master's memories!

Incredible!

For it to stumble on something such as this...

The large creature looked around at the nigh insurmountable lights.

All of these really were...

The Hound wanted to stare a bit more but felt a tug at the mana that it had and that which it was borrowing from its master.

There was heavy consumption from that one dive into the memories it seemed.

In that case, it had to act faster and find the little girl as it was told.

The Hound looked around, trying to discern from the little it could see while paying mind to where it stepped.

Unfortunately, this was pretty much useless as the mash of sounds and the distortion by the light emanated from the balls obscured its sight and auditory sense.

Without further thought, it then stared at another random orb where its vision was sucked in.

In this one, it saw the familiar almond-coloured hands holding something that left marks on paper. Stacks of books were over a desk that the individual it inhabited sat behind.

Right now, it could sense focus and frustration at the same time from this individual.

A heavy sigh leaked from the man as he leaned back against the chair he sat in.

At that same moment, the door to the right squealed as it swung open, a small figure racing up to reach him.

"Hmm?"

The Hound found its vision descending and focusing on something it hadn't expected.

"Look who it is. My furry little bro. You've already learned to open doors on your own? How did you do it?"

A small creature, like a tiny wolf stood there sticking its tongue out while wagging its tail joyfully, a cute bark being the response it rendered to its master!

The fur coat with a beautiful copper shimmer lustre and hue covered it in a shaggy manner, bringing out a truly amazing beauty.

This sight perplexed the Hound.

What was this creature? A young wolf?

Was it really though? It was too small.

The little thing was lifted up by the almond coloured hands, and set on the man's lap.

The beady eyes and the pink nose that huffed in air excitedly as it looked up was quite the refreshing sight.

The Hound felt its vision being pulled to something that was around the creature's neck.

A black band with a round, silver tag attached to the front with a certain etched into it.

Ferex.

Chapter 357: Into The Soul! (4)

"Urgh..."

The almond-coloured hands reached for the tag that had the name, stroking it gently.

"She had one thing to do. It's supposed to be Ferox, which means fierce. Now it's just a random name that doesn't give you credit for the one thing you've got going for you."

The small thing on the man barked, maintaining its enthusiasm.

"You still like this the name Ferex instead?"

The adorable thing leapt up and down and barked cutely.

"Well aren't you a literal son of bitch. I took the liberty of letting law drive me into picking out a cool Latin name and you backstab me like this, huh?"

The little creature nudged the man's hands as it licked them as if trying to quell its master's sparkly wrath with the charm of cute.

Surprisingly however, it worked.

A feeling of joy overcame the irritation, as the Hound felt and focused on this interaction with rapt attention.

His master really seemed to love this little creature.

"Fine, fine. Do the thing for me and I'll forgive you."

The little thing became even more elated as it heard this, standing at attention and facing its master with a serious visage that didn't display even a hint of playfulness.

The Hound greatly anticipated what this thing was going to do.

What kind of thing did the master look forward to from this thing?

What was it?

A magic trick?

A special skill?

After a full five seconds of preparation, the small creature over the man's lap started swaying its ears to the left and to the right in impeccable synchronicity!

At the same time, it got in a lower stance and wore a 'fierce' look that could be perceived as being more adorable than threatening and then it started spinning its tail in a circular motion!

WUFF! WUFF! WUFF!

"Pffft! Hahahahahahaha!"

A burst of joyous laughter leaked from the man as he hurriedly patted the small creature and ruffled its fur.

"That's never not funny, Ferex. For your sake I'll forgive my sister's mistake."

The little creature stuck its tongue out again and leapt up and down in circles.

The man's vision focused on it as it did the dance and he began to wonder aloud.

"I never thought the day when even animals could understand human speech would come. The world is changing way too quickly. <Sigh>."

The little creature noticed its master's sudden solemnity and stopped its exhilarated bounce.

It tilted its head, standing on its hind legs as it settled its paws on the man's chest while huffing hurriedly.

