

## Undead 841

### Chapter 841: Bolstering The Duke! (1)

The glinting armor Replicus wore receded to form a gap that exposed the majority of the turbulent storms attached to his skeletal frame. These too also gave way, showing the two bright mana cores hanging just before Replicus' spine – one with a radiant blue that pulsed vigorously, and another with a jarring white that almost contended with Replicus' sockets at full flash.

Asides from these though, a small, pale creature with crumpled skin, its head bald and its face eyeless, was squirming irritably, beating at these two cores with as much strength as it could muster.

Perhaps the little thing was just mad about the cramped space, or maybe it was displeased by the band around its neck which Replicus had placed on it just after it was born.

"You're so vicious, huh?" Replicus said exasperatedly.

This latest Apostle was already proving to be a handful.

He had known already, but he thought that the leash that he placed around it would make it tolerably docile for the time being. Well, that certainly wasn't the case. He really needed to complete the process before proceeding.

Since the little Apostle had calmed down before – perhaps it had fallen asleep, he didn't know – he had placed it in his body and began feeding it Null Life Essence. With the vast reserves of it in the Honing Fortress, and without access to it being restricted while he was in the Severed Union, Replicus thought the little thing would have more than enough.

Because circumstances had changed though, and he had to limit his supply, and thus the little Apostle had woken up and started trying to manhandle his mana cores. It didn't help that Pherdanta's striking mana had burst out vibrantly just now. The new Apostle was probably startled by it.

Replicus reached within himself and drew out the little menace.

He held it up and watched it make all sorts of faces as it tried to jump out of his hand and flee.

'I guess this is better than having the little sockethole try to use that Dominion or whatever on me,' Replicus thought.

That didn't seem to be a viable option for the little Apostle now though, as the source of that Dominion it had exhibited earlier today, was the crown that had been growing from its temple.

There was no sign of it now, which, according to what Replicus had seen from the guidance field, meant that the authority it had been trying to steal, has passed.

'In any case, let's get this over with.'

Replicus held down the little creature.

When he experimented with the original egg it had been born from, he had linked all sorts of skills to the unborn creature inside making it a little too strong, and then killed it.

When using [Apostle Summon], the quality of the specimen determined what kind of creature would be born, after all.

That had worked a little too well, as far as Skullius was concerned. He knew from experience that Apostles could be born with skills they had before being summoned from a carcass. That had played a hefty role in this case.

The guidance field sparked alive before Replicus' sockets and he had it show him the description of the little one's species once again.

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[Astute Duke of Transversal]

This is an incredibly prodigious race honored among the stars and favored by the many worlds in the Null Verse. The Astute Duke of Transversal is loosely related to one of the most formidable races within Serenity's treasure - a royal race - and has even adopted traits that go beyond the very definition of its name.

Asides from being extremely favored by various versions of Null Life Essence, having several innate powers that bar contact with the Duke's body unless it allows it, and several racial manifestations that propound dreadful offensive capabilities, this species can temporarily transplant various regions of the Null Verse anywhere it wishes, and quickly adapt them to its advantage.

It also possesses the ability to passively learn all there is to know about the Null Verse and its vast dimensions.

(Due to its unique powers, the Astute Duke of Transversal has inherited a flaw to balance its existence among the natives of different worlds.

The Astute Duke of Transversal can NEVER truly become subservient to another being because of its close ties to a royal race. To sway it into service somewhat, a LEASH will be provided, however, even after using it, the Duke will slowly grow more and more rebellious with age unless its master tames it UNCONVENTIONALLY).

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-This species has the possibility of awakening a hidden AUTHORITY in the future.

-This species has the possibility of awakening a Second FOND CALAMITY in the future.

-This species has the possibility of awakening a SUPREME skill in the future.

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All stats and skills will only be revealed when LEASH is fully utilized.

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Replicus' sockets flashed with intrigue. The context he now had gave him several degrees of enlightenment.

'Definitely high risk and high reward,' Replicus thought while raising the Apostle, the Astute Duke of Transversal.

Once again, he had seen three options some time ago, when he gave the required experience for the unborn creature to reach Tier 1. Because of the quality, the evolution options had been absurd, but this had stolen his eye.

Still, he had yet to fully understand the fullest extent of this creature's powers.

The combination of the creature's unique race and its young age locked out Replicus from seeing its abilities. For that...

The Penetrator looked at the little band around its neck and tapped it with his finger. He sent forth a dash of Null Life Essence with the contact, and the metallic band sparked blue.

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[Half-hearted Binder]

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Forged by one of the many renowned blacksmiths across the stars in blazing furnaces made from mined, mountainous souls, this band's purpose is to restrain the Astute Duke of Transversal in its youth. To increase the success rate and lengthen the period of submission, the band allows the user to give the Duke a NAME.

This name is then branded onto the Duke's body and may even increase its prowess if the user is strong enough.

-Caution-

The NAME given to the Duke will be branded in flame for all to see and will continue to glow on the creature's skin unobstructed. When the incandescent dies, so does the Duke's loyalty.

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Band. Binder. Leash.

Whichever way the guidance field explained what was around the Astute Duke's neck did not dampen Replicus' caution. He knew how dangerous of an Apostle he had summoned, but the returns would be extremely worth it if he played his cards.

He doubted the Duke would start to rebel in a matter of days.

Besides, he had a few ideas on how to tame this thing unconventionally, as the guidance field had said.

'Here goes,' Replicus cackled and placed the Apostle on the floor. The blue tinge of the band around its neck meant that the band was ready to inscribe whatever name he chose.

At this moment, he couldn't carelessly say a word, since there was no warranty here.

The little Apostle seemed pleased to finally be in an open, unrestricted space and without grubby hands hanging onto it.

However, perhaps because of the band's influence, it looked up at Replicus with its hollow sockets, awaiting its name.

Replicus scoffed.

'I've got something fitting for you,' he thought before opening his mouth.

"ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN."

The words fled from Replicus' mouth livid with all the Null Life Essence he could send out in a single instant.

...!!!

Even the Penetrator was dumbstruck but the pulse that left his mouth as he spoke, as though drawn by the Half-hearted Binder.

A shockwave spread from around the two and blew out through the entire ship temporarily bringing it to an abrupt halt!

Despite his initial shock though, Replicus kept his sights on the little Apostle.

It had just been blasted by what he assumed was the force of his words, and the draw of Binder.

The bellow of flame echoed throughout the room, but Replicus didn't see the fire.

No.

He saw it.

He just didn't realize that it was a fire.

It could barely be differentiated from the air at first, but soon, it became clear.

An icy blue hue drew the characters of the name he had chosen on the little of the Apostle.

The creature let out an inhuman scream.

No one could that heard the scream could have assumed it was from anything other than pure agony.

Even Replicus was a little unsettled.

He would have felt sorry for the little thing if it didn't unleash a flood of greenish Null Life Essence at him that blew him back before he could fully guard!

Because of his immense agility, however, Replicus was flung like a ragdoll.

He gave himself and the creature distance, and watched as the process started to conclude.

Half a blink later, he felt the approach of his Unlimited, who attempted to use their Limited Granted Warp to emerge at his side. With a wave of his hand, he denied them access to this space and built up a barrier around the room.

He couldn't tolerate any variables that could complicate things further.

Moments later, everything seemed to settle.

Where the little Apostle used to be, a tall shroud of Null Life Essence with the likeness of thick mist now stood, hiding its figure.

Despite this though, Replicus could see clearly a print of blue that read:

"ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN."

In an ancient dialect lost to Feinheath as a whole, it could only mean:

"HE THAT REBELS AGAINST ORDER."

Chapter 842: Bolstering The Duke! (2)

The cloud of Null Life Essence slowly dissipated to reveal a different figure than that it last hid. This one didn't look as powerless. It seemed to truly embody the name that was sizzling in light blue over its chest.

Replicus paid close attention.

While he did put his all into giving the Apostle a name, he wondered if he himself qualified as a user of the Half-hearted Binder worthy of bringing out more potential from his new summon.

The guidance field rushed to announce what he wanted to know.

[You gave granted your Apostle the name 'ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN']

[The name 'ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN' has been branded onto your Apostle, and it... he, as you deign he be called, hesitantly accepts]

[Due to your high rank in racial quality as a TITAN WORLD STORM PENETRATOR and outstanding mastery of the VEHEMENT BONE NULLMANCER class, your Apostle receives bonuses in his might]

"Oh..." Replicus voiced in surprise.

