

## Undead 831

### Chapter 831: A Save of Ice and Fire

The hundreds of feet stomping on the ground made it seem as though a miniature earthquake was visiting the area to inspire mild concern. But no, it wasn't.

The men, women and children sprinting away wished it was a mere natural disaster. At least then, even if it took from them all the same, they wouldn't see a clear hatred on its face.

Several had already died, and despite everyone else fleeing with a passion, they hardly had an hopes.

It had only been a bit more than half a day, but news travelled fast. The entirety of Pelian was assaulted by an unnatural threat. One that these people who were fleeing at the moment, had only been able to escape the advance assault of.

They had been far from a large, dark tower that rose, inspiring horror so deep that it killed with a glance – as the rumours had said, and had been verified. Yet, the real threat was flying towards them right now, making sure every single one of them, would be lost to its claws.

WHOOSH!

Something unseen sped through the crowd at this moment, it's dark body so fast and hard that it dismantled tens into pulpy red and splintered pale bone in a breath. The people screamed as guts and whatever was in them sprayed onto their faces, decorating the ground and their souls with the tragic reality of mortality.

The crowd scattered.

Another enemy?

Something was already pursuing them from the sky!

There was another following on the ground as well?

The screams of people being ran through by the mysterious entity rang out all over the place, despite the separation.

It was terrifying.

A woman drew her daughter into her arms, and slumped to the ground with her. She gritted her teeth and then let out a loud, uneven wail that caused her thirteen year old child to shiver, more terrified of her mother mentally breaking apart than the threats chasing them.

The middle aged woman scrambled on the ground, amid the fine human remains, and found a sharp shard of bone. She didn't even look at it, but she felt it was right.

With a shudder, she looked at her daughter with bloodshot eyes.

She couldn't let her be killed by these monsters as she watched. At least she could give her child the benefit of death by her hand. A more dignified death.

That was what she thought in the moment. Whether it made sense or not didn't matter.

Without further hesitation, she conjured all her strength, and made to drive the bone into her daughter's temple.

But then...

A firm hand stopped her attempt with ease.

Panicked, the woman screamed and looked at the figure responsible, expecting to see a treacherous face gleefully looking down at her.

But no.

It was a kind looking face, atop it a full head of fiery red hair and beautiful blue eyes.

It was a tall man dressed in a dark green armour.

His presence comforted the woman, but only for a moment.

She wasn't from here.

Where she had come from, combatants dressed in similar armour had all perished easily against the monsters. This man couldn't be any different. She refused to give herself false hope again.

As though to encourage her doubt, a dark figure sped towards the armoured man and the woman at an atrocious sped. It targeted the red haired man, going for his head without a fraction of imprecision.

The woman felt her hope finally rest.

Of course it was over, yet the man still held her hand firmly.

A shame. To think they would perish like this.

KRRKCH.

The woman heard a quick, unsettling noise... and then there was silence.

What happened?

She looked up, and saw a large humanoid figure encased in a thick, rugged white layer of what looked ice... but also fire.

"It's alright. You're safe now," the red haired man said to the woman, who shook.

He smiled and then pointed up.

"I know you feel as if all is lost. You can still live. Look up."

The woman followed where the man's finger pointed, and she saw bright golden light in the air.

Wait.

It wasn't just a light.

The sun's rays reflected on a set of shining armour in the air, which then expounded a brilliant glow.  
A man-shaped glow.

Was it a man flying?

The woman squinted and noticed a silky, exaggerated cape – freakish even – draping from the set of armour, and serenely flowing in air.

It looked exceedingly enticing to the eye for some reason, inviting and calming even, especially when the wide open arms of whoever was adorned in that armour spread wide.

The woman felt hope.

Pure and blissful hope.

Then came faith and strength that made her smile with resolve and stand up.

The same went for her daughter.

They felt rejuvenated... emboldened.

They weren't the only ones to feel this though.

All the people scattered throughout the city were attracted and entranced by the figure in the sky, given a strange sense of immense strength, some almost to the point of taking a U-turn and running towards what had been chasing them.

Theurien smiled at the effect.

He let go for the woman who had dropped the bone in her hand.

'Having you around is handy,' he thought as he glanced at the sky, but a certain shade of darkness below his eyes kept him immune to Red Rage's glow.

It had fought his heart when he saw this woman almost kill her daughter.

Good Deities, what had this world become.

...!

Suddenly, Theurien turned his head.

Another of the dark, speedy creatures ran towards him, then another and another.

There were more of them.

Worse yet, a large shadow was cast over the town.

Something flew low and slow, the rapid flapping of its wings sounding like the violent spin of a tornado.

Theurien didn't pay any mind to that thing though. He wore a fierce face and marched forward, moving past the enemy he had just immobilised with his technique.

The incoming enemies stopped when they were twenty meters from Theurien, perhaps because they noticed the difference between him and the humans they had encountered so far.

With a close look, they looked like men made of black stone, with crooked details on their faces that vaguely resembled eyes, noses and mouths.

They had details of jagged armour on their stone like textures, and from them all, an ominous presence wafted.

'They are different from the ones I faced before, but no doubt just as durable...'

The moment Theurien had this thought, the stone-like creature he had trapped two paces behind him suddenly broke free and lunged at him.

At the same time, the others of its kind bolted at Theurien from the front, ruthless gestures already prepared from their large hands.

An instant before all these creatures reached him – with the one behind him in the lead – Theurien breathed out heavily.

Half a moment later, the space around Theurien turned white and bright. Thickets of what looked like ice... flaring with a brilliant whitish blue flame exploded to cover everything except Theurien.

The man took a step forward, hearing the crunch and hiss of the icy flame below his greaves.

At the very least, the might of Clandestine Glow, an application of the Contrasting Twin Sword Technique, was potent enough to bring an absolute halt to these abominations.

Chapter 832: That's Flamboyant For Sure

Red Rage's glow saved many from self destructive despair. He had almost lost count of just how many were saved by just glancing at his magnificent figure.

But this wasn't enough.

Saving their souls would only be relevant if their bodies were saved as well. After all, the brimming of the soul and mind with hope and zeal did no good to commonfolk.

At the moment, the biggest threat to the hundreds of people that were now looking at Red Rage, was a large creature that had fittingly proportional insect-like wings.

They kept it afloat as it looked keenly at Red Rage, appraising him.

The creature looked like a fat, misshapen worm with six limbs that stretched out from its body, their ends spotting low sharp claws bred from its stone-like texture.

Its wings were a pale shade of red with symbols on them that irked Red Rage.

How odd.

The Apostle didn't pause for too long without taking action. He had been fighting beings like this for several hours and he knew that it wouldn't do to give them time.

He pointed at the creature, and a righteous voice blasted from behind his helm.

"Winged fool. Your executioners have been decided," he declared.

At that moment, Red Rage's cape turned a little stiff and opened wide in the rushing wind.

A stellar stream of light shot from the underside of the cape and hurtled towards the flying worm in a breath.

Wait. It wasn't just light.

The worm only realised this after a mighty force rammed into it and sent it flying up with shocking momentum that only grew and grew, since the source of the attack never left, but kept on!

The devastating thunder came only seconds after the dark worm had disappeared into the clouds, a large bolt of lightning carrying it!

A second figure shot from Red Rage's cape.

It fell down to the town, and landed gracefully.

It was a goblin. One with quite the handsome features and a broad, neat build fully emphasised by how it was... naked, and proud of it.

Just a moment after the goblin landed, its body contorted, convulsed, expanded and grew feathers, claws and a beak. Soon, a large eagle stood in place of the goblin, contending in height with some of the buildings around.