The man's sight did not continue to linger on this pet though. He turned to the books over his desk and where he had been scribbling, as quickly, all his happiness seemed to fade under sullen memories.

"Ferex. Do you think dad would be happy that I turned to Law instead of Business like he wanted...?"

The man's sight turned back to the little creature that halted its expressions of enthusiasm and focused on his words.

"I mean, I definitely would have become a bang up Salesman or something but... maybe... maybe this would finally make him proud of me. At least he won't have to bicker me into it, right?"

The little thing over his chest wore a determined expression and barked with gusto as if trying to encourage him.

"Bro, I know you can understand me but I don't get a single word you're saying. <Sigh>. But you're right! Maybe I was born to be some Salesman-Lawyer hybrid. Salawyer man? Salayer?

Who cares! I'll do my best in both!"

WUFF! WUFF!

...

The Hound found itself standing within the violets again and looked around.

The memory had ended.

It took a few seconds to digest the information it had learned, the contents being something it took to heart quite a bit.

But there was no time to dwell on it as it felt the mana it had almost bottom out.

This seriously drained mana even with its master's' continuous supply.

However, the Hound was resolved to find the girl.

She had to be within some of these, right?

The creature refrained from viewing the many visions wantonly and saved its possible last try as it started to prowl carefully while being blasted by noises from all sides.

It hurriedly crossed a large distance as its sockets spied around.

After a few steps, it suddenly saw something strange and was drawn towards it.

It was a violet, much like the others, above it a white orb that housed a memory.

However, where it was placed was what caught the Hound's attention.

A deep crack was beneath it and the violet seemed to be growing out of it.

Peculiar.

Peculiar indeed.

However, this peculiarity is what drew the Hound to decide that this was to be its last memory for this time and if it just so happened to not feature the girl, then so be it.

It still a had a lot to show for this round.

The Hound reached the large violet and focused its sight on the orb above, all its sensations being drawn to the memory.

...

The prominent almond-coloured hands opened a door to reveal a large room that looked rather messy, with clothes that lay scattered on the floor along with an uncovered bed.

Even the Hound that did not have much of an appreciation towards neatness disapproved of this arrangement.

A small desk was erected in front of the bed, with a chair along with it.

These weren't empty however, as a figure sat upon the chair while writing something over a sheet of paper.

No. Rather than writing, she was drawing.

And yes. A she.

A young girl with dark hair that reached up to her shoulders, its fringes being matted with a brown colour that contrasted her youthful, ivory skin.

She wasn't exactly extraordinarily pretty, but much of her appearance – her hazel coloured eyes, high nose and ideal lips matched beautifully with her oval-shaped face – gave a refreshing feel of her tender age.

Her petite figure was rocking to and fro, her head bobbing back and forth as she seemed to be listening from the object slung over her head with two other parts attached to it that covered her eyes.

There was leakage of frail sound from this contraption.

The Hound was elated to see this however, despite the initial unpleasantness.

This was it!

This must be it!

The girl that master sought!

"Camila! Hey! Cami- CAMILA!!!!"

The little girl almost fell from the chair when the man boomed at the top of his voice.

She quickly removed the object over her head and clutched her chest as she fiercely glared at the man.

"Are you trying to give me a heart attack?!" she hissed.

"I'd gladly hand it to you at this point. It seems like only something like it can drag you out of your shitty music. What do they call it, steel?"

"It's metal! And it's really cool! You wouldn't know about it."

The Hound felt the man shake his head as he sighed.

A feeling of pity and love gripped it, as it was what the man felt towards this young lady.

He walked over to the girl's desk and snatched the paper she had been drawing on before she could react and sat on the bed as he looked over it.

"Very... gothic..."

"It's cool!"

"Yeah, right. A lizard being beheaded by a chainsaw. How... cool is that?!"

"It's a dinosaur!"

"Pffft!"

What was this memory?

Chapter 358: Into The Soul! (5)

A rather scary drawing was held in the almond-coloured hands.

It was surprisingly detailed with the blood that sprayed from the cartoon-ish lizard- ahem, dinosaur spilling from an acute opening on its neck.

