

## Undead 851

Chapter 851: 'Efficiency' Incarnate!

As the glow of Aggrante pulsed from Grim's gauntlet and shot forward, the Unlimited finally saw the scene in front of him.

It unnerved him.

Never before had he ever seen the glaring might of Aggrante be deflected, split into several separate rays that went on a whirling craze in different directions, destroying the surrounding, pitiful undead as soon as they met the tip of a weapon.

Only the scimitar, which sped even more to then meet his finger, its origin seeming to be the clear, expansive space before Grim, was capable of this... and so much more.

For when it met Grim's index, it ignored the Granted Armament he was adorning and carved past it and then along his arm to pierce his shoulder as it went!

...!!!

The sudden surge in speed just now had thrown Grim off!

By the time he felt the grave sting from his arm and his shoulder, with the scimitar seeming to have faded through his armor to get to his flesh, his enemy had already gone and revealed himself!

The dimpled undead man was bathed in a precious neon glow... but one different from the previous, subtle one he donned to prevent himself from flying off.

He emerged from the mouth of the bullfrog which had turned itself invisible, and guffawed.

"Hahahahahahaha! I got you, didn't I?! You're done for!" he screamed.

Grim wore a dark face, traces of agony showing from his face, but he didn't give his opponent the pleasure of making it too obvious.

With a thought, he vanished from the tip of the white scimitar and appeared a distance away in the air.

The throbbing pain he felt only grew worse.

Blood was leaking furiously behind his armor, and the wound he had received seemed to start leaking a pungent sort of pus that mixed in with blood.

Grim frowned.

'What is that sword?' he wondered before looking where he had teleported from.

The undead man was looking in his direction with a grin.

His appearance had changed.

He was no longer wearing any sort of armament. His torso was bare, from his waist, what could be seen was a wispy haze of hazel that fed into the bullfrog below him, flapping its wings rapidly. A similarly colored hazel glow surrounded his body as well and looked to be reinforcing his flesh and bone where Grim had hit him.

Grim narrowed his eyes and grunted from the pain.

'I see. So he's a Peak Master Stage expert. Good to know,' he thought.

Peak Master Stage experts were capable of combining their bodies with the shape of their Genuine Incarnations. The result was a 1,000% boost to their overall capabilities both offensive and defensive.

'That explains the sudden speed just now,' Grim thought.

He felt his shoulder.

A large chunk of it all the way to his neck seemed to have been eaten up by a strange rot that left his flesh white with the odd pus. He could also feel himself get numb from the right side of his body.

A shuddering boom exploded in the distance, but by the time it sounded, the grinning undead was already upon Grim, his sword cutting down towards him with a vastly greater sense of fatality than before.

It was overbearing, especially for Grim who was not in the same calibre Stage-wise!

The Unlimited hastily cast his right arm forward to block while pumping a great surge of energy into his gauntlet. He then careened to the side as best as he could, but it only barely helped.

"YOU IDIOT! DON'T YOU LEARN?!" the undead man cried as his sword once again sliced through Grim's armor as if it didn't exist and severed his arm cleanly from the elbow!

The scimitar then carved a shallow length down his torso before Grim fully dodged the side and ignited mana which he directed to his feet, forcing him down towards the swarmed ocean!

The dimpled undead cried with glee.

"How are those wounds so far?! Half your body must have already been eaten away by now!" he screamed as with another boom, his lone, half-ghostly figure shot down to catch up easily!

"This sword was already one of a kind, but when I died, it remained bonded to me – a product of one of its amazing abilities! By sharing even death with its master, it grew stronger! Now it craves the flesh of anyone it sees and will stop at nothing to taste it! Not even your fancy armor can do anything about it!"

Another dreadful swipe came from the scimitar, backed by the fierce force of might behind the Master!

It was too quick to dodge without sacrificing something, and for Grim, losing an arm seemed to already be a large detriment to his balance, not to mention top the fact he was in mid-air.

It also didn't help that half of his face was full of rank puss mixed with blood. His flesh was rapidly getting eaten away!

The scimitar whistling as it approached his neck for a definite blow also didn't bode well.

However...

"Aggrante."

An instant later, a brilliant glow emerged.

However, it didn't come from anywhere near Grim.

It came from behind the undead Master!

...!

