

# Undead 801

## Chapter 801: 'Idling' In The Territory

It was Yuyui's first time entering a Territory, even if it was a dormant one. Because of past experiences, she knew what a Territory projected by a beast would look like, especially in relation to its surroundings, but deliberately trapping herself within it wasn't something she was too happy about.

However, since Replicus nonchalantly followed after Timmit the grumpy stork, she followed suit. Surely, if this bird suddenly went rogue and decided to attack, her master could do something about it, right?

These thoughts turned into fleeting whispers in her brain however, as she saw a large nest masterfully woven from dried grass and twigs that had the subtle misty overlay of sturdy, pure mana.

The round structure of about seven meters in radius stood over the beefy trunk of a severed tree which supported it firmly through the kinds of bird sorcery Replicus wasn't familiar with.

The two eggs within; one the size of a human head, with a grating scaly texture like stone, and a brownish hue, as well as the other which was about four times larger, with a pale turquoise lustre on its smooth shell, were making some ripe movements.

The smaller egg had a shallow crack on its face, and while the other was yet to show signs of a breach, it trembled violently.

The haze of mana around the nest seemed to be propagating the fierce reactions from within the eggs. It wasn't a surprise however, because within this Territory, where lush red vegetation thrived, a staggering volume of pure mana could be seen gathering above in a bland sky, and slowly dripping down like translucent rain.

Seeing the eggs, Replicus' sockets lit up frightfully.

"Look at this. These eggs are moments away from hatching. You weren't trying to bond with them before calling me over, were you?" Replicus asked in an accusing tone.

Timmit took lackadaisical steps into the large nest and settled comfortably. His eyes depicted a human-like lax.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Replicus shook his head.

Yuyui poked him, garnering his attention for another question as to what they were doing here, but he gestured for her to be patient and to look around if she would.

She didn't like the idea.

Replicus sat down on the oddly coloured grass, and the clouds that clung to him rose to gather above him, leaving his starkly black skeleton on full display.

"Urgh. Vile!" Timmit remarked.

"Right back at you. Try to be more bird-like, will you?" Replicus shot back.

Timmit clapped his beak.

"Making yourself at home, are you? You know how much energy it takes to gather all this pure mana, pfff?"

"The forest is producing it, not you. Besides, you can keep your Territory open almost indefinitely. I'm not about to feel sorry for you, sockethole."

Timmit looked appalled, which, when his beak pried open to properly display how he felt, looked utterly hilarious.

Replicus ignored the stork.

He looked to focus as he sat down, on the mana visible in different shapes around and above.

Through a plethora of experiences, Skullius had discovered that pure mana was different from that which humans expelled from mana cores for their skills – though it was produced from the Centre of the core once a mana core was established, only to be changed by the Refinery.

Pure mana was also different from cumulative mana experience, as it was completely devoid of artificial influence, and at most it carried the aspects of wherever it was situated. Natural concepts and elements for instance.

Humans raised their stats by levelling up, as all creatures did, but to efficiently boost their physical properties, they absorbed the energy from Enriching Gems. As Skullius had discovered months before, his Penetrator form fell under the beast category, and thus while adopting it, he couldn't absorb the gems like humans did.

Because of this, he found this inability of beasts to improve stats with gems to contradict how powerful some of them – those not from Clusters at least – got even when considering that evolving gave them a lot of said stats, but soon, he learned the secret.

Indeed, it was pure mana.

Beasts raised from Sacred Forests and outside special spaces, could refine pure mana through their bodies to enhance their mana cores. They could inflate their mana values to an extreme degree, and by evolving to higher Tiers, they rapidly mastered how to condense their mana cores to the next level – blue, purple and gold – consciously, which in turn bulked up their other stats furiously.

It was a longer process, but it was effective.

Skullius had been told before by Benzard, back in the Tremur Forest, that beasts only became troublesome when they reached the Fourth Tier. This was undoubtedly part of what he meant.

Replicus took a breath, though the sound that occurred was more like that which one would hear when a gust of wind blew into a cave mouth.

The pure mana in Timmit's Territory gushed towards him in droves, entering his body at once.

When it was there, Replicus applied what he had been taught by Timmit some time ago – a secret he had only learned after making an important trade – and then...

[Your mana has increased by 1,500]

[Your mana has increased by 700]

[Your mana has increased by 500]

...

Once again, Replicus' second mana core trembled as a wild gush of mana bellowed within it.

He took another breath.

[Your mana has increased by 2,000]

[Your mana has increased by 1,200]

[Your mana has increased by 850]

"That's enough you bastard pfff! Some of us have to create savings!" Timmit squawked.

Replicus looked exasperated.

"Really? I was just getting started."

"Started?! I have already been hospitable by allowing you to drain my supplies! If you had one mana core, I would have allowed you another minute, but two?!" Timmit flapped his wings violently in rage. "Wait! Was that your play all along for suddenly coming without my call, pfff?! To steal some pure mana from me?!"

"Of course not. I'm just here for the eggs."

Yuyui watched with a dumbfounded visage. Her unwavering attention on the eggs had been drawn away by the tiff here.

What was this?

If it was her from before she got stuck in the Temple of Unlusted Tears, she wouldn't have believed that a bird and a skeleton were having this kind of interaction.

It looked absurd.

A few moments of quarrelling later, Replicus turned to a serious discussion with Timmit.

"So, you heard any news about that quaking?" the Penetrator asked.

The stork settled back down and adopted a complicated look in its eyes.

"Yes. It's bad. I went off to meet a few old friends on the mainland some time ago. Urgh. Everything is going wrong. I barely made it back myself.

Giant towers are springing up from the ground and spitting out unbelievably powerful monstrosities. Some guardians have had to intervene to save entire regions. Some powerful humans too."

Replicus' sockets flashed with a deeper light.

"Towers?"

"Yes. It's only happening in Pelian though, but I've seen some of those fiends spotting wings! Wings! One of them even chased after me! Sooner or later, those monstrosities will probably become everyone's problem, pfff."

Replicus pulled his fingers to his chin.

Well, that was unexpected.

No wonder the Factions had been called, and by the mysterious Immortals no less, if they truly existed.

But the way Timmit described...

"What did these towers look like? Did you get a good look?"

The stork looked insulted by the question. His long neck drew back.

"Get a closer look? Get a closer look?!"

Replicus raised his hand, gesturing that he knew how absurd that sounded. But...

"Well, yes I did get a look! More like a glance. Horrible things. I felt like I shouldn't have seen. They looked old. Too old.

As if they predate the seas!" Timmit shook his head.

Replicus went deep into thought.

Well, if that was the case.

Perhaps he was right or maybe he wrong, but...

'It's more or less confirmation. I was weary about what he would do in the end. It's probably...'

Suddenly, there was a chipping and cracking noise.

The smaller egg in the nest began to hatch, rather eagerly at that.

Whatever was inside had had enough of a being cramped in the small space all this time. If one could be presumptuous, they'd say whatever it was, was a little claustrophobic.

A moment later, the egg shattered, and a little thing emitted a scream of effort, along with a tongue of furious orange-pink fire that showered Yuyui, melting her in an instant!

...!

"Bright Storm! Bright Storm!" Timmit yapped urgently. He hadn't thought that there'd be such violence with the hatching, or worse, murder.

"Your partner! The stranger! Do something!" Timmit pointed with his wings.

But Replicus was looking at the creature that had just finished coughing out a truly astounding flame, while giving no attention to Yuyui's remains whatsoever.

Timmit stuttered, stammered and stuttermmered.