It seemed he had underestimated his attainments.

Barring what he accomplished on his own with the Vehement Bone Nullmancer class, his current race was a product of him earning extraordinarily good luck back then with the Chubby Remnant Child of Polarity. If he hadn't been so lucky as to be set on the path by that stroke of luck, he likely wouldn't have tasted the might of this particular race until many Tiers later.

"Heh. Show what this little bigger has," Replicus thought.

[Granted NAME blesses Apostle 'ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN' with a doubling of all relevant stats]

[Granted NAME blesses Apostle 'ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN' with a single, permanent evolution of all skills]

[Granted NAME blesses Apostle 'ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN' with a qualitative augmentation to his Fond Calamity, Empyrean Ribbon]

[Fond Calamity, Empyrean Ribbon is upgraded from Legendary status to Mythical status]

And the Apostle's status was revealed.

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[ Name : ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN ]

[ Tier : 1 ]

[ Apostle Trait : None ]

[ Rank : None ]

[ Level : 1 ]

[ EXP (NLE) : 0/500 ]

[ Core : --- ]

[ Class : None ]

[ Race : Astute Duke of Transversal ]

[ Inv. Status : Furiously... but mildly pleased ]

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[<Stats>]

[ Strength : Depends of Null Life Essence ]

[ Agility : Depends of Null Life Essence ]

[ Intelligence: On perpetual rise ]

[ Endurance : Depends on Null Life Essence ]

[ Luck : 0 ]

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[ Health : Depends on Null Life Essence capacity ]

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[ Mana : None ]

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[ Null Life Essence(s) : 300,000/300,000; 80,000/80,000 ]

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[<Skills>]

[ Excel | Lv.1 ]

[ Elite Null Life Aura | Lv.1 ]

[ Greater Flowing Hubris | Lv.1 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Greatest Mana Understanding ]

<Racial>

[ Inverted Boundary | Lv.1 ]

[ Accelerated Inverted Boundary | Lv.1 ]

[ Grandiose Manifestation | Lv.1 ]

[ Dimensional Submission | Lv.1 ]

[ Imbued Fester Blights | Lv.2 ]

<Oddities>

[ Empyrean Ribbon ]

<Affinities>

Null Life Essence

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It just so happened that when Replicus finished scanning through his new Apostle's status, the cloud of Null Life Essence cleared enough for the creature to come into full view.

Unlike its shorter, smaller appearance from before, the Apostle was now almost as tall as a full-grown man with a standard physique that would have made it look ordinary, if not for the pale, crumpled skin all over.

In as much as the Duke was humanoid... or rather human-like, its dark, hollow sockets, lack of a nose, and unnervingly wide mouth made the difference clear. The somewhat long, off-white hairs growing on its head opposed however, and Replicus was almost made to believe that he could self this latest brother, Araeyn – to shorten his name – as an albino twice removed from a sickly, tone-deficient aunt.

"You don't look so bad," Replicus said as he drew closer to the Apostle.

Vaguely, he could see some manner of interest and joy in Araeyn. He kept caressing his chest, which made Replicus wonder if he perhaps understood the meaning of his name.

"Doesn't help then that I'm shortening your name to 'He'," Replicus chuckled.

Araeyn silently looked up at Replicus with a haughty look. For someone so young, he looked rather old when his expression expressed any form of tension.

The Penetrator looked deep into the creature.

'Ah, I'm so jealous...' he thought.

Araeyn had no mana core, but he did have a Null Life Essence core.

Better yet, his core was like two compatible cores merged together to form one.

This, as Replicus saw, was because Araeyn was capable of producing and using two different types of Null Life Essence within his body, both of which were very potent.

Indeed, Araeyn was vastly different from Ferex and Red Rage in that regard alone, better even, as the pale Apostle also powered all his skills using Null Life Essence instead of mana. A step further into the absurdity, one would see that most of his stats depended solely on the amount of Null Life Essence he had.

Replicus sighed.

He knew the day would come, but to think he had an Apostle that far outclassed what Red Rage was. It was absurd.

Instead of being merely blessed by Serenity, Araeyn was a prodigy in various respects that thoroughly crushed Replicus' conceptions of the past.

'Creating a core that holds Null Life Essence is something that I have been trying to do for a while now. Unfortunately for me, a core can only be sustained when you can produce the essence it is supposed to hold. Since I can't produce Null Life Essence...' Replicus thought.

Araeyn was different.

Even now, the Penetrator could see a complex network within Araeyn's body that began from his core, and past his core, he could see two steady streams of Null Life Essence funneling into the cores.

Replicus shook his head.

He cleared himself of the momentary jealousy.

"Let's see. The name I gave you is supposed added on to what you already have..." he said.

Araeyn's stats were supposed to be doubled, but that seemed to relate more to his core as everything depended on that.

As for having the Apostle's skills evolve, Replicus couldn't exactly tell how much that benefit the Apostle. There was no classification of Normal, Special, Super, and Supreme for them.

He would have to test that.

For the thing to be enhanced because of the grand name...

"Let's see your Fond Calamity," Replicus said.

Araeyn only hesitated for a moment before doing as he was told.

From thin air, a very long, silky cloth appeared.

It was more like a hazy ribbon in a vermillion hue that wound around the Apostle and paused as if it had suddenly been turned solid.

Replicus looked at the object curiously.

Fond Calamities seemed to be very special objects among Null creatures. He had something similar, but it didn't function the same. As the name implied, Fond Calamities were items that the user would feel attached to, or vice versa.

They seemed a bit... personal.

The Penetrator appraised the long ribbon.

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[Empyrean Ribbon]

<Mythical>

Four thousand enslaved Sages of the Musing Embroider were tasked to carefully create this beautiful piece over seven years, by an ambitious fiend that sought authority. Soon after it was finished, tales of its profound abilities, as well as its exploits in the hands of the ambitious fiend called upon powers that coveted it so much, that they killed the fiend and each other for it.

-Special Effects-

- Responds to the user's will
- Can find anything that the user desires
- Can heal itself with Null Life Essence
- Embodies traits of the user to make itself stronger
- Extremely resistant to physical and elemental attacks
- Can stretch as far as is needed

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[Skill: Suffocate]

Whoever this Empyrean Ribbon wraps around will be flooded with Null Life Essence from the body to the core until all their active abilities are shut down.

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[Skill: Crossition]

By expending the user's Null Life Essence, the Empyrean Ribbon can create alternate versions of received attacks and send them back to their source.

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[Skill: Gluttonous Bringing]

Once a certain number of substantial sacrifices are fed to the Empyrean Ribbon, it gains the ability to draw restricted essences, their bodies, essences, and weapons are mutated and fed directly to the user. This skill works in combination with [Imbued Fester Blights].

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Replicus laughed.

'Red Rage could never,' he thought.

Chapter 843: Too Defensive

Replicus paced around Araeyn for a few dozen minutes, analyzing and dissecting everything about him.

The Apostle's stats, according to what he could see, made him more or less equal to that of a high-end Master Stager with a very high-quality blue core, and even more than that.

In fact, whether or not he was technically stronger didn't matter.

What made Araeyn fearsome in terms of physical strength alone, was the fact that his raw attacks had the same properties that Null Life Essence at its base had.

Genuine Incarnations wouldn't work against even Araeyn's physical attacks. If he got a very good hit in, he could probably start to mess up his opponent's coordination of mana altogether, since Null Life Essence was also very invasive. It could pour into things very easily and most importantly, unnoticed.

It annoyed Replicus more and more how his Apostles were just that good at everything Null Life.

He too could accomplish this feat in his Penetrator form – quite frankly Masters weren't a problem for him to deal with if they relied too much on their Incarnations – however, he couldn't do it as easily, since he focused on both mana and Null Life Essence.

Araeyn's experience requirement also seemed to be in the form of Null Life Essence instead of cumulative mana experience. Replicus guessed that like him, the Apostle would collect Null Life Essence from dead foes, only, for him, it was what he needed to grow from Tier to Tier.

'That's going to be a hefty price to pay...' Replicus thought.

Indeed it was.

In his experience, Null Life Essence for every species was fixed, which made the journey to Araeyn's growth a tough one.