The creature shook and took brisk steps towards the humans scattered on the ground.

Normally, the commonfolk would have fled at the sight of it, but the glow from Red Rage influenced their state of mind, bending it towards the Apostle's will. Red Rage gave a simple nod from above and the men, women and children climbed up the giant eagle's back.

Soon, the creature took off, flying away with a quarter of the people here.

Another figure had dropped from Red Rage's cape. A large creature with the head of a ram, and the body of a bison. It grunted, carried some more people on its back and rushed away, gaining more speed with each gallop it made.

FWOOOSH!

A dark figure suddenly dropped the sky and then zipped up again with a deafening crackle!

The dark worm had returned.

There was no damage to its body, but Red Rage had expected it. Even the worm's assailant had expected it too, and he came flying down as a great ball of fire that smashed into the ground before forming a goblin shape made of the element.

The dark worm, seeming agitated, but clearly unable to show it freely, darted towards not the goblin, but Red Rage, with insane speed.

Red Rage harrumphed.

"Fool. Are you that short-sighted?!" he cried.

Just below his cape, half the head of a pale, giant fly showed, humming almost imperceptibly.



Red Rage could tell what it was mumbling. It wasn't an it, after all. It was Buzz O. A loyal fly beast with the ability to predict close set future outcomes.

The Arbiter had been told exactly how the enemy would move, and he had already planned out how he would end the enemy.

In fact, his response, from the moment the dark worm fell from the sky, had already begun.

The dark worm only noticed when it was inches from Red Rage.

Cracks emerged on its hard body, which began to expand unnaturally – not that it could have looked natural anyway.

The creature was astonished.

There was something within its body. Something pushing outward with a firm force.

The flying worm couldn't see it, but a tall goblin was in its gut, or what could have been its gut.

The humanoid creature held out its hand, its eyes which were aglow in white facilitating the barely visible pulse of mental energy that increased every moment in a spherical shape. With both the ability to turn into an invisible, barely perceptible substance akin to air, and the ability to give mental strength tangible form, this Hau Kaka goblin was one of Red Rage's aces.

However, it wasn't the only one.

In fact, the most dependable among Red Rage's summons wasn't a goblin, but something else.

A heavy creature had fallen from the Arbiter's cape just when the dark worm realised it was being attacked from within.

It was large humanoid body with dark, moist skin, bulging muscles and long tentacles draping from its face.

It was Killin Max.

The creature locked its fingers, and a wave of vibrant white energy sped from its feet and onto the surroundings, enclosing Red Rage, the worm and the goblins.

A moment later, the solid white all around shifted. Suddenly, the enclosed space turned dim, and heavy, as though it had been filled with water that couldn't be seen!

The movements of all trapped within it became sluggish and slow, the fact that it became hard to see anything only making things worse.

Red Rage's glow vanished, and Buzz O sticking out his cape was forced to retreat back inside. The raging flames that made up the elemental goblin disappeared, revealing its ordinary form.

The suppressive force of a Territory.

This was the still developing Majestic Territory of Killin Max, yet to possess a proper Imaginary GeoScape. However...

The creature brought forth its hands as they were clasped together, and pointed them in the direction of the inflating worm which had started to return to normal.

A crushing force, seemingly propounded by all the invisible waters within the Territory, condensed and constricted against the dark, flying worm from all sides!

The shiver-inducing noise of something hard shattering rang out loudly, and at the same time, the Territory collapsed, releasing everyone that was trapped within it!

The pitiful body of the large worm fell to the ground, a large portion of it dismantled and in pieces.

The creature was still alive... well, if it had actually been alive to begin with, and crying out loud as it faced the sky.

Red Rage looked at it and scoffed.

"Well deserved," he said before giving an order for it to be finished off. These creatures, as he had seen so far, were incredibly resilient, and even in this state, it took several severe blows to truly eradicate them.

Turning to Killin Max, Red Rage found the burly creature wheezing while hunching over.

Using the full extent of his Territory was still extremely draining. The poor fellow's Primary Assault was enough to sap him of all his strength at this stage, sadly.

Red Rage walked up to give his loyal soldier a few words of encouragement.

But then... he suddenly turned.

The flying worm screeched louder, and from its battered body, an inky black shroud spontaneously exploded out, casting itself expansively!

As soon as it imprinted firmly create a dark canvas on the air and buildings around, a massive hand shaped like that of a man, but with a rough, dark layer that glinted subtly, shot from the darkness with appalling speed that none around could have reacted to.

All except two.

The hand was quickly covered in a layer of ice that blazed, slowing its movements tremendously before it was too late.

Theurien's eyes were on it, his hand extended in its direction with obvious strain.

But then, there was...

"Aggrante."

A glaring beam of light so brilliant, quick and devastating that it tore the air apart, brushed the mana aside and irked all living things close to it, flashed like a laser from the distance!

It sped under the large hand almost as soon as it began to get frozen, and struck the darkness from which it emerged.

Without any resistance at all, the blanket of darkness was ripped apart as though corroded by potent acid, and as it collapsed, the hand that emerged from it, quickly whipped back in and disappeared.

Theurien, Red Rage and his beasts all turned to where the frighteningly effective stream of light had come from.

Its source turned out to be a man in a beautiful set of armour, who took relaxed steps as he walked towards them.

This man looked at Red Rage and sighed helplessly.

"That's flamboyant for sure," he murmured to himself.

Chapter 833: Honour Among Thieves

Fifty minutes later.

"Hmm. This is more than a few people," Kenno said as he scratched the back of his head and looked into the distance.

Red Rage had been modest.

The place was crowded. In fact, crowded was an understatement. The noise from the hundreds, perhaps thousands of people behind the two great transparent veils that covered the Bryne Family Estate, gave the illusion that a whole region's worth of people had suddenly been fitted here.

The fields, the pathway between the tall trees that welcomed all who came to this remodelled place, and even the mansions in the distance...

All spaces were packed with people from different areas.

Hmmm.

Perhaps it wasn't an illusion after all. At least not in the same sense.

Kenno, Red Rage and Theurien passed seamlessly through the first barrier outside the walls of the Estate. Because the Unlimited had been forced to learn mana manipulation by Replicus, his face expressed a deep level of surprise as he made contact with the veil-like barrier.

"Damn..." he muttered.

This thing was complex. It was at least half as strong as Replicus' usual barriers, and that was a high compliment.

Seeing the look on Kenno's face, Theurien turned to the man and said with a dull smile, "It's something, isn't it? Those creatures haven't been able to break through it."

Kenno nodded as he looked up at the construct.

"Chieftain Screen, huh? It's definitely impressive..." he said.

Inwardly though, he felt very conflicted.

The Unlimited, just like his other peers, was let in on secrets about his boss that the others didn't know. For instance, he knew that the boss split himself into two some time after his encounter with him back in the Isise, when he still led his band of bandits.

Apparently, this happened on the same day he felt his soul get ripped apart, a portion of it flying far off only to return a little later – an experience he was yet to truly forgive the boss for, especially after he casually brushed it off.

What had he said again?

'Ah, about that. It could have been worse. If you saw what... rather who caused it, you'd be giving me offerings right now.'

Kenno hadn't been pleased about it. Who cared about the one responsible for it?

In any case, the boss split himself in order to develop different kinds of abilities faster, and to also make accomplishing certain missions on his agenda easier.

This had greatly baffled Kenno at first, and it still did, especially when he thought about what this other version of his boss was capable of. He could confirm though, that he was vastly weaker than the boss from what he'd been told by this vibrantly armoured figure.