"What?!" the dimpled man screamed in surprise.

Because he was so eager to cut down Grim with his scimitar, he didn't manage to find the room to dodge. The bright mix of Null Life Essence and Mana didn't afford him the chance with its great speed either!

Thus...

"ARRGHHH!"

The beam smashed into the undead man, and the force behind it caused him to crash into Grim and the two began plummeting to the ocean with a nitrous light carrying them!

The scimitar spun from the undead man's hand!

The Singlefold Aggrante couldn't be defended against effectively by a Genuine Incarnation, but the undead man survived the short-lived blast by guarding with the majority of his Aura belatedly!

He gnashed his teeth as his back sizzled, its form now that of an indented, charred spot on his back.

What had happened?

Where had that attack come from?

Grim wore a delighted grin as they fell, plastered against each other.

His half-eaten face looked terrifying, especially when he answered the undead man's questions... and in the dark sort of way.

"You're smart. Almost had me fooled there," he said. "But you lost when you allowed me to see that you're just a Form User with an absurdly powerful sword. I would have thrown caution to the wind otherwise!"

The undead man scowled heavily.

"You speak about my loss when I cannot die! When you are falling with me?! When your body is almost gone?!" he screamed.

Grim's grin grew wider.

"Yes," he said to all, and he wrapped his arm tight around his opponent.

Behind the dimpled man, Grim's severed arm could be seen, falling along with them also.

The index to its hand was pointing out after having loosened an Aggrante from the surge of energy Grim had infused into his gauntlet moments before.

And now...

Furious volumes of white fur poured out of the gaps within the armor, and in the next moment, a smaller version of Avhanar the Voracious emerged cast a shadow, and the two and greedily devoured them both.

"NO!" the undead man screamed as he felt the enclosure of darkness drown him and Grim.

Sharp teeth closed around the two.

The large head of Avhanar stood in the air, a hundred meters away from the sea.

A micro-moment later, the armless figure of Grim appeared on top of its head. He gave a deep sigh and sat on the head which began to rise into the sky.

His face was almost completely eaten away at this point.

However...

"Granted Restoration."

A glowing white pulse flashed over Grim and his armor, and his skin, and flesh was swiftly restored, his arm behind the limo gauntlet was regenerated by the time the flash of light was gone.

The Granted Armament of the Unlimited had several universal properties, such as allowing the user to know the mechanics of the armor from the moment they wore it, the ability to restore itself by using Null Life Essence reserves, and specialized skills like Aggrante, Limited Granted Warp, Granted Restoration and several others.

Grim hadn't used Granted Restoration immediately after taking damage because unlike most of the armor skills, Granted Restoration had a cooldown of ten minutes. The cooldown seemed to be because the armor applied an advanced healing mechanism that dealt with types of injury the same way and with the same cost.

"Urgh. It ended up becoming a struggle between saving energy from the armor and not revealing too much about my Hidden Class, huh? Off to a not-so-good start," Grim shook his head.

An important detail about his powers that his opponent had learned about too late, was that in addition to having complete control of the armor and its energies despite not being able to sense Null Life Essence, Grim also had complete control over his body, even severed portions.

Because of the vast amounts of stamina and endurance he gained when devouring enemies, Grim's detached body parts could still act vivaciously, as long he commanded to. This included having them temporarily adopt the Avhanar transformation as well.

The Unlimited suddenly turned his head up to the left and swiped with the gleaming claws from two of his fingers.

Immediately, a clean spray of blood dyed the skies, and a large, amphibian body with bat wings was revealed, cleaved into three!

"Damn undead frog," Grim grumbled while looking hatefully at its incapacitated figure. "Not so hard to find when you're not relying on your fellow mates, huh?"

#### Chapter 852: The Way of The Creed

The rumbles of battle taking place beyond the angry waves only grew worse with time, and the red shade above grew more intense.

The undead racing over and under the waters, seeking to destroy the ships, hadn't gained much of a foothold, however. In fact, half of them had already been wiped out by the forces of the Factions, the leaders of which were appraising the situation.

There were a lot of things to consider before rushing towards the mayhem ahead. The masked man was a formidable foe, clearly. Those that had doubted could only narrow their eyes and dig further doubts in the deep recesses of their minds.