But then, to his absolute shock...

"Awwwwww! He's so cute!"

The stork found an unharmed lime-haired girl rushing to the little thing that was hiccupping sparks, and kneeling to look at it with unwavering interest.

Chapter 802: What's It For?

What had hatched from the egg, was a curious little humanoid creature, and at the moment, it sat in what remained of the bottom half of its destroyed egg.

A pair of white hot horns sat on its large forehead, contrasting its reddish black skin. Matching its lack of a hairline, were two large yellow eyes that seemed to have flaming snake-like pupils, and to match them in turn, was a very wide mouth just above its chin.

Its dwarfish torso looked mostly human, though its scales could already be seen, stained with colourless goo from the innards of the egg.

The creature took a steady look at Yuyui and wore a big smile... or it could have just been a prep gesture before it ate her, it was impossible to know for sure.

"Aaaaaaaaaw!" Yuyui scooped up the little thing and started playing with it.

A hiccup infested coo crawled from its mouth as Yuyui tossed it up and caught it.

Timmit remained frozen.

What did he just witness?

He was sure...

Wait, he was right!

The pathetic leather armour Yuyui had been wearing... was wearing, was meeting its end along with her flesh which festered with boils, blood and a horrendous smell on the ground!

And yet, in another location a short distance away, another Yuyui was happily playing with the newly born creature.

Timmit turned to Replicus and flapped his way to him.

"What evil is this, Bright Storm?! I saw her die! What devils are you making on my island! Tell me! Tell me!" he screamed.

Replicus brushed him away.

"Relax. It's just part of her set of powers. She can't die. Well, she can, but also... It's complicated, alright? And I didn't make her," he tried to explain only to find his expositing abilities suffering terribly from complication.

Timmit stopped his hysterical outrage.

"And here I thought the real wonder was going to be what would come out of the egg."



"Well, you weren't exactly wrong," Replicus said as he turned to the other egg, which was still shaking vehemently, but still yet to show signs of breaking.

A long while back, when he first arrived in Genhuis City, Skullius had taken his first mission as an exclusive mercenary to take care of a blue Cluster that was haunting a popular tourist site. There, he had met the Fire Breeders, and their Cluster General who had a Legendary grade throne onto which two eggs were imbedded.

That throne, which was called the Kindling Heath, was the same one which sat in the lowest floor of the Honing Fortress, and its most unique ability was to draw nearby essences towards the one who sat on it, so that they could absorb them faster.

This was why Replicus had the walls behind the throne removed, so that the chaotic essences on the stout mountain would be easily drawn in by the Kindling Heath.

As for the eggs on the throne, Replicus had used the first. By using [Unbound] on it, he managed to attain the Chubby Remnant Child of Polarity, whose beneficial and not so beneficial properties had taken their course already.

These two eggs in Timmit's possession, were the rest.

Replicus had made a pact with Timmit – rather recently – to have the stork keep them safe while providing them with as much pure mana as he could before they hatched.

And unsurprisingly, Timmit was very good at the job and didn't particularly mind.

However...

"That other egg..." Timmit said while eyeing the larger, blue one. "You said it was stranger than the other, but Bright Storm... while it's moving now, I haven't been able to feel the thing inside it. What kind of creature is it?"

Replicus sighed.

His will to exposit failed him again. How would he go about explaining the concept behind it?

Luckily, Yuyui came rushing in to intercept the conversation, the little new-born creature in hand.

"Master! This thing is adorable! It's so cute! What are you going to do with it? You aren't going to... eat it, are you?" Yuyui's streak of excitement ended with the last word to her sentence.

Her eyes narrowed severely too, accusingly even.

Timmit turned his head to Replicus, his beak gaping.

"EAT IT?!" he was once again appalled.

"It was just ONE TIME!" Replicus finally exploded for the first time in a while.

He was guilty of eating a 'living' child, but in his defence, the child was meant to be eaten!

Well, at least according to the guidance field.

It was a consumable, dammit!

After doing everything in his power to defend his half-baked morality, Replicus turned serious and addressed Yuyui who looked like she would literally die on a hill for the somewhat cute little creature.

"At first I was going to use that thing for some experimentation, but I changed my mind a few weeks ago. I already got the answers I wanted," he said.

"Then... what do you want it for now?" Yuyui asked with pursed lips. Even the little scaled creature which had been climbing on my arm while burping sparks of orange-pink turned its attention to Replicus, as wondering its fate too.

"Well, rather than a main course, like last time, I was going to have it for dessert, but..."

"Master!" Yuyui screamed.

Replicus emitted a hollow laugh. His joke didn't land. It had been a while since he found something funny.

"Alright, alright. It's for you."

...!

Yuyui was taken aback.

Even Timmit was a little surprised. Though, he imagined it must have been a little obvious – if he thought at all like a human, that was.

"W-what?" Yuyui asked.

"Yes, it's yours. My reasoning now differs a little from what I had in mind back when I decided, but it's all the same. You still haven't made a decision about what we discussed before, and that's fine. But if you do choose to leave, you can have this little guy as a companion. I gave him a little enhancements before he hatched. He's strong...

probably Tier 4 already. He will be fit enough to protect you."

Yuyui froze.

Right.

She had been told to make a choice.

She had almost forgotten amidst the crazy around her right now.

All of sudden, she looked at the little creature that now stared at her with unwavering attention, differently.

Why did this feel like... like...

"This isn't replacing Ferex. Like I said. He's my responsibility. I'll get him back as soon as I find him. It's not a sin for you to accept that," Replicus said once again, reading Yuyui's emotions like a book.

The thoughts and memories he had drawn from many bandits with [Basic Evil Sanction] back then helped with time, as he processed them all that was.

Yuyui didn't give a reply.

She couldn't.

Her inner war grew intense. She hugged the little thing while keeping her eyes on Replicus.

The Penetrator on the other hand, had moved on from discussing this.

He expelled something from a spatial storage ring nearly indiscernible from the colour of his phalanxes.

The look of it threw Timmit off, and he felt slightly threatened.

"What is that?" he asked cautiously.

Replicus turned to him. His sockets flashed brightly.

"Well, let's just say it's a leash of sorts," he replied.

"Unlike the easy hatching with the first egg, my little unborn Apostle in that one... will likely need restraining. Best to prepare before it's too late."

Chapter 803: Difference In Calibre (1)

The concept of imprinting new skills on living things using the Nullmancer exclusive skill, [Wealth of Spoils]...

After Replicus realised that the skill only worked with objects, he had had to get creative. Barring what he knew of the influence of the soul – however limited it was – he began to dive deeper into his knowledge of the body.

The body naturally had the capacity to learn, but [Wealth of Spoils] seemed to refuse to grant abilities to living bodies, which forced the Penetrator to go back to his roots.

In Deadmanland, and even Aigas, it was common for one to develop skills through the process of repeating a certain motion. This was how his best friend Bonet had awakened [Boneman of Steel] in Deadmanland, and this was how Skullius had learned skills like [Mana Sense], [Mana Force] and [Artless Dodger].

This process, seemed to be one of the universal concepts that applies to living bodies in general, even if they were technically 'dead'.

Simply, bodies had a remarkable capacity to learn.

This got Replicus thinking.

Of course, he couldn't create a regiment that allowed someone to learn how to use complex abilities, but... what was the central part of the body that allowed one to learn, generally speaking?

That's right. The brain.

While it sounded obvious, to Skullius who didn't know that brains existed until he came to Aigas – meaning he had 1,000 years worth of garbage to decondition himself from – it took longer than it would have a normal person to realise that the brain was the gateway to certain bodily functions.