Kenno, after helping these two – having been drawn by the commotion in the town, as it was close to where the boss directed him to go – had explained his purpose for being here. Of course, the one to make sense of it all, was Red Rage, who considered the traces of Null Life Essence in Kenno's armour as evidence that he spoke true.

Red Rage began filling in Kenno on what he was sent to learn, and so far, the Unlimited was finding the revelations rather chilling.

Naturally, the bulk of Red Rage's knowledge came from Alaris and Ruhrees, who had escaped from the stadium which housed the witnesses for the Premium Age Royale, and brought back the corpses of Daggs and Terese for Theurien.

Kenno was stunned.

He had been averse to coming on this mission because of laziness, admittedly, but also because he feared the punishment for unapproved traversals to the main continents.

Now though, he could care less.

The boss had been right to send him here.

Even if there were consequences – which Replicus assured Kenno there wouldn't – he was happy to learn more and share with the boss as quickly as possible.

...

The three reached the wall, and Kenno saw a menagerie of creatures – powerful creatures – standing guard on it.

"I understand you need lookouts but why are there so many beasts guarding here when there's this uh... Screen?" he asked.

"We don't have much information about these mysterious monsters, but since we began going out for rescues, we've noticed that they appear from towers that rise from the ground. Dark, heretic-looking towers. My theory is that these towers appear anywhere with a population above a certain amount," Theurien explained as they passed into the crowded space behind the wall.

"I see," Kenno nodded, understanding where the Bryne Family Head was going with this. "This place might be reaching this numerical requirement for a tower to appear."

Theurien silently nodded.

Red Rage added on.

"Fear not. It might be dire, but there are variations among these towers. For weaker settlements with lesser populations, the towers that emerge house numerous, weaker foes. Like the ones we were fighting. It's only for large cities that truly terrible threats come forth, and usually, only a single creature emerges from the tower then."

There was a bit of optimism here, but it would quickly be crushed once one realised that sooner or later, these singular, more powerful threats would prowl around Pelian until they arrived here.

Kenno sighed.

Within the second Chieftain Screen, the full scale of the camp finally showed. It was like a refugee site here, with hundreds of tents, fires, makeshift hospitals and obviously, the pool of negativity billowing from the many frightened souls.

Hundreds were wounded and being treated, but it seemed that the means that had been working until now were slowly getting depleted.

Unfortunately, Red Rage's charm only worked to cheer the people up when he was present, and as a core fighting force, he couldn't sit still.

Kenno felt a little sorry for these people. He never thought he would, given the nature he adopted ever since his life in the Severed Union began.

"How are you feeding all these people and healing those who are wounded?" he asked.

"Well, I had several restorative treasures in reserve, but they have limits and the number of people only continues to grow. As for the food, well... I didn't have stores for an entire region. We're going to have to deal with that soon."

Kenno glanced at Theurien who gave his reply with a dark, but eager face and sighed.

'No honour among thieves. When did I discard that mentality?' he thought. 'Maybe somewhere along the way, I started to learn how to be... content.'

Kenno thought of the boss, and then laughed at himself.

He then looked to Red Rage and Theurien.

"Well, I can take care of all the wounded. As for the food situation..." he said before wearing a thoughtful expression. "If you could gather for me all the iron, steel and wood you have, I can solve it in a heart beat."

Chapter 834: What Is He?

Far from Pelian.

A man strummed his lute while rocking on his chair with an annoying degree of carefreeness. He played high and low notes in a way that was very tempting, the dancing of the cords almost effectively persuading his audience to relax.

Almost.

None of them could.



Despite the draping, leafy vines of the tree they all sat under which featured orchids and roses on opposite sides of each, their scents teasing the nose blissfully, none could appreciate the beauty.

The sun was diving down finally, bringing about the much needed end to this day which seemed to last thrice as long as the others.

On Pelian, perhaps others were celebrating it, but Vali, Maxim, and Darwel could barely see a reason for tomorrow to come if it was only going to emphasise what happened today.

A tall man with long, dark hair sat by Erlton's side as he strummed his lute, awaiting the many, many, many questions that were yet to reach his ears from his audience.

Seeing as these others were not ready to speak yet, this man broke the silence.

"Well, I might as well ask now," he said, and Erlton glanced at him with a shallow smile. "You knew all along what was going to happen, didn't you?"

Erlton whipped his blonde hair to the side before answering.

"Knew is a strong word. You can call it a more certain version of instinct that haunts you, coercing you into following what it says at all costs."

The dark haired man frowned, and then pinched the bridge of his nose.

"I still don't get it. You've only been hinting at how I factor into all of this. You say what's going on now, the trembling and all, was meant to happen. But how did my simple goal to meet, well... him, affect any of this?"

At that moment, Darwel interjected.

"What exactly is he?" she asked with a distraught look on her face.

It was time. She had to know. Her own theorising wouldn't cut it anymore.

Vali and Maxim turned to Erlton too.

The former, a shapely, curvaceous beauty with navy blue hair, and the latter, a pretty flat-chested lady with pink hair, had complex expressions, but ultimately, they wanted to know what was going on here.

Erlton smiled deeply. A semblance of relief, and some manner of hesitation subtly floated about his face.

"I see you've recovered somewhat. I knew it would do you good to have some time away from his body," he said, and then looked to the dark haired man at his side.

"To your question. You were on the way to causing complications with what Direction has set in stone. I've come to understand that Direction usually flows differently when confined by the powers of a Deity into one world. Those who bring their own versions of Direction elsewhere tend to unknowingly break apart that which flows in the land they invade."

The dark haired man groaned unsettlingly.

Vali gave the man a suspicious look.

What was that now? Did she hear what the bard said correctly?

"You don't know it, but had you pushed that man further in strength, even a little bit after meeting him, finding common ground and befriending him, as you surely would... I felt that was too risky. If not me, perhaps another like myself would have acted against you," Erlton continued.

The dark haired man narrowed his eyes.

Common ground? Well...

"I had suspicions when I smelled the scent of a powerful undeath curse, but... he seems like something else entirely..." he said.

"What is he?" Maxim asked this time, a threatening look in her eyes.

Vali chimed in.

"You only said to trust you, and that nothing would go wrong for now – whatever that means. I for one am inclined to believe so spill it already."

Erlton put down his lute.

After sealing Skullius' body away, he had taken everyone who saw what happened to his body outside for some cool air.

That didn't help, and he obviously knew it.

Truth be told, the cool air was mainly for himself.

He didn't know how to even begin to explain this.

Alas...

He looked at the three women and spoke.

"Before I tell you all there is about him, I want you all to know one thing. He has no ties to undeath. Uh... any friendly ties I mean... goodness, that's not right either. Well, he's not an undead," Erlton struggled with the technicalities involved in this.

The nuances, which he had unfortunately been forced to learn and appreciate, making decisions over the centuries he had been alive extremely difficult, poured in as he tried to make sense of Skullius' existence to the ignorant.

"Whatever you have seen up until this point, was genuine. I'm sure all three of you have shared some intimacy with this individual one way or another. I can tell you with certainty that it was all real."

The three women donned even more complex expressions. Series of thoughts rushed through their heads, all very different in nature, as the relationships they shared with Skullius... Festos, were also very different in nature.

Genuine, huh?

Was it?

It was undeniable that they had all shared something critical, or slightly less so, with Skullius, though.

For that reason alone, they applied common sense and reason, and let Erlton speak.

The bard sighed in relief.

"Good. As I've seen..." he began.

\*\*\*

The same bed that the body of the Penetrator had laid in before, was the same which he lay in now, burnt, broken and bent from the destructive properties that floated around it.