At the very least, the army of undead set loose here, was some kind of devastating expression of strength that couldn't be taken lightly. Worse yet, this could one of many armies the masked necromancer was keeping in reserve.

If that alone wasn't enough to force calm calculation, then the Paladin Champion who was battling the masked man would at least force a momentary halt. The Purity guarded against all voyages past the Central Boundary.

The affiliation of the Factions was unlikely to garner a favourable perspective from the first ranked Paladin Champion, and to be fair most of the Faction leaders weren't interested in helping the Paladin Champion anyway.

Over Replicus' ship, Allora looked down and clicked her tongue.

"I thought he was coming up, what's he doing now?" she said, watching the figure of Grim hover over the ocean.

No one answered her.

As soon as Grim finished his battle, Replicus and Pherdanta had turned away. The former began searching for the unique variants of undead like the dimpled man all around.

It was certainly odd how they looked; how they felt to his sensory skill [Sorcery of Essence].

When the only close specimen had been within range, Replicus had noticed that indeed, the man had no traces of life energy whatsoever, but rather than being sustained by Undeath energy...

'That's odd. He seemed a bit like me. I'm not an undead, but in some way, my existence is still being dictated by Somanda,' Replicus thought.

If he had to guess, then it definitely had something to do with the soul. The masked man seemed very proficient in it, and unlike Replicus' previous evaluation of the masked man's skill at shaping the soul, Replicus added several more degrees of wariness where his likely encounter with the necromancer was concerned.

Given the variety the man seemed to have with his undead specimens, it also didn't bode well when Replicus saw that the abnormal undead among the many, somehow had the ability to command the regular undead to move as they willed too.

At this point, the Severed Union's numbers might truly make no difference.

"Hmm?" Replicus hummed when he spotted another undead with the same traits as the man with white scimitar.

Unlike the flock of its lesser kind rushing towards the thirty and some vessels only to be obliterated, it stood a distance away, getting washed by the salt water over and over again.



The man wore a thin, black vest on his chiselled body, and a tattered pair of pants.

His greying hair and thick beard showed signs of complete neglect despite being soaked, which, when paired with his unfortunate choice of clothing, told Replicus that this enemy – if he was fully sentient like the rest of the abnormal undead – was either a powerful fanatic following Actuass, or monstrous combatant who had lived his past life without a care for luxury.

The man looked over fifty years of age, so the latter was likely, but...

OOOOOM!

The vast, chaotic waves were batted away the moment the man released his awful presence.

A quick expanding dome of it – like an illusory breeze, which smelled like sulphur – seemed to whip out as soon as he brought his hands together, as though about to make a solemn prayer.

Replicus' sockets flashed.

He did not like this one bit.

"An Incandescent Stager. And a nasty one at that..." he said.

...

The undead man in the vest raised his right hand over his head and slowly extended it forward as mana crackled like thunder around it. It appeared as a vicious white glow that rose up a great height intimidatingly.

The cold, chocolate brown hue in the man's eyes, which lit up to a bright hazel in the next moment, made what he said – and with a suspiciously loud, yet calm voice – all the more... daunting.

"This is my Creed. You are all in effective range."

...The undead man then balled his extended hand into a tight fist.

...!!!

Everyone who heard his voice also felt the furious build up in the man's mana, which happened in the same instance when they felt a blistering heat fire off with an ungodly blunt force behind their armour...

...Behind their defensive spells...

...Behind the protection of blessings...

An attack that was impossible to dodge and defend against blasted directed against their bodies; directly at the chest, where the heart should be!

The rambunctious, simultaneously blows overwhelmed the chorus of the ocean waves for one instance.

Dozens of glints of white lights depicted the numerous individuals taking the blows, and the result was... truly atrocious.

Pherdanta, Allora and Grim were hit especially hard; so hard that they became dark blurs that flew backward with more than a few traces of agony!

They weren't the only ones.

Tens of figures could be seen bursting from the ships of several Factions, their bodies torn and bloodied. There was no shortage of wails either, as it seemed more than a lot had perished with that one attack.

Most of the regular undead weren't spared either.

The ocean suddenly became a treacherous place for a completely different reason to the previous few!

...

"Hahahaha. It's already beginning, huh?" Replicus said with two of the sockets behind his helmet completely dimmed out.