Once this realisation set in, Replicus tied this research on the body to other studies that he had been coming up with concerning his Apostles... concerning the skill [Apostle Summon] which had finally begun to level up without the need to rely on evolution.

...

At this moment, Replicus held what looked like a metallic band that would fit his wrist with some manner of effort. It had a complex string of writing across it, as well as a thin streak of glowing blue, which housed Null Life Essence. A very specific type of it.

Just as he had told Timmit, this indeed was a leash, but that was its most basic function. And sadly, he needed to exploit it now, before even thinking about the other functions of the band.

"What do you mean I best prepare, Bright Storm? What is about to come out of that egg?" the stork asked while eyeing the tumbling blue oval shape warily.

"Relax. We're in your Territory. If it turns out to be extremely dangerous, you can subdue it – or at least try to – with your Primary attack. As long as you don't kill it," Replicus said.

Chip.

At that moment, a thin crack appeared on the egg, and it shook violently. Timmit sprang up and flapped away.

"Bright Storm!" the stork screamed.

"I said relax," Replicus said.

Yuyui, who had once again begun to think about her future, reeled in her focus and shielded the cute monstrosity that had been given to her with her arms. She felt a grave sense of unease when the blue egg tilted to the side with another jerk from the inside.

"I might need your eye, Yuyui. Just in case. Even though it's not as effective on Null Life," the Penetrator said without turning to the girl.

The Eye of Dispersal.

Yuyui acknowledged that she would be able to use it, but she backed away further and further, and soon Timmit joined her.

"Crazy! You're all crazy! I thought this was normal hatching! I was even expectant! But surprise, surprise! Why did I put my faith in a charred skeleton, pfff?!" Timmit complained while raising his wings.

"It's a design," Replicus answered the mockery with his own justification.

"Sure! Of course it is!" the stork cried hysterically. Still, a surge of super condensed mana was already surging from his radiant purple core.

Dormant Territories, especially for higher Tier beasts, could be rooted in a place where they felt the strongest connection to. While exploiting the pure mana in such locations, which usually turned out to be deep forests, the rooted dormant Territory would act as a shelter for the beast, which they could keep active without expending more than a quarter of their own mana reserves daily.

The properties of the Territory while dormant, were usually limited, but if they chose, the masters of the Territories could disallow all who came in from leaving and vice versa.

When truly in need of the other functions of the Territory, the beasts would only need to take back the mana supply reins of the Territory, and...

The red stained environment around the group grew eerie, and dark, the humble trees becoming thick and bulky, as though they had suddenly turned to trunk building in the past second. They arched to create a deep shade around the nest while their forms drew a large chunk of the pure mana in the atmosphere.

"Good," Replicus remarked.

Just like the others, he too was worried about what would come out of the egg. He knew what its powers would be, but its behaviour is what mattered most. After all, unlike many other times, Replicus hadn't exactly chosen an Apostle that was completely subservient to him this time.

That was why this particular creature came with the band.

A few minutes of heavy, almost crushing tension followed, and finally, there was a loud shattering noise that sounded more like the destruction of a thick boulder.

The egg hatched.

And then...

A sharp burst of Null Life Essence soared without warning right after the different pieces of the egg scattered about.

...!

Replicus' sockets shot forth glaring beams of light.

He was extremely excited.

The colour of the Null Life Essence...

It was more green than it was blue, but with a diluted shade.

Incredible.

He had actually done!

And the volume of it!

It was likely more than the amount of mana he had within his second mana core!

"Hahahaha. As if you could ever, Somanda..." he said with a low voice.

Timmit and Yuyui didn't share his enthusiasm, unfortunately.

The stork had been caught off guard, and only now had he mobilised a massive force of mana to reinforce his Territory, and expand its range.



As cruel as it was, he couldn't see the beam of greenish energy which had almost torn the upper layer of his magical demesne, and this handicap made it hard to act accordingly.

Yuyui by the side looked in wonder. She too was blind to the force, but could see the effects.

The air was darting away.

The mana was drifting wildly.

The pulse of Null Life Essence sent out waves of a single emotion.

Unfocused zeal.

"Bright Storm!" Timmit shrieked.

Replicus didn't offer the stork the reaction nor the response it wanted.

This was tricky, even for him.

Over the past month, he had spent many days creating Apostles, pushing them to Tier 1 so that they could obtain special races, extracting interesting skills, and then killing them off.

Indeed, [Wealth of Spoils] had shown that it couldn't extract skills from living things, so Replicus had turned to working around his theory about the brain.

The brain stored information, and with the use of his Hybrid Luman's [Basic Evil Invasion] – as unlike Skullius, Replicus didn't combine it with different skills – he managed to extract information about skills from beasts, and made attempts to assemble this information into skills when he returned to his Penetrator form, which had advanced abilities that allowed him to construct blueprints of what the skills related would look like.

As for imprinting these skills into another body?

Well...

Just as Skullius had figured out before the Premium Age Royale, Replicus had also learned that Null Life Essence was a very invasive energy... and it worked particularly well with unborn subjects.

Even better than [Basic Evil Invasion]!

Replicus wished he could grin.

'If I manage to place this band around it, I've won. But the type of Null Life Essence it is producing is incredibly deadly. In terms of potency, it can be likened to Primus energy. Hostile Primus energy...' he thought. 'Oh well... it's not like I die that easily.

I can suffer all the embarrassment I need to away from my subordinates."

In an instant, Replicus zipped towards the location of the egg, under the pillar of energy.

However...

...!

He had just gotten close enough when the column of energy died down so abruptly that it made him pause for a split moment in surprise.

A small creature huddled against itself, with pale, crumpled skin and almost indiscernible, glinting stems that grew from its temples, like an unfinished crown, emerged out of bright light.

At the sight, Yuyui let out a subdued scream.

That was...!

Didn't that look like...?!

Replicus made to clip the leash around the creature's barely formed neck, but...

It didn't go as planned.

A guidance field notification even popped up to spell the trouble ahead.

[The Apostle you are attempting to restrain resists with 'Dominion']

Chapter 804: Difference In Calibre (2)

'Dominion?'

Replicus was caught off guard by the presented term.

He didn't have an inkling of an idea what this was, but the simple fact that the guidance field had brought to his attention this detail as evidence that the little Apostle was resisting him, not only instinctively, as he had expected, but with the support of an unknown authority, threw him off.

Then again, this little thing wasn't supposed to have a crown growing from its temples either.

Replicus still made to clasp the band in his head around the little thing's neck, when he found that his body... couldn't move. It refused to budge even an inch closer to the floating body.

He tried to push further. He was only a few inches from the little rascal. If he could just...

But it was no good.

He tried to draw himself back instead. Surprisingly, the binding force stopping him withered away, allowing him to move.

'The flesh? What's going on?' he asked with his sockets flashing bright.

The guidance field continued to narrate what was happening.

[Your Apostle qualifies in quality for a Higher Authority within the Null Verse]

[Your Apostle is attempting to fully claim the Authority left behind by a missing King in the Null Verse]

[Processing...]

Replicus felt a grave sense of unease.

A missing King? What was that supposed to mean? And his Apostle was trying to become... what in the Null Verse?

What did all of this allude to?

"Master!" Yuyui suddenly called to Replicus. "That crown... it looks just like the one the thing Ferex turned into had!"

Replicus' socket lights narrowed.

'Is that so?' he wondered, and his mind furiously tried to piece things together.

However, the little Apostle didn't remain idle. The greenish Null Life Essence from before began to gather behind its eyelids, which began to rise. It appeared that there were only holes behind its eyelids, which were filled with green light, as it did not hold have eyeballs at all, which Yuyui recognised to be similar to that thing the BoneTender had taken the body of back them.

As the bright hue overtook its sockets, Replicus immediately made the call.

"Timmit. Do it! Use your Primary assault!"

The stork, which had been massively taken aback by the sudden course of events – mainly the Penetrator's inability to tame his own creation – looked to Replicus hesitantly.

"But Bright Storm, the Primary attack for my Territory doesn't distinguish between friend and foe! You will be—"

"Just do it. We'll all be fine. Trust me. Your hits are fittingly weak, as a bird's should be anyway," Replicus said with a chuckle.

Timmit was offended even while knowing it was a joke, but he was more concerned about what the outcome to this was going to be.

Still, if Bright Storm said it was alright, then it was probably alright.

Timmit switched his Territory from dormancy.

The entire space shook, a moment away from expelling Timmit's Primary assault. At the same time, Yuyui turned pale, realising something.

"Master...!" Yuyui screamed and hugged the little creature in her arms tight.

Before she could finish her sentence, Replicus' finger had already pointed to her, and sent a dazzling bolt of grey lightning that smashed into the little beast's face. At once, it disappeared from Yuyui's arms, just before a terrible power smashed onto her!

This same power smacked Replicus and the floating Apostle too!

'I really hate this bird's Territory...' Replicus thought with his sockets dimming.

He buckled and knelt on one knee. Then suddenly, hundreds of rough, red leaves began to gush from his body, soaring up into the collective circle of hunching trees that could be seen when one looked up.

The same began to happen to Yuyui, whose confusion at first then turned to incredible fatigue that killed her in less than two seconds after Timmit activated the hostile functions of his Territory!

The newly born Apostle was not exempt from this.

It made a shallow cry equal in likeness to that of a human infant, and squirmed as leaves burst from its body as well.

Replicus cackled.

That's it.

Timmit's Territory, Scarlet Usurper's Corridor – as the stork had named it – was the best for this situation after all.

Its Primary attack mechanism targeted all living organisms within the Territory, and confiscated their vitality and mana, the sequence of which was represented visually by red leaves leaving the targets' bodies, as all of it would be stored within the Territory.

Of course, vitality was a loose term. In reality, vitality, in the Territory grounds extended to both mental and physical. To fiends like Replicus with inexhaustible stamina, the strain would be mainly focused on their mental energy, and this was what Replicus was hoping for – well not for himself.

Like him, the little creature was turning weary, but as it turned out, the effects were even worse for the little thing because unlike Replicus, it wasn't all bones. It had a finite capacity for activity.

'And if it has been consciously trying to become a King or whatever, this should mean...' Replicus hypothesised, and surely, his thoughts turned out to be true.

The small crown that had begun to appear from the little Apostle's temples slowly started to flow back into its pale skin. The little creature cried and its altitude fell, its small body landing lightly on the bottom shell of the egg it had hatched from.

Replicus immediately clasped the band around the little Apostle with the little strength he had, and just like that, he had successfully thwarted what might have actually been an unprecedented disaster.

"You can stop now," Replicus said to Timmit.

The stork immediately turned its Territory dormant again, and the primary assault of Scarlet Usurper's Corridor disappeared.

Replicus felt his mental strength rise once again. The assault had only lasted for a little more than five seconds, but he had felt himself slipping away. Timmit's powers were rightfully potent, and useful.

"Good job," he complimented the stork, but it only kept its sight on the little Apostle.

Replicus scooped up the little thing, which fit in both his palms perfectly.

With the band – which adjusted accordingly – around its neck, the Apostle looked a little different. It barely looked alive. But then again, was it, in the conventional sense?

'Thankfully, that crown disappeared completely. I have a hunch about what would have happened if it fully manifested...' Replicus thought.

Yuyui had re-emerged alive and well from nothingness. She walked up to Replicus and looked at the little creature in his hands.

She gulped, not knowing whether to say it was cute and carry it up.

Replicus turned to her.

"Can you recount to me what happened with Ferex and that other creature again?"

Chapter 805: Seeking Counsel

"I see..." Replicus said.

The clouds he had expelled from his body swirled above him and tremored with the same intensity of emotion he felt at the moment. He had to admit. This experience had opened him up to some added knowledge he hadn't anticipated ever attaining.

Yuyui looked anxiously at her master while a little dark-skinned menace leapt up and down on her head, messing up her hair.

"Since I came here, I've seen hints at some form of royalty or authority existing in the Null world. Like the Null Devil's Aegis of Damnation, which was the first suit of armour I ever acquired with [Unbound]," Replicus said.

He remembered the dark armour's description very well. Apparently, it had been made by an entity known as the second Null Devil King. At the time he received it, Replicus had already been getting suspicious about his Null powers, and the details surrounding their origins. While it was cool to have the armour, he did wonder a lot of things.

"When I wanted to get Ferex a race, I also saw another name in one of the evolution options. The Blood-Risen Emperor. The evolution species was called the Blood-Risen Emperor's Keeper, and it was the first evolution species that I learned of which wouldn't submit to me entirely. The advantage was that it would be extremely powerful, to offset the glaring trade off.

I based this little Apostle's powers on that actually."

As Replicus explained, Yuyui looked at his abdomen with some degree of strain on her face.

The little Apostle's body, was balled up and packed just behind Replicus' second mana core, below his ribcage. It was encased in a shroud of mana, and was softly spinning while looking to be at peace.

Timmit was also looking at this odd parental choice from his nest, barely focusing on what Replicus was saying.

"I'm not sure if the Null Devil King or Blood-Risen Emperor are the only types of royal figures in the Null world, but from what I gather, just having one of them in Aigas is a problem. Since it's safe to assume Skullius already made contact with it and lived..." the Penetrator paused in thought.

Yuyui pulled on the little creature gnawing at her hair.

"Do you think the monster Ferex turned into sensed that your... ahem..." Yuyui pointed at Replicus' abdomen.

"Probably. If that thing is the missing King, then maybe it felt this little guy's authority, Dominion whatever. Come to think of it, can you see anything about this little guy with the guidance field?" Replicus asked.



It was only natural for him to assume that Yuyui, who was an Attachment – a person given a lesser version of the guidance field by Replicus – had attempted to find out what Replicus' latest Apostle was like, mainly in how strong it was.

"Uh, I did, but... nothing's showing. It's too high level for me..." Yuyui replied meekly.

"I see."

He was quite proud of that actually.

The little thing was leagues stronger than Yuyui even in infancy. Though, that wasn't a really great feat at the same.

Different from Yuyui, Replicus could see all about his new Apostle at the moment, and while he already knew what it was capable of, he wanted to know about its attempt just now, information that a simple appraisal with the guidance field couldn't retrieve.

But wait.

"Right. <Counsel>!" Replicus exclaimed.

He had almost forgotten about it. Or rather, he saw it every time he checked his own status, but because he assumed Skullius would need to use it more than him, he turned a blind eye to it most of the time.

Months back when Skullius reached Tier 2, the guidance field had been upgraded, turning from Patronage Rank 0, to Rank 1. With this, came spectacular benefits such as <Attachments> and <Marked Spots>, but the only one he had ever used – at least consciously – was <Counsel>.

<Counsel> had the simple mechanism of allowing Skullius to ask the guidance field, or perhaps even the Voice of Worlds, something that it should know, and an answer would be provided.