Thick, dark clouds that shot out bright bolts of Levin over and onto the unconscious figure swirled about, but were restricted by a four fold barrier around the bed with complex runes.

From an aerial view, the image looked peaceful. After all, the Penetrator was resting.

However, this swiftly began to change.

Flesh began to cover the dark, skeletal frame, and as it did...

Chapter 835: Crumbs For An Eager Bird

The Kindling Heath pulsed lightly as always while taking in the immense waves of essences that rushed from the stout mountain. Regardless of how chaotic and intertwined they were, the great throne tamed them, and divided them according to their characteristics.

Replicus felt the eager energies get sucked into him, and his body absorbed them greedily.

The Titan World Storm Penetrator sat, still decked in his starry armour, his flashing sockets telling of his current state of mind. He had a lot of things to sort through, most related to the journey he had just returned from.

Thankfully, because of his thought phantoms, he didn't have to exert himself. After all, when it truly mattered, the mini-hims expressed quite the decent level of intelligence.

"Got to say, it's good we made that arrangement with the Bishop when it counted. Having to constantly look over our backs for FRIENDLY FIRE is annoying."

"At least we could avoid a fight with the Bishop if we really wanted to, given the terms we set in place. The real problem is Eaniss. There's absolutely no way we can ignore her. I have a feeling she's going to sic on us some of her dogs on the way."

"Just fantastic, isn't it? Not mention, she has given our other enemies a chance to fight us as well make an attempt to raid this place while we're gone. I bet they think that with our core combatants gone, this place should be easy to raid given that it hasn't been long since we made it."

"They can try. Oh, I want them to try."

Replicus was sure it was only going to be conflict from here on out. Perhaps with no break in between either. The way to Edagon was probably going to be riddled with immense danger – perhaps even Cluster beasts that freely wandered the ocean.

This wasn't even including how exactly it was going to be like when they caught up to the masked man. Replicus was certain that facing this man was going to be the greatest challenge of all.

And speaking of the masked man, the Emissary had assured the Faction leaders that he wasn't moving at as rapid a pace as they suspected. It seemed he was not in a hurry to face the Paladin Champion waiting by the Central Boundary.

Even if he was in a hurry though, the course to the Central Boundary was very, very long. It didn't help that most teleportation means required users to have either visited their destination before, or to

at least see it with their eyes. On the sea, with barely any landmarks, such means were not that useful.

The masked man seemed to prefer to save his strength by using a large water vessel for transport – which was likely to be exceedingly powerful given what the seas and skies past the Boundary were like – rather than resort to supernatural means of covering vast distances.

Also, according to the Emissary, even if the masked man had a headstart, the vessels he provided were the best of the best. They were faster and more resilient.

With how Replicus believed most of what the Emissary said, he also chose to put his faith in how the Emissary had faith in his products.

A sigh came from the Penetrator's mouth.

The trip to the Labyrinth of the Yoke which he had been agonising over, would have to wait for now.

That was the only piece left before he went to search for Skullius. That was plan before today.

Now, this journey, which he assumed would take a week at least, was going to shave away some of his remaining time before Doom Factor 2 needed tending to.

At that moment, someone walked towards Replicus.

It was Yuyui, the little creature that had hatched hours ago in her hands. It suddenly started to squirm and become restless when it saw the gleaming pool of lava below the Kindling Health.

"It's alright," Replicus said to Yuyui who was making an effort to keep the little thing still.

She then smiled lightly and let the small humanoid go. It dove into the pool and disappeared into it, though vicious ripples showed how much it was enjoying itself.

"Have you made your choice?" Replicus asked.

Yuyui hung her head.

She didn't speak for a while.

And then...

"Back then, Ferex had agreed to dig into my soul and help me find the memories I have forgotten... about my parents and what really happened the day I lost them. I was supposed to help him clear the same Cluster that overwhelmed us, and then he'd help, but..." she said.

Yuyui's powers had responded to excessive emotion before. That was how she had awakened the Eye of Dispersal. Replicus thought that was one way for her to awaken a third eye out of the twelve she was supposed to have.

Since she hadn't been in the state of mind to try anything related to it though, he had not given any suggestions.

Though, there was one other method that Yuyui could get stronger with.

Replicus remembered that Yuyui had managed to use Demion's Dance properly before. Like him, she didn't fear death, and the weapon resonated with her that time.

That was too complex a solution to even try out, unfortunately.

Anyway...

"You don't have to give it too much thought. Even if you were to say you wanted to stay by my side, I wouldn't pick you for this journey. That wouldn't help you at all," Replicus said to Yuyui who shrank.

She had more she wanted to say, but she didn't know how to say it.

Being useless was hard to make appealing.

What case could she make for herself?

The kind of mind set she had... was it the one that her Hidden Class required in the long run?

Yuyui wasn't afforded any more time to think over what she wanted to say to Replicus, sadly.

Allora marched up to the Penetrator and gave a huge smile.

"Everything's ready, boss!" she said.

Replicus nodded and stood from the throne.

He walked through the lava and emerged out of it to stand before Yuyui who he then pulled along. Behind them, the easily forgotten figure of Pherdanta followed.

Replicus looked down at Yuyui who seemed to want to fit in his palm which lightly pushed her from her back.

"I'll say it again. I meant it when I said I'm fine with whatever you choose. Though, there is one instance in the near future where I might need your help, Yuyui," Replicus said, his sockets flashing from dim to bright twice.

Yuyui looked up at him.

"What is it?" she asked desperately.

\*\*\*

On the shore of Deign, under the dark night sky, all the members of Replicus' Faction could be seen gathered around something huge.

The Penetrator sighed at the sight.



He often recalled that this team of his didn't have a name. Every other Faction had their own.

To the Penetrator however, a name was useless before this group set out for its true mission – the real reason behind its existence. That was when he would grant a name.

"Hmph."

Replicus looked up.

His subordinates were all looking up at the massive vessel a few meters from Deign – a great ship made to brave calamities of the seas and skies.

#### Chapter 836: Departure

The ship was at least thirty meters tall and more than double that in length. A rough-looking hull of blackish brown, visibly reinforced by some extraordinary means, encased the exterior, showing none of the usual armaments that sprang open portions of regular vessels of the same type.

The vessel had no sail, or even mast of any kind. All that could be seen above its large body, was a stream of disjointed golden lights in an umbrella shape, reaching down in an arc to cover the whole deck – hiding and shielding it at the same time.

At the front end of the ship, a figureless bowsprit stood erect, pointing yonder, looking more like a stabbing lance than a mere pole awaiting decoration. At the back end, what looked like long, brown thorns jutted out, their ends tinged with a dim orange light that hissed faintly.

When Replicus had first seen this, he had identified a heavy element from that glow, something like fire, but much greater.

The strangest thing about this vessel though, was the fact that dozens of odd, dark creatures were attached to its keel, most of them submerged in the waters of the sea.

They were too mashed together to give a definite description as to what they were, but at the very least, anyone could see the aquamarine features they had, from fins, gills and webbed limbs.

At the moment, they all stood still, but Replicus knew their purpose, and they would be moving soon.

Grim was addressing the other Faction members when Replicus finally arrived in their midst.

"Oh boss," he said when he saw the Penetrator. "Shall we get going?"

Replicus looked around.

"Where's Baddan?" he asked.

"Already on board."

The Penetrator nodded.

Yuyui by his side had grown meek since they left the Honing Fortress. Her odd behavior only grew worse when she saw Grim expressing an undaunted desire to leave already.