The chainsaw was drawn with motion indicating lines over its jagged teeth, giving it a rather menacing image. Apparently no one was holding it.

The girl looked at the man with a pouting face as she then folded her arms, as if she felt offended.

The man sighed as he looked at her intently. This little brat.

"This is how you cope, right? With mom and dad's death. The horrible art and the... steel music?"

"..."

The girl didn't respond at first as she hung her head instead. One could see that she had complex emotions building up within her in relation to this subject.

The man sighed once again, his expression softening.

"It's not a bad thing, you know? To feel sad that they are gone. They really loved you and so do I. You're allowed to cry about it too."

The girl slowly raised her head, her eyes which had started to redden showing the bulk of her brimming emotion.

Above all else, she looked surprised that this young man before her actually knew exactly how she felt.

Probably.

The Hound could only guess from what its master felt.

"But...I didn't get to say thank you to them..."

The Hound found its vision rolling.

"Of course they knew you dummy and they didn't need to hear it from you. Besides, mom loved your crappy drawings and could always interpret what they meant nomatter how weird they were. You get what that means right?"

"What? What does that mean?"

"You figure it out yourself!"

The Hound felt the heavy atmosphere that had been building up just now dissipating as the girl showed a semblance of a smile while swiping the paper she had been drawing on from the hands of the man and looked at it closely with a, "Is it really crap?"

She seemed to have understood what the master meant.

The Hound couldn't help but wonder....

The master was like this before...

At that moment, a speeding figure darted into the room, its small stature seeking attention as it leapt up and down.

The girl called for the small creature and held it in her hands.

"Ferex. You wouldn't say this is bad, right?" the girl said as she pointed towards her drawing which had been placed over the desk.

The little creature she had picked up whimpered lightly as it looked at the detailed drawing.

Its eyes perused over the illustration a bit before it reluctantly barked and nodded.

Unfortunately, its true feelings were not hidden from either of the two who looked at it and the individual that the Hound inhabited began to laugh madly.

The girl pouted as her eyes met the innocent eyes of the little creature she held, the small criminal imitating a shrug.

At this moment, as the Hound heard its master's laughter, it felt a pull on its vision and at its body at the same time.

Time was up.

However, before it could be pulled away, the creature used a certain skill it had to try and bring something back for its master!

This was important!

The skill was none other than...

[Amorphous Sampling!]

While this skill was being cast, the large skeleton a distance away instantly became alert, turning its head quickly only to relax again a moment afterwards as it felt that there was no hostile intent.

It was hard to not react to such sensations when this was the first time that it had been subjected to an intrusion such as this.

Soon after, the image of the Hound which it was seeing vividly before turned into a streak of light as it then vanished from sight.

"Ah... chaotic and lonely this soul is, again..." the large skeleton said as it lowered its head and sat over the waters.

*

Skullius felt the mana he was drawing from [Elevated Mana Manipulation] and the regeneration of the mana from his core fail to keep up with the consumption of the Limitless Body Null Demon Hound skill.

'This is taking quite a lot more mana than I thought it would...' he thought.

Forcefully feeding mana into his core from a larger mana source had always been something he looked to when the conditions were right.

He had learned this from the time with Dezrael and his armour which contained a massive amount of mana that he pulled on to keep Doom Factor 1 from claiming his existence.

Now, he was applying the same principle to continue feeding mana to the Hound so that its skill, [Spirit Walk] would last longer. Its only limit was the single usage per day but the duration, as Skullius discovered relied on the constant supply of mana.

As he wrestled with the constantly disappearing mana, a light burst from his body and manifested before him in the form of a brown-furred large wolf that stood still at first and then looked around.

Skullius stopped feeding mana into his core and looked at his Apostle expectantly.

"Did you find anything bro...?"

The hesitation and expectancy in the Penetrator's voice was thick, easily identifiable for the Hound but it withheld what it had found.

"What? Why won't you respond?" Skullius asked in confusion.

The Hound resumed its pause until a few minutes after where it walked a few steps to Skullius.