Of course, it seemed one use of <Counsel> had already been used by Skullius in Pelian a month ago, and only one more remained.

'Unfortunately, [Brisk Storm Avatar] can't allow us to cheat by having double gains from the guidance field. If I use this last piece of <Counsel>, that's it, until Skullius raises his Tier or we fuse back together...' Replicus thought.

But he was determined.

It was all but clear that Ferex was still at large. He doubted Skullius had managed to catch him, if he truly was something of royalty from the Null world.

"Well, it's better to know the enemy anyway. Besides, I'm pretty sure the only things the guidance field can tell me with certainty are things like this..."

And it was true.

Therefore...

"I want to use a piece <Counsel>," he said to the guidance field.

[What is your inquiry?]

Replicus thought long and hard.

This was like making a wish to a rigid entity that didn't take nuance into account. He felt he had to be a little specific.

"Tell me everything about the highest authorities in the Null Verse. Like the Null Devil King and the Blood-Risen Emperor."

[Processing...]

Replicus anxiously waited as the guidance field seemed to take its time collecting the information.

Yuyui and Timmit had left the Penetrator to his own devices for now. The latter knew – quite obviously – that Replicus wasn't a normal cloud casted skeleton, and his origins stemming from

outside Aigas had turned into less and less of an odd idea the more he hadn't gotten to know Replicus.

Timmit knew of undead which had ravaged the mainland Sacred Forests millenia ago, but he hadn't bought at all that Replicus was the same.

Still, he wasn't the curious sort. If he was, he may have declined helping Replicus with his eggs the same day the Penetrator made the request.

At last, a stream of information flooded in Replicus' vision, and he eagerly read it.

[The Null Verse is a mystically engineered worldscape lorded over by four authorities that reside in different realms, and are of different races:

The Null Devil King of the East, who rises every dozen millennia as a revered, insatiable Forcemancer;

The Blood-Risen Emperor of the North, usually titled as the Abhorring Craftsmen among the Beastial Demon Fantasies;

The Maleficent Siphoner of the South, a terrible, fleeting Spirit Walker with each consequent heir whose faces remain unseen;

The Ever-Adorned Sovereign of the West, who rules over nothing but desolate cities, satisfied with silence.

Each of the four holds a Dominion, an authority exerted over other, lesser Null Lifeforms, granted to them by Serenity herself.

The four are bound to endless attempts at conquest within the many layers of the Null Verse by seals from Serenity...]

Chapter 806: The Truth About The Four Classes

Replicus had expected the guidance field to continue. When the pause after that lore dump came, he almost said, "Go on" before realising that he wasn't going to get anymore free information.

A sigh left Replicus' mouth.

"This is ridiculous. That's all I get? Well, I suppose I should have expected it. Serenity is also secretive about this stuff, so it would be strange if the guidance field could tell me more," he said, more than a bit irritated.

"So four authorities, huh?"

To Replicus, what was more impressive, or rather, what made the four names he had just heard – the Null Devil King, the Blood-Risen Emperor, the Maleficent Siphoner, and the Ever-Adorned Sovereign – more impressive, was the implied scale of the Null Verse.

The descriptions of items that he upgraded with [Unbound], and those of evolution species like the Six-legged Flash Dipper, which had appeared when Ferex had reached Tier 1, made it seem as though the Null Verse was infinite.

Picturing the North, South, East and West that the guidance field was talking about, made Replicus wonder...

"Just how large are the areas these four rule over?"

How powerful would one have to be to rule over such vast lands?

It was certainly a thought.

What's more, the Null Devil King and Maleficent Siphoner seemed to have classes that Replicus had been offered in the very beginning of his journey.

The Revenant Forcecaster.

The Spirit Walker.

And not only that, from what he gathered – with a few references to all the notifications he had ever received – the Ever-Adorned Sovereign, from how it was described, ruled over cities. Well, empty

cities but... was it just Replicus, or did this eerily resemble the alluring selling point that was used to describe the class he ultimately chose back then.

The Vehement Nullmancer.

After all, he distinctly recalled that it had said:

[He who chooses to walk this path will conquer kingdoms...]

Kingdoms usually spotted cities, as Skullius had seen...

When Replicus' thoughts reached this point, his four sockets blazed with even more fierce, glaring light.

"Were all those descriptions I saw, of those four classes, based on these four beings?" the Penetrator said, almost frowning.

He didn't know if he liked that idea very much.

If anything, these descriptions were misleading, giving the impression that the powers he acquired...

"Does this mean that me getting these powers is more related to things I have to do in the Null Verse?"

Damn Serenity.

What was her angle exactly?

Worse yet, the four beings mentioned in the description were said to be bound to the Null Verse by some form of seal. So, if one of them truly was here on Aigas, how did they manage that feat?

Through the creature that Ferex turned into?

Ah, the way Yuyui explained the whole ordeal was confusing. Or maybe the ordeal itself was just that confusing.

Despite how gravely lacking all this information was, Replicus had been given a better idea about what he was facing.

As he imagined before, if these creatures were so powerful that they ruled over what Replicus could safely assume where clumps of worlds...

"Damn it. Won't we need the might of a Deity or something to take just that one thing down?" he thought.

And speaking of the power scaling, Replicus turned his attention to the huddled creature below his ribcage.

The text just now said that these four beings could only keep their powers, Dominions, in the Null Verse. So how was this little guy able to intercept an authority like that while being outside the Null Verse?

The Penetrator had a theory.

'Every time I evolved before, I saw Serenity and that obscure ball behind her – likely the Null Verse itself. I'm an anomaly, but I'm probably still connected to it. Perhaps these two factors allow me to break rules that Serenity made, and this little thing, born from me, took advantage of that in order to resist the forced subservience that comes with being my Apostle...' Replicus thought.

He had a feeling he was right.

He probably existed outside the seals and rules of Serenity, but with the same potential as anything born in the Null Verse.

If not, and he was wrong, then the vast wealth of knowledge Replicus had amassed, and was proud of, still paled in comparison – a lot more than he had thought – to everything he was yet to learn.

\*\*\*

Minutes later, the trio was walking through the forest again.

Timmit was kind enough to see them out despite his squawk and aggressive flapping.

Replicus appreciated the good manners the bird had. It reminded him of the giant dolphin Fuwin, the beast that had guarded the Temple of Unlusted Tears.

"So, about that compensation. We all agree that today was more troublesome than we all had anticipated, right? You stole some of my pure mana, had me use my Territory and worst of all, you had me keeping warm an evil spawn!" Timmit complained.

Replicus could have sworn his beak had clapped thousands of times since they left his Territory.

"You're right. I'll think of something. Though you are really getting more greedy with each time we meet. This is why I hate getting familiar with beasts. They get too comfortable with you," the Penetrator said.

"You're one to talk!" Timmit screamed.

"I take it your cold is gone?" Replicus shifted the subject.

"It's not a cold. It's a seasonal ailment that blocks the beak. Nasty business. It comes and goes every few minutes," Timmit explained with an annoyed look burning in his eyes. He seemed to hate being compared to humans.

In his mind, Replicus who always made such comparisons, was more than a bit racist.

Again, as the group walked past, the beasts all around paid keen attention, while others sent meaningfully hostile glares towards them, especially Timmit.

This time, he didn't give a comment.

Yuyui was pretty creeped out, but she glared back, with the little creature in her arms sharing the same sentiment. It hiccupped an orange-pink flame and cooed wrathfully in the direction of the potential aggressors.

Replicus shook his head.

Like idiot like idiot.

The Penetrator then suddenly came to a stop in the next second.

"Hmmm," he hummed.

Yuyui and Timmit also stopped, and looked at him quizzically.

"What?" the stork asked.

"How long ago did you say you returned here after one of those creatures from the mainland followed after you?" Replicus asked.

Timmit grew tense.

"Almost half an hour ago. Why?"

In the next moment, a great shadow covered the Sacred Forest, dyeing it in inky black.

Chapter 807: Mystery From A Tower

It was as though a titan from a treacherous nightmare had descended, with the power to kill sunlight wherever its shadow landed.

The fact that the entire Sacred Forest was covered in the inky darkness in that instant, not only demonstrated its power, but the atrocity that was its size too. Perhaps 'titan' didn't even cut it.

All visibility was stolen, save for the line of weak light in the far horizon. All who had eyes could spot it, but it seemed too far to reach.



A great gust swept across the forest with staggering intensity.

The beating of wings could be heard, and each one, from the feeling of the large masses hurtling over and across, tore down great portions of the forestry.

Replicus gave out a sigh.

What a peculiar presence.

He didn't feel the surging of mana which would normally tell him what kind of an ability was used by an assailant. The air was strangely devoid of any residual energy.

This was raw might.

'This must be the thing that chased Timmit. Well, according to his story. If he really was pursued, and by this thing, then it merely hid itself while following him...' the Penetrator thought.

Speaking of the stork, the darkness around him was so thick that it felt like a viscous blanket which pressed down on the sensations of its ensnared targets.

How effective.

Killing of all senses, and splitting up its prey.

It was smart.

However...

Unseen in the darkness, grey lightning sparked from Replicus' fingers and hit the ground, travelling through it while fighting off the darkness to smash into two beings that had started to drift away from the Penetrator.

In the next moment, the three felt a lull, and then the bright light of the sun washed over them again, temporarily blinding their eyes.

The hiss of the wind then came, and with it a fortunate and unfortunate realisation.

"Goodness, Bright Storm!" Timmit was the first to speak while looking down, his feathers fluttering furiously.

"Whoa!" Yuyui screamed, half-thrilled and half-terrified.

The trio was high in the sky... and falling.

They appeared to be at least five thousand meters up, which made everything below them look small. Everything, except for a large mass that kept beating its wings to stay afloat.

Timmit grumbled.

"That thing again!" he called while plucking Yuyui from the sky, throwing her into his back and calling mana to his wings such that he began to glide.

Replicus became encased in a royal blue matte, which, like Timmit's gliding reduced the speed of his descent.

"You made it seem as though these creatures were dumb. It clearly outsmarted you, Timmit," the Penetrator said while looking down.

"I assumed a creature so large couldn't hide anywhere I couldn't see!" Timmit rebutted.

His eyes remained locked on the monstrosity below though.

He was more than a little anxious at the sight of this bastard again.

Unfortunately for him, the great creature arched its head up and looked straight at them with malevolent, ruby red eyes.

It was a massive, eagle-like creature with an ungodly pair of dark wings that looked so rough that they might as well have been stone. Above its head, large, stiff feathers sprang out, leading down its neck like upturned knives to reach its tail, which also looked to be made out of sharp, shiny black protrusions.

Strangely though, the creature wasn't nearly large enough to cover the entire forest. The darkness it seemed to be able to control only gave the illusion that it was so wide, when in reality, it wasn't the incarnation of the word 'vast' at all.

"Well that's not good," Replicus said while looking at the notification from his guidance field.

[Unable to interpret the nature of the target].

This was a first.

Replicus had never seen a notification like this before. Whenever the guidance field was unable to show him the status of an opponent before, it was usually because he was incredibly outclassed, not because the status couldn't define what he was facing.

This did not bode well.

Such a sentiment was demonstrated splendidly in the next moment, when the giant creature below them suddenly raised its wings and pushed itself up so fast that it turned into a blur.

Needless to say whatever was below it was flattened, ground to dust, incinerated by the harsh wave of heat or cruelly done in by all three.

The wind turned hostile as the creature approached, and a normal combatant would have been shredded to pieces just by the effects of the movement of the creature, but Replicus had already been prepared. And so was Timmit.

The stork dove down at hot speed while Replicus turned into bolt of lighting that shot up and dug into one of the clouds overhead.

Completely ignoring any natural law that dictated movement in Aigas, the mysterious creature made a perfect turn while maintaining its ungodly speed, making the definite decision to follow after Timmit.

To the stork's dismay, it didn't even take three seconds before the assailant caught up and opened its beak wide, ready to devour him and Yuyui on his back in an instant.

"Curse you, damn bird!" Timmit shrieked while bathing himself in the mana flooding from his purple mana core, which forced him to accelerated five fold.

It didn't make much of a difference, and neither did the impossible, angular turn he made just before he reached the forest. The odd, giant bird accelerated while making an even smoother curve.

Timmit made several more impossibly shrewd manoeuvres that made both Yuyui and the creature she held, scream aloud, but the giant bird followed after them, soon tailing the stork to the sea.

Once again, a large beak flashed to snap around Timmit despite his best efforts, but...

The sky rumbled.

Yet, its noise was a mere after effect.

A striking bolt of lightning so bright its colour couldn't be determined by the eye, had already landed on the giant bird's head by the time the skies made their declaration.

The beast was hit so hard it plummeted into the sea at rapid speed, leaving the surface steaming and incredibly humid.

"It's about time!" Timmit yelled before making a turn to the skies.

An innocent looking cloud was floating high up, right above where the giant bird had been hit, sparks dancing from under it.

A voice called from the cloud, addressing the stork.

"Take those two to your Territory, and have it ready for a Secondary assault."

"What?" Timmit said.

"You said you wanted compensation, right? I'll be giving it to you in a few minutes at most."

Timmit was skeptical, but he didn't have time to doubt. The sea below exploded, exposing the head of the giant bird, which was completely unharmed.

As it emerged, Timmit muttered, "Fine" and shot towards the forest.

At the same time, a thick bolt of lightning shot from the white cloud and landed on the shore of the island.

As it did, it formed the image of the Penetrator.

"Let's see what this thing's all about, shall we?" Replicus said, but not to the air.

Three of his most trusted, and most powerful combatants were standing behind him, overlooking the figure of the beast a distance off which was glaring at them with motivated ruby eyes.

#### Chapter 808: Probing (1)

Replicus was pleased to see his Unlimited respond to the threat so quickly. He had already sensed them by the time he had shot up as a bolt of Levin into the innocent looking cloud, and just as any good subordinates who knew how powerful their master was, they waited for his orders before making a move.

"Boss, what is that thing?" Grim was the first to speak with an unsettled grimace on his face. He genuinely looked disturbed by what he was looking at.

The ruby red eyes of the enemy were glinting menacingly in their direction after all.

"I'm afraid I also have no clue as to what it is," Replicus replied, donning his persona.

Pherdanta stepped forward.

"Let us cut it down," she said in a cold voice. On her waist which had been vacant before, there were now two swords strapped on. One was a sheathed katana to her side, and the other was thick, red-bladed odachi completely exposed behind her.

"Can we even do that?" Kenno asked while raising his brow to Pherdanta, but he looked just as ready to pounce if given the order.

Replicus was amused. They all had the right mind-set. Allora also did, but she either wasn't able to rush here as quickly as the others because he hadn't given her the completed Granted Armament, or the others had told her to sit this one out.

Either way, Replicus thought it was good that she wasn't here. He wouldn't want her first assignment to be this.

At that moment, there was a striking pulse of energy that dyed a decent portion of the seas black.

...!

Even Replicus was a little startled by the sudden malevolence.

No.

It wasn't as fickle as that.

It was...

"Primus...?" the Penetrator wondered.

The great, dark bird whipped its wings to the sides, which caused massive waves of sea water to be cast from either of its sides, almost leaving the wet land beneath.

In the next moment, the creature was masked in a unseen force, and it shot towards the four so quickly that the surroundings didn't react to its movement until its cruel beak was only a meter away from Replicus!

Anything near the shore was reduced to nothingness, and a cordon of force had thrashed its way deep into the island, erasing anything in its path, and giving way for the seawater to invade!

Yet...

The giant creature, its beak pointed to the Penetrator remained in place. It hadn't moved from its meter's worth of distance from Replicus, but it wasn't the Null Lifeform's doing.

Around him, facing in three different directions, the Unlimited stood, their arms outstretched, pointing with fists ahead.

Because of this gesture, a large, cubical barrier with a sturdy white hue that gave out tiny flakes energy, stood erect around them, guarding their master in addition to themselves.

This was the Granted Compound Seal, a skill from the Unlimited's Granted Armament which allowed them to create a fiercely resilient barrier that used meaningfully woven proportions of Null Life Essence and condensed Mana.

Each of the Unlimited could create one themselves simply by performing the gesture they were doing now, but combining the Seals was the best way to use this skill, as hinted by its name.

The large, dark creature hadn't been able to make it budge or buckle at all, and it was still trying attempting to do so.

Replicus stared at it.

'Why do I get the feeling that this creature is...' he thought, but was interrupted by a zealous voice to his side.

"Boss, you're studying it, right? How about I probe it for you?" Grim said with a confident smile. "Just give me the order, and I'll have it straining itself in a few moments."

Replicus sighed exasperatedly.

This guy's class influenced his behaviour to a terrifying degree. Pherdanta and Kenno looked irked by his enthusiasm.

"Fine. But if you feel like you are about to die, just crawl back to me so that I can get the last blow. Wouldn't want to lose such a special specimen without gaining something in return," Replicus said.

"That's a sick joke, boss," Grim said as he broke the gesture for the Granted Compound Seal, which made the cubical barrier lose a little of its lustre.

The white-haired man flashed through the border of the barrier, and started sprinting on the water.

As he did, he mobilised a great amount of his mana and had it flare from his body with such intensity that it turned him into a human-shaped glow.

"Come and get me!" Grim called the creature which had already begun to eye him with a certain degree of... hunger. Before he knew it, the great bird had flashed from Replicus and the others, and it was following after him.

Replicus paid close attention to it, and then to where it had shot from before – from the immediate water of the sea.

A dark sight met him, now that the view wasn't obstructed.

The seawater was slowly turning black. The inky kind of black.

That burst of Primus from moments ago...

"Strange," Replicus said while scratching his chin.

Grim raced on top of the water as if it was the most natural thing to do, all the while being chased by a massive bird that looked to be made of stone. A delighted grin was on his face even as the wind beat back his skin and hair.

He didn't underestimate his opponent. Not one bit. However, he was going to have a bit of fun with it, after all, unlike most times, he had actually been given permission.



A moment later, the speed of the great creature allowed it to quickly catch up to him, and it opened its beak wide to devour Grim.

It clamped on his figure with a dangerously vicious bite force, and there was even a disastrous force that accompanied the action, but... Grim had not become its meal.

Instead, several hundreds of meters in the skies, the white-haired Unlimited appeared, a grin on his face as he fell horizontally.

The great creature spotted him immediately, and with a furious flap of its wings, which resulted in another discharge of Primus with an inky darkness to it that stained the sea, it rapidly flew to approach him.

Grim, like Replicus noticed the darkness left behind. His eyes, even without him straining them, could see kilometres from his position with impeccable clarity.

'This thing behaves instinctively. It doesn't seem like a Cluster beast or a general beast with a sophisticated set of abilities. Strange. Yet for some reason, even an unguarded strike from the boss didn't leave a mark on its body...' he thought.

It indeed was strange.

Aside from its discharge of Primus, was toughness the only thing this bird had going for it?

But how tough was it really?

Grim's grin grew wider the closer the bird got.

When it was a mere twenty meters away, he gave it a condescending side eye, saluted and then pointed towards it with his right hand – with his index.

Grim then chanted:

"Aggrante."

## Chapter 809: Probing (2)

From Grim's finger, a dot of light that quaked unstably while draining the highlights from the blue sky to apply them to Grim's grinning face, and armour appeared.

It charged quickly, mobilising the mana and Null Life Essence that was stored within Grim's Granted Armament and compressing them in a form that the respective skill required.

A dashing royal blue dot with a thick haze of shivering white.

As the bird reached a meagre two meters from its target, its eyes showing a certain degree of uncertainty in light of what it faced... Grim fired!

"Aggrante."

The skies suddenly turned so bright that nothing alive could have seen clearly what occurred in the next micro moment.

And since that was the case, the great creature that faced the actual attack did not see anything, though it did feel the hellish might of the throng of force which beat into it cruelly!

From the ground, a straight, extremely fast stream of light could be seen darting over the island towards a destination several kilometres away as the sky made a noise akin to falling meteors dropping heavily onto the crusted world!

It was quite the sight.

Grim, while still falling, laughed.

"Yeah, that got you, didn't it?" he said.

The great monster wasn't unharmed after that. He had seen it.

Aggrante was that powerful.

"What's with that kid and being so wasteful with energy all the time? Didn't you restrict our uses of Aggrante and Limited Granted Warp, boss?" Kenno asked while looking irritated at the skies.

"It's fine. The reserves are still abundant enough to allow such usages. Besides, I only restricted the use of your Granted Armament skills for parlour tricks. I'm actually glad Grim is choosing to rely on the armour for now instead of using his Hidden Class abilities," Replicus said.

Aggrante was an offensive skill that came with every version of the Granted Armament that Replicus had made. It had three degrees of strength – Singlefold, Doublefold, Triplefold – each of which Replicus forbade the Unlimited from using unless absolutely necessary. Even the basic form could corrode natural resilience and the artificial defences of low Mythical grade treasures if applied well enough.

As for Limited Granted Warp, it was a teleportation ability of the Granted Armament that allowed Unlimited to rush to Replicus' side immediately or transport themselves wherever they pleased.

Kenno raised a brow.

"Would you have us join that white dog on the spending spree then?" he asked, seeing as the boss wasn't upset about the excess use of energy reserves.

"No. You don't need to. All I need right now, is to figure out the nature of this creature..." Replicus said. It was clear that he was concerned about the creature's effect on the water.

How and why was it dyeing everything black?

Pherdanta, seeing where her master was gazing, spoke up.

"Has the Sacred Forest been affected too?" she asked him. She had seen the dark shadow the creature cast on the forest earlier.

Had that been permanent as well?

The gears in Replicus' mind churned.

Right. The forest. He had almost completely overlooked that previous attack.

\*

While the others were analysing what was on the table, Grim was enjoying himself.

Since the dark creature had been sent so far by his Aggrante, he had used another Limited Granted Warp which soaked him a greyish light and transplated him to the far side of the sea just in time for him to see a steak of roaring right pass overhead and into the waters a kilometre away with moist boom.

Grim grinned.

He covered the distance quickly, and dove into the water after the dark creature.

He saw its body, which had a sizzling, glowing red scar and indentation on its neck flap its wings furiously, getting ready to rise back up to the surface.

'You really are resilient...' Grim thought at the sight.

The creature was seething with fury. Its mood only became worse when it saw him, and it opened its beak wide.

A great trembling caused the water to heat up immediately.

What then followed, was a fierce darkness that washed over the water, turning it inky black in a few short moments.

A glaring burst of Primus also coursed along, and before everything was masked completely, Grim sensed the lives of all the aquatic creatures nearby disappear. He didn't know whether it was because his senses were cut off, or if the creatures had just up and died immediately.

'It's most likely that my senses have been suppressed. This must be its primary form of attack, but there's something else...' Grim frowned.

Right now, there was silence. Terrible silence.

Grim could escape whenever he wanted, but he decided to wait.

What would be the creature's next move after it cut off its target's senses?

As expected, Grim felt as though he was being watched. It was more like intuition than sense really, but this wouldn't have fazed him nearly as much as it did moments later.

It was natural for the bird creature to be able to see him in its domain of darkness, but...

The set of eyes looking at him, felt different.

Grim narrowed his eyes.

What was more like a faint feeling, then turned into absolute certainty.

Something was watching him from the darkness, but it wasn't the great dark bird.

...

Suddenly...

A deep red image appeared before Grim!

It was circular, but odd slanted.

It was... was it... an eye?!

Its curve convinced him of what it was, and the dull radiance of it, which was more than just reflective colour smashed into Grim like a physical blow to the head!

'Damn it!' Grim cursed.

His mind spun.

The light pierced through his eyes and stroked his brain!

Quickly, in order to halt the effect, Grim closed his eyes... but the light still cut through his eyes.

The eye kept staring into his pair.

...!

Worse than that, Grim felt his body get squeezed firmly, as though he had been caught within the grip of a large hand!

No. It wasn't an analogy!

He was indeed caught!

The Unlimited grew wary, but his mind also spun to figure out what was happening.

The darkness he was trapped in... It was like a...

'...doorway?'

Chapter 810: Favour

20 seconds ago...

It struck Replicus as he put in more effort to his thoughts, and all the possible conjectures. When the large bird beast had appeared over the Sacred Forest and cast a shadow, the Penetrator had not felt the influence of energy that he had come to expect when unnatural abilities were activated by various kinds of combatants.

He had expected traces of mana or Aura, but there were none, which was the first flag to drop in his lap, announcing that this beast wasn't a usual one.

Now, however, given that Pherdanta had pointed out to him a key detail he had almost overlooked...

'That's right. The Forest didn't remain painted black...' Replicus thought. He had seen that from the sky, where he had teleported Yuyui and Timmit.

As for the reason why, unlike the sea, the forest didn't just become a dark mass...

'Sacred Forests are the only places that are resistant to the formation of Clusters...' Replicus thought.

Indeed. This must be why.

Clusters were formed by the harsh energies of the Deities – who had sacrificed their physical forms to make the land, sea and skies of Aigas – clashing chaotically.

Replicus didn't really understand why, but he did understand the how.

Sacred Forests, especially if they were densely populated by mystical beasts, managed to ward off the chaotic energies that formed possibilities for Cluster development. Among these energies, Primus, a low level form of Divine energy could also be found, which meant that the Sacred Forest expelled the effect spawned by the bird creature after it had left.

'I didn't feel the Primus, either because all my senses, including those that come from my skills were limited by that thing's powers, or because the Sacred Forest warded off the Primus that allowed for that shadow effect... which is why it didn't become permanent...' Replicus thought.

Intriguing.

As he imagined this, his extended vision caught something odd, and he quickly turned to Pherdanta and Kenno.

"Go to Grim's side."

Without bothering to ask why, the two Unlimited vanished from Replicus' side, according to his order.

\*

Grim found it hard to break free. The hold over him was so powerful that it refused to allow him even an inch of movement. And with the large red eye pressing a course intent onto his mind that both hurt and disoriented his thoughts, Grim found the task of mobilising his energy become increasingly difficult.

'Fan...tastic...' he thought with some manner of sarcasm. 'So much for some carefree fun...'

Indeed, it wasn't fun anymore.

This whole scenario was undoubtedly ominous. The darkness that the large bird was leaving behind could act as some form of gateway from which it could invite... whatever it is that held Grim now.

'I did my fair share for probing. The boss must have already seen by now, right? ' Grim thought. 'And now, I should take probably avoid becoming a corpse...'

The Unlimited's own red eyes sparkled as he used every bit of mana he could while resisting the glow from his unusual opponent. An inhumane growl fiercely belched from his mouth, and he opened his eyes to look daringly into the opponent – the uncertain shape hidden by the darkness.

Tufts of white hair began to grow from Grim's face, and what could be seen of his neck. His skin began to change colour, and...

"Aggrante."

A word and a harsh boom interrupted Grim.

A laser-like throng of light that tore through darkness, dispersing it with deep highlight, and a corrosive effect, shot past an inch from Grim's arm.

He was alarmed.



All of a sudden, the firm grip he felt around him vanished, and so did the eye that had been weakening him. Only the stunned figure of the great, stone bird remained, pushing its wings against the waves.

Grim turned from within the waters and saw Pherdanta, her cold face looking ahead, and her dark hair with green ends flying in all directions. She was pointing forward with her index finger that still had a glowing dot before it.

Kenno swam beside her.

He gave Grim one look and shook his head, to which the white-haired Unlimited shrugged, as though asking, "What?"

The former bandit leader extended his hand to the side, and his palm emitted a bright glow.

Then, as quickly as one could blink, all the water within a six kilometre radius froze solid.

The waves that had been arching up stood still, and even droplets that had floated from the main body found themselves turning to flakes or clear orbs.

On the surface of the sea, three holes could be seen atop the hard ice, and from them, Pherdanta, Kenno and Grim swam out.

As Pherdanta squeezed the water from her ponytail, Kenno gave a quick flick to Grim's forehead.

"And here the boss was praising you for not relying on your Hidden Class abilities so carelessly," he said.

Grim, who had wanted to say he wasn't going to do anything of the sort, stopped when he remembered that even though he had stopped midway from his transformation, white hairs were yet to fade from his face.

"Well, I had to. The boss saw what I was up against," he ended up saying.

Kenno narrowed his eyes.

"Both of you, pay attention," Pherdanta interjected while looking below the surface of the ice.

A moment later, the large form of the great bird blasted up from the entrapment of solid water, and glared at the three while beating its wings.

Grim quickly filled the others in.

"Aside from being pretty quick on its wings, and having a decent defence, this thing isn't that hard to deal with. Either of us could kill it easily. The problem is that it can open a path with its darkness for something more dangerous..."

Pherdanta had been about to draw her sword, but when she heard Grim's words, she wore a disappointed look. Kenno was the same.

Grim couldn't believe what he was seeing. It was like these two had up and lost their will to fight entirely.

The bird beast got ready to emit another wave of darkness, and it was Grim who was the fastest to react. He was pretty sure preventing whatever that thing that had come out before from doing so again, was the best choice.

However...

"I'll take it from here..."

The three heard a voice come from their Granted Armament.

It was Replicus.

At almost the same time, a thin streak of grey lightning flashed from behind them and smashed into the bird beast with a blight flash.

The moment it did, the large creature disappeared.

Grim looked at his peers.

"Where do you think it went?" he asked them.

His answer came shortly after. A distance away, back on Deign, the island, a stunning glow was coming from the Sacred Forest, as well as an undulating force that rocked the sea.