Replicus walked ahead, turned and addressed his Faction members.

"The fact that I am taking three of my Unlimited with me is not only a testament to my faith in our defences, but also to you, and what you are capable of. A Fortress can be rebuilt, but such a luxury doesn't apply to living, breathing individuals. You all have learnt something during your time with me. You will be tested on what exactly you learned, believe me.

It will be up to you to decide how you proceed," he said.

The many combatants were evidently paying rapt attention. From those that had already been with Replicus from the start, to those that joined after, there was barely any difference.

They had all endured the same.

All of them recognised that the boss spoke to all of them only when there was something very important to tell.

This was one such instance.

"I have no real interest in seeing this place thriving as always when I get back. Rather, let me say, seeing such a thing or not doesn't move me. I'd rather return to see Deign burning, but all or some of you standing on it, renewed and polished from what is to come. Keep that in mind."

Replicus concluded and turned. He then began walking towards the ship.

His subordinates bellowed in agreement while watching his figure draw away.

Allora rushed to follow with a big smile and waved goodbye to the others. Pherdanta also followed, unnoticed.

Grim walked up to Yuyui and patted her shoulder.

"I'll be seeing you soon then, Yu," he said, his red eyes gleaming with positive light.

"...Yeah," she said meekly, hollowly.

Grim scoffed.

"Don't be like that. If you start moping around now, I don't think you'll be any different by the time we come back," he said.

Yuyui looked at him.

"I won't," she said with a frown.

Grim was pleasantly surprised.

"I hope so," he said before drawing away from her. "Make sure to eat for five."

Yuyui blushed before scooping some wet dirt and throwing it at Grim who laughed and dodged.

As the group, with Replicus in the lead approached the sea, a ring of white light was drawn on the shore. It remained luminous even when waves drowned it.

Replicus took the first steps into it, followed by the others.

A moment later, the ring of light disappeared along with them, and they appeared on the deck of the ship.

With the shower of gold light above, visibility was barely a concern on the ship. Some kind of neat blackish wood with an unreal smooth texture, was what made the deck.

Except for a small cabin that stood on the quarter deck, there was nothing else on this layer of the ship. It seemed visibility was the emphasised theme, for even the light spraying in an arc above, somehow vanished from view when either of the four made even a lax attempt at looking past it.

Replicus and the others had checked everything about the ship before this, ensuring that it was safe and learning all its functions and compartments.

All of it was easy enough to understand.

The ship could only be boarded using a spatial light rift that appeared when anyone got close to the ship.

The umbrella above it was an absolute barrier that protected the whole ship against attacks from outside, and even smoothened the experience for everyone aboard should the ride become chaotic – as it undoubtedly would.

Allora beamed and rushed to the end of the deck to look down with a smile.

"This is incredible! This ship has to be Mythical grade at least!" she cried. Unlike everyone else, she hadn't boarded the ship yet before this.

Most of her time was spent begging Replicus to take her with him, and talking to her friends, most of whom were now lower ranked than her.

"Of course it's Mythical. I doubt it could be beyond that though. There aren't any offensive functions. That's left to us, I guess..." Grim said while looking ahead.

"Let's go. I'd rather get the tension around me as soon as possible," Replicus said as he summoned a chair and sat on it.

Pherdanta nodded, and looked ahead.

To make the ship set off, only a simple vocal command was needed.

"Non-Sail," Pherdanta called.

At that moment, the ship shook lightly.

The dozens of creatures woven together on the keel suddenly came to life. Their limbs spread out at once, and the sea water fled inches from them.

Behind the ship, the thorns attached to it glowed furiously, each attaining an orange rune at its tip that cast a blazing heat outward.

The Faction members drew back just in time before a rattling boom ensued with a scorching heat!

The great ship sped forth in a straight, smooth line, unshaken by the large waves that blocked its path.

They all dissipated before it as it streaked past at an unimaginable speed towards an uncanny destination.

#### Chapter 837: Genius Onboard

Past the door to the small cabin, was a spatially augmented area that was equal in size to a single floor in the Honing Fortress. Wooden tiling made everything underfoot, the space clear and clean – initially – but Replicus' subordinates had packed a lot of supplies into the space.

Tools, weapons, shields, spears. All of these could be seen leaning against the walls, though their purpose wasn't so straight forward. A large cubical object had been positioned in the first third of

the large space, full of cooked food, all of it enough to last at least a month, even if the group ate unsparingly.

Curiously, the Faction members had also compartmentalised the large space, creating five rooms that had luxury almost equal to that of the Honing Fortress.

At the moment, in one of these tidy rooms, Replicus was seated with Baddan.

The Sky Watcher sat on the floor. His body spotted the same kind of outfit he always wore, but much cleaner and in dazzling white. The baggy pair of pants, and the long sleeved, low necked baggy shirt that fed into the pants couldn't have looked any more ceremonial. Replicus had honoured Baddan's desire to keep the garb.

With his white furs, the Sky Watcher looked like a sacred beast from mythology which fickle souls would send their prayers and offerings to.

He sat on the floor, one of his legs angled up to support his elbow. His dark eyes never left the Penetrator who sat on a chair ten meters away.

"Has it all sunk in?" Replicus asked.

Baddan remained silent for several moments, and then he spoke.

"...Creeds. I've never heard of such things until now. They do seem rather... dangerous."

"Oh they are. Beasts tend to celebrate reaching the tenth tier and earning a Majestic Territory, but for humans, it's different. A Territory is a trump card, but Incandescent Stagers normally won't use it even a pinch. The more experienced ones will use complex Creeds before exhausting themselves in Territory battles."

Baddan sucked in a slow, deep breath.

The information that Replicus was adding, was only building up to what the Penetrator had inserted in him just now. Implanting small quantities of knowledge into the brain using mana seemed like a very simple feat for this ridiculous being before Baddan.

"If you were to enter into a battle without knowing about Creeds, I fear I would lose my investment. And don't be fooled, Incandescent Stage experts can use their Creeds on anything and anyone lower ranked than them. If you see a weaker opponent, don't dare rule them out. The Faction leaders are almost as messed up as I am."

Baddan grunted in agreement.

A few images that had been transmitted to his brain reacted to what Replicus was talking about, giving him a better representation of what he was talking about.

Creeds.

After one passed into the Incandescent Stage they would begin to understand their soul to a terrifying degree. For the most part, very few creatures were able to manipulate their souls consciously.

Perhaps Mages could cheat their way into learning intricacies of the soul because ultimately, their powers relied more on mastery of their Class than Stages, but every other normal Class holder could only gain the added advantage of swaying their inner self, as they would their body, at the Incandescent Stage.

Once a firm understanding of the soul was granted, Incandescent Stagers would begin to generate Creeds.

Replicus had heard an extreme, but very accurate definition of Creeds.

Fragments of Rules.

The same Rules that Deities were able to impose on their worlds for protection and progress. Creeds were a deeply diluted version of that.

As such, Creeds could be used for almost anything. They were a currency to break out of rigid systems and make the impossible or set in stone, possible and flexible. That was dangerous thing.

The soul was able produce Creeds over time, and the quantity depended on the quality of the soul. Tasks also generated a few Creeds due to their difficulty at the Incandescent Stage, but this was the poorest method to acquire them.

The best way was a little more difficult, yet blissfully rewarding.

"How are you doing with your technique?" Replicus asked.

Baddan narrowed his eyes lightly, and looked at his palm.

"It was difficult to handle even after I subdued all six, but now.... it's easier. I have already integrated the technique into my Territory. It worked surprisingly well with my old abilities, as you said."