"Huh?"

Skullius was so confused by what was happening that he began to think that perhaps the Hound had been RESET again somehow.

The creature suddenly retracted its Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide, its many dark blue Unliving Threads that covered its bone structure being revealed.

On both sides of the Hound's head, ears appeared with the same shade of colour as the rest of the body, along with what could be called a long, fuzzy tail.

Skullius' sockets dimmed a bit.

The Hound then started to twirl its ears in unison while circling its tail in perfect arcs, its stance lowering as it then...

RUFF! RUFF!

A powerful voice rocked the air as the Hound imitated what it had seen from the little creature in the memory, obviously a dog.

Skullius' socket flames dilated even more until they became mere dots.

Something within him was... pulled on.

But still... he couldn't quite put a finger on it.

It was simply... vaguely familiar.

"Bro... this..." Skullius said as his hand twitched.

He reacted to this quite intensely.

The Hound didn't stop there however, as it then started to draw on the ground with its claw.

It quickly finished marking the dirt and nudged Skullius to look, the Penetrator's sockets actually flaring intensely this time.

"This... is... this is too..."

That's right!

The Hound felt it!

Its master was reacting to this information.

He had to remember right? These memories were his right? So he should remember this!

As a final card, the Unliving Thread around the creature's body convulsed as they revealed something akin to a placard the size of its head, a rather clear and clean one.

On it, was the image of a little girl looking up front with a subdued smile while a blurry and hairy figure with a shaggy copper shimmer fur barely emerged from the corner.

Chapter 359: King and Pawn (1)

Within a rather simple and fairly neat house...

"Do you know what this is?"

"..."

"You know, refusing to answer my question will not be beneficial to you in any way. As someone who yearns to eventually rid yourself of my hold, it would do you some good to figure as much as you can about me, no?"

A brief bout of silence ensued after this statement.

"...What is it?"

"That's more like it. This... is a Creed Seal," Actuass said as he held up a thick green card the size of his palm.

It had extremely complex runes drawn in a spiral formation with a dark colour, the object oozing of a very potent energy that nauseated Revia who donned a clunky hooded robe.

Her silver hair had been washed, regaining its past beauty and her skin looked a bit healthier, discounting a slight drop in its usual lively shade.

"Its purpose is to either create a set of rules for the individual that it is implanted on, creating a situation where the victim's soul, body and mind are forcefully bound to the respective conditions attached to it or... to create a set of rules agreed upon by both the user and the target."

"The former is the easiest to do, but its results are usually not as potent while the latter produces the best results, but in truth, no one is willing to wager their soul for such. No one ordinary that is..."

Revia glared at Actuass' masked face.

"Will you use that on me? It'd be easy if you used the first option right?" she asked with a unveiled disgust.

Actuass paused for a moment, his hazel eyes behind the mask showing hints of amusement.

"You still see me as a monster it seems, even after I washed and stitched you up. Regular healing won't work on you but I'm sure the unbearable pain has subsided, has it not? Given all this, do you still think I have any interest in having more puppets?"

"You seem to enjoy using others. Didn't you use something like that back in the Isise when we fought? It was something like a double right?"

"Hmmm..." Actuass hummed. "Indeed. But, I don't need you as one such as those. Besides, how would you eventually escape me as you wish if I bound your free will?"

Revia took several breaths while glaring intently at Actuass before turning away, her face all wrinkled up in unveiled fury.

This was the worst thing to ever happen to her.

Falling to an enemy only to have that same enemy make her his immortal slave.

How distasteful.

"Come, let me finish..." Actuass said as he once again brought over the conversation to the Creed Seal.

"You're familiar with the Giants right?"

"...Yes.."

"Good. They invented many forms of magic, including higher applications that break known and unknown boundaries. Some of these were taught to us as a whole and some were not. For instance, there is the Tie of Exchange, a secret contract technique used by the Giants to protect self interest."

"Is that and this... Seal the same thing then?"