His body was arched back from the blow, and a rough, exaggerated cloud of smoke was billowing from the inside of his armour, leaking through the gaps.

His hand was extended out behind him, and with keen sight one would be able to tell that this was the reason the figures of his Unlimited were paused in space, a distance from the ship.

Replicus couldn't show it, but his mood had turned up.

"Quite the blow. However..."

His sight fell on the enemy below.

It was not much, but the old bastard had a strip of blood falling from the corner of his mouth. He licked it off, and his brown eyes looked up, locking onto the Titan World Storm Penetrator.

Chapter 853: Onward!

Pherdanta and Allora had been hit so hard that they both temporarily lost consciousness. However, they came to seconds later, both more than a little disappointed at having to face such humiliation in front of the boss.

They were supposed to be his top force.

The fact that Replicus had stopped them from being sent flying back tens of kilometers by grabbing ahold of the Null Life Essence in their Granted Armament, only served to make them feel worse.

Pherdanta was especially ticked off.

She used Limited Granted Warp to return to Replicus' side, as did Allora, who gave a heavy breath afterwards, and touched the chest plate of her armour. The blow just now hadn't breached her armour. It simply hit her directly.

She felt her chest pulse in tremendous pain, her heart throbbed intensely.

"Incredible," she said, more awed than terrified.

Pherdanta gave her a harsh look as she wiped away the blood from her mouth.

She looked up at Replicus, who had both cloud and smoke whirling around him.

If not for the ridiculous levels of protection that the Granted Armament gave each of them as Unlimited, she knew for fact that she and the others would have been dead or close to it by now.

"Don't be too hard on yourselves. Not including the Creed just now – which made distance and positioning irrelevant for that bastard's technique, whatever it is – blocking an Incandescent Stager's attack isn't something I expect from you all without using your special traits," Replicus said without turning to them.

His words didn't really make Pherdanta feel better, but she was determined to not let herself be hit again.

"I didn't think even that creepy introvert of yours and Baddan would be fine, boss. Are they that much stronger than us?" Allora said with a smile, expressing sentiments different from Pherdanta's.

She felt the Sky Watcher and the Astute Duke's presence – the former on the inverted deck, and the latter on the bowsprit.

They both seemed fine, and they hadn't been sent flying like the rest.

Replicus merely chuckled to Allora's words.

He was surprised at how carefree she was after that attack, but all the better.

One was going to need a mind-set like that on this assignment.

He didn't know if she could take another blow though.

The old undead man still locked eyes with Replicus. Asides from probably deliberating if a second attack of the previous scale was necessary, he seemed to be wondering what had happened just now.

One of his many, simultaneous blows had landed on the target successfully, but had rebounded with four times the amount of force, hitting him square in the chest and breaking a few ribs!

Because the man's physique was tolerant to even the harshest of blows, he had managed to withstand the attack, and without fear of dying since he was already dead. However, a third of his heart had been crushed.

Even now, his vest was indented, the skin and flesh bruised heavily.

The undead man's brown eyes keenly locked onto the figure with the starry armour.

It was him.

Definitely.

The look behind that helm was too taunting for it to not be him.

Surely, Replicus' sockets had returned to flickering wholesomely, all four in a blue, confident gleam.

'Let's see you try it again...' he thought as a certain skill inscribed in his bone body became engulfed in the light of mana.

However...

"Boss, look!" Allora called Replicus to see.

The Penetrator had been so absorbed by the tension between him and the undead man that he hadn't yet noticed the development from the other Faction leaders' side.

A singular ship had suddenly burst forth, charting a straight course past the hundreds of undead attempting to block its path. It simply knocked into the lot of them, while at times weaving animatedly to dodge the more dangerous attacks from more powerful undead successfully – some that came from above, and others that exploded from under the waters!

This feat was likely possible only due to the bold stroke of white mana around the ship, which seemed to empower its functions and provide a doubly effective defence and some manner of offense.

This was the work of an Incandescent Stager expert, no doubt.

The umbrella-shaped glow over this vessel was still prominent, which barred Replicus' perception.

He had an idea as to who owned this ship though. Two ideas.

He could picture it belonging to the Mad Bishop, or Eaniss.

His best bet was on the former though. That crazy hag was likely to forge a path through danger before anyone else.

The old man in the vest tore his attention from Replicus and gazed at the incoming ship.