Replicus was taken aback.

"You already... integrated it into your Territory? That is some monstrous talent," he said.

He wasn't faking surprise.

As ridiculous as it seemed for Replicus to be able to inject techniques into living beings using [Wealth of Spoils], it was much nearly impossible to achieve this on fully grown living things.

The reason Replicus had been more inclined to use hatchlings from different species for this, was because their brains were easier to shape and manipulate, and their bodies would be yet to take proper form.

This was different for older beings.

If it were that easy, Replicus would have been overloading his subordinates with all sorts of powers.

Once the body grew, and the brain too, they would become less malleable because of already chosen Classes, habits and all.



Replicus only succeeded with Baddan because his abilities, as his race and class suggested – Sky Watcher – were owned by the Cluster he had been born in. As such, when he lost them, his body was like an empty vessel strained by old habits, yet greedily awaiting the return of its original powers.

And even though Baddan succeeded, Replicus didn't expect the Cluster beast to familiarize himself with the new powers in just a matter of hours.

That... was truly terrifying.

Replicus sighed.

"Well. Good job. If a Territory springs up, I'll be expecting you to counter it. This will probably happen a lot more times than is tolerable," he said.

"I thought you said Incandescent Stage experts don't normally use their Territories," Baddan asked.

"They don't," Replicus said while standing up. "Unfortunately for us, all of top enemies are Incandescent Stage experts, and all of them are crazy – one moreso than the others."

The Penetrator left a thoughtful Baddan in his room and exited into a corridor with the beautiful wooden tiling.

Replicus passed nine doors to nine spacious rooms, one of which invited many eyes to see past its open door, and spot Allora, who was sprawled on a large bed, fast asleep.

The Penetrator shook his head and closed the door to her room

He wasn't averse to Allora getting some shut-eye. Once the trip picked up its pace, he doubted there would be too much time for rest.

'I still can't believe she managed to convince me...' Replicus thought.

He had initially decided to leave Allora because she wasn't good at controlling her powers yet, which were fairly demanding.

However, she won him over with several good points, one of them being that if Replicus wanted her to grow faster, there was no better training ground than this voyage to catch the masked man.

Allora even used his speech for his subordinates against him.

Apparently saying that he would prefer to see Deign burnt down when he came back instead of it thriving, but with his subordinates polished from the carnage, worked a little too well for Allora's case.

In the end, Replicus decided to leave the duty for Kenno alone.

After passing by Allora's room, Replicus reached a door at the end of the long corridor.

The door led to the deck, with no prelude of a step ladder or stairs. Magic rightfully allowed for such tedious things to be omitted.

The Penetrator saw Pherdanta standing in the middle of the deck with her hands behind her back.

Unlike others, Replicus could spot her easily because he had several degrees of perception that were vastly different from the norm. After once getting annoyed at having so many eyes, Replicus had decided to give them another purpose that one which could simply be replaced by a torch.

Grim was leaning against the edge of the deck while looking down at the flowing waters below. He seemed so distracted that he didn't notice Replicus reach him.

"What's on your mind?" Replicus asked.

Grim was a little startled, but quickly relaxed.

"Oh, boss. Nothing much. I just... remembered the day I got these abilities," he said, and a smile crept on his face. "I didn't believe I would survive the trials in that place despite itching to become an Unlimited."

"Really? You looked so confident when you came back. I thought you had been confident about it from the get go," Replicus said.

"No. The attitude, the smile and the confidence all came with the Hidden Class. I wasn't usually so cheerful... or brave. But I guess I did have the opportunistic touch of a bandit. Kenno made sure we all had it."

Replicus' sockets flashed.

"How do you feel about your Class?" he asked.

At this question, Pherdanta turned to the two with an odd look.

Grim looked at Replicus curiously.

"My Class?"

"Yes."

Grim scratched his head.

"Well, I love it. You gotta appreciate what you fight hard for, right? Not a day goes by where I don't admire my claws," he said with grin. "It's made me feel more... authentic, you know? Like I've become bigger than the man from my dreams."

Replicus nodded silently.

Inwardly, his visage turned dark.

Chapter 838: In The Know

Several hours passed with the large vessel casually striding over untamed waters. Replicus sat on a chair he summoned, and silently looked ahead, past Pherdanta whose duty was to steer the ship.

The vessel reacted to whoever stood in the middle of the deck – the area specified for all steering functions. To move the ship in any particular way, all one had to do was gesture meaningfully toward the direction of choice, and it would follow.

For now, Pherdanta who had her hands behind her back, made the ship keep heading North. It was going to be a long way to the Central Boundary, and soon, threats that needed dealing with soon start rising, but for now, it was smooth sailing.

Replicus sighed.

His mind was still set on the conversation he had been having with Grim.

It tied into what Riba said, and what Pherdanta said too.

It seemed like a good thing that his subordinates liked having their Hidden Classes, and for the most part, it was, however, Replicus wanted to know how much each could affect the other.

As Riba had said, Hidden Classes were essentially ways olden powerhouses used to preserve their legacies. And sometimes, said legacies did more than just carry forward their unique fighting styles and powers into the future. They also carried their wills.

Replicus recalled well what happened when he absorbed the Luminant Seed in the Temple of Unlusted Tears. Because of his rapid growth, how he passed from the Foundation Stage and into the Advancement Stage, he had awakened another portion of Fulgardt's powers.

The WILLS of Fulgardt.

On top of this, he awakened another one of the pillars of the Fruit of World Myths.

Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge.

During this time, Sause had warned him never to use this power at all. According to him, it was a manifestation of Fulgardt's will.

Recalling this now, Replicus was stressed by the implication.

Fulgardt was definitely an outlier in more than one way, but the various Hidden Classes with potential at least similar to his, likely had installed ways to take over whoever drew their legacy, right?

Pherdanta claimed that fulfillment was the answer to not getting tangled up in the mess that came with Hidden Classes. Perhaps she believed that was the way to overcome the powerful wills of individuals who were not satisfied with how their lives played out back then.

Could it be true?

Was he going to fail at this because he was far from fulfilled?

He only had half his soul, and he had no closure with important bits of his life.

His supposed sister.

His fellow Moronic Undead in Deadmanland.

And even Somanda.

'Damn it...' Replicus thought.

The image he had seen from Riba's Divination constantly plagued his thoughts.

At that moment, the door to the small cabin behind him opened to reveal a yawning Allora who hunched in order to fit through in the doorway. She was rather tall, after all.

"Hello, boss!" she said a sluggish cheeriness.

Replicus merely nodded.

"The slacker awakens," Grim scoffed, and Allora scowled.

"I was just getting a little sleep. Unlike you, I don't thrive in the night," she defended herself.

"Heh."

Allora turned back to Replicus.

"Boss, you said a Paladin Champion is awaiting at the Central Boundary right?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Are we really sure he can't defeat this masked man or whatever. If he's the number one ranked Paladin Champion, what are the chances that he is above the Incandescent Stage? I've heard everyone above the Incandescent Stage is ridiculously strong."

Replicus sighed.

"We don't know what the chances are. I'm leaning more toward what the Emissary said. If this guy is confident enough to take down a dragon, then he probably won't be taken down by Paladin Champion. However..." he said with a grave tone that made even Pherdanta turn her head. "This also makes me think there's something crucial the Emissary left out."

"Even Eaniss didn't point it out, but I think she caught on. If the Emissary, rather, the Herald among the Immortals, is reluctant to face this masked man, or even consider collaborating with the other Herald against him, then the power of the Deities, Divine power, must be ineffective against the masked man."

...!

"Really?" Allora asked with a frown.

"But how is that possible? If the Heralds are like stronger versions of the Paladin Champions, how could their powers be ineffective against the guy?" Grim said.

Replicus hunched over.

"Maybe ineffective isn't the right term. The masked man seems capable of taking away the power of the Heralds. I believe since they are reluctant to even fight him, then he must be able to do this easily. That's why we are being hired for this. Incandescent Stage experts use normal blessings, but they aren't reliant on them, and the rest of you, as Masters rely on mana and Aura," he explained.

Allora leaned against the end of the deck and folded her arms over her chest.

"So in short, this number one Paladin Champion is going to be made quick work of?" she asked.

"Not necessarily. If the Purity is in the know as we – the Severed Union – then they must have some measures against their top fighter getting defeated," Replicus said.

He only considered this because assuming that the masked man would plow his way through every obstacle without resistance wasn't possible.

Maybe this Paladin Champion's Divine Blessing was just absurd enough to render the masked man's unusual abilities useless. Or...

"I'm sure we'll get to know what the outcome of that fight was, or is. We're drawing closer to the Boundary."

Several minutes of silence followed with everyone indulging their thoughts.

The lull was only torn apart when a light thump registered on the arching umbrella of light above.

Something was standing on it!

Before tension grew, however, everyone relaxed at the sight of what it was.... who it was.

Pherdanta manipulated the golden barriers to create an opening onto the deck, and the figure dropped through.

"Took you long enough, Kenno," Grim said.

The former bandit group leader gave Grim a roll of the eye and went up to Replicus.

"A few more hours and you probably wouldn't have been able to teleport right to me. Our destination is riddled with obstacles that make it impossible for spatial transportation to work well," the Penetrator said to the Unlimited.

"Would you believe me if I said I sensed my timing would be fitting?" Kenno said with a smile and slumped to the deck, leaning against its edge.

He gave an exhausted sigh.

"What did you find?" Replicus sighed.

Kenno's face immediately changed into a difficult one.

"You're not going to like most of it."

\*

Ten minutes later.

"I see," Replicus said calmly, but his sockets flashed continuously from dim to bright.

The four Unlimited shuddered.

None of them said a word for a while, digesting what had just been said, and anxiously wondering if the boss would process it all well, as he seemed to do always.

It was unlikely.

There were just too many things to think about, as Kenno had drawn as much information as he could.



The revelation that Setkh had been the one who cursed Theurien, having partnered with a strange group that took the Harmonic Ember, the precious gem of the Bryne Family.

The mysterious blue creatures invaded Genhuis City months ago, on the same day that Yuyui returned from Pelian screaming about how Ferex was gone.

Stylla's disappearance on the same day, and how she cured her father of his illness and flew away.

Theurien's return to consciousness.

How the masked man absorbed the souls of the millions of people at the venue for the Premium Age Royale while the Game Master absorbed, something else from the masses and fled.

The death of Terese and Daggs as a result.

A rogue Paladin Champion.

The emergence of the towers.

It was all quite a bit to digest.

In the same two months that Replicus had been growing wildly, chaos had been brewing around Skullius, and it was definitely far more than he could handle.

The first thing Replicus paid attention to, was the intricate detail of how the masked man had extracted the souls of the witnesses. Apparently, it took a heavy toll on him but he remained standing. He even had helpers, one of them being a Paladin Champion who was thought to be long lost.

'This guy must be really proficient in undeath if he can manipulate the souls of millions of people all at once. This is what Serenity is the peak of Undeath. What Arch-Liches practice. Did Somanda teach him, or did he figure it out on his own?' he thought.

'The fact that he can subdue Paladin Champions could also validate my theory on this man being capable of handing Divine Blessing users. If he has an army of similar powerful reanimated corpses by his side...'

Replicus' face turned dark.

Yeah, his power was probably very formidable.

But the Penetrator wasn't afraid of him.

He thought about how Kenno described the corpse of Terese, Theurien's youngest daughter.

Something cracked within him.

'I'm growing more eager to meet this guy.'

Chapter 839: Poor Souls

The heavy atmosphere conjured by Replicus didn't see a pause for a while since Kenno finished delivering the news. The Penetrator didn't move an inch. It seemed only his thoughts did, swirling around his head, unseen by his Unlimited who only grew more tense by the second.

"To think Theurien actually woke up. How did Stylla even manage such a feat? I guess Skullius would be the only one to know," one of the thought phantoms said as it whizzed past Replicus' eyes.

"More than a dozen million souls... What is that masked necromancer's goal? And what did Guissepo get from this? If his goal was to release Boron, what could he have extracted from the witnesses?"

Almost at the same time that a second thought phantoms asked this, the other responded with the answer. It was so clear.

"Dormant blessings!"

Given that Skullius, while in his Hybrid Luman form, always got the notification about a reward in the form of a blessing after clearing a Cluster, only to get taken away by the influence of the Binds

of Fukal – which blocked any blessing or curses from the four Deities – the idea of how normal people got blessings that most of them never got to use stayed in his mind.

As the Penetrator, he never got any notifications like that after clearing a Cluster, strangely, but he also kept the prospect in mind. The Deities rewarded those served by vanquishing Clusters by increasing the potency of their blessings according to the level of Cluster they cleared.

As such, if dormant blessings grew enough, even someone who had yet to taste the Incandescent Stage could activate them and began using them for their own good.

A good example was Gertreld from Tulnas' Harem Guild.

(A/N: Refer to Ch.273).

"The blessings come from the three Deities, meaning they must play a part using this key the Emissary spoke about. And well, if gathering a lot of blessings is all that is needed, then in a way, it really wasn't all that difficult to free Boron in the first place," a thought phantom said.

"Hmmm. Honestly having a whole Deity manifest in the world seems like a bigger problem than this masked man, but I feel like if allowed to do as he pleases, he might just be an even bigger threat. Just how much power would he get from absorbing the dragon in Edagon anyway?"

"None of us wants to find that out."

Replicus sighed.

The tense atmosphere turned warm and willy again.

However...

"You recall that man with that black and white jewel around his neck?" Replicus said to the Unlimited.

Kenno, Grim, and Pherdanta nodded, but Allora seemed to be in the dark. She hadn't been able to meet a lot of the other Faction leaders yet. Pherdanta would have been in the same boat if not for her trip with Replicus to the Union hours ago.

"The jewel he always wears around his neck. It's called the Harmonic Ember. It's something the Bryne Family – the people my other self has been working with – have had in their household for centuries. It was stolen months ago."

Kenno's face hardened.

"I see."

Red Rage had been the one to tell him what happened with the incident when Setkh confessed, and didn't know enough to give Kenno any clue that the attackers were from the Severed Union.

"My other self marked the person who stole it. I've been sensing the mark placed on him without knowing what it was for. And now..." Replicus said, his sockets flashing terribly. "...That whole Faction is on my list."

The <Marked Spot> Replicus saw on the Mage who was the guard to the man with the Harmonic Ember around his neck finally made sense.

Skullius had probably hoped to one day meet this man again, but well. First come, first served. Replicus would have to deal with the original's business.

Grim grinned.

"To think you'd have targets of your own, boss," he said. "I thought we would be on the defensive for the whole trip."

"I did too," Replicus said.

Having said that, he turned back to Kenno.

"These towers you spoke of... they've only been appearing in Pelian, right?"

"Yes. I made a few trips around. News is that only Pelian is plagued by them," Kenno replied. "The Six Houses have intervened though. I heard certain regions have already cleared out the towers and the beasts that they released."

Replicus nodded.

Unfortunately, there was probably no aid coming from a sixth House.

"Master."

Pherdanta's call grabbed Skullius' attention, and his senses immediately widened. Pherdanta normally wouldn't call for him without adding on what she called him for.

This meant that there was danger somewhere.

A split moment later, Replicus detected the problem.

Far, far off, was a treacherous tangle of powers that attracted his Special essence manipulation skill, [Sorcery of Essence].

A large Cluster sent pulses of mad power in every direction.

It was a bright blue Cluster, the large crack in space that represented it half submerged in the ocean.

"Hmmm," Replicus sensed its shape.

His Unlimited could barely see a bright dot in the distance, despite knowing what it was already. Even Grim who had very good eyesight couldn't see it any better than the others.

With the quick speed with which the ship carved through the length of the ocean, however, the Cluster was getting clearer and clearer.

"It's open," Allora said as the view of the thing improved.

Indeed. The Cluster was open. The bright blue that could be seen only hung around the crack, but at its center, there was a gaping void that would have been plastered blue otherwise.

The door to the small cabin opened, and Baddan emerged from it. The Unlimited turned to look at him and found him looking dazedly at the Cluster which was drawing closer and closer with each moment.

The Sky Watcher seemed lost in it.

The sensation the phenomenon propounded must have drawn him, as it felt all too familiar.

It had the distinct flavor of his past home, but he knew it wasn't.

Hours ago, Replicus had taught him the basics about this world, and the formation of Clusters had been part of that lengthy explanation.

Getting to know that his whole world was only a very insignificant portion of a larger world was certainly unpleasant. The Sky Watcher had already known since he met Rias, but getting the breakdown of the how and why just hit differently.

Now, as Baddan looked at the large crack a mere five hundred meters away, he shook his head solemnly.

A tinge of pity even crawled up to his heart when a large, winding body sprang forth from the ocean, a few meters from the Cluster, its head facing the ship with a vicious visage.

Another like-bodied fiend emerged and then another.

'Poor souls,' Baddan thought.

Chapter 840: Rare Showcase

Three great serpents, their bodies glittering with a luminous shine that emanated from their wet scales had emerged. They had peculiar sets of webbed wings around their necks which quivered violently to conjure gusts and beat away the waters around them.

Each of them was large enough to wrap around the great ship and drag it into – if it were a normal cruising vessel – and they seemed eager to do it. At least one of them was.

When the ship was two hundred meters closer, all three serpents moved.

One dove into the sea, likely to attack from below, the other leapt up and opened its mouth wide, revealing a set of long, fleshy fangs as it beat its wings madly for temporary flight. The last hissed with glee and swam towards the ship at great speed.

"Looks like we can't go around, huh?" Grim said as he smirked.

"There's a simple solution," Allora said excitedly while propping up her hand and extending two fingers forward.

"No. We need to conserve as much Null Life Essence as possible. We could be cut off from the Honing Fortress' reserve at any time," Replicus said.

Allora's zeal dwindled and she nodded sadly.

"Pherdanta."

Replicus called someone best suited to ending the nuisances faster than anyone else aboard, save for himself.

The great vessel was sturdy and probably wouldn't be grazed by creatures like this. However, since there were inherent attack functions to this marvel of the sea...

Without a word, Pherdanta left the designated control section for the ship and walked over to the front of the deck.

She could see the waters splashing madly as the enemies approached from different directions and with different strategies of attack.

The quickest one out of the three was the attack from below. Pherdanta sensed its approach. It was roughly twenty meters.

The next was the one swimming directly towards them, and last, was the one soaring through the air, its body encased with what seemed all its mana at once!

None of this matter to Pherdanta.

The fearsome woman had two swords on her, all above the battle skirt connected to the rest of her armor.

One was a sheathed katana on her side, and the other was a thick, red-bladed odachi, its steel bare behind her back.

A split moment later, Pherdanta had both swords held in each of her hands – the katana still sheathed.

As though it was the simplest, and most unsophisticated thing she could ever do, the Unlimited brought the swords together... and merged them.

The result, which came with no special effect at all to compliment the strange feat, was a killing tool with the girth of a gauntlet sword, and the curve of a saber, the details of its blade hidden behind a fitting sheath.

It was only then that Pherdanta's mana blasted from her body, surging up in a graceful tower of white so controlled and yet so...

"...Barbaric," Baddan said with fascination.

All the other Unlimited paid close attention.

If there was anyone among them who rarely showed her abilities, it would be Pherdanta, and given the opportunity to see her work...

Pherdanta held the sheathed sword with its tip facing down. With her free hand, she then held the hilt.



The enemies finally arrived at the same moment.

The luster of the new blade... was never seen.

Its owner never drew it from its narrow home.

However, that didn't stop it from expressing its furious intent.

The ship was the first to feel the might of the female Unlimited. For a moment, it forced to lean to the right, as if pulled on desperate suction.

Next, was the sea.

A cruel whipping of the wind sent a tide of ocean waters gushing to the right, towering for dozens of kilometers.

A spray of blood simultaneously hit the golden barrier that covered the deck, along with finely chopped triangular fragments of all three of the winged serpents!

Unfortunately, this wasn't all.

The crack in space a few meters away now, partly obscured by raging wind and waters, was shattered into fragments as well, its dissipating pieces carried rightward until they vanished.

The great vessel rocked for a bit because of the waters which dipped and rose.

It then finally settled.

Kenno sighed.

"Why do I get the feeling she's more fit for this than me?" he said with a smile.

"She probably is," Grim laughed.

Allora gave a steady stream of applause as Pherdanta walked back to the middle of the deck. Her hybrid sword slipped seamlessly back into two different swords that she placed in their original positions.

"Good job," Replicus said.

Pherdanta reminded him of Alaris quite a bit. He didn't think she was on his level yet, but he did think she was likely someone the Bloodless Steel Phantom would call a swordmaster.

Because the Penetrator series had the parent flaw of being unable to perform attacks that didn't have penetrative power, Replicus had never indulged in grooming swordsmanship. That task was left for Skullius.

He did wonder who was currently better at the sword though.

Baddan seemed enthralled by the 'performance'. His gaze didn't leave Pherdanta for a while. Fortunately for him, after the woman did something to grab attention, her presence wouldn't be as fleeting until the people around her turned from her.

Replicus noticed this and got a chuckle from it. It was interesting to see a Cluster beast gawking at a human like this. Perhaps it was because Baddan had the fascination hammered into him since his experience with Rias.

In any case...

"Right. Kenno. I've tasked you with keeping the Honing Fortress safe. You should leave before it's too late," Replicus said promptly.

"Can't say I didn't expect that..." Kenno said. Grim had given him a brief whisper-ish rundown of the events that occurred during his absence when Replicus had been digesting what he told him.

He was pretty much alright with the idea of defending Deign.

He then stood up and craned his neck.

"I hope you don't come back carrying defeat on your backs. I might as well take back control if that should happen," he scoffed humorously.

"I don't think there's much room for coming back if we are defeated out there," Replicus said.

Kenno laughed.

He then gave a few goodbyes to his peers and disappeared into thin air moments later.

Following Kenno's departure, Replicus retreated to the cabin, leaving his four subordinates on deck.

He quickly reached his room, which was needlessly luxurious, with a bed he would probably never use and various trinkets and tools, most of which he didn't need.

Replicus sat on a chair modeled after his Kindling Heath, and held the chest plate of his starry armor.

Something was stirring within him since a few minutes ago, and it had only grown more insistent as time passed.

"What's got you riled up, hmm? Was it Pherdanta?" Replicus spoke to this 'nag'.