"Not exactly, but the principle is the same. This Seal is imbued with powerful runic orders that claim the victim's soul, body and mind. However , all this comes at a cost. To someone like you who was raised with the notion that your talent was unrivalled and that your Divine Blessing could carry you to the top, this would be news to you. However..."

"No one in this world passes certain bottlenecks of power without making a Creed with something or themselves. Giving something so that another can be obtained. Such a thing doesn't exist in lower forms of magic but when you reach the Incandescent Stage, it becomes clear..."

Revia's eyes narrowed as as she heard things she hadn't before.

Contradictions to what she knew.

Did this man mean to say that she had been using lower forms of magic?

"So then what? You want to train me to become something like you?"

Actuass lowered his gaze as his eyes fixated on the Creed Seal.

"This Seal is just one of the many that I have prepared. Moving with caution all these years has yielded its fair share of surprises, but my hard work is about to be rewarded," Actuass said ignoring Revia's verbal spit.

"And? What are you going to do with these the—" the young lady's face turned from confusion to realisation as her mind churned out a possibility.

"This has to do with that event you have planned with the EverSword House isn't it?"

"Indeed. That's part of it. Someone else has entered a Tie of Exchange with me over that event so I won't be the only one trying to reap benefits from it," Actuass said with a light exasperated breath.

Revia's brow creased. She still had a lot she didn't understand about that simple trip to the EverSword House.

"If you're so strong that you don't even need to fight me personally, why not just go on with your plans? Why waste your time with all these convoluted plans? Is help from that House even necessary?" the silver-haired lady asked.

At this point, she might as well extract the details from Actuass as he asked to clear herself of the curiosity.

Actuass looked mildly pleased to hear her ask him these things.

"There are a lot more moving parts than you think. I'm not so bold as to launch an all out war on this world. Unlike the Evenfall, we don't have that much devotion to the one who guides us. I'd rather ally myself with a national powerhouse with vast connections first."

Revia scoffed with her visage showing her displeasure and discontent.

"Sounds cowardly, doesn't it? Don't worry, when it all unfolds, it will become clear that each step has a purpose."

The former Paladin Champion frowned further. This man seemed to really be confident that he had accounted for everything.

Yet, even after accounting for this, she couldn't help but wonder...

"What exactly do you wish to achieve? What's your goal?"

Chapter 360: King and Pawn (2)

Actuass paused without changing his posture as he sat, making him look like a stationary doll.

The question he had been asked was quite an intriguing one that probed at what exactly his goals were.

And one would be prompted to wonder what exactly the Green Neolists wanted.

As Actuass had stated, unlike the Evenfall, a cultist group that worshipped Boron in the Under and were extremely reverent towards his will and unseen visage, he and his Neolists were different.

There was no sense of respect or reverence between them and the one who gifted him this power.

The power of Undeath.

The inherent power of the Liches and Arch-Liches.

It was simply a transactional relationship and by now, it was no secret that what the undead wanted, particularly the Arch-Liches, was to raid worlds.

Yet, this was only Actuass' primary mandate for fulfilling his end of the bargain. For to gain the power he had now, they had to be given from something that did not exist in this world.

His individual goals as the leader of the band of Necromancers was quite detached from simply allowing the undead to descend on Aigas.

One should not overthink these goals however, as they were not so much maniacal as they were eccentric.

"I'm the only person on this entire continent who understands the soul to a complete degree. Its composition, its taste, its feel. Having a complete appreciation of the soul is a prerequisite to mastering the very core of Undeath. To master breaking down these bundles of information just waiting to explode wildly, spreading their hold within a vessel is an intricate process.

Slight derailments and mistakes can trigger undesirable effects after all."

"What?" Revia said as she wore a look of annoyance. "This isn't what I asked."

"Indeed it is not, but it is what you need to hear."

Revia couldn't help but shake her head slightly with a disgruntled curve of her lip.

"In all truth, I first learned of how the soul was more complex than I had initially thought back when I was studying the basic Necromancer class that I received after devoting myself to Undeath. Above the soul's immense information storage capacity, it also possesses the ability to replicate information that is not inherently its own. This extends even to blessings."