His face turned solemn, and the mana bathing his hands turned into an ebony coloured Aura, much like ash!

The ocean became wilder as his furious might raged about with ten times the force.

The skies turned overcast, and a tragic storm was instantly formed.

Replicus shook his head.

"Deck. Now," he said to his subordinates.

An instant later, all of them were on deck, where Baddan had been watching everything from. The Sky Watcher had a slightly bloody mark on his attire, but he look to be mostly fine. Araeyn on the other hand, was entirely unscathed.

Replicus gestured for Pherdanta to steer the ship as he planted his hand on its sleek boards under his grieves.

"Full speed ahead. Don't stop," he ordered as a glow travelled through the ship.

Soon the large vessel stood upright in the air.

"What about Grim?" Allora asked, noticing that the canine Unlimited was not aboard.

"He'll catch up."

The ship's rear spikes lit up and sent the ship blasting forward like an aerial craft from a far, distinct reality!

The dozens of odd attachments to its keel were now pushing against the restricting atmosphere to give the ship a greater edge in flight!

Replicus had applied a skill known simply as [Float] to the ship back when the ocean had rebelled against progress.

[Wealth of Spoils] could extract and grant skills to objects, and he had used the opportunity to give the ship an answer to the precarious situation.

Rushing to the edge of the deck, Replicus was just in time to see the old undead man bolt towards the approaching ship which bounced over the waters as it sped, his movement butchering all logic pertaining to the sea!

The storm clouds above were pulled down as he moved, as were the throngs of lightning they cradled. They smashed against everything, highlighting the undead man's body grimly as he cocked back his fist for an attack that could probably level the Mythical grade vessel he was up against with ease!

However, as Replicus watched, something truly unexpected happened.

...!!!

The Penetrator sockets flashed continuously.

"Son of a..."

From the great vessel barrelling forward, a figure darted out of the umbrella-shaped shield to meet the incoming enemy.

It was a pale youth with long, white hair tied into a ponytail, his body adorned in a large, fuzzy coat meant to ward away the cold.

He wore a massive grin as he met the enemy that far outclassed him in multiple respects.

He wasn't afraid.

He was unfazed by the might of his enemy.

This pale man opened his mouth and uttered a few words to his opponent.

...!!!

The Penetrator was alarmed.

He didn't hear what the pale man said to the undead Incandescent Stager in the fraction of time before they met for blows, however, the outlandish effect which bellowed as he spoke was too clear, and too familiar.

'Veneration?!'



Was it truly...?

But that wasn't the thick of it.

A micro moment later, the figure of the undead old man was quickly dragged up by an unseen force, stripped from the ocean surface as a barrier that stood against the great sailing vessel Aurolio had darted from!

Fortune fell for one and misfortune for the other.

The old undead man kept soaring into the sky, and his path just so happened to lead into that of Replicus and his subordinates!

The Penetrator's sockets blazed.

"Sockethole...!" he growled.

Chapter 854: Back to Sender

A collision was afoot, and it wasn't with a box-shaped metallic locomotive – which would have been a much better companion in the imminent crash in this case. The undead Incandescent Stager was likely to use the chance to wreck the great vessel with furious glee.

Pherdanta wouldn't allow it.

With palpable strain, she forced the ship to come to a less than smooth halt just in time, the passenger aboard with her jerking a little at the sudden stop!

The undead old man whizzed up past the end of the ship's bowsprit where Araeyn was seated peacefully, and soared further into the height, nearly reaching the clouds!

Pherdanta urged the ship forward, intent on not giving the dreadful foe a chance to target them. The ship resumed its motion in the air with a vehement bellow, the bright glints at its end firing off a baleful scorch that beat against the cool winds!

Replicus looked up. As did Baddan and Allora.

'Just our luck...' he thought as he watched the undead Incandescent Stager lose the momentum that dragged him up.

At once, the man's brown eyes flashed towards their ship. They turned hazel as his furious ebony Aura grew to cover him like a thick, wide blanket, then leave a beautiful trail in the sky as the man kicked off the air, and hurtled at an atrocious speed towards Replicus' ship!

A great shattering noise rang out as the undead combatant broke the umbrella-shaped shield over the ship's deck with ease!