Replicus pulled out a set of armor from his storage and was about to hand it to Araeyn when...

"Hmm... Almost forgot," he said.

He had just read about it, but it was hard to keep it in kind when even he couldn't sense it.

Around Araeyn was a fatally dangerous fixed space that made it nearly impossible to reach him as long as he didn't allow it. Replicus, while being used to having subservient Apostles and subordinates in general, would have almost forgotten that his current bro wouldn't mind too much to see him hurt himself in an instance of ...

"You have a ready good set of annoying abilities..." Replicus said.

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[Inverted Boundary | Lv. 1]

A cubical space that constantly masks itself by taking the likeness of surroundings passively encases the user and transports all that approaches to a place of the Duke of Transversal's pre-set location.

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And as if this wasn't enough...

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[Accelerated Inverted Boundary | Lv. 1]

A thin, but refined barrier fuelled by a mix of Null Life Essence which flows furiously in the opposite any attacks that manage to bypass the 'Inverted Boundary' and rebounds them back to the 'Inverted Boundary'.

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Twofold measures against contact with the Astute Duke of Transversal.

Replicus had finally gotten an idea of how strong Araeyn's fleshly evolved skills were. This was the best example. While originally these two particular skills had likely been strong, Replicus did some probing and found that now, perhaps only some exceptions among Special skills, and Super skills could bypass one or both of Araeyn's boundaries.

"Why are you so afraid of being touched?" Replicus scoffed.

If another time and reality, he would have been commenting on how the little ones grew so fast, but he didn't have the heart for it.

Just thinking about difficult it would have been for him to tame this Apostle if he had all these abilities from right when he left his egg, doused his mood.

Araeyn was freakishly strong with all this alone, but he had even more cards. For that reason, Replicus was yet to grant him a class from the options provided.

He would have to see what the Apostle lacked first.

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Moments later, Araeyn had donned a fitting set of armour a grey and silver gradient, simplistic and standard in design.

It suited him pretty well, especially with the pale skin and now brushed hair.

Replicus had forced the Duke to turn off both of his boundary skills and worked on that hair until it made sense. It hadn't been an easy endeavor, unfortunately. The hair had turned out to be saturated with Null Life Essence and difficult to comb into shape.

In the end, Replicus' determination to capitalize on his only non-skeletal Apostle's salvageable beauty paid off.

The Apostle wasn't so pleased, however.

The only thing to even remotely soothe him, as it seemed, was the fact that the name on his chest showed despite the chest plate of his armor covering it.

This, and perhaps the Emyrean Ribbon wrapped around his forearm.

Replicus gave the Apostle a nod of satisfaction.

Other than feeling that this Apostle was a very good investment as a combat unit, the Penetrator saw an even better benefit far removed from anything close to offensive power. When the optimal time came, he would be sure to make it count.

"Let's go meet a few friends. Some whom you even share similar hair colors with," Replicus said.

The barrier he had set up around his barrier collapsed at his will, and he generously allowed the Apostle to walk out first.

On emerging in the corridor, however, Replicus found the figures of Allora and Grim already waiting.

"Master, are you...al-alrigh..." Allora was the first to speak, at first with an anxious high tone before her eyes locked onto the unfriendly creature staring right at her.

"Whoa..." Grim remarked with surprise while backing away.

Replicus was amused.

"I wish I could say you've seen the worst of him," he said, but Allora and Grim couldn't pay him any attention yet. Their interest was still in Araeyn.

At that moment, the great vessel suddenly slowed down and stopped.

Grim and Allora immediately tensed.

Why did the ship stop? Nothing on the open sea could cause it to come to a halt when Pherdanta was at the helm.

With such thoughts stacking within their minds, the two Unlimited flashed to the deck.

Replicus did so too, leaving Araeyn behind.

On arriving, he sighed as he saw the problem.

Another ship like this one could be seen in the far distance, rapidly approaching.

The glow that hid everything on deck was nowhere to be seen – purposefully so, it seemed – and thus whom this ship belonged to was exposed.

"Of course..." Replicus said.

Chapter 844: Warding Pride

"Look who it is..." Replicus said while looking ahead. The umbrella-shaped glow around the deck dissipated.

His voice may have been low, but it reached the individual... individuals, he was addressing.

Pherdanta who still stood where she needed to be in order for the ship to be steered correctly, was donning a subtly strained expression. Replicus had picked up on this the instant he warped himself here.

A determined scoff across the smooth ocean waters between the two vessels, its origin being the prominent figure among those who had been addressed just now.

"Have I ever told you how much I hate that snark about you, Bright Storm?"

A woman with a blue skin tone that started from her neck and reached all the way down to her feet, said. She was dressed in what seemed like fluffy bath robes that reached her ankles, with her ... hair proudly announcing that she had either taken a bath or was coming from a swim.

As she spoke to Replicus, a faint expression of annoyance crept on her face, mirroring her words.

"You haven't said it outright, but I believe several of my other seniors have stressed that constantly," Replicus replied. He then stepped closer to the edge of the deck. "If I may ask, why have you stopped us, Warding Pride?"

The woman's eye flickered.

She, much like Replicus, hated the nickname that had been granted to her because of her exceedingly sophisticated skill in making barriers.

As strange as it was, only a few Faction leaders had given themselves nicknames, or rather, they didn't have the power to give themselves more fitting names.

Warding Pride pretended as though she wasn't moved – whichever way – by the name.

"I caught sight of a familiar shape from the distance," she said her focus shifting to someone else. "I grew concerned at the sight of her. To think you would bring her along on such a dangerous excursion."

Pherdanta twitched slightly as soon as Warding Pride's gaze fell on her.

The Faction leader's visage softened.

"Oh, Pherdanta. Look how you've grown in such an insignificant amount of time," she said. "I see no joy in your eyes. Did fleeing from our side turn out to be everything you hoped for?"

Grim, Allora, and even Baddan turned to Pherdanta.

Replicus kept his sights on Warding Pride.

'To think she would still try.'

Different from Warding Pride's gaze, Pherdanta wasn't affected by her words. If there was anything she would never regret, it was allying herself with Replicus.

"It did," she replied to Warding Pride. "I have everything I want right here?"

"Really? Even he doesn't matter to you anymore?" the blue-skinned woman asked while gesturing to one particular individual among the dozen or so on the deck with her.

It was a young man with sunflower boodle hair and wide-set brown eyes. His face did not show even a lick of emotion, but he stared at Pherdanta intensely, as if heavily anticipating what would be her reply.

Pherdanta was the same.

Her face gave away nothing but cold indifference.

"As I said. I have everything I want here."

A flicker of light died in the eye of the young man Pherdanta was looking at.

Warding Pride smiled.

"How cold. I always liked that about you. Pretending to be a machine that feels nothing for the sake of duty. I miss that. You pulled off the facade best," she said. "If only—"

"Well, it seems like we have exceeded our budgeted time for momentary stops. If you would excuse us, Warding Pride," Replicus cut off the Faction leader.

The woman laughed.

"You say that as if you actually expect great exploits for yourself on this assignment. You have no idea how much the other Faction leaders covet that little scrap of land Eaniss gave you. They will all be fighting for a chance to kill you. If I scrounge up enough pity, in addition to Pherdanta, I might just have you spared... if you become a slave of mine on a leash."

Grim and Allora were visibly infuriated. The former's eyes look on a vibrant glow as he glared at Warding Pride who completely ignored him.

Replicus on the other hand laughed.

"I think we'll manage," he said before gesturing for Pherdanta to set the ship off.

"Is that so? I think your reliance on a beast speaks to how in over your head you are," Warding Pride scoffed.

Baddan, who was the being referred to, didn't have any reaction. After accepting what he was, the term 'beast' seemed to explain what he was to people in this world perfectly.

Replicus laughed again.

The numerous monstrosities attached to the keel of the ship quivered to life as Pherdanta said, "Non-Sail," and at the same time, the Penetrator clutched his helmet while facing Warding Pride.

"Don't write off beasts too readily, Warding Pride..." he said, and his helmet vanished.

...!

For the first time since this short back and forth, Warding Pride's face changed.

Her face turned ugly as she saw it.

A dark skull with more than dozens of needle-thin bolts of Levin coursing in and over it now faced her. Its four sockets turned blindingly bright, which forced Warding Pride's crew to look away with groans.

This...

Warding Pride was utterly stunned.

This was her first time seeing Bright Storm without his helmet and...

She couldn't find the words to speak or remark.

What was this?

She looked around Bright Storm and saw that none of those in his company were as shocked as her. Not even Pherdanta. The only one mildly interested was Baddan.

They all knew?!

"Unfortunately for you..." Replicus said, "...beasts like me make the worst slaves and even worse enemies."

Just a second later, the great vessel the Penetrator was on blasted ahead at vicious speed, leading behind the smitten Faction.

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On the way, Replicus summoned his helmet again and breathed out a sigh.

He then walked over to Pherdanta and patted her shield.

"Sorry. That must have been hard for you," he said.

"Not at all," Pherdanta said, her face as rigid as stone with her eyes pinned forward.

Replicus' gaze lingered on her for a few moments and then he left her side.

Despite emerging somewhat victorious in a verbal clash with Warding Pride, he wasn't all that pleased. It seemed that unlike every other Faction leader, he had a disadvantage.

'The ship's barrier won't do. Incandescent Stage experts can still see our souls through it...' he thought.

Besides wondering if Warding Pride could see his soul, or if she could it all, Replicus became a little more concerned.

'The Bishop is definitely going to catch me off guard like this.'

Chapter 845: When It Counts

From the moment Kenno arrived in Deign, he had begun initiating any and all magical protocols that were devised by Replicus for high-security situations much like this one.

He, just like all the other Unlimited, understood how vulnerable they were currently.

As a Faction that was yet to settle firmly and create its own connections across vast distances, as well as own multiple strides of land, it was pretty much guaranteed that every other Faction considered them easy pickings, especially now, with all the Faction leaders gone.

The only reason there hadn't been a series of attacks to rob the Faction of all that was precious to them yet, was because the Faction leaders would have to honor Eaniss' decision to appoint Replicus as a Faction leader for a certain amount of time.

It would be disrespectful to destroy a Faction that was created a day ago and steal what the Head Faction had given after all.

This was likely the only degree of courtesy that the Factions would give each other, ever, and it wasn't even because of generosity.

That said, the belief that Deign would fall easily, was ridiculous.

The island itself didn't have countermeasures against attack, as evidenced by how the massive stone bird from earlier had swooped in and done damage to the Sacred Forest without being countered. However, that was only because there ordinarily wasn't any reason for safety protocols to be spared on the island – and also because of complaints from Timmit.

The situation was different now.

Several Faction members in golden armor were moving around Deign under the night sky.

Each of them held silver, cylindrical objects that they dug into the ground at varying locations on the island. So far, about two hundred had been placed in their rightful positions.

The red stork was flying above, overseeing this endeavor with an uncomfortable look in his eyes.

Normally, he wouldn't have agreed to have such intense activity near the Sacred Forest or all around the island for that matter, but Kenno had given him a stern, convincing explanation on why he should keep his beak shut and be grateful that Replicus was generous enough to extend his protection to him.

Timmit had wanted to argue, but couldn't.

The earlier attack cemented the need for better security.

Better yet, he had earned newfound respect from the beasts in his forest all because of Replicus' help. This same respect was also coming into play beautifully.

He had yet to hear peeps of mutiny despite the loathsome trudging of the humans.

Spotting a figure decked in blue, white, and silver armor, Timmit flew down and landed beside him.

"Are there any signs of enemies, yet?" he asked Kenno.

"No. I don't think you'll get to worry about them as long as I'm here. Your responsibility is to your forest," the Unlimited said.

"Right. Pfff! Ah, it's back," Timmit muttered with a sneeze. "What are your people planting into the ground?"

"Conduits for energy. We'll be setting up a special type of barrier very soon. I hope you don't have plans of leaving before then. The barrier must recognize you. If not..."

Timmit looked mildly intimidated.

He often joked with Bright Storm whose strength was easy to miss when he was adopting his easy-going, relaxed side, but when it came to his subordinates...

It seemed like they were all so... serious, and he couldn't get the chance to doubt how formidable they were.

Timmit's ability for small talk died shortly after.

Seeing Kenno issuing out orders to the Faction leaders with a stern face and participating himself where needed, made him shrink.

Fifteen minutes later, when all seemed set, Timmit was amazed by the bold, turquoise shield that was cast around the entire island only to be hidden from sight.

The Faction members celebrated the completion of the barrier with loud applause, and they soon left along with Kenno.

Timmit, watched timidly before retreating to the Sacred Forest. If he had gotten anything from this, it was hope that the terrors which he had confirmed through Kenno, wouldn't be his biggest problems. Heck, he didn't even need to worry according to Kenno.

The Unlimited, on the other hand, had many things to think about.

As he passed through the archway that led to the Honing Fortress, he was already devising countermeasures for further countermeasures, in case their enemies managed to break through their first line of defense – which they probably would.

There were many options, so he wasn't too worried.

However, he was a bit concerned about something else.

Kenno pulled on one of his fellow Faction members.

"Have you seen Yuyui?" he asked.

\*\*\*

The great doors to the Ground of Communion were finally opened after a long time, revealing the damaged floors and walls that spotted cracks and gouges of immense proportions.

Twelve large statues with basic designs of feminine figures all adorned in attire that told extensive stories about their preferred styles of combat and hinting at their personalities could be seen standing against the walls.

At the base of each statue, were hollows that were fitted with magnificently sculpted stone figures that had human-like proportions and features. Most of them were cracked and broken beyond repair, but one was intact.

Yuyui sucked in a deep breath.

She was back here after what could be considered a long time.

She felt that it was extremely audacious of her to just casually return as if she owned the place. Well, it was a little bold, but she had made her choice.

It was the right choice... right?

Yuyui imagined that the little creature burping orange-pink flames from her shoulder nodded.

BOOOM!

Yuyui shook at the sudden noise.

It came from the only sculpture that was neither broken nor cracked in here.

It had suddenly moved its hand from the hollow it was stuck in and smashed it into the wall.

"My doubts were confirmed and rejected. Again and again," the sculpture said it drew itself from the hollow.

"Bassbion..." Yuyui murmured.

"I had faith. I cast it away. I had doubt. I cast it away. Then, you just never returned," the Spirit Guardian Bassbion growled.

Her white marble figure suddenly became tainted with other colors as she took step after step, her tall figure approaching Yuyui.

The lime-haired girl kept her gaze on her.

"I'm back now," she said.

"To do what?" Bassbion scoffed. "Even Yagrina who used to vouch for you doesn't have any more rebuttals for me. She can't see how it's possible for you to ever reach your full potential with that pathetic attitude of yours."

The aggressive tone in Bassbion's voice was terrifying.

She had every right to be angry, and Yuyui knew that.

She grew silent for a while.

Even she wondered.

What was she here to do?

How was this going to be any different from before?

'...Though there is one instance in the near future where I might need your help, Yuyui.'

Yuyui recalled these words and those that came afterward.

Replicus had asked for help.

With a determined face, she faced Bassbion who was barely two inches from her by now, and spoke.

"I want to awaken all my eyes! Without them, I won't be able to help this one time where it counts!"

Chapter 846: Cursed Bloods

"Is this... necessary?" Revia asked. The folds on her face as she grimaced at what she saw, only added to how she didn't see what was before in a pleasant light.

Her counterpart, on the other hand, didn't even flinch. She was crouching down, sullyng her robes in blood without a care. The clotting crimson seemed to soothe her, actually, providing a sense of comfort.

The sharp dagger in her hand ripped through the neck of a human corpse for the umpteenth, and blood sprayed to her face. She wiped it away with her hands and sighed.

"It's necessary. Tedious... but necessary," this woman said.

She rose and looked all around at her work.

The hundreds of thousands that had perished in Inhone City lay sprawled over the ground, amid the large chunks of debris, dilapidated builds, entrails, scattered fruit from vending stalls, cheap clothing, and all that could be found in the lively hours of the city – before the attack hours earlier.

Several residents, including those of prestigious Guilds had been wrecked, leaving nothing intact. However, as gruesome as it all seemed, there was evidence of the majority of the city's population escaping before they were completely wiped out.

A great tower cast an eerie, long shadow into the city from its entrance. Even though what it had held within it had long soared to other places within this world, the tower still had a fierce sense of sacredness. At least a dark version of it that could be likened to taboo.

Revia and Fulina weren't affected, however.

Both had felt worse, having traveled with Actuass.

The silver-haired former Paladin Champion looked at the many corpses. Different from Fulina who seemed subtly pleased by this work which she had invested many hours in since Actuass left, she just had to question the justification for this.

"What's the use in cutting their necks? I know the brand of Necromancy you use is different from Actuass, but what does this accomplish?" she asked.

Fulina kicked over the corpse she had been working on. It laid face down on the ground, revealing the cleanly cut spine behind the neck.

"Undeath and Necromancy are a science. Without understanding that fact, and committing it to superstition and morality, this power will become shallow," she explained while watching the ground get dyed red from the stream gushing out of the corpse.

"To make sure the movements of the corpse are more precise, I sever the spine at the neck to remove the reliance on the brain for physical functions body; that task is left to the Undeath energy that I pass into the corpse. The energy also preserves the mana core after death, and in the case that there isn't one it acts as a substitute."

Regardless of how much uglier Revia's face became as she heard the full explanation for the requirements of this Necromancy, Fulina only grew more pleased with herself.

She looked at several thousand fresh corpses that she had set aside. Unlike the one she had just finished fine-tuning, these were special specimens of hers, after all, she had killed them herself.

They worked way better with her Undeath Concept, Faithful Message Undeath.

"With Actuass' help, I've reached a level where I can use the souls of corpses that haven't been dead for long to augment the corpses' strength. I'm sure you're familiar with how the concept of using a willless soul as an energy source," Fulina said.

Revia's grimace turned deeper.

She recalled the millions of souls dropping down into the complex seal that Actuass had made.

Thinking that she had just aided such a thing made her still heart shrink.

Fulina noticed her reaction and scoffed.

"Still fighting with your conscience?" she said.

"Yeah."

"Then where are you going to find the resolve for what you actually want to accomplish? What was it again? Taking down the Purity?"

Revia scowled.

"That's a shallow way of putting it," she glared at Fulina.

"Is it? Well you never really shared with any of us the specifics of your actual goal, did you? I was convinced when you attacked that Paladin Champion at the stadium meaningfully though. Making sure you fulfill your role was all that ever mattered to Actuass anyway,"

Revia's silver seemed to lose several shades of beauty with each instant she had to be forced to reaffirm her new resolve.

Fulina was right though.

No one had really been interested in the specifics of what Revia wanted to do. All they knew was that she wanted to go against the Purity.

"Elita," she said, garnering the attention of Fulina who had begun to think she had no desire to share her hopes. "Elita was my friend. A sister even. When I joined the Purity, I was very young. I barely

understood anything. I saw only the possibility of being exploited, of dying, of losing things I loved.

You know how my story went before..."

Fulina nodded before leaning against a cracked wall.

"Of course, before that Priest came with a fantasy calling," she mocked.

Revia ignored.

"Elita was the only person to change my outlook. She was kind. She was loving. She had a few overly idealistic thoughts that even I as a child disagreed with but that's what saved me," she said, her face turning. "Despite all she was, she was often treated unfairly by the higher-ranking Knights in the Purity. Even Paladin Champions.

At first, I thought she was a wolf in sheep's clothing... that there was something really about her but..."

Fulina raised her brow.

"But what?"

Revia sighed.

"I was scared to ask her for the longest time. I didn't, in fact. I only found out when I became a Paladin Champion. Apparently, Elita came from a long line of Cursed Bloods."

"Cursed Bloods? What are those?"

Revia turned to Fulina.

"Actuass didn't tell you, huh?" she mocked Fulina in turn, but likewise, she ignored. "Those used as vessels in the Second Grand War had to pay an additional price even after dying to the immense

power they would hold in the short term. Those connected to them by blood would perish unless they had strong bodies that would allow them to withstand the curse."

"Interesting," Fulina said with a smile. "There's always a price for swindling Rules. So this Elita..."

"The Purity has been keeping track of all Cursed Bloods. They keep them close, preventing them from having children with normal people. They don't live the best lives, but if one of them proves to have talent, they are trained to become Purity Knights. Elita was the only one I know to become a Paladin Champion though."

"Is that an impressive feat? How does this curse affect Cursed Bloods?" Fulina asked.

"It exploits any weaknesses. Normally, it kills children within a year of birth, but I guess Cursed Bloods have been evolving over the years. Some of them grow to adulthood and old age. For most though, even the least concerning sickness or injury will be turned deadly by the curse, killing them."

Fulina whistled, her interest portrayed more in amusement than empathy.

"So Elita fought through all that to even become a Paladin Champion? That explains your idolizing."

Revia gave a hollow laugh.

"Well... the curse wasn't the only thing waiting to exploit her weakness. Her becoming a Paladin Champion wasn't favored by everyone. One slip-up and her Paladin Champion status was revoked. Last I saw her, she was treated as though she had committed mass murder."

Revia remembered that day, visiting Elita in her little room – like a fancy prison.

She hadn't been able to do anything then. Rather, Elita was always against her acting out when she was such a high-ranking Paladin Champion.

Now though, with Elita's disappearance, Revia had slowly begun to awaken her new resolve. It only started with Elita after all, and only grew as she learned of a series of other things the Purity lied about.

She hated that Actuass was such a reliable source of information.

Fulina shook her head.

"And you took it upon yourself to actually help in the deed," she said with a laugh. "Why does the Purity hate Cursed Bloods anyway? According to their fabricated history, aren't vessels heroes? Surely taking care of their cursed relatives shouldn't be that big of a deal."

"It shouldn't," Revia said with another sigh.

To this, she refused to elaborate. Fulina didn't mind.

"Well, seems like you have a problem with authority," Fulina said before pushing off against the wall and walking towards a group of corpses.

"Do you blame me? The cowardly Pelian Royal Family, the selfish EverSword House, and the greedy Guilds Association. None of these really motivate me to stay in line."

"Fair point," Fulina said. "Good story. Now let's get to work. We have to make this region a stronghold that Guissepo doesn't grab ahold of before Actuass comes back."

Revia reluctantly nodded.

Soon, she saw hundreds of thousands of corpses rise, a raging red flame within their socket, while a haze of the same hue rose from their bodies.

#### Chapter 847: The Assignment's Generous Reward

The light of dawn had brought with it greater prospects for the voyage to all aboard the vast vessel that was practically flying over the clear waters, looking to gain more and more speed with every several kilometers it covered in a second.

The fact that there was still a considerable distance to the Central Boundary even with such speed, and even while accounting for elapsed time since departure, was staggering.

The broad horizon that featured nothing but the clear waters ahead – and not a single island whatsoever – only served to reinforce just how difficult it would be to traverse with normal teleportation means.

What also reinforced this idea, were the changes in the sky. Vaguely, the cloudy blue sky was getting marred with what looked like faint, greyish....scars. They looked like webbing cracks past the clouds, etched into the atmosphere.

In all honesty, it was easy to miss, but Replicus had noticed it rather quickly.

This was the first glimpse at the damage done millennia ago by Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness.

It was a simple visual either. As Replicus had warned Allora before, contact with people or objects from afar was beginning to get scrambled. Warping techniques were already started to get constrained.

That wasn't all.

The atmosphere as the ship approached the Boundary was growing more and more... unreadable. Airflow had gaps, mana had chaotic patterns and even the light was unevenly distributed – not accounting for cloud cover.

This was the first sign of the trouble that was brewing ahead.

All that said, Replicus encouraged his subordinates not to take any of it too seriously, which turned out to be a cinch since Allora and Grim were mostly easy-going, Pherdanta was unshaken by such, and Baddan had grown quite confident since receiving his new technique.

Seeing his troupe behaving as they normally would put Replicus' soul at ease.

However, there was one thing that unsettled the crew very effectively.

Naturally, it was Araeyn.

The Apostle freaked even Replicus out a little.

If the Penetrator didn't give him a direct order for something, he would simply stand on the cathead or bowsprit of the ship with the wind blowing his off-white hair and watch what was going on in all directions.

Hours would pass with the pale bastard standing at attention with no dynamic poses to refresh the eyes of the spectators at all.

Grim considered sharing a similar hair type to such a rigid individual an insult. Replicus agreed.

Araeyn didn't care, unfortunately.

Of course, Replicus knew that the Apostle wasn't simply sightseeing.

Replicus had given the carcass from which Araeyn was born several skills that he wanted to be added to this non-racial, non-Class skill set.

[Greater Flowing Hubris].

[Greater Mana Understanding].

[Excel].

These skills allowed Araeyn to get a firm grasp on how the concepts of a world worked passively through the atmosphere and actively by engaging with living beings in any way.

Mana, humans, beasts. Araeyn understood a fair bit of all these three by now.

He was constantly learning.

Additionally, he had the natural ability to gain an appreciation of the various dimensions in the Null Verse, which fed into his skill [Grandiose Manifestation], which allowed him to manifest the characteristics of those dimensions where he pleased.

Replicus didn't want a demonstration yet.

He didn't even want to see what Araeyn's racial skills looked like unless they were used in combat.

The reserves of Null Life Essence and Mana that had been built into this ship – stored in two of the ten rooms added into the vessel – weren't as vast as those in the Honing Fortress, and since the Astute Duke of Transversal only used Null Life Essence, Replicus didn't want to tempt the rebel into exhausting their reserves already.

Asides from the developments of Replicus' ship, the Penetrator had noticed other vessels belonging to the other Faction leaders as well.

They were spread far apart, isolated from each other. Replicus and his crew had yet to see any of the inevitable altercations yet, which wasn't exclusively a good thing.

By the time the sun rose its invisible pedestal in the sky, Replicus had spotted sixteen other vessels.

Inwardly, he really hoped he wouldn't get to see the Bishop anytime soon.

Unlike the Incandescent Stage Faction leaders, Replicus was unable to see through the umbrella-shaped shield of lights that hid the decks of the similar vessels.

"Boss, you mentioned something about us getting something from catching this masked man, right? What is that something? Besides getting to keep the possessions of the Factions we defeat that is," Allora asked Replicus as they sat on the deck.

"That's a lot of somethings," Grim pointed out from the middle of the deck. He had taken over for Pherdanta who had retreated to her room – after an excessive amount of convincing.

Allora waved him off.

Replicus, seated on a chair close to the small cabin, nodded.

"Yes there is," he said.

He had figured that revealing the reward for the assignment during the briefing he had given immediately after returning from the Severed Union, was pointless.

The nature of the reward wasn't one that everyone in the Faction could celebrate, after all.

Thus, Replicus had held off on telling even his Unlimited – barring Pherdanta, who had heard from the actual horse's mouth, even though it didn't actually have a mouth.

"For capturing the masked man, whether dead or alive – though preferably alive – the Faction leader responsible will get an audience with the Immortals and be granted a reward of their choice," the Penetrator said.

Allora skewed her face.

"That seems underwhelming," she said. "The reward is something they choose for you?"

"Indeed. More than a few Faction leaders don't feel too happy about it either," Replicus said.

"We're handling all their dirty work. You'd think they'd be more generous," Grim chimed in with a shake of his head. "It doesn't matter if these Immortals created the Severed Union. That shouldn't have them thinking they can look down on us. We've been working hard even before this!"

Replicus concurred but he didn't see the need to complain as much.

Indeed the Factions worked hard.

Their job, unlike the fodder sent to rampage on the main continents, was divided between consolidating the efforts on said fodder and dealing with threats beyond the main continents.

Replicus had doubted it at first, but after encountering a fair share of purple Clusters and the monsters born within them, he had to agree that there was no way Feinheath wouldn't have been hit by a few Tier 40 beasts with how many scattered lands over the seas harbored and bred beasts born from untended Clusters.

Even if Maqi and Opungale were powerhouses in their own rights, many calamities had been stalled or stopped thanks to the Severed Union.

This act of dealing with these threats didn't serve as a contradiction to the philosophy of Severed Union. Stimulating the different societies on Feinheath and Opungale with bandits was different from setting loose disasters on the masses.

At least that was what Eaniss said.

Then again, with what Replicus knew now, he didn't know the degree of variation between the values of the Head Faction and those of the Immortals.

Allora rationalized.

"I suppose if we all get to meet them, it wouldn't be so ba—"

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

The first to respond to the ship suddenly being sent flying up, and spinning violently in the air, was Replicus.

The waters beyond the ship had suddenly cast away their relaxed stillness and hurled everything, including themselves kilometers upon kilometers into the air!

The sky darkened in the instant, and then everything became dyed in red and gold!

This wasn't an attack.

Replicus had seen a glimpse of the cause, but as the ship was rising, with the torrent of whisked waves below it, he knew he couldn't afford to speculate yet.

"[Wealth of Spoils]."

While somehow maintaining a semblance of balance on the deck, Replicus planted his hand onto the beautiful wooden platform, and white light traced itself into the vessel, granting it a skill!

In an instant, the ship stopped spinning and soared high into the sky, ascending in a straight line.

The ship was currently upside down, but that didn't stop Replicus and company from hastily balancing themselves, some maintaining a hold on the deck and some on the umbrella-shaped shield which still held.

The roar of the insurmountable waters below crying as they were forced to fly in all directions... was awe-inspiring.

From thousands upon thousands of kilometers ahead, the waters of the vast ocean were still rising, and fleeing from an atrocious impact that almost saw the sea be reduced to a mere dam.

Replicus' sockets lit up bright.

He didn't need to see past the wall of waters to guess what was going on.

It seemed the masked man and the number one Paladin Champion had finally met.

Chapter 848: Rampage!

The sea was a beast with a grueling call that could devastate the ear. The common folk wouldn't know, and they wouldn't have survived the incredible sound that blared out as the waves crashed against each other, forced to cram into themselves by the force of the battle so far away.

It was truly astonishing.

Even now, the waters still towered vast heights from the last impact, and they weren't given a chance to return to the cool and calm, because another shattering burst of deafening noise crackled from the distance, forming a pale, spherical impact in the air that showed for a micro-second!

The ocean far away shrieked and shuddered outward, blocking the view that all wanted to see!

The red glow that had only vaguely built up until now, grew intense, making the world blush.

When another impact that seemed to shake the entire ocean and turn up its temperatures by several hundreds of degrees came, the light around the vast expanse dimmed, leaving only the red glow.

Then the world turned unclear... and then back to clarity.

'The stark difference...' Replicus thought while looking ahead.

The moment he sensed the Undeath energy brewing further up, he had compared it to the one he knew.

Clearly, this was the foe they were hunting down, but he didn't know if it was the same one he had encountered back then.

To his surprise, it was hard for him to tell.

It wasn't because of the distance, but because the presence he felt clashing with another far away, was encased in a qualitative shell of sorts. Diluted, yet voluminous. It was like trying to guess the flavor of a small portion of concentrated fruit drink that had been diluted by twenty times the amount of water.

In this case, the dilution didn't mean a loss of concentration. In fact, it was the opposite.

The presence he felt with only the casual signature of undeath he knew, was incredibly vast.

Soaring far above the sea had given Replicus and his crew an immense advantage, but as he looked down, he saw that each Faction had its own means of not getting bashed down by the raging ocean.

Frankly, even without intervening, the vessels probably wouldn't get a scratch even if the ocean waters slammed into them for a full day, however, amidst more enemies than allies, it was unwise to allow yourself to be placed in compromising positions.

The crisp blows rampaging beyond continued to wreck the sanity of Aigas' skies and seas, seeming to grow more intense by the second.

"Master..." Pherdanta called to Replicus.

She had arrived by the Penetrator's side as soon as the ship was airborne.

"Let's hold on for now," Replicus said.

He had the best senses out of everyone here, with the only one who could even dream of contending being Grim. However, even the gifted Unlimited couldn't really tell exactly what was going on ahead.

...!

Replicus' sockets flickered.

Amidst the blasting waves, he sensed something approaching at a shocking pace from the distant location of the ferocious battle ahead, its trajectory unchallenged by the chaotic motion of the abundant ocean.

It drew a course straight towards the line of scattered ships below in less than half a second – much to Penetrator's utter befuddlement – and before Replicus could speak, it showed itself.

An explosive splash of the winding waters on the surface caught everyone's attention.

An enormous creature with dark, stone-like skin emerged!

It looked much like a cross between a lizard and a mantis, its head similar to the former, and its limbs a mix of the two – in total numbering up to twelve.

Half of its body arched up to a straight posture, while the rest remained buried underwater, the limbs around it whipping the excessively violent ocean waters away.

"It's one of those things again!" Grim exclaimed.

Pherdanta thought so too, and her eyes narrowed.

However...

"Not exactly," Replicus replied with a somewhat grave tone.

No.

It wasn't exactly the same.

After all...

The enormous creature's eyes were different from those of the tower monsters.

This one had great, greenish-black flames flaring madly from its sockets!

Replicus groaned inwardly.

"That masked bastard..." he said to the others. "He's fighting on two fronts. He already noticed our approach and sent this thing to stall us. He's both confident and incredibly cautious."

Grim, Allora, and Pherdanta were stunned to hear this.

To think the masked man had even enslaved one of the tower monsters with Undeath!

According to the information Kenno had gathered, the stronger ones among them were usually on their own. This massive existence seemed like a prime example of the lone fiends!

The great creature in the sea suddenly opened its toothless mouth wide.

Very wide.

Its face contorted to accommodate the elongation of its maw, and only when its visage had become at least two hundred meters, did it stop, and let loose from the dark, colossal gap on its face... thousands upon thousands of undead creatures!

...!

They all fell like vomit from its maw, some immediately taking flight, some sinking to then start swimming forward at breakneck speeds, and others simply running over the water as though it was the most natural thing to do!

"You've got to be kidding me!" said Grim... but with a wide grin on his face.

Replicus' sockets grew bright.

The enemies were many.

And none of them were fodder.

Among the rotten and fresh corpses fuelled by Undeath, he spotted at least several hundred with purple cores, several hundred with enormous mana signatures – Cluster Generals, likely plucked from high-level Clusters – and many others with an odd energy about them.

Actually, it was more than odd.

'What in the world...?'

These specific ones didn't look dead at all, whether they be human or monster.

They didn't have flaring flames in their sockets and they even looked to have their souls intact. Yet... they were definitely undead.

Replicus flashed from the deck and appeared on the bottom of the ship, which was facing toward the skies.

Pherdanta, Allora, and Grim followed with Limited Granted Warp.

Around the four, the numerous monsters attached to the keel of the ship had grown still. They presented a rather admirable picture of Replicus and his Unlimited standing among them.

The group looked at the dark mass of creatures rapidly approaching them with various means of flight.

"Don't you dare!" Grim suddenly said while holding his hand out to Pherdanta, who was about to draw her sword and no doubt obliterate many, if not most of the undead assailants. "Let the rest of us do something, will you? Aren't you supposed to be on break anyway?!"

Pherdanta gave Grim a cross look, but he merely scoffed at it before turning to Replicus.

"Ahem. Can I...?" he said imploringly.

"Can we, you mean!" Allora pitched in with the same degree of zeal.

Replicus sighed helplessly.

"Just don't waste too much of your energy, or armour accessories. And be careful. Some of these are \_\_\_\_"

"GOT IT, BOSS!"

Grim was off before Replicus finished speaking.

The ship rocked a bit when he launched himself high and far towards the enemies.

He whipped through the turbulent, humid air like an arrow shot from a Divine bow, multiple pale rings of air booming outwards as he went.

In a moment, he was facing the first few in the charging cordon of flying foes.

With his white hair furiously rustling about, his red eyes gleaming with a bit too much excitement, and his pristine teeth pushing away his lips in a vicious grin, Grim howled and swiped with his right hand across his own field of vision.

...!!!!

Noticeable for only a micro-moment, was the soft light from long, gleaming claws that inched out of specialized openings at the end of his right hand's gauntlet.

Then...

Five, long gaps were carved out of the image of the monsters approaching just now!

Then came the crackle like thunder, and the splash of different colored blood!

Many of the enemies had been erased, decapitated, and disemboweled before they even knew it!

Grim didn't care enough to tell them that they were already dead!

With the same murderous zeal, he kicked off their still airborne corpses, one after the other to force himself forward, and swiped at the air menacingly again!

Hundreds more were eviscerated!

Some were adorned in Legendary grade armor.

Grim's claws didn't give a damn!

Some had purple cores powering their bodies.

That didn't ward away death from a distance!

With the atrocious boosts from the Mythical grade Granted Armament, in addition to Grim's Hidden Class, what would have been terrifying foes turned into glorified fodder!

Grim became a blur that whizzed past the long stretch of undead creatures with relative ease. For tougher opponents, he only needed to actually make contact with his claws, and for those stronger than that...

A starkly bright light streaked from his index finger as he yelled, "Aggrante!", a pompous highlight lighting his face.

The corrosive might of the condensed beam of Null Life Essence and Mana tore most enemies apart, reducing their flesh to nothing. Not even ash.

Replicus looked on with mild interest.

The wave of enemies was sizable. Even with Grim practically deleting them by the dozens, there was still a lot.

Thankfully, that wasn't inherently a bad thing.

After all...

[1,000 (I) Mana has been added!]

[4,000 (I) Mana has been added!]

[22,000 (I) Mana has been added!]

[2,300 (I) Mana has been added!]

Each kill that the Unlimited made with the Granted Armament, stole 1-5% of the slain enemies' mana, and added it to Replicus reserve.

A handy feature installed by the Titan World Storm Penetrator!

Allora had barely seen an opening to intervene yet.

It was ridiculous how quickly Grim moved.

"Must be nice to be blessed with Form Using techniques," she muttered with a frown. "Well, I wasn't going to rely on my Hidden Class anyway."

Allora pointed her fingers toward the enemies that were quickly being dismantled by Grim.

"Chaining Fury," she uttered eagerly.

A crushing wave of heat howled at the end of her fingers, turning from red, then yellow, then orange, white, and blue!

It then fizzled out, vanishing from sight.

Allora beamed.

The boost by her Granted Armament was immense, even to her former Shamanic abilities which were coming into play now.

This only showed when the vacant spot at the tip of her fingers shone blindingly and set off a rich column of flame so precise that it looked like a pale, grey string from the distance!

It traveled furiously and made contact with the first enemy, who was immediately set ablaze... and turned into a glowing ball of imploding flame that grew rapidly!

But then, the link of pale grey stretched from this great fireball, and caught another enemy, then another and another, turning them all into scorching, miniature suns which inflated out to sizzle almost silently!

The pale column and Grim's rampage seemed to work in harmony, eradicating the enemies perfectly.

Replicus was pleased to see the enthusiasm between the two childish jovial Unlimited, however, he knew things weren't going to be so easy.

Soon, he was proven right.

#### Chapter 849: Equally Zealous Undead

Replicus kept his sights on the enormous lizard-mantis hybrid which promptly finished spilling the wave of undead that scattered about, covering as much ground as possible as they headed for their targets.

Besides simply noticing the influence of Undeath energy on the creature, he had brought to make an assertion he was certain was definitely true.

Unfortunately, the truth of it didn't bear good news at all. In fact, it widened the scope of things he had already considered needlessly complex and vast to look into it.

'From the looks of it, the tower monsters, seem to be living things. I didn't think so at first, but the fact that these creatures are susceptible to resurrection with Undeath might prove it. However...'  
Replicus strained under his helmet, his sockets flashing.

'...there's a possibility that they are non-living things too. Somanda did use Undeath on lost pieces of armor and weapons back then. Even if they were special cases, it means that it's not impossible – however that works.'

Back when Somanda manifested through the above Legendary grade tool SoSei and chased after Skullius, he had made a flying platform out of corpses and weapons that were livid with Undeath energy.

Skullius had noticed but had barely been in a position to wonder how on Aigas that was possible. The subject had also only now become relevant when he was facing a necromancer for the first time since then.

'I should probably consider that the masked man isn't as proficient in Undeath as an Arch-Lich. He may have some serious understanding of the soul, even enough to make undead in a similar way Liches from Deadmanland do, but... no. For now, I'll assume I'm correct.'

At that moment, the enormous hybrid on the chaotic ocean surface dipped down and swam at terrible speeds back to where it came from.

Replicus hummed.

'If these things are living creatures, does it mean Boron created his own race of beings in the Under?' he thought.

Perhaps.

If true, that did not spell anything good.

\*

Grim had killed close to five hundred undead by the time a minute passed. He flitted between the mutilated corpses while giant balls of cruel heat constantly emerged around him.

Allora was keeping up. In fact, she was close to overtaking him in kills even while standing on the ship and merely shooting a condensed flame from her fingers.

Grim cackled.

Despite the ease with which he took care of the monsters, his senses were incredibly keen to any anomaly that could surge, even from the undead he had destroyed.

He heeded the boss' warning in spite of how overzealous he appeared.

With a glance down below while using the undead as footholds, he noticed the waves of undead assaulting the vessels of the other Factions.

As expected, they all defended themselves without a hitch.

Grim knew that some of the other Factions expected the boss and the Unlimited to be having a bit of a tough time though. Because of that, the boss had warned before they left Deign, that in case

something happened to put them at a disadvantage – most likely the conditions past the Boundary – it was imperative that they immediately went on full guard and expect attacks from other Factions.

'This seems like the perfect scenario for that...' Grim thought as he went for another swipe at the populous skies.

...!!!!

Before Grim knew what he was doing, his body swiveled, his legs rapidly taking steps over the bodies of five flying undead before launching him far into the sky!

The instant he had leaped off the last corpse, the gleam of a menacing scimitar flashed for half a second across, barely missing him!

Grim's senses were stretched wider. His red eyes constricted for sharp focus as he flew up.

The Unlimited came face to face with a man who didn't look quite like the other undead – drained of life, expression, and eyeballs.

This man stood on the large body of a creature that looked too much like a bullfrog with batwings. He had soft caramel hair in a crew cut, a sallow face, and incredibly unrealistic dimples.

He hung a white-bladed scimitar behind his neck, his grip on its golden green handle.

Grim's face hardened.

Besides the bizarre fact that this man leaked Undeath energy like the other creatures, what threw Grim way off, was the feeling his curved sword gave. The Unlimited's skin crawled at the sight of it.

Something was wrong with that sword.

The grin of confidence on the man's face only served to make Grim more apprehensive.

"Where's that smile of yours from just now?! Come on back down and keep cutting us up!" the dimpled man screamed with a very loud voice that sent nigh palpable sound waves towards Grim whose momentum finally seized.

"No?!" the undead man spoke again, leaving his opponent no chance to deliberate, "Good, good!" Then he pointed his scimitar up.

In an instant, the flock of undead stopped heading toward Replicus and the others and made a sharp turn into the sky!

The thousands of creatures barely needed two seconds to reach Grim.

'He can control them too?' the Unlimited thought moments before he was swarmed. The man with the similar vanished from sight as his vanguard blocked the view.

...A smile crept on Grim's face.

"Well... this is good too."

Unfortunately for the enemies, he wasn't a single trick pony.

A burst of sharp, white furs flooded out from behind Grim's Granted Armament which immediately began to morph into a different shape, accommodating the use of his unique powers!

A rush of mana flowed within the mass that started as a mega cotton ball before turning into something much more fierce.

Something much more terrifying.

It started with tens of yellowing fangs half the length of the great ships over the ocean, all manifesting within a great snout that emerged, twisting into shape with rubbery motion before turning rigid.

A massive, obsidian gap was between the rows of teeth below and above, a great, dark prickly nose above.

Tall, straight ears loosely flanked the cruel, crimson eyes that marked the thousands of enemies below, the fur from them flowing back to the wild tangle of curly white furs behind the great head, which stood in place of a full body!

With a loud, chilling roar that sucked the attention of all above the ocean for several moments, the great wolverine head dove down with its fangs growing larger.... and devoured all!

#### Chapter 850: Brazen Opponents

The swarm of enemies had certainly out scaled the great white wolverine head in size with their collective charge, but somehow, most of them disappeared the instant the maw of the Unlimited chomped, the force of the bite blaring louder than ten eruptions of thunder!

An underrated shockwave blew the remainder of the enemies down, forcing the majority of them to lose their stability – whether with the power of their wings, or their ability to combat the atmospheric space for motion with other mysterious abilities.

Several moments later, the maw of the great wolverine head opened, revealing nothing but darkness within it.

The enemies were gone.

They had perished.

The Unlimited twisted unnaturally and flashed down at tremendous speed, a ravenous glow in his large eyes. He took a vicious bite at another portion of the now scattered enemies and devoured them with an almost carefree sort of dominance.

Once again, the enemies vanished.

Grim's Hidden Class abilities were rooted in supernatural bestial properties, mainly, but not limited those of a canine.

His Class, the Esurient Hoarder, allowed him to manifest canine characteristics on his human body – all of which were exaggerated and incredibly efficient at doing what a regular canine would use them for.

Of course, this was only a rudimentary benefit.

The core ability of the Esurient Hoarder allowed Grim to transform into three great named beasts with three separate characteristics that could only be used in their forms.

Avhanar the Voracious.

Paradon Parody.

Esurient.

Currently, Grim was taking on the form of Avhanar the Voracious, a giant wolf head that could fly and devour anything no matter how large. When anything with potent essence destructive or not was devoured, it would be broken down the darkness in Avhanar's maw, and all its essences were transformed into a temporary boost to Grim's endurance and stamina.

Needless to say, Grim's abilities were incredibly exhausting, thus Avhanar's stamina-restoring property. Unfortunately, it was the only form he had with this benefit, as well as the most balanced.

Grim devoured another portion of the enemies in the skies rapidly and felt himself brimming with energy. His eyes moved this way and that. Despite having so much energy, all gained from the devoured enemies, he was eager to revert back to normal.

The other Factions didn't know much about Replicus' Faction's strength. While they considered them inferior, they weren't fools. This was the perfect opportunity for them to learn more about Replicus' elite force, and Grim didn't want to show the full scope of even his Avhanar transformation.

SHIIIIING!!!

A horrible pressure suddenly barrelled towards Grim.

...!!!

It was that white scimitar!

He didn't see it, but he felt it!

...And a little too late.

A crisp line cut across the skies, marking Avhanar the Voracious from jaw to ear!

The wind whipped with a crackle, and the giant wolven head was split in two!

The dimpled man was a distance away, his scimitar pointed down from the slash he did just now.

He was atop the closed lips of the large, winged bullfrog he had been riding earlier, which was flying with its head tilted up.

The man watched as the wolf twitched, its two parts sliding apart.

"Come on! I didn't even show you what my sword can do! Is that all you were worth?!" he cried into the distance with an offended face.

Truly.

He hadn't used a single skill from his Pseudo-Mythical grade scimitar.

After finally being let loose from that crowded place, and given a simple mission that appealed to everything he had gained after willingly losing morality, patience, and even his own life, how could his first opponent be so pathetic?!

The dimpled man spat and growled.

However...

Wait.

Something wasn't right.

He was sure he had seen that man with the fancy armor transform into the great beast. That wasn't a summon, or a tamed creature.

So why...

Why were the two portions of the severed head only spouting out swaths of white fur in every direction instead of blood?

That didn't make any sense.

And indeed it didn't.

Half a breath after the dimpled man thought this, a vehement, solid object crashed into the side of his face!

The force was beyond crushing!

The man held his ground however, within the short span the attack came. A neon glow rushed over him a micro-second after the hit connected, a majority of it gathering around his waist and legs, stabilizing him!

That didn't stop the left side of his skull from fracturing though.

Blood spilled from his skin as the bone protruded out!

Grim, decked in his Granted Armament had connected his fist to the undead man, however, he narrowed his eyes at the man's reaction.

The man grinned as his eyes finally scrolled to his left. Even with his deformed face, he found the impressive street to counter by swinging his sword, at a speed that startled Grim!

...!

The Unlimited was alarmed.

He warped to the man's other side, revealed his glowing claws, and swiped at his head!

However...

The dimpled man suddenly sank into the open mouth of the giant frog under him!

In the next instance, the frog's presence vanished, as well as its body.

Grim began freefalling, a dark look on his face.

His senses were stretched around him.

'That frog...' he thought.

His enemy was a lot more shrewd than he had thought.

Seconds passed as Grim fell.

He still didn't sense the dimpled man.

The remaining undead were starting to fly toward him, but he wasn't concerned about them. Though, they did begin to block his view.

Two seconds...

Four seconds...

Six seconds...

The other undead reached Grim.

He didn't deal with them immediately, however.

He waited until they were only a few centimeters close and...

...!!!

The sharp presence of a loathsome scimitar appeared, shooting from... right below Grim!

At the exact same time, without looking to see with his eyes, Grim pointed forward!

He didn't see it, but his finger and the tip of the scimitar were almost poking each other in this instance.

Then the unthinkable happened...