

## Undead 641

### Chapter 641: Nostalgia

Bonet's sockets flickered with an intense light as he welcomed another day in undeath. He rose from the position which he had laid in and stood up.

His spot was a hollow space in the wall where he and the rest of his dead folk would go into 'slumber' – each with their own individual spots, of course.

Below his own hollow was another one also etched into the same wall, one of his many brethren still in slumber within it though only moments away from being revived into fresh death by the power of their master.

The tomb was small, with a large, firm rock covering the circular entrance imposingly, this clearly being a hilarious aesthetic placed by the unfunny higher echelon of the dead, as in all seriousness, who could escape from this place?

Bonet's fellow brother in death shook, causing his bony body to rattle and the fire in his sockets to burn a bright blue.

He woke up and jumped down from the hollow, landing on the ground with a perfect bony score of 10.

"Dead morning, Bonet," he said to his bunk tomb mate.

"Dead morning to you too, Socketson," Bonet reciprocated the cheerful greeting.

Bonet's gaze lingered on his friend, as he did every time since THAT day. He got the feeling that something was missing but he couldn't quite put a bone on it. There was a specific scene that should play out where he would then be forced to ask...

"Bro, what are you doing?" Socketson broke Bonet's immersion into deep thought with the blue flames in his eyes dancing in confusion.

Bonet jerked, his large frame swaying a little.

"I don't know. I vaguely felt like something was missing," he replied dismissively.

"Alright then, mate. Let's hurry. We really shouldn't miss roll call."

Bonet walked up to the large rock that covered the tomb, as did Socketson. As they began pushing the large rock away, behind them, a figure decked in an ethereal glow, its finer details barely looking to be connected to this world stood, gawking, mouth agape and blank eyes swollen with disbelief!

"WHAT THEEE FLESH?!" Skullius screamed but no one heard his boisterous voice ring so madly around!

In his hazy Hybrid Luman form, he had spawned several seconds ago to find that, [Celestial Hack] had actually worked!

It transcended Rules and Worlds to actually allow him to peer into distant places as promised!

It had brought him to Deadmanland, as he had envisioned and right where he wanted to appear to boot!

With a mysterious kind of vivid sight that actually allowed him to see properly granted to him, Skullius was taking in everything – his old bro Bonet, the bunk tomb and...

"I'VE BEEN REPLACED?!" Skullius screamed again to the oblivious two skeletons – one bulky with a greyish bone colour tone and an unimpressive frail one with no features of note – who pushed the large rock that acted as their door from the entrance successfully.

Skullius took steps towards the two with a furious visage, the usual calmness that was slowly smothering his Hybrid Luman form of late collapsing temporarily under the pressure of his original temperament!

"Seriously, Bonet?! After all this time, you actually replaced me?! Who even this new bro? Socketson?! That's a terrible name! Mine is clearly more imaginative!

His mana core.... it's barely existent and there's nothing special about him! Ah, I could strangle you right now, you traitor! Have you ANY idea how much I have spread your false legends in Aigas?! And here you are, fraternising with inferior sons of lanky femurs?!" the Hybrid Luman huffed after bombarding the completely unaware Bonet who strode with this... Socketson, out of the bunk tomb...

with his arm around his shoulder!

Skullius' eyes bulged and he nearly extended his hand with the intent to cast [Undaunted Calamity] on the frail, assless imposter!

Soon though, he calmed down. He only had a limited amount of time and several seconds had been beaten to death by the cringe worthy scenes he had seen.

Skullius scoffed, turning away from the two skeletons to look around the massive space between the collection of bunk tombs where the seemingly insurmountable number of Moronic Undead – Greater and Lesser included – flocked at the end and at the start of each day.

The Hybrid Luman's rage faded as a blast of nostalgia smote his mind. The dark, creepy space full of stupid skeletons chatting before the work of the day began, the luminous collection of pathetic mana cores, the constant challenges for who was next to attain the skill [Boneman of Steel]...

It was all painfully nostalgic.

Skullius felt a powerful emotion grip him as he saw the cracked, weak skeletons.

Sadly, Somanda's words rung in his head as he gazed upon all the fellowships among his past brofriends.

All this was fake. The camaraderie, the friendships...

It was all because each and every skeleton here was missing a piece of their soul and to make themselves feel whole, they were forced to desperately try and forge intimacy through any means to fill the void.

Suddenly, Bonet hanging out with this Socketson character made Skullius less angry and more sympathetic.

In fact, he began to feel a bit ashamed for screaming at Bonet when he knew this truth now and to top that all off, Skullius' earlier quandary about his identity almost seemed like a luxury when compared to the struggle these souls denied rest went through – resurrected only to be split and put to eternal labour service by a cruel force.

'I was thinking too much,' Skullius thought. 'I do want an identity but... maybe goals determine identity more than anything else. First and foremost, as far as I'm concerned, I was this.'

He was this. A weak, oblivious skeleton that vaguely started to remember fragments of his past through [Mana Sense] and also the obscure ability from his past that Serenity hinted at.

'Since in a few months or less I'll be coming here anyway... I'll keep my identity as a former undead and use it to free these guys,' Skullius declared in his mind, his mental voice choking on sorrow.

He considered that perhaps Somanda knew he was here. Well... 'here', but he only had a few seconds left anyway and he wanted to use the last bits of this time to watch his old pals.

As he reached the crowd of skeletons gathered for roll call, he found the old gang bundled together and chatting.

Bonet, the large Fractures, Mono-socket... and then this new Socketson.

"Tktktktktktktktkt! You're kidding! This little one is trying to learn [Boneman of Steel]?!"  
Fractures laughed while pointing at Socketson who looked flustered – an emotion Skullius could only identify because of his unalive-reanimated background.

"Yep. He was begging me to teach him yesterday but he literally falls down at a touch. Brother here can barely lift up a pick axe. Somanda may be THIS close to pulling the mana plug on you, you know?" Bonet teased with a chortle.

Socketson couldn't take the joke. He was alarmed.

"Pull the mana plug?! No! No! I want to live! I want to live!" Socketson hugged Bonet's arm and screamed.

Unfortunately for him, several death stares immediately landed on him from Bonet, Fractures and Mono-socket whose flames burnt bright, their taller frames intimidatingly looming over him, a bit closer than before.

Mono-socket gripped Socketson's shoulder with a dark skull face.

"Might want to rephrase that, bro," he demanded threateningly.

Immediately, the fairly new Socketson recognised his mistake and shuddered.

"I meant that... I want to stay dead...?" he said, a bit unsure.

The atmosphere quickly switched to a lighter one again and Bonet smacked Socketson's back heavily.

"Tktktktktktktkt! That's better!" he said, laughing out loud, as did the others.

Skullius watched this interaction with a quizzical expression on his face.

"Has the word 'live' become another curse in Deadmanland? Weird, I don't remember any other undead ever saying something like 'I want to live' before," Skullius said while focusing on Socketson.

Strange.

This interaction was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps approaching, causing all the skeletons to shut up and stand at attention.

Skullius turned to the front, the remaining seconds ticking by within his unwilling heart.

To his surprise, the Death Knight he expected to show, as the reason behind the menacing footsteps was nowhere to be found. All he saw was giant creature decked in a black and red armour that hissed of a furious, crimson fume that bellowed around its figure terribly!

Skullius doubted it was a Death Knight. It was definitely far stronger than that. The skeletons shuddered as well, all kneeling on one knee fearfully in a single swift movement.

'It seems like things have changed a bit since Somanda's rise to Divinity,' Skullius thought with a scoff.

Sadly, his time was up but thankfully, [Celestial Hack] didn't pull him out of this well of ongoing terror until he heard something he had wanted to hear for a long time.

Something all the skeletons chanted everyday at this exact same time.

As the bony fingers of all the undead were placed on their chests, Skullius joined in for old time's sake, chanting the daily motivation mantra along with his brethren.

"FOREVER DEAD, DEAD FOREVER! F\*CK LIFE! A NASTY ENDEAVOUR!"

Yeah. That hit the spot.

Chapter 642: Tight Buddies!

"What are you smiling about?" Silrat asked the Hybrid Luman who indeed had donned a curve of the lip subconsciously while his blank eyes drifted off somewhere far away from the conversation subtly.

"It's nothing too special. I just didn't realise the past can make you feel like this. Wait. Maybe I did and I had just forgotten," Skullius replied, hiding the remnants of his feelings at the moment.

Silrat sighed exasperatedly and didn't even bother to pry.

As time went on, he discovered that most things about Skullius were best left alone. Frankly, he was quite content not knowing everything about him even though they were practically besties in schemes and potentially illegal practices at this point, minor misdemeanours included.

The last six weeks had seen Silrat grow and change to an unfathomable degree, both visually, intellectually and hierarchically.

In the visual department, his crushed garnet coloured hair had been cut to become shorter and much, much more elegant. The gel that was applied to it, refining it into the shape of a solid modern quiff was the cherry on top as it complemented his physique which had switched from the usual gaunt lankiness to a more robust, I-don't-hate-my-life frame.

Appearances.

That was something Silrat had learned after he successfully graduated from being a mere scout to a Supervising Overseer a week ago due to his tremendous contributions in the Association. Of course, this advice didn't come from his always preoccupied consciousness or through a divine dream. It came from the wise mouth of Alaris who told him to look the part of the job he had.

Supervising Overseers always looked and acted sharp.

If Silrat was going to own the title, he had to look it first. From the sword master's perspective, Silrat had the brain and mouth for it but his presence had been lacking.

Now, after all the work he had to do to transform himself – mostly eating, exercising and getting enough sleep – Silrat now had a face that Skullius could respect. The Hybrid Luman had bluntly said that statement to the former Association Branch Head. Face to face, word for word.

Silrat's focused grey eyes settled on Skullius once again after his tangential thought into the don'ts involved with dealing with Skullius.

"So, everything is set?" he asked.

"Yes. Stylla says she won't come though," Skullius replied.

"I thought as much. She is breaking down more and more by the day. I fear she can't endure anymore than this. We'll have to do something about it. Strictly sticking in the lane of business, we need a Bryne if we are going to conduct business with other Families," Silrat stressed.

"Are you good at therapy?"

"Not the mental kind. Well, it depends on how you look at it but any man can give 'therapy.'

"...Snake in the crevice?"

"Snake in the crevice."

The two men sighed, Skullius moreso at this concept that he was clearly equipped for, shockingly. He literally had the tools for it. He had seen Silrat engage in it from time to time but wasn't really interested himself. Not yet, anyway.

As it turned out, Skullius discovered more about how... human, Silrat was as they grew more comfortable with each other the past six weeks – courtesy of the long sailed away UNCoddled. Outside of business and serious issues concerning both their livelihoods, one more than the other, they had never actually been that casual with each other.

The tension had lessened.

Just now when Silrat had interrupted Skullius' digestion of the trip he had just come from – through space and time to land conveniently where he wanted, where everything up to the moment he felt the largest connection to in Deadmanland progressed – he had half expected the refined Supervising Overseer to invite him for a drink... again.

Truthfully, because of the sporadic visits to the taverns that Silrat usually took because of mild amounts of stress, Skullius was beginning to enjoy the burning liquid torture that slid like lava down his throat. For him it was more like a sour drink though.

Sadly... this visit was all in the name of business.

No party invites.

"The meeting place is the Estate, right?" Silrat asked.

"Sure," Skullius replied.



Silrat frowned.

"What does that mean?"

"That's what I said! Unfortunately, Stylla decided to be vague."

Silrat sighed again, exasperatedly this time.

"She's depressed not stupid so we can hope she arranged everything right. By the way, did you already go the Association with the mission evidence?"

"Not yet."

"Great! Give it to me."

"Why?"

"Why else? I'm going to haggle for the corpses and earn pretty Plasma coin. In future, I feel you should be banned from any and all money-related transactions. Your skills at handling coin are surprisingly atrocious."

"Hey, I... You know what? Fine," Skullius surrendered the spatial storage ring where he had stored the many corpses he had collected from the Clusters he had raided over the past day and a half.

Silrat checked them all and glanced at Skullius strangely.

"You know, you always find the strangest things? You found goblins in a Cluster?" he asked.

"Are they uncommon?"

"As far I know, I haven't read about goblins in Clusters. Not that I'm that reliable as a researcher of such things anyway. Leave it to you to confirm such useless things for me."

"Uh... Thanks? Is there anything else we have to think about with all this boring stuff. How about that drink?"

"I didn't ask to go for a drink?"

"Right. Well, you do that so often that I thought you did ask me moments ago?" Skullius said while resting his back on the bed.

Silrat sighed for the umpteenth time.

"We'll have to discuss the specifics tomorrow morning before the transportation to the Venue. If Stylla is still with her father..." Silrat ended the sentence with a grimace.

"I know. You're right. Best to leave it to tomorrow. For now..." Skullius said, dragging out the end of his own sentence while turning to Silrat with subdued alcoholic suggestions spinning in his blank eyes.

The former Association Branch Head slapped his face.

"Fine, fine. Let's go get the damn drink!" he barked as he stood, Skullius following enthusiastically after him.

Chapter 643: Guardian of the Estate

Bryne Family Estate.

The walls erected around the estate stood proud, announcing the rise of this small Family whose grace and glory had been slowly dimming over the centuries.

The wall was firm and thick, with multiple armoured guards stationed over and before it, scouting for potential threats and managing entry as well as exit into the guarded lands behind them.

The stretch of trees was the same as always – each tall and looking like a mix between eucalyptus and weeping willow trees – leading up to the three large buildings ahead in a beautiful, cool shade interlude that looked more picturesque than before, especially with the lively sun today.

Clearly, the new hired hands were doing a marvellous job at tending to the greenery around the estate. Outside of the pathway guided by the trees, a sweet verdant enclosure could be spotted from peripheral vision, with sprinkles of strategically placed colourful flowers of different kinds that gave a unique aesthetic.

The artisans who had been employed to make the estate look good prioritised maximising the creation of a grandiose picture in the welcoming frontal area, even going as far as to remove everything other than the three main buildings that ruined the natural beauty. It was breath-taking.

From there though, bizzaredom took hold.

Within the space between the large trees where slanted, ethereal lasers of sunlight forcefully barrelled past the defence of the canopies to leave white dots on the flat ground, a figure riding a strange beast could be seen.

He was adorned in a white armour that refused to reveal his body underneath, a freakishly long cape draping behind him.

He was astride a large beast that measured nearly three meters in height with the build of a bison but the head of ram, thick mana reinforced muscles pulsing with ready-to-work powers twitching under its shaggy golden brown furs.

Swollen and massive, ivory horns could be spotted over this beast's head all curled into a circular shape like a coiled millipede. Several grey joints along the twist of these horns sporadically flashed with a harsh white light as the creature slowly took steps ahead, from its nostrils brutish breaths bursting out at random intervals.

As Red Rage rode his beast, which had evolved twice during the last Cluster raid, he couldn't help but don an invisible coat of pride. This was the creature he had named Bull 1, the strongest of its kind within the Pelvic Arbiter's collection.

The Infinity Charge Bull Ram was its race after evolution, a creature that could theoretically increase its attributes infinitely just by galloping in a single direction!

A procession of similar creatures – though two Tiers behind – took humble steps behind Bull 1, their temperament with their glowing silver eyes showing a certain giddiness. There were roughly 50 of them, from Bull 2 to 50.

When the group reached the end of the stretch of trees to the wall, Red Rage patted Bull 1, making the beast turn around to go back towards the direction of the mansions.

This time, through the intimate connection he shared with Bull 1, he gave the order for it to charge freely ahead.

Bull 1 was ecstatic!

He raised his frontal legs and released a hot breath along with what a common man could only describe as a masculine bleat... and then bolted forward, its lesser followers making way!

The first stride it made covered a hundred meters in an instant, a foggy mash of grey, black and white being left as a streaking trail in the air by Bull 1 as it stormed forward!

A surge of power burned under the creature's shaggy hairs and when it galloped its next steps, it streaked past four hundred meters in an instant, and this was merely it holding back to make this last a bit longer!

Soon, beast and caped humanoid were facing the new Bryne Estate main mansion which was so large and beautiful, the previous one couldn't even be compared to it.

It towered over everything in the estate at a height of close to 150 meters, its girth nearly 100 meters from a frontal view. A humble shade of golden peach could be seen over its exterior with a particularly marvellous design at its face crafted to inspire nothing but awe. Even the grand double doors looked a bit too fancy.

Around the mansion a collection of tall, meaningful statues were erected, the precious gems used to make them glistening under the sun in the corners of the lawn covered front yard which was divided in two by a clean, rough pavement.

More guards could be seen stationed around specific points outside the mansion with several individuals going in and out in an orderly fashion.

On top of this, other inhuman protectors were also stationed around the mansion as if it was the most natural thing ever.

Tall, chiselled beasts with a reddish hue over their bodies, long tentacles dancing from their faces, stood motionlessly at designated points, their bodies decked in quality, customised armour.

These were the Virulent Taint Terrors, the evolved forms of the Venom Terrors, Killin 0 to 3. They were taller and thicker, their tentacles looking to carry a more treacherous form of venom now.

Stationed around the other two supplementary mansions, similar but bulky Terrors with yellow skin, their thick arms and legs spotting blackish golden scales. These were the Crushing Bastion Terrors, the evolved Killin 4 and beyond Boulder Terrors.

Red Rage looked at his collection proudly. He was happy that they had all gotten to these creatures to evolve so much, especially the more unique ones he had in his collection.

The Pelvic Arbiter looked up.

Above the main mansion, something huge was flying at a consistent height silently while accompanied by ten others of its kind, though their size being smaller.

It was a huge white fly with expansive colourful wings.

If not the shadow that it cast over the main mansion, most would dismiss its existence as even with the enormous size, this fly had a special natural property that allowed it to blend into the environment. Perhaps not visually but certainly aesthetically.

This was Buzz 0.

After evolving close to three times, it had become larger and more powerful, transforming into the Cryptic Clairvoyant Rainbow Drifter.

This creature was by far one of the best guards for practically anything at all. It had the natural born ability to see multiple possibilities within its sectioned eyes, the target being at whatever it was gazing at.

With its evolution, it was capable of making short range glimpses into simple futures and with its link to Red Rage, it could convey what it had seen. The others behind it, Buzz 1 to 9 were capable of similar feats, though with infinitely less efficiency. Still, more flies were better than one. Right?

'I think these guys will serve best the Estate. The rest I can't afford to expose,' Red Rage thought.

This was his newly appointed station by Skullius.

He was the Head of security at this place whenever Skullius didn't need him urgently. Of course he had freedom to go and come as he pleased but he couldn't neglect his primary objective.

The people who were working here had been freaked out by these beasts at first but with time, they simply grew to accept the lie that this Knight in dazzling white armour was a powerful Tamer. It was believable, considering none of the beasts were ever hostile in addition to the fact that most of the people here didn't understand much about Energy Forming in general. They accepted it and moved on.

It was reassuring to have all these strong protectors here actually.

Red Rage disembarked from Bull 1.

He then detached his long cape from his armour, and laid it on the beast's back. It was so long that it draped to the ground but the Arbiter didn't care. It wouldn't get dirty anyway.

In the next moment, he walked into the bright surface of the cape, sinking in as if swallowed by a golden light.

What appeared before Red Rage after a glaring light was a vast sea filled with waters that were saturated with highly concentrated mana. These were extracted from the ocean in Fortune and within their clear flow, one could count hundreds of Terrors swimming within – provided their sight could see miles deep – and others that nested in massive, beautiful civilisation of sturdy mud houses.

Above the waters, a large city, the same one that Skullius had asked if Red Rage wanted, floated mystically, a calming stillness over it that the Juvenile Pelvic Arbiter was greatly fascinated by.

His figure that was floating above the waters suddenly turned into a streak of light and appeared within the city that had long been cleared of the goblin corpses.

Several mature and otherwise beasts had settled within it, most of them being Tier 4 to Tier 6 Cluster beasts already brought to submit under Red Rage.

Many of them were beasts he wasn't ready to expose yet as they were too unique.