His speed when shooting through his previous destination to where he was right now had truly been beyond what Masters, and even a Tier 14 beast – Baddan – could follow!

The man cocked back his fist and sent it tearing through the deck with a horrendous force that threatened to make the whole ship implode, a tragedy that began with a violent heat that drew everything around it!

Everyone aboard felt the greedy pull while their vision was yet to properly register what was happening!

The worst was coming!

However...

In the same instance when the undead Incandescent Stager caused a gaping hole through the deck to manifest, something appeared right beside his fist.

It was small orb, barely the size of an eyeball, with a faded greyish black hue.

Oddly, this orb vanished as soon as it appeared, but...

"Ngghh!"

The undead Incandescent Stager suddenly felt his skin, flesh and bones get yanked in a direction far from the ship! His body was skewed as he flashed in the same direction as the vessel had been going at a speed comparable to that which he had used to reach the ship from the sky!

The old man travelled seven hundred meters in less than a quarter of a breath, and when he felt his body relax, his velocity dampening, another orb appeared right above his forward... and vanished again!

The undead man was appalled.

His body sped straight down towards the raging sea at an unfathomable speed, and slammed into the head of the ship he had attacked moments ago!

The great vessel forced the surrounding waters to groan as its frontmost half sank deep into the ocean!

Replicus looked down and chuckled mockingly.

'That's definitely Eaniss' ship. She'll probably want payback later...' he thought while watching the vessel below groan and push forward again, the undead Incandescent Stager attached to its shattered head.

He turned away his focus.

His crew were all still a bit stunned at what had just happened, Pherdanta immediately retrieved her wits and forced the ship to surge faster forward!

While she was at it, she had the ship manifest another barrier over the deck – a feature she was very grateful for, as without it, she now felt naked.

Looking at the gaping hole in the deck, Replicus sighed.

'I was a bit late, but I still managed it...'

"A bit?!" one of Replicus' thought phantoms cried in front of his face.

"Yeah! We did all the work, sockethole!" another said scathingly.

Replicus sighed.

Well, they weren't wrong.

Incandescent Stagers, Form Users in particular, had terrifying physical attributes. It only got worse when they used their Aura or Nitros.

Because of this, Replicus had been a little late in responding to the old man's assault even with his thought phantoms' assistance. Thankfully, his counter had activated just in time.

The affinity that was previously exclusive to the Hybrid Luman's body was now accessible to Replicus' in his Penetrator body as well.

Distorted Gravity.

Since he had been learning more and more about it while using the Kindling Heath to draw on its essence – the mana which manifested its effect – and the Vehement Bone Nullmancer exclusive skill, [Epiphany], he had mastered it to a significant extent.

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[ Epiphany | Lv.7 ]

The very core of a Vehement Bone Nullmancer. The user gains boosts to his current capabilities and channels to learn concepts with ease.

<Passive>

- +150% to all skill proficiency and power

- Constantly analyses concepts around the user with a chance of generating lesser fundamental knowledge on said concepts.

<Active>

Allows the user to learn the fundamentals of any mana-related concept using specified quantities of Null Life Essence.

Mana Requirements: None

Duration: None

Cooldown: ---

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Unlike before, his understanding of the concept was more advanced and his affinity with it had grown to B.

This allowed him to learn how to create centres of gravity - the orbs - which could pull and push with extremely intricate application of force.

The only drawback for Replicus, was that unlike with his Hybrid Luman form, which had a mana core developed specifically for adopting Distorted Gravity, his Penetrator form could only marginally achieve better results by using his second mana core, the Malleable form core.

This was a mana core he had gotten after using [Unbound] on his mana stat.

The mana core was in tune with basic elements, and could produce them on a whim, but it was still white, which limited this specific trait it had. Thankfully, it allowed Replicus to use Distorted Gravity a bit better, especially when influenced by [Epiphany]'s boost to all skills!

"This is my Creed..."

...!

Replicus shook as he heard this and turned his attention below the ship.

The undead man standing on the head of Eaniss' ship bellowed with a voice that everyone could hear amid the storms.

'Another attack...' Replicus thought.

However, another voice spoke over that of the old Incandescent Stager.

"This is MY Creed. Fuck off!"

...

The first thing Replicus saw as he gaped behind his helmet, was the old undead man shooting off Eaniss' ship and disappearing into the far distance while hunching back, as though something had knocked into him ruthlessly.