Revia who had barely been paying attention suddenly perked up. She still wore an irritated frown but her willingness to listen further was all but hidden.

"Blessings?"

"Indeed. Blessings do not inhabit the soul but a fundamental part of the body, right, even if they have soul related abilities?"

"...That's... true. So by replicating such information, especially such which has dwelled in the body for prolonged periods of time..."

"Are you trying to say... my soul can ... replicate my blessings?" Revia finished off Actuass' sentence. In meaning at least.

The masked man didn't provide a simple reply, his amusement being pointed out by a muffled 'hmmm.'

"Being my pawn for a short while doesn't sound too bad now doesn't it?"

"If this is true, you're just grooming your own killer," Revia said with a terrifying glint that flared in her eyes.

Actuass wasn't fazed in the least however.

"Settle down now. If you do want to become my eventual killer, you better listen to the rest of what I have to say."

The silver-haired woman was forced to quiet down and listen as the man she had tried to rattle with words wasn't intimidated one bit.

"In my studies of the soul, learning of the emotions stored as buds within it, the limits they cradle and the potential they house, I stumbled upon the unique Advanced Class of Necromancy, the Profane Necromancer. This in turn led me to the current mastery of the Undeath concept I wield. Reverent Soul."

...!

Revia immediately took in deep breath as a memory she thought she had digested and accepted, welled up and almost caused her to reel back.

During her fight with Actuass when the strange effect of his powers had more than doubled her strength, making her ridiculously more powerful than before, she had thought she was going to win.

Yet, the man had suddenly used a power than turned the tide of the battle in a heartbeat and on that day, she had heard its name.

Reverent Soul Undeath.

Hearing it now, she was brought to shudder but Actuass put her at ease.

"Relax. I don't typically use that in normal situations. Under ideal circumstances I'd even use my Territory before my Undeath Concept. Its quite interesting if I do say so myself. Yet, I digress."

"In my studies of the soul with my concept, I unravelled the many mysteries hidden within this piece of existence. First, as I stated, that souls did not house blessing. Second that a soul could lose its will and such a soul is a very powerful energy source, one so potent that it rivals a single, fully realised normal blessing."

"As a matter of fact, this is the basis of my agreement with that individual that I mentioned earlier and it partly answers your previous question as to my motive. Hundreds of powerful experts gathered in one place for a death game while bound by Creed Seals. I'm sure you can dissect much of the rest..."

...!

Revia's mind immediately came to a conclusion.

What?!

Did this man intend to....?!

"Indeed I do, as you have thought, but that's not relevant now. I'm merely fulfilling the courtesy of answering your question."

Revia calmed down only after a long stretch of time where she rendered another question, one that she hoped Actuass would answer adequately.

"What do you need me for? I'm not as useful as a ...pawn, as you said. There are people more powerful than me out there. Why me specifically?"

"Hmmm... " Actuass hummed as he then raised his hand and pointed up with his index finger.

From the tip of this limb, a greenish black flame came out in the form of a ring and started to expand in the air, as if burning away space itself.

As this continued, within the encirclement of flame, appeared a strange space vastly different from the contents of the room.

It was as if Actuass had opened a doorway to another space!

"Do you see anything besides the flames?"

...!

Revia looked pale as the look in her eyes seemed to show that she indeed could see the obscure glimpses at what was beyond the ring of green and black fire!

Strange bodies swirled and flashed past while others looked directly at her from the distance through this space that had been opened.

"...Yes... yes I can see... something else..."

"Good. Such a thing should be beyond someone who is at the Master Stage. The Incandescent Stage allows one to perceive spirits and souls very well but not any Stage below it. Yet, there are rare individuals who are able to acquire this power before then. Surprisingly, this ability CAN be hereditary or inherited under special circumstances but the conditions for such elude me."

Revia looked at Actuass in disbelief.

Spirits and souls?

Souls she knew but spirits?

"For that I've designated you as an important piece. I've heard there is even a name for people with your abilities. Apparently they are called..."