'Brilliant. Once I tame the special goblins we captured, I'll decide which one will manage this city like how Killin Max managed the sea,' Red Rage thought with glee as he passed the normal sections of the city to appear within the inner part of the manor that had belonged to Hobbu Gogo.

Within it, nine goblins, six captured within glass cubes and the rest laying unconscious while bound by special means could be seen.

The Juvenile Pelvic Arbiter grew excited.

The desire to raise more powerful monstrosities made him shudder in excitement and he readied [Second Chance] immediately.

An Unlimited Shifter, an Imperial Elemental, a Bizarre Archer, a Gold Encompassing Mage and more....

Such wonder!

The first four were the goblins he had captured himself so he knew their Classes but the rest were still unexplored, but equally or perhaps even more unique given that they were Hobbu Gogo's personal guards!

With a quiver, Red Rage took the time to induct these poor souls into his convoluted army.

He was very patient.

Chapter 644: Ruling and Realisation!

Next day.

While the sun still hung low over the blue canvas that was the sky, a second one already brightly pouring its mandatory joy over Genhuis City, a conference had been called and was already in session.

Within a designated, luxurious room within the Governor's manor, several high ranking figures were seated, their presence and thoughts making the air so heavy, the natural gravitational pull seemed to worsen.

Among these individuals were the Governor and his son, the Paladin Champion Ruhrees, the City Guardian Gillewart, a beautiful mature lady with a shield behind her back, Onarmont and lastly... Rearren EverSword.

As the Governor had promised, he had gathered all the help he could find to thwart the progression of the Premium Age Royale and everyone in this room, save for the EverSword House head, was in support.

Enough was enough.

Something had to be done otherwise the death toll would only continue to grow.

The Governor had decided to act before the routine time for transportation to the Venue, which was why everyone had gathered early.

Rearren smirked visibly at the effort.

"So how does this work exactly? Do you just say the word and the event stops... or are you prepared to play the violence card?" Rearren asked with a relaxed look on his face that bordered on cheeky and arrogant.

Actually, it WAS both of those!

Such an attitude towards something serious ticked off most of the people in this room, especially the Governor, who had felt Rearren's disregard for 'lesser lives' when they had had their chat yesterday.



"What do you think?" Ornamont shot at the EverSword House head with a side glance that quickly turned away, dismissing the arrogant man as not worth her time.

Rearren chuckled.

"I represent the Purity in strongly encouraging you to put a stop to this event. Such a large number of suspicious deaths isn't a coincidence, even when disregarding your Control Seal. The city has not seen such a high mortality rate in a short period according to the numbers I've seen. There's no hiding what's already transparent here," Ruhrees said with a firm, serious gaze on Rearren.

This was his stance but in truth, the Purity didn't have his back.

He had informed the higher echelon of power within the organisation about this matter but it was as if he had been ignored. No one responded.

So in the end, he decided to stand up to this alone and pretend that he had the backing by merely declaring it. Hopefully it was enough for Intimidation at least.

"You're all under the impression that I'm killing people... that this event which has kept the common and rich alike well fed and entertained is the reason why thousands have died? Absurd. What would that benefit me? My House has been a pillar for Pelian since the First Grand War. Why would we stoop to senseless murder now?" Rearren asked.

"We were hoping you'd be the one to shed some light on that," Gillear pitched in while pushing up his monocle. "I've witnessed several of these incidents occur in real time. While I couldn't determine the influence of magic on the victims, I did notice the Control Seal on them shining moments after death. Is that a mere coincidence as well? The corpses shrivel considerably too."

"There are no such things as coincidences. The Control Seal is designed to release itself from the person it is attached to soon after death. That is all. It protects them against harm at the Venue so why would it suddenly turn to killing?" Rearren said.

"Perhaps... you made a Creed that compensates you somehow for the trouble of taking care of millions of common folk, or should I say witnesses, by weakening them outside the Venue. That could be reasonable right? All these deaths I've heard happened because of clumsiness or just some ridiculous circumstances that would normally be non-lethal or..."

impossible," Ornamont hypothesised while shutting her eyes.

Rearren wore a smirk within.

'Close...'

"That's a stretch, Lady Ornamont. As an Incandescent Stage expert yourself you must know how hard it is to procure Creeds. How would I attain enough to kill hundreds of people, let alone thousands?"

This was a fair argument. Only Incandescent Stage experts and above could understand the torture involved with creating Creeds. Using one was like spending your entire fortune all at once. No matter what you got in return, just thinking about starting to gather your wealth to the same degree again from scratch stabbed painfully at the mind.

A bit of silence pervaded within the room.

Rearren exploited it.

"This event surely has other motives that I have not shared... but I'm quite sure the correct guesses as to what these motives are, are already the talk of the town. It certainly isn't about genocide. In part what I said was true. I simply want to stimulate the rusting hearts of warriors with a death game. It's not a new concept right?"

Maybe my Control Seal has slight adverse effects on some common folk. That is not a new concept either and to be fair, everyone who spectates or participates in the Royale agreed to the risks beforehand. Right? So legally, there is nothing I've done wrong," the man explained while shrugging emptily.

Everyone in the room silently exploded in rage.

Even Ornamont opened her eyes and glared at Rearren.

She was kind of glad she had still been in the city when she was called to join this hearing. People like this were what she hated the most.

The Six Houses truly had balls.

Speaking about technicalities while shamelessly avoiding the brunt of the responsibility...

This bastard was guilty and he knew it, but he was pretty slippery with his words.

Clearly, what was needed was brute force.

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Bryne Family Residence.

At the same time, Silrat, Skullius and Stylla were seated in the lounge, discussing the details of the meeting that had been arranged for after the days' matches at the event Venue.

Skullius sat directly opposite to Stylla while Silrat was to his right.

The young woman looked as sickly as always, dark bags sloppily sagging under her eyes as she struggled to listen to what Silrat was saying.

Skullius couldn't understand how this was the same person who had started off energetic, seemingly hell-bent on restoring her Family weeks ago only to start deflating hard.

Organising a meeting with these yet-to-be-seen Family representatives was the last good thing she had done in a while.

"...so this must go perfectly, otherwise we'll have to rely on the backup plan as the main plan. Do you understand?" Silrat concluded his sentence while giving Stylla a piercing look.

The redhead nodded sloppily much to the Supervising Overseer's exasperation.

Skullius decided to chip in.

"We can be confident that we are going to meet some sensible people, right?" he asked.

Stylla merely nodded indifferently.

Skullius rolled his eyes.

There was nothing more to discuss here. At the end of the day, they would see for themselves the results and bite her later if she slacked on this too.

For now, it was time to focus on the Premium Age Royale.

It was possible that Skullius could be the one fighting today and in this Second round of the Preliminaries, he needed a win to be able to participate in the Royale. More than that, he wanted to give an impressive showing too.

He couldn't bear to have people still remember that loss from the First Round of the Preliminaries even after he won this match. It had be spectacular.

Yes. This was a matter of pride.

"Ah, hey Silrat. I've been meaning to ask. Is th—"

...!!!!

Skullius' body suddenly jerked back violently and a flood of perspiration leaked from all over his skin behind the clothing he wore!

'Shit! SHIT! SHIT!' Skullius raised his head in a panic, [Graceless Hunter] exploding to cover the room with desperate intensity!

An ungodly presence has suddenly appeared, smacking the Hybrid Luman ferociously from within his flesh, bone and even his soul!

Skullius paled and gawked emptily, his face sinking!

A figure was standing behind Stylla who sat opposite the Hybrid Luman, its frame immensely crooked yet gracefully aloof, immensely devilish magnificently saint-like, immensely condescending yet... unbelievably regal!

Both Stylla and Silrat were somehow oblivious to it, their curious eyes only turning only to him who had such a violent reaction!

This...

This...!

An authoritative voice came from this being, its tone crackling with unevenness as it spoke.

"Ah, kin. So you are the one settled in this rich land..."

Skullius could barely remain conscious after hearing THAT voice and THOSE words.

His eyes drooped, his mind spinning, as with this creature's sentence, a terrible burst of wild Null Life Essence had smashed into him and him alone...

Chapter 645: Two Left Behind

Two hours ago.

Belvion Union.

Amidst the clamour that had just risen along with the stylish curve of the sun, two figures carved through a city street, one looking wiry while the other looked impossibly energetic.

The difference in their sizes, structures and details was stark, but with the conversations bouncing between them, it was clear that they shared quite some common ground.

The hawkers and suspicious merchants setting up their tents and stalls created the bulk of the noise this early in the morning, most people being annoyed by their yells for attention. However, one of the two passing individuals was delighted to hear the noise instead.

The fresh items, both cooking ingredients and food of various kinds and quality offered from several newly setup stalls made her grin and sigh in relief. At least food was here was stay.

Boredom may come.

Brutal wryness may come.

But at least, in the end, there was always friend food, the blessed one.

The lady was adorned in a reddish agile half plate armour with segmented reptilian leather underneath it that helped to accentuate her robust figure. Her lime green hair had a healthy, unnatural sheen to it, its length maxing out right behind her ear. Some of it draped down into bangs that hid one of her eyes while the visible one showed an almost savage vibrance.

One could hardly believe this was Yuyui.

She took quick steps towards one of the stalls while her tall companion shook his head and followed after her at his own pace.

The sheathed dagger that was attached behind Yuyui's armour, right above her waist dangled as she leapt to a stop, her eye shining at the assortment of roasted meats that she saw before her. The stall here was the only one with readily made meats, ones that looked to have a rich quality to boot!

It was perfect!

For someone who couldn't luxuriously dine in eateries within major settlements like Yuyui, this was the best place she could find!

The fat oozing from the fish, mutton, bird and other unknown slabs of flesh that were skewered over a makeshift yet classy heat source – a heat containing platform with neatly arranged burning coals – was the sole reason why the once petite young woman now had something to show off in various areas. Her efforts were being rewarded.

Her fancy armour and shapely body caught the attention of more than several people within the same street. Some looked at her with greed while others only showed admiration but she didn't care about those fools!

Yuyui gave a sagely nod at what she was looking at.

"Anything you like here, miss?" the man behind the stall whom Yuyui had completely dismissed till now asked with a smirk. He had a slim figure, gaunt really, a simple grey shirt and pants settling over his body. A pair of small, sharp eyes, thin lips and a stubble spotted his face in a rather unkempt style but that, in fact, was his preferred appearance.

"Yes sir," Yuyui replied as a bulky figure approached from behind, slowly catching up while garnering gawking eyes. "I would like to eat all your meat please!"

The stall owner's eyes reflected the shock burning... in the minds of several men and women from another relevant universe, but his own surprise was only from why this woman wanted to purchase all the meat he had ready, which usually lasted him till noon!

"Are... are you sure, miss? This is a lot of meat. Are you certain you can take it all?" the stall owner asked with the raise of his eyebrow.

Yuyui scowled.

"No one..." she said menacingly, her forehead twitching a bit. "No one... questions what and how much I can eat. Now, serve it all up."

The stall owner flinched a little before regaining his composure and wearing a grin.

"Fine then. Since you're so dedicated, I'll give you a 70% discount on your purchase," he said "The total price is 4,000 gold coins."

Yuyui had already been reaching into her storage for the money before the stall owner even mentioned about payment.

"70%? How generous of you. I'll just... Wait. Did you just say 4,000 gold coins?!" Yuyui barked with an appalled visage.

The stall owner's grin grew wider.

"As you can see I'm the only one with variety here especially when it comes to meat. Bird, beast, fish... I have it all. Judging by your equipment, 4,000 gold coins shouldn't be too much to fork out, right? This is a discounted price too. You should be thanking me!"

Yuyui shrank as she counted the amount of coins she had left. A little over 1,200 silvers and 900 gold coins.

She quivered.

She spent a bit too much this time. Her salary and allowance had been rapidly racing to the finish line ever since her master and the group went on that long expedition weeks ago. That was also her first time being left alone without a continuous flow of cash. She had even been neglecting collecting beast corpses to sell since she had a lot of money anyway.

Sigh.

What a lapse in judgement.

Food was an expensive friend.

As she grew sullen, her belly growling in such a manner that made startled nearby by-standers, the tall figure that had been walking towards her finally arrived.

The stall owner paled when he saw him.

A figure decked in what he could only describe as custom made dark silver scale armour stood behind Yuyui.

A marvellous large brown fur cloak hid most of his thick armoured body but the wolf shaped helmet he had over his head, its appearance giving the illusion that it was part of his body made the stall



owner weak in the knees, the luminous glow coming from the slanted holes in it strangling his earlier energy.

"Is there a problem here?" this two and a half meter tall giant asked the stall owner while caringly pressing his hand on the sobbing Yuyui's head.

The lime haired girl turned to her companion, Ferex, and pouted.

"Can you believe it, Ferex? The meat... It's 4,000 golds! It's surpassed my pocket. I may never eat my fill again," she dramatically reeled back only to be caught by the giant who shook his head and faced the stall owner.

With a deep and menacing voice that caused a dreadfully tension within the area, Ferex spoke:

"Is it all really 4,000 gold coins?"

The man behind the stall nearly collapsed in fear.

He gulped and opened his mouth with a tremble.

"I... uh... actually..."

\*

Minutes later, Yuyui was chomping down happily on a comically large thigh that still had the sizzle of heat. Her smile as she ate made Ferex who walked by her side garnering a lot of long stares feel content.

"By the way, Ferex. You've become really good at speaking the Known Language. I thought you were going to skip and mispronounce some words like last time," Yuyui complimented.

The bulky Apostle stared blankly at Yuyui.

"Your teaching may have been terrible at first, but I must commend your effort, servant Yuyui," Ferex said. "Now hurry up so that we can clear that Cluster before someone gets it first."

Yuyui deflated.

"I thought we were taking a break. You're already halfway through the second Tier. What's the rush?" she said, trying to dissuade Ferex from another unrelenting killing spree.

"Master will be back soon. I intend to be at Tier 3 when that happens. I can't be slacking, like you."

Yuyui flinched.

'I'm not slacking! I just can't handle four days straight of hunting Cluster beasts!' she screamed in her mind.

Replicus had left with the rest of their group three weeks ago on a journey somewhere far. Presumably, they were going outside of Pelian on a special mission. Replicus' last order was for Yuyui and Ferex to grow their strength, otherwise they would be left behind by everyone else.

Because of Replicus' quick wit and growing connections, his crew were growing terrifyingly powerful and surely, Yuyui even with her power would grow less valuable with time, all things remaining constant. In that aspect, she understood why Ferex was eager.

'<Sigh>. He's right. We need to get stronger. At this point, Master might not even have use for both of us. He's become powerful. Way too powerful.

And he's not even slowing down.'

The thought of the current level of her master made Yuyui shudder. No one behaved casually in his mighty presence. The only reason she could was because he was friendlier with her.

The last time Yuyui had seen Skullius, he was close to reaching Tier 4. Finally. He spent most of his time in his Penetrator and frankly, Yuyui was terrified of it.

She doubted that the original, Skullius, held a candle to how Replicus was right now.

After contemplating a bit...

"Fine, we'll go but... your mana isn't back to full yet. Let's wait a little longer. Remember, Master said to not engage in battles you can't end really quickly. You'll lose everything you've learned so far if your Flaw triggers," Yuyui advised.

"... I know," Ferex said.

"Good. And don't forget what you promised me.... I'm ready for it now," Yuyui said with a bit of an emotional tremble.

"Alright."

As the two were passing through the streets, several people bumped into them. No, it wasn't several people but a group.

They seemed to have been pushed away violently, making way for something on the road. For someone.

When Yuyui saw what the source of the commotion was – a stylish carriage with open sides that was passing through – she donned a disgusted expression.

"This man again?"

Chapter 646: Lurking Fate! (1)

The Belvion Union was a cluster of cities and towns joined together for common benefit, like the Isise.

Sadly, the Family that ruled over the lands where these settlements nested was incompetent and preferred not to do anything but continue to demand coin as tribute without committing to the social responsibility.

As alluded to before, in order to at least facilitate the delivery of the people's basic needs, a noble by name Dionas had risen to govern the Belvion Union, controlling the coin generated through all

small to large transactional mediums. He managed to achieve the bare minimum of what was required to keep people alive and somewhat well, which earned him a lot of following.

Ignorant following.

Corrupt following.

He owned a lot of riches for being the 'hero' of the people and his influence had grown to such a degree that he became the symbol of stability, protection and all forms of security. He was above the minor Governors here who didn't have much authority, not that Royal Family would care anyway.

During this time where many calamities were looming over the horizon, the Purity and the Capital Service could hardly spare the time to take an introspective look at their systems and solve problems like this. Or perhaps these calamities were just excuses.

Besides, for most people settled in the Belvion Union, this greedy tyrant Dionas, was far better than the uncaring Family silently eating away at their livelihoods.

This same man was the one passing through the streets of this city at the moment.

Some cheered for him while others scowled and called him names only to be dragged out by the powerful entourage Dionas had with him to be taught a fistful lesson.

Dionas acted as if he didn't see it all happen but inwardly, he wore a satisfied grin.

Ungrateful rats!

Served them right!

He was beyond benevolent. Even now, he did not have these rebels that protested openly against him killed but kept them under his wing to find shelter and food in his cities!

Was that not mercy?!

So what if he took some wealth for himself? Was it not well deserved for the role he took upon himself?!

It was barely enough to satiate his desires anyway!

'Soon, I will confront that accursed Guuld Family and when they finally fall, my pockets won't know a lack of gold again. I will make sure of it. What use is money if it is not in abundance? If one can't get so much of it they get sick, why have it?' Dionas thought.

Despite his inner, ongoing justification, Dionas, waved at the people with a dazzling smile. His bald head which had a saintly sparkle complemented the satin grey lustre in his crescent-shaped eyes at this moment, his lean but broad shouldered frame sticking up a hand for a friendly wave.

Yuyui looked at this man and scowled through the crowds.

She and Ferex did not make a habit of visiting the towns and cities in the Belvion Union frequently, especially not the same ones, but she had witnessed enough to know that Dionas was fake.

If he replaced the Guuld Family, the powerhouse in charge of these small lands, he would likely devolve into the same idle evil that sucked the life of the people without bringing them anything in return.

No one who collected beautiful women to keep them in his mansion as a hobby, had anyone who preached the anti-Dionas gospel even privately brutally murdered, was reluctant to encourage better, advanced services for the people in the way of medicine, housing and even education, among many other crimes, could be a kind soul capable of redemption.

This whole thing really just ticked Yuyui off.

As she watched the baldy pass through with the ambience of cheer mixed in with complaint around him, Ferex noticed her hateful glare and asked.

"Why do you hate him?"

"Because... because what he's doing is not right!" Yuyui declared.

She had done some investigation with her now heightened abilities, infiltrating places that kept Dionas' darkest secrets in order to get rid of them all but there were too many and too heavily guarded. While most of the combatants wouldn't be problem to tackle, the issue that deterred her from full action was her identity.

Even now, she was taking a risk just by walking among the crowd.

At some point though, Yuyui had thought about killing Dionas but...

The lime haired girl deflated when she had this thought.

Whenever she thought about killing, her hands would tremble.

No.

Not killing in general. It was killing humans that bothered her.

Ever since the day she killed the Grand Priest...

It was hard to imagine doing it again. She placed value on human life because she knew what it was like to lose someone. The feeling was vague but she knew it was real.

She was tormented by the fact that what had happened to her – losing her parents – she... she would be doing that to someone else.

When Skullius had that pep talk with her, she had sincerely hoped that he had told her that killing was fine flat out. Instead, it was up to her to decide how to move forward. Skullius didn't want to take away her will. Even though she had a Tie of Exchange that said she was his forever loyal servant, he respected her own thought process.

Sadly, Yuyui didn't understand her own thoughts on this.

Yuyui felt her rage simmer down slightly.

"Don't spend a lot of time thinking about useless things. What happens here is none of our concern. Let us go do what matters," Ferex said.

Yuyui nodded melancholically and the two left the scene. As the lime haired girl had advised, they took a break until Ferex recovered all his mana from the previous Cluster raid they had just gone through and in that same time, Yuyui managed to finish her meat.

Soon, they were off, leaving the city to go back the way they had come before.

Ferex hunched over when they were out of sight and his form changed into a tall, lean beast that had long legs and a layer of dark silver scales all over its body. Its shape was like that of a panther, one with a mane of shaggy brown fur that draped down from its neck to its back.

This form was a different variant from before as Ferex had evolved into the second Tier, becoming much stronger, though his core was still stuck as white.

Yuyui leapt onto his back and the Hound burst forth with terrifying speed!

The lime haired girl held on tight as she already knew what Ferex was capable of speed-wise. She enjoyed the ride though. Sort of.

As they rode to their destination, she checked her status which had many changes and many stagnant aspects.

~~~

[ Name : Yuyui Yuyui Yuyui ]

[ Level : 6 ]

[ EXP : 0/200 ; <Task Pending> ]

[ Class : Pinnacle Occuluthon ]

[ Race : Human ]

[ Inv. Status : Mildly Motivated ]

-----

[ Stats ]

[ STRENGTH (I) : 4,560 ]

[ AGILITY (I) : 3805 ]

[ INTELLIGENCE (I) : 2,712 ]

[ ENDURANCE (I) : 3,005 ]

[ LUCK : 44 ]

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[ HEALTH : --- ]

-----

[ MANA (I) : 6,140/6,140 ]

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[ Skills ]

[ The Musical (Special) | Lv.90 ]



[ Greatest Voice | Lv.120 ]

[ Twisted Mind (Special) | Lv.112 ]

[ Melodious (Special) | Lv.150 ]

[ Greatest Music Tool Art | Lv.199 ]

[ Advanced Dagger Arts | Lv.46 ]

[ Advanced Dressing | Lv.59 ]

[ Basic Mana Manipulation | Lv.9 ]

[ Atlas Dash | Lv.78 ]

[ Beatdown (Special) | Lv.80 ]

[ Triple Strike | Lv. 41 ]

[ Overpower | Lv.13 ]

[ Nimble | Lv.22 ]

[ Greater Teacher | Lv.20 ]

[<Class>]

[ Body Hazard (Special) | Lv.97 ]

[ Inhumane Eye ]

[ Eye of Dispersal ]

[<Oddities>]

[ Inhumane Eye ]

[ Eye of Dispersal ]

[<Affinities>]

[ None ]

~~~

Because of how rough the discovery that she, Ferex and Replicus made about the mysterious Severed Union six weeks ago, Yuyui had barely had enough time to focus on her Tasks. She had only begun focusing on it around the same time Replicus left for his mission with the rest.

Since the quandary about her Tasks still leaning towards her previous class as a Ballad, Yuyui had also decided to focus on grooming all her song-related abilities. If the Tasks remained the same, at least she could tackle them.

That said, it wasn't like Yuyui was weak because of this.

She had learned a lot of skills and evolved them with the help of the guidance field. A lot of them. That was one of the perks of having such a mystical cheat. Her growth was a sharp incline!

This wasn't her limit though. Yuyui was yet to explore more about her Hidden Class from the Temple of Unlusted Tears. Bassbion and Yagrina, the spirits trapped within...

If she managed to awaken a third eye of the twelve she was supposed to have, the spirit guardians would come under her as subordinates, which would be a terrifying boon!

Additionally, awakening the third eye seemed to possess some kind of substantial increment to her overall strength, moreso than awakening the first two eyes. After all, it was the quarter-way point to the whole.

Yuyui had a plan to reach that level but it all depended on Ferex and the Hound had guaranteed that he would help her after clearing the Cluster they were about to go into now.

As for why she hadn't asked Ferex to do whatever this was sooner, it was because she felt like she wasn't ready. The incident at the Temple had weighed more on her than she had thought and with the madness she had been entangled with after journeying with Replacus, she hadn't had the time to settle her thoughts.

'If I find some closure, I'm sure I'll get the third eye. It's really all about emotions. Just like how I awakened the Eye of Dispersal with master back then,' Yuyui thought.

Soon, she too could comfortably stand by Skullius' side as a fully realised valuable asset.

Before then though, she had a long way to go and was still in a kind of competition with Ferex for power, the Apostle in question rising steadily to match her pace.

~~~

[ Name : Ferex ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Apostle Trait : None ]

[ Rank : None ]

[ Level : 21 ]

[ Race : Adaptable Body Steel Hound ]

[ Inv. Status : Extra determined ]

-----

[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 5,709 ]

[Agility : 10, 680 ]

[ Intelligence : 9,664 ]

[ Endurance : Infinite ]

[ Luck : 5 ]

-----

[ Health : 8,509/8509 ]

-----

[ Mana : 17,543/17,543 ]

-----

[ Null Life Essence : 6,000/6,000 ]

-----

[ Skills ]

[ Null Life Aura | Lv.4 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Stars of the Fallen | Lv. 56 ]

[ Greatest Hurdle Charge | Lv.78 ]

[ Greatest Lightning Speedster | Lv 44 ]

[ Brute Might | Lv. 67 ]

[ Great Chomping | Lv.11 ]

[ Greater Lunge | Lv.22 ]

[ Ramp-up | Lv.89 ]

<Racial>

[ Unlimited Self Refinement | Lv.19 ]

[ OTHERWORLDY COPY! | Lv.65 ]

[ Soul Lord | Lv.69 ]

[ Greater Unlimited Thread Generator | Lv.11 ]

[ Thread Weaving : Environmental Devastation | Lv. 30 ]

<Mutation>

[ Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide ]

> Spirit Touch

[ Null Steel Core ]

....

~~~

Yuyui grimaced once again.

It was tradition at this point. Looking at Ferex's guidance field status was a way to motivate herself but it also brought her down the dumps.

This bastard had grown strong, especially with his soul manipulation ability that had evolved from [Dark Soul Bending] to [Soul Lord]. It was a cheat really, and Yuyui called foul!

Everything that followed after Ferex leapt to Tier 2, becoming the Adaptable Body Steel Hound was ridiculous. He had awakened another type of Unliving Thread, awakened another mutation, gotten high stats and...

Urgh.

The Hound could overwhelm strong opponents easily with his arsenal. This was how Ferex beat his Flaw – by making sure any fight he got into wasn't a fight at all!

Soon, the two reached the Cluster, with Ferex instantly taking on his humanoid form.

The Cluster was a vibrant blue crack carved into the sky amazingly like a permanently frozen blue bolt of lightning, inches away from touching the ground.

Within it would be some powerful creatures and the two were ready.

Ferex manifested from his storage ring the giant greatsword which had belonged to the Grand Flame Breeder, and wielded it in his hands.

"Let's go," the Hound said in a determined voice, oblivious to what direction had in store.

Chapter 647: Lurking Fate! (2)

The agonised hiss of a serpent as it was carved into two strips rang out, splashes of blood raining onto the rough ground. Yuyui while reverse handling her dagger was like mini-deity well versed in the art of the curved, short blade, dishing out equally devastating measures of death.

The look of focus in her eyes as she darted here and there, evading flighty ambushes from snakes that jutted out of the endless stretch of burrows in the floor, walls and ceiling was nothing short of inspiring.

This wasn't the same Yuyui who had sulked in weakness. It was as if she was a different person!

The lime haired girl spun backwards, avoiding ten serpents that zipped down from the openings in the ceiling with their white fangs ready to expose a peculiar attack as well as a hateful bite.

She then stormed back to where she had been standing and with her arm swinging ferociously, masterfully even, her dagger which spat fire from the edges turned the black scaled serpents into partly-cooked and sliced slabs of meat ready for kebabbing.

"Phew..." Yuyui took a breather.

This Cluster had a troublesome layout. Usually the Clusters she encountered had worlds that were more or less comfortable to fight in, even if they gave specific advantages to their inhabitants. This one however, was different.

Over the hardened, constantly slopping ground painted with red soils, countless holes could be seen, unevenly distributed everywhere she looked. Their sizes differed too, which was rather annoying.

When she focused adequately, Yuyui could hear the slithering within these holes, spelling the approach of her enemies that came in different variations of size, much to hers and Ferex's detriment – having to guess which size a serpent would be when they shot from the hole to attack.

Above the nimbleness of the serpents which made for a trying time because they all had stats amplified by blue cores, they all had an annoying ability.

Yuyui shot her head to the left when she heard the slightest hints of movement within the narrow corridor she was currently in. A serpent as a thick her thigh poked its head out, opened its mouth and hissed menacingly, a storm of mana flowing from its mouth.

Then, a dastardly, unnatural darkness crept from its maw along with the sound of its angry call, its pervasive nature crawling from the wall speedily in an attempt to submerge Yuyui like a dark sea!

The lime haired girl remained calm, not showing any signs of moving to attack or evade. Instead, the skin on her forehead parted to reveal an eye with dark sclera and an ice blue iris that glared at the serpent!

The creature reeled back in shock, first at the power contained within the eye and second... at how the darkness it had cast was dispersed instantly!

Only when its attack had vanished did Yuyui deal a definitive fatal blow to put down her enemy.

'All things considered these things aren't that hard to kill. If you prevent them from using that darkness or kill them before they can use it, there's basically no threat. Though... THAT feeling was unpleasant...' Yuyui thought, her memory retreating to her experience with the serpent Cluster beasts' darkness ability.

She had been the one to dive into the Cluster first, just in case there was something that could give her and Ferex a tough fight, which wouldn't be too good for the Adaptable Body Steel Hound.

When the obscure darkness from the serpents touched anything, living or otherwise, it ate it all rapidly like a corrosive acid. While this occurred, it was needless to mention that there was no window for sight. Blindness would be the only company you had while you were swallowed whole.

This was a formidable attack.

Thankfully, Yuyui was immune to death and after learning how the attacked worked, the impromptu demonstration also assisting Ferex, beating these monsters became easier to beat.



Speaking of the Apostle, he was a few paces ahead of Yuyui where the ground sloped downwards.

Even though beasts with blue cores would have been trying for him in a physical contest, Ferex was actually having an easier time in this Cluster than Yuyui.

The Apostle was surrounded by a growing mound of serpent corpses, some still twitching after fairly recent deaths.

Tens more of these legless enemies shot from the burrows all around, some already opening their mouths to spit shadow-like darkness. Ferex who already had his hand extended out in preparation for attacks he couldn't react to because of the physical stat gap, activated [Soul Lord] once more.

The threads that had been present when he used [Dark Soul Bending] last time were gone, and only a ghostly blue light flared from him in a circular arc to show his area of dominance and reign over his enemies' souls!

The serpents were suddenly brought to a halt, with no exception.

Immediately after the effect of his skill took hold, Ferex brandished his greatsword, the Cross Pyre and pointed it at the mess of black, slithery bodies ensnared by his power. The weapon glowed in a menacing orange hue before spewing hot flames that scorched everything before him with a violent force, digging a massive cross shaped indentation in the narrow corridor at same time!

The hiss of the snakes was unnerving yet satisfying as they were burnt to death.

The others still hidden within the holes in the thick walls staved away from the fire and sought to catch Ferex off guard through other burrows but as they escaped the safety of darkness to shoot close to the Apostle, a tight grip on their souls sealed their fate. From there Ferex only had to cleave their heads and move on.

The seemingly limitless application of [Soul Lord] allowed Ferex to overcome differences in strength between himself and enemies with better cores, though he didn't use it in many complex ways in said circumstances as the stronger his opponent, the stronger their soul.

~~~

[Soul Lord | Lv.]

The user is able to make the souls of lesser or equal opponents turn docile in his presence while stronger souls, depending on the disparity, can be stunned for short periods. Only a 4 meter radius of control can be achieved without coming into physical contact with the target while the vice versa doubles the range.

Mana Requirements: 3,000 Mana Points, 1500 Mana every minute

Duration: ---

Cooldown: None

~~~

With the bright flame ahead illuminating his frame, Ferex turned back to find Yuyui approaching.

"Let's keep moving," the lime haired girl said. "I hate snakes. They are weird. The sooner we finish this, the better."

"I too must admit, these are not the type of opponents I favour, servant Yuyui," Ferex also dejectedly declared.

Seeing the Apostle's drop in enthusiasm, Yuyui smiled and patted his shoulder – by taking a leap to actually reach it – and gave some encouragement.

"We'll hunt for better Clusters tomorrow, alright?" she said.

The Apostle nodded.

Another rustling came, though faint and Yuyui instantly responded.

"Two more are coming. Big ones."

With her alert, the two stood back to back.

"Let me handle their creepy ability. You go for the kill," she said to which Ferex nodded..

In the next moment, not one but two large black serpents with shiny scales darted out from both sides of the walls, both their maws open to push out a starving darkness.

Yuyui's Eye of Dispersal fully opened, thwarting her enemies' attacks – she started with Ferex's opponent and then her own in one quick motion – and then leapt up to dice the coiling Cluster beast on her side to death.

Ferex on the other hand didn't have the time to activate [Soul Lord] again because his opponent was particular quick, so he first braced for impact, his whole scaly body being covered in the pristine glow of the magic spells etched onto every one of his individual scales!

At the same time, on his arm, a thick shield made of light grey steel spawned in the blink of an eye, at its centre, the pale glow from golden, tangled Unliving Threads being seen!

The serpent, which was as thick as Yuyui's entire body rammed into the Adaptable Body Steel Hound but failed to make him budge even an inch!

Before it could recoil for another attack, a soul stunning attack rendered it motionless for a second, just enough for it to be sliced apart by the Cross Pyre which slashed upwards.

The effectiveness Ferex's combo was unparalleled.

After evolution, he had awakened another mutation other than the [Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide], as it was for a creatures like him with an inhuman base.

What he got was the [Steel Core], a small spherical metallic orb that was forged in his abdomen. Because of it, light grey steel which was highly conductive to Null Life Essence could be forged anywhere on his body, the amount and shape depending on how much mana he employed.

The core itself was like a mana core, but instead of generating mana, it generated steel which Ferex could use to create anything he wanted!

Coupling this steel which he mainly used for defence, with another type of Unliving Thread he had awakened that was capable of absorbing impacts, produced stellar results!

Yuyui and Ferex reformed their back to back formation, watching and listening for other incoming opponents as they moved.

Several minutes passed.

Several suspicious quiet minutes.

"I'm guessing the General is coming. Right?" Yuyui said.

"I've been saving up my mana for it. Let it come," Ferex declared.

Another stretch of seconds passed with nothing happening but this only served to make the duo even more tense.

Yet, before they could consider any other forms of action... it happened.

Darkness started to creep from behind them, travelling through the widening tunnel they had been traversing . It moved slowly but that did not put the two at ease at all.

Yuyui faced ahead with her Eye of Dispersal, prompting for the darkness to be vanquished easily and she urged Ferex on while taking the lead.

Another burst of darkness stormed from beyond them still, this time with an unrelenting force but it still died off to Yuyui's optical powers.

Once again, it came and thrashed towards the two but Yuyui's wouldn't have it. It was futile as long as sh-

"Servant Yuyui!" Ferex called, prompting the lime haired girl to turn her two eyes slightly behind him in order to not break her focus from the threat in front.

...!!!

A speeding, almost desperate wave of darkness was throwing itself from their rear as well, moving too quickly for compromise!

Chapter 648: Lurking Fate! (3)

Yuyui cursed and instantly turned behind them, prioritising Ferex's safety first since she couldn't die.

The darkness coming from Ferex's side was dispelled but before Yuyui could turn back to her own share of poison, the pitch black veil had already enveloped her, with its wash over her body having the same effect as being cooked!

This was different from before. When Yuyui had been harmed by the darkness from the serpents before, it hadn't been enough to damage her armour but this...

Boils festered on Yuyui's skin as she grunted, eating her flesh away in mere moments, her Legendary grade armour crumbling visibly. Before her Eye of Dispersal could be devoured whole too, she use it to dispel the darkness... but more was coming behind!

What was happening?

Was this the Cluster General?

If so, how was it attacking from two completely opposite directions?

Was there more than one?

Yuyui had never encountered a situation like that before. The worst part was that since the location of whatever was doing this was difficult to reach, possibly impossible even, she and Ferex couldn't kill this enemy without scouring a large portion of Cluster if not all of it!

Ferex dove into one of the openings in the wall to evade the darkness and started crawling wherever it lead.

Since it was big enough to contain his entire body while he was crouching, the Apostle moved faster while willing a light grey crude sword to emerge from his palm. He then coated it with mana, nearly oversaturating it to provide light. By waving it around, he got the chance to see his surroundings clearly.

As one would expect, the deeper Ferex went, the more a feeling of foreboding crept up on his tough armor body. He was in enemy territory. He could be swarmed easily here. This sentiment prompted him to apply more mana to his body, igniting the arrays etched onto his scales in preparation for what was to come.

In the distance, he heard Yuyui grunt and start to race forward.

"Ferex, if you can, follow my voice! We'll meet up ahead!" she yelled, seemingly having saved herself from the encroaching darkness.

Ferex began moving faster.

There were a lot of junctions and an intricately designed network of burrows but as he moved, Ferex did not see any of the dark serpents. What made this even more strange was the fact that the crevice he had started to move through grew every few meters, until he could even stand within it.

The holes in the walls, ceiling and floor grew more in number but still no attacks came.

Another call came from Yuyui, directing him towards where to go but there wasn't an opening large enough for Ferex to go through and he feared that simply destroying the wall would do more harm than good.

On the other hand, going straight ahead... would probably lead him somewhere unpleasant, but it was the better option, as he thought. He couldn't evade the enemy forever. Also, he could call Yuyui over if he met the General... or Generals.

Thus Ferex bolted ahead, preparing his heavy hitters as he watched the corridor grow larger and larger, make a curve and lead to a dimly lit, open space ahead.

It seemed this was where the corridor or tunnel ended.

Before he was even ten meters from it, Ferex heard an almost hypnotic cacophony of noises. More than several hisses, to be precise.

When tens of thousands of eyes lit up from the dark space ahead, all with him in sight, Ferex knew it was danger had resumed its call.

Then...

Thousands of serpents burst from the open space, all of them viciously opening their mouths to spread the signature darkness!

...!

Ferex extended his hand which held the [Cross Pyre] and the great sword spat out a ghastly stream of flames that began melting the walls to this corridor immediately!

As it met the darkness, its light did not seem to dispel the eerie attack. Instead, it sank in wholly, the efficacy of it when it made contact with the swarm of enemies becoming an unknown!

The attack from the serpents though, did not need any speculation of its result. Ferex could only respond to it by summoning thick plates of light grey armour around his body!

When the darkness devoured him, these plates held better than he had imagined. He felt them being eaten away, as if they were being eroded to rust but the process wasn't as quick, especially when he infused Null Life Essence into them!

With the time he had, Ferex blindly brandished his sword while also preparing to use [Soul Lord ] but...

...!

An immense force rammed into violently, sending him flying tens of meters away!

Ferex crashed and rolled, the bits of light that remained within the enclosed space after the darkness attack had passed serving his surprised sight that eagerly wanted to see what had struck him just now!

To his shock, the thousands of snakes he had seen were melded into each, forming... forming a gigantic dark scaled serpent that glared at Ferex with its large green eyes!

Wait!

Was the Cluster General actually the thousands of serpents combined?

A forked tongue slipped from the creature's mouth before it rushed towards the Apostle at a shocking speed!

Ferex in turn quickly morphed into a slender, shiny wolf-hound that zipped away in the opposite direction!

While he fast, his giant enemy quickly caught up and sent another plume of darkness that contended with Ferex's quickly manifesting steel.

With the darkness blinding him, the Apostle crashed multiple times as he couldn't see, this forcing him to take up his humanoid form again where, with the Cross Pyre, he unleashed the full pyro kinetic might of the Legendary grade weapon, a devastating attack instantly melted everything around him with a fierce, unforgiving heat!

This did not deter the massive serpent, unfortunately. It blitzed through the molten ground, sustaining damage but knocked it Ferex vehemently anyway!

As if this treachery wasn't enough, from the other side of the corridor, another blinding wave of darkness smothered everything – the orange hue of lava and the crumbling surroundings!

Where did this batch of darkness come from?!

Another giant serpent?!



Ferex found his steel plates eroding under the darkness once more and in the next moment, he was smacked hard from the other side, his figure crashing on the ceiling and then the floor!

Things were looking dire.

Ferex feared that using [Soul Lord] on thousands of serpents with blue cores brought together would simply be a waste of mana. Truly, this opponent was not an easy one. Some would even say it was bad match-up for Ferex but the real issue remained.

Ferex was weak.

Unlike Skullius and Red Rage who had gotten the chance to earn unique evolutions, Ferex was standard at best, as far as Null Lifeforms went. This was why he had been trying so hard to grow stronger. As he was, he wouldn't be able to be of use to his master.

He even recalled that his master had wanted him to become a speed oriented summon, but circumstances had dictated otherwise. He had been proud of what he could do, but at his current level, opponents like could overwhelm him easily.

The luminous sockets of the Adaptable Body Steel Hound flickered sullenly.

He remembered delving deep into Skullius' soul and seeing a little creature that his master loved so much. It was small and powerless but his master had cherished it.

Its name had been Ferex, the original owner of his name.

At the time, the Apostle had decided to become a version of that little creature that his master could rely on but with the current set of events...

As the Apostle was smacked once again within the corrosive darkness, he felt his will to fight wane. It wasn't because he was giving up on battling for his life. No it was because...

'Is it really going to happen now?' Ferex wondered.

This situation had already devolved into a tough battle. No, a perilous one so naturally...

Suddenly, there was a crashing noise from the wall and the darkness was parted without warning, the image of a young woman with three eyes having come to rescue!

With clarity restored by the mysterious dull light that had already been present in the Cluster when the two challengers had entered, two large serpent heads glared at Yuyui and Ferex.

"Why did you grow quiet all of a sudden? Stand up!" the lime haired girl urged Ferex, though with a sullen expression at seeing his pathetic state.

The Apostle stood and brandished his great sword, but he was trembling.

He could feel it.

The RESET Flaw was already beginning to act now.

Chapter 649: Lurking Fate! (4)

Ferex felt a deep, crushing sensation that originated from the very depths of his being. It didn't feel like something that churned out from his mana core, but from a location more delicate and... precious.

Apostles didn't have souls.

What they did have, was a connection to a certain treasure that served as the home of all Null related beings and phenomenon. A Null source, would be a more apt term to describe it. It wasn't something that could be touched or connected to through ordinary means, but in this case, it was rattled.

The Adaptable Body Steel Hound trembled violently and dropped to the ground. Unlike Skullius, he didn't have a visual medium that projected the effect of the RESET and this was his first time going through the effect of his Flaw alone.

Different from all the other times, the RESET had begun before the battle was even over, something Ferex didn't understand.

It was sad to say, the crushing feeling of defeat he had allowed to overtake him just now, spelled to his internal Null Source that the battle, at least for him, was over.

Yuyui glanced back at the Apostle heavily concerned.

So far, with meticulous teamwork and preparation, they had overcome all manner of enemies together as a team, becoming close enough to understand the limits of each other's abilities. For so long, Yuyui had even forgotten that Ferex was way weaker because of his white core. The efficiency with which the Apostle had handled the more...

ordinary yet still powerful opponents, especially with her taking care of the more devastating abilities, gave the illusion that he was on the same level as her.

"Come on, Ferex!" she urged, but the Apostle was already under the spell of the Flaw that dictated that any challenging altercation he had would prompt a RESET of his abilities, personality and individualistic quirks – it still left out the raw progression though, his evolution Tier for instance.

Yuyui evaded the vicious attacks from the serpents, her Eye of Dispersal cancelling out the corrosive darkness they dished out relentlessly. Using the eye for prolonged periods and against powerful attacks was taxing and she was starting to feel the burden of strain.

Furthermore, throwing her own body every which way the attacks came from to try and repel the physical charges of these massive serpents as they caused calamitous destruction without any regard for the integrity of the Cluster, was also challenging!

'If even I am having trouble with this...!' she thought while gritting her teeth.

Her pace of growth was too slow and perhaps Ferex's too. Blue Clusters still had monsters that could challenge them like so, which was telling of their not so special level of power.

While the lime haired girl was struggling, Ferex's body jerked into an unnatural shape.

Slowly, he began to feel parts of himself crumbling.

No!

His strength started to vanish!

No!

His memories started to disintegrate!

No!

No, no, no, no!

The Apostle couldn't bear to be forced to forget.

His relationship with his master.

What he had seen within Skullius' soul, which he considered precious.

The moments he had shared with Yuyui for the past three weeks.

What he had learned and experienced until now combat wise and in general.

All of it.

For it to all be erased because he had a challenging battle...

"NO!" the Apostle expressed overwhelming rebellion against this mandatory, authoritative force!

Then he thought, as the thick plates of light grey armour began to crumble away from his body. His master had once rejected the RESET right? Back when he had successfully used the RESET to refresh the cooldowns of all his skills.

Granted, the circumstances were different. He and Skullius had been merged as one being through [Bringer of All] with his master at helm, which was not the same with this circumstance.

But still...

Could he try to do the same?

This was his body!

He had the right to refuse the RESET, didn't he?!

The Apostle gathered the remnants of his individual will to fight against his Null Source!

He rejected the Flaw's influence with all he had!

His sockets flared with a super bright light that depicted a glimpse of the struggle that was going on within him, the brightness of it attracting Yuyui who was struggling!

Ferex fought hard.

He denied it.

He rejected it.

He refused to start from zero again.

And...

To the Apostle's surprise, the plates of armour conjured from the [Steel Core] stopped disappearing after every breath. His tall form stopped regressing into that of his original wolverine form without even the basic coating of the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide!

Was it actually working?

The RESET had been trying to make him forget everything he had learned, not what he had acquired through evolution, which was why it was carving away the plates of light grey armour and his hide.

And now, since there were actually results...

Ferex's desperate attempt had merely been that... a desperate attempt! He hadn't know if it would work for sure but from the looks of it...

As he offered more resistance, the RESET seemingly came to a halt, his body remaining as it was without further changes!

"Servant Yuyui..." Ferex said, astonished.

The lime haired girl turned to see Ferex standing up and brandishing the Cross Pyre greatsword with renewed vigour. No small amount of surprise showed in her eyes, a smile even creeping up on her face.

She didn't know what happened but this was good!

She could ask all about it later.

"Don't just stand there then!" she called as she used one of her skills to knock one of the serpents away from her successfully, yet at a terrible cost in mana.

"Right..." Ferex responded with a fast lunge towards the enemy, all his enhancement skills working to boost his raw strength!

For the first time in a while, Ferex felt unshackled. He didn't really know the implications... or rather, he preferred not to think about them. He had escaped a cruel result right? Why not just move on and try not to make the same mistake?

'For now, I'll fight on...' the Apostle told himself, his resolve burning gloriously.

But...

Resolve was merely resolve. In the way of Rules, it was nothing but fragile glass to rock.

Ferex body collapsed on the ground unceremoniously, its frame sliding across the rough, heated surface below.

...!

Yuyui was startled.

The hell? What the actual freaking hell?

It had happened so fast and without warning!

What was with Ferex now?

The lime haired girl had a terrible feeling.

One of the large serpents she was battling saw this as an opportunity to finally put an end to one of these miserable invaders, its head hammering towards Ferex with all its might before Yuyui could react!

"NO!" the lime haired girl screamed as she rushed to try and protect her friend, desperation livid in her arms and legs.

Yet, suddenly...

Yuyui, the giant serpents, the falling rubble from the ceiling and the crumbling walls of the tunnel still moaning like thunder from being partially molten by the extreme heat that had borne out of the Cross Pyre...

Everything was held in place when a ghastly blue sphere of energy blew out of Ferex's body like a phantom shockwave, tinging everything in a similar hue!

Silence ensued.

This wasn't the effect of time being halted.

No.

It was masterful use of Null Life Essence.

Yuyui and the serpents could only move their eyes while frozen in their previous poses, over and under them hanging pieces of rock sharing in the same fate – witnessing the slow rise of Ferex's body.

The scale armoured body of the Apostle cracked and began transforming into transparent wisps of thin cloth that grew and grew as the moments ticked by.

The sturdy frame of the Adaptable Body Steel Hound quickly morphed with a vortex spin, its build forcibly changed by the Null Source into something completely different.

Yuyui's eyes constricted.

A...creature appeared in Ferex's place.

Could it even be called a creature? It was more like an apparition. A ghost.

It was adorned in long whitish blue robes that extended from its unnaturally tall frame that seamlessly sank into the ceiling, hiding a portion of its torso, to cover the, heated ground like a carpet.

The sleeves of its robe masked thin limbs that were pressed against the unknown fabric, the same being true for the rest of this raiment as it seemed fairly determined to hide its owner's body underneath.

It was bewildering to look up at a potential enemy and not see its head simply because of its height. Anyone would be given a free pass from being flustered in such an encounter.



Yuyui sure was.

Even though this new monster seemed ethereal, it seemed to draw a distant, sharp breath and take audible steps on the burning ground.

Then...

It swiped its concealed hand lazily and another burst of Null Life Essence... silently erased everything around it.

Everything.

Before a breath could pass, the Cluster was destroyed, as well as everything in it, this apparition finding itself standing under the bright, rising sun of Aigas.

A collection of energies that had been forcefully disassembled still swam in the air, their tangling mash of colour still pervading the surroundings, though only for a few seconds more.

"I have been called to another world? Is it not too soon? I thought HE was yet to even begin the ritual. Or perhaps... does this have nothing to do with him at all."

A soft, alluring voice that belonged to neither a man or woman came from the apparition's head – a massive ball of cobalt blue fire that settled over its shoulders.

This was another reason to panic just from this being's looks.

Its half a mile tall existence, wholesomely frightening as it was, tread forward, turning its flame head this way and that.

It then turned to its robes.

Ghostly fragments of the beautiful raiment were already breaking away, spelling that its form was rapidly coming undone even though it had just appeared.

"How cruel you are, my lady Serenity. You would grant such grace only to take it away from your loyal servant?" the apparition said with a hum. "Nomatter. I shall not waste this chance. There has to be a suitable vessel carrier in these rich lands."

Suddenly, something drew the attention of the creature, causing its ghostly flame to lean below.

A pale, utterly shaken Yuyui was on ground panting heavily while looking up at the apparition wordlessly. Her mouth was agape, her eyes barely believing what had just happened as well as what she was seeing right now.

"Hmmm? I thought I destroyed all the nuisances just now. How could you be alive, curious thing?" the apparition asked but Yuyui couldn't hear. She couldn't understand what it was saying.

"Ah, wait. This one knows. I see now."

The apparition expressed realisation and then surprise. Slowly, knowledge trickled in from the mind from its host. Seconds later, it looked at Yuyui in a new light.

"Hmmm..."

The lime haired girl appeared as a vivid turquoise blue outline with a small dark blue flame burning within it, much to the apparition's slight disappointment.

But still... this was no ordinary lifeform, clearly. Besides that, she was...

"Well... perhaps you can be a carrier for my promised vessel still," the apparition said.

A thin arm stormed out of the lengthy robes of this creature. A thin, bone arm with a pristine shine.

It had a mesmerising, borderline hypnotic energy about it that seduced even space and time.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?" the apparition asked with a voice that rang sweetly in Yuyui's ears, replacing the need for comprehending its language with attractive intent.

As the creature's arm neared Yuyui who couldn't even lift a finger in fright, the Eye of Dispersal opened wide on her forehead and dispelled the encroaching influence from the apparition with struggling shudder!

"Oh... Even this does not work on you? Truly curious!" the apparition said with jovial energy. "If that be the case my immortal friend, travel with me!"

Before the trembling Yuyui knew it, her body had left the ground and she was flying off at an unreal speed in a familiar direction.

She didn't know it but she was the first in this world to encounter a formidable, dangerous being.

The World-ending Null Terror, the Full Deck BoneTender.

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[Author's Note]

In case you'd forgotten.

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Due to its unique powers, the Limitless Body Null Demon Hound has inherited a flaw to balance its existence among the natives of different worlds.

The Limitless Body Null Demon Hound **MUST** be **RESET** immediately after any intense or strenuous confrontation. If not, there is a **CHANCE** that it will forcefully evolve into the world-ending Null Terror, the Full Deck BoneTender. You have been **WARNED**.)

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Chapter 650: Lurking Fate! (5)

Belvion Union.

Dionas was seated with the Governor of this city, the differences in their postures being stark representatives of who was in charge and who was not.

The bald man wore a smug grin as servants brought in sacks full of gold coins and laid them on the table between him and the short Governor who was sweating profusely.

"You thought you could swindle sixty thousand in gold past me? How tactless and inconsiderate. Your miserable existence has been well fed and well defended for the past eight years and you dare insult me like this?" Dionas scoffed.

"No, I..."

"Quiet! All gold in this city is mine. I manage every operation. I manage livelihoods. I manage your security. All you have to do is smile and wave at the crowd while feeding on the crumbs I leave you.

Is that not enough? If I see some more...heroism from you again..."

"You will not, Lord Dionas, I swear!" the Governor shrunk while bowing to his knees.

"And you call me a tyrant?" Dionas said as he stood, one the guards at his side collecting the fat gold sacks into his spatial storage.

The bald man exited the building and entered his flashy carriage which immediately set out.

'These Governors are getting more and more bold. Was he gathering the money to fund some sort of resistance or was he simply trying to use it to win the people? I should consider replacing him and all the others,' Dionas thought.

Dionas had seen it all before. The benevolent, righteous types that tried to serve the people well enough to encourage them to fight against his rise and those that save up coin to buy mercenaries that could overthrow him...

They had all fallen eternally silent and been buried far deep with their resolve.

At the end of the day, tyranny and money was what made a man invincible. Dionas had learned this the hard way.

'Now, I should probably go t—'

BOOOOOOOOOM!

In the distance, a thunderous explosion sounded, with a mighty shockwave blowing outward like sandstorm to eradicate infrastructure throughout the entire city!

Dionas' carriage was pushed away by the remnants of the stupefying momentum, causing it to fly high and hard to the ground!

The thrumming vibrations that sounded from the ground tickled Dionas' hands that were pressed against the dusty ground, the weight of the carriage leaning against him making him cough and grunt in pain!

His guards were nowhere to be seen and everything that was reflected in his eyes was in shambles.

Buildings had collapsed, many people were screaming in pain with torn limbs or dead – impaled, crushed by falling debris or shredded mercilessly by the force of the shockwave!

'Dear Quintess...' Dionas paled.

What was this?

What happened?

\*

The BoneTender stood tall in the midst of the city, its ethereal robes fluttering serenely.

Few who had been near where it landed had survived and some of those who were alive right now were barely hanging by a thread.

In the sight of the BoneTender, the living humans had flames burning within them, though there were differences in the size and ferocity of the flame – some were larger than others.

'Curious... Why are these beings so weak? Their deaths would not provide that much Null Life Essence. Ah, is it perhaps... Are there Deities in this world protecting them?' the Bone Tender thought with the shake of its head.

No matter.

What it sought was not Null Life Essence anyway.

It needed clusters upon clusters of burning emotions that formed desires... ambitions. All of it from as many living things as possible. And fast.

Unlike millenia ago, there were restrictions imposed upon it now, just as it was with other weaker Null Lifeforms that had managed to escape from Serenity's treasure. Her prison. The same case was with its host.

Flaws.

It couldn't wantonly appeal to any creature it wanted to do as it pleased with them anymore.

This was a challenge, given the time limit it has.

The fragments of light dispersing from its robe were telling, turning it dimmer and tearing it apart slowly.

On the ground beside its feet, Yuyui had spawned once again thanks to the Inhumane Eye, the force of the landing having killed her instantly.

It took her a few moments to realise what was happening, but when she did...

'Are we back at... No! What is it going to do?!' she thought while looking up at the tall apparition which quivered vehemently and started to... duplicate!

...!

Slender variations of the BoneTender flashed out of its original body, their proportions smaller but equally as horrific!

They sped through the air at rapid speeds like shooting stars and sought out all the humans in the vicinity, energetic, almost desperate resolve fueling them.

One of the BoneTenders reached a young woman who was partially buried under thick rubble, blood gushing from her mouth as her life flashed in front of her cloudy eyes.

The Bone Tender loomed over her, its pristine bony hands caressing her face.

Sadly, this woman, like all the other humans here couldn't see the BoneTender as Yuyui could but a seductive energy invaded her mind, attracting her to the voice of the Bone Tender, dismissing the need to comprehend the language it spoke.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?" the Bone Tender asked patiently.

The woman felt a feverish joy that encouraged her to say 'yes' and she didn't struggle against it. She was at death's door. Anything was better than the darkness about to smother her. Her lips curved, an involuntary smile creeping into her blood face as she answered the damn question.

"Yes," she said.

Immediately, before her eyes, 72 cards appeared in her sight, all of them with different abstract designs acted as their cover. Behind the abstract design, the identity of different realities were depicted on these cards that floated in the air in neat rows, hiding their content from the woman. She just had to pick a card and then it would reveal what it had in store.

"Then pick your fate," the Bone Tender said.

The woman did not need elaboration as the seductive feeling invading her mind nudged informative detail to her.

All she had to do was pick a card.

To pick a fate.

Even the Bone Tender could not influence what she chose.

With little thought because she was fading fast, the woman picked a card and when her choice was registered, the card flipped, showing the minimalistic depiction of a humanoid figure bathing in gold coins!

The Bone Tender sighed in defeat.

"A shame..."

In the next moment, as promised by the Bone Tender's deck, gold coins began falling on the dying woman in abundance, their ring as they knocked against each other, falling from thin space resounding with morbidity.

Slowly, they buried the woman under their weight and unending rain, finishing the last embers of her life in the process.

In another location, a young man who had been trying to pull his unconscious, bloody wife from a ditch was visited by one of the Bone Tenders, its touch on his face luring him into a sweet trance that made him drop his beloved without care.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?"

The young man hesitated, but fell for the delightful feeling as well.

As a deck of cards hung in the air before him, he too chose his fate, his card depicting the minimalistic image of a humanoid figure with tears in its eyes, a dark storm cloud over its head.



'What a terrible choice...' the Bone Tender scoffed while watching as the air turned furious, a dark cloud that spilled heavy rains and lightning rising up above the man to cover the sky!

The man suddenly started to weep bitterly, cradling his legs like a child in a sudden fit of violent sorrow that prompted the storm clouds above to spew even more treacherous amounts of rain and lightning!

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious empty bliss that may last for all undone time?"

This same question was presented over and over and over again to every living, conscious human in the city, with obscure gifts or evil omens being the reward.

One child chose a card with the minimalistic depiction of a bulky man with a mighty air of transcendent power around him and that fate was what he received.

His body glowed with a blue light and he felt an endless surge of raw physical might that rivalled that of a Peak Master Stage expert. He began cackling madly moments later and drowning this power, losing his sanity.

Another, a woman who had been cowering within her half destroyed house chose a card that depicted a humanoid figure crossing a vertical line to the other half of the card where its image turned hazy and a bit discoloured.

As reality would have it, she died immediately but her soul remained, floating over her corpse in astonishment.

"Curious..." the main body of the Full Deck Bone Tender said. The results were as random as always, but some were already promising.

There were six powerful presences it already sensed within the city, meaning that its makeshift, secondary objective had been fulfilled but... its primary one remained.

One of these humans needed to pick or be chosen by that card before it was too late, otherwise this unexpected chance would be wasted.

Just one of them needed to choose that card.

If not...

"Oh..." the apparition's attention was ensnared by something burning bright from the distance.

It grabbed the frightened Yuyui in its hand and rushed towards the source of this light.

As direction would have it, a bald human trapped under a wooden locomotive was emitting this attractive light.

No.

It wasn't light.

It was a bright flame. A bonfire, in fact!

Unlike the rest of the humans here, he was completely different. His ambition and desire, it was too grand!

The Bone Tender expectantly reached its bony hand to Dionas' face and caressed it, bringing his panic to a hold.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?" it asked.

The result was...