An unnatural calm then suddenly imposed itself for thousands of meters, forcing the chaotic waves to relax and turn back into the glossy sheen of steady waters under the great ship.

The storms were forced away.

The wind steadied.

Everything turned peaceful.

...

Replicus shook his head.

'Well... Way to show them,' he thought while continuing to stare at Eaniss' ship.

He didn't know how many Creeds were used just for this 'fuck off', or if it even worked as a command for a Creed. Who knew?

Replicus didn't want to think about it too much.

In fact, there was something even more pressing and shocking than Eaniss' impressive showing.

It seemed the clash between the masked man and the Paladin Champion had concluded.

Chapter 855: Evasion

Perhaps it was because the Incandescent Stager had showed up and effectively posed as a threat for all the Factions, which caused the majority of the voyaging combatants to not notice the sudden disappearance of the raging blows far away.

No.

Maybe, the old undead man had caused the racket with the storm he prompted with his unknown Form Using technique so that he could provide an impeccable cover for his master right when he needed it; at the end of his battle.

That could be it.

All the undead did the masked man's bidding, right, regardless of which type they were?

In any case, Replicus had not noticed until everything calmed down.

He had been busy with the Incandescent Stage expert's assault just now, but Eaniss, and probably a few other Incandescent Stage Faction leaders had probably noticed as soon as the terrible battle concluded.

That was probably why the Head Faction leader had cleared the view.

The group of vessels trailing behind surged forth, dealing with the remaining undead as they went.

Tens of Faction members had been lost at a casual glance, likely from the old Incandescent Stager's attack earlier, and perhaps from the several abnormal undead that had been sprinkled among the regular undead.

Speaking of these abnormal undead...

'I could have sworn there were more of them,' Replicus thought suspiciously.

The thousands of mindless undead, even the stronger Cluster beast variants, had been wiped out, but the sentient enemies, like the one Grim had fought, had suddenly disappeared. They could have just been killed off like the rest, but Replicus doubted it.

'Maybe there weren't that many strong ones sent out in this wave?'

He too had assumed that this was likely a first wave of many, and was made of weaker Undead meant to stall for a few minutes.

Had it been worth it though?

Had the masked man won?

Had the battle truly concluded?

Replicus didn't know.

Looking below at the casualties on this side, which were supposed to be in the tens, he felt and saw several of the corpses be brought to life.

The Severed Union had a steady supply of all types of potions, even Supreme ones. Other high grade restoratives were manufactured too.

As such, dying or being brought close to it, wasn't that terrifying for Faction members, especially if they had enticing potential to their leader.



'He probably knows that too...' Replicus thought.

Indeed.

The masked man probably accounted for such an obvious hack among his enemies, meaning he wouldn't send his best minions right away.

The Factions' ships charged forward.

Soon, all the threats had been eliminated, but the tension was far from being alleviated. Everyone was still on edge. A subtle sense of confidence was inspired by having Eaniss lead the fleet, but even then...

The anticipation of what became of the two powers that had been clashing, and the imminent 'true' beginning of the dangerous voyage, tugged at everyone's nerves. The Faction Head's presence would only work as a hygiene factor at best.

Replicus leaned against the edge of the deck.

'So that man – Aurolio, if I recall his name correctly – is with Eaniss, huh? If he has a Veneration art, I guess it would make sense for Eaniss to bring him along...' Replicus thought.

He had met Aurolio at Eaniss' residence, seemingly as a newcomer to the Severed Union invited by Gabel, a prominent member of the Head Faction.

'I guess it makes too much sense...' Replicus sighed, becoming more convinced.

Eaniss had an appreciation of Veneration art abilities. She had Gabel, whom Replicus had heard had strange time-related abilities.

The woman's fascination in Veneration type abilities was likely bolstered by Replicus himself. While trying to earn the right to form his Faction back then, he had shown Eaniss his own Veneration art, the one in his eye... rather, socket, in order to make himself a lot more enticing.

Eaniss had recognised how unique it was immediately.

Veneration type abilities had a strange feel to them upon activation. That was why both Skullius and Replicus reacted to them with odd expressions of recognition. Eaniss could as well, as her sensory skill as an Incandescent Stager was just that good.

If Aurolio showed that he had one... well, the rest was easy to figure out.

What was vexing to Replicus, however, was if Aurolio had been forced to come by Eaniss, or if he had insisted on being brought along. Replicus assumed it was the former, but...

"BRIGHT STORM!"

The Penetrator was torn from his thoughts by a loud, jovial voice that came from behind his ship!

He immediately sighed exasperatedly, and looked back only for courtesy's sake.

He recognised the voice.

A great vessel painted by a pale golden glow was softly following after him and his crew in the air.

The glow seemed to be what was keeping it afloat, but to a less rate of efficiency when it came to speeding up the vessel's flight capability, compared to Replicus' vessel.

The umbrella-shaped shield over the trailing ship's deck vanished to reveal a smiling ancient woman in priestly robes and what looked like a very tall sparkly crown over her perm.

She waved both of her hands at Replicus childishly and then made a funny boxing gesture with her fists, her eyes beaming with zeal.

"Nope. I'm not ready for this just yet," Replicus said with a heavy tone. "Everyone hold on," he told his group.

The Bishop was almost within range for their terms to come into effect. If she reached within fifty meters of Replicus' ship, they would have to fight, and he didn't want that right now.

'Read the room you hag,' Replicus thought before pointing his finger towards the deck.

A streak of greyish lightning smote the ship and in the next moment, the great vessel appeared in a boundless, tranquil dark void.

Pherdanta and Allora had seen this before, and were used to it, but Baddan was stunned. As was Araeyn. The Apostle looked with mild surprise at the vast black, a bit of fascination showing from his sockets.

This didn't last long, however.

A moment later, the great ship was on the ocean surface, wobbling lightly as the waters welcomed it with a splash. It then straightened, and pushed forward with Pherdanta's direction.

Replicus and company were a few tens of meters behind Eaniss' ship, sandwiched by two others.

The Bishop, left behind with her circle of handsome guards, buckled pitifully. She looked like a child who had her favourite toy taken away.

Replicus didn't feel sorry for her at all, however.

Pherdanta, on the other hand, did. In fact, she was unsettled.

"Master..."

"I already told you. It's fine," Replicus gave her a reply before she could ask.

Antagonising two Incandescent Stagers, however lightly, was daring indeed, but for now it had been worth it.

Between using the Distorted Gravity and the warping just now – which sucked a significant amount of mana – Replicus considered his resources well spent.

Using Spatial Lightning to transport things was easy for Replicus, but if he wanted a precise destination – one of his choosing – from the spatial movement, he often had to use the trans-positioning lightning in conjunction with Stagnant Space.

Stagnant space was another concept Replicus had learned through [Epiphany] and the Kindling Heath.

Basically, it was blanket of space between the material existence of Aigas. A realm of nothingness, so to speak.

The main benefit of having access to this hidden, plain space, was that one would be able to exploit its biggest, and arguably greatest trait; stability.

Stagnant Space enforced stability to anything that managed to form or appear within it.

Replicus had discovered belatedly that the Arcane Teleportation scroll he had used in the Tremur Forest, applied this concept, as well.

He also had the sneaking suspicion that Stagnant Space was related to Clusters, but his theories were yet to be proven right.

The brief moment of levity Replicus had found in evading the Mad Bishop was quickly eaten up as the tension swarming around the great ships around and behind him caught up with him.

It only grew worse when he and the others finally saw semblances of what had happened between the masked man and the Purity.

It started with a decrepit scene of dozens of shattered, torn and wrecked large ships, all with a three-pointed star symbol over their hull and sails. At least those that were not too damaged depicted it.

Another more unnerving visual detail, was the sea of red that cut across the calm ocean.

It was all blood, and those who had spilled it could be seen floating within.

Chapter 856: The Other Side

It wouldn't have been a stretch to say that the wooden and metallic scraps scattered all over the reddened ocean surface suggested a fleet-on-fleet battle, rather than a one-on-one battle between men.

Worse yet, even with the evidence of dozens of shattered vessels on the surface, dozens more could be spotted deep underwater and over an enormous range in all directions.

Given that the great battle just now – regardless of how short-lived it was – had been changing setting from sea to sky, it made sense that probably the majority of the vessels that made a line along the Central Boundary would be ruined, sunken, and scattered with the waves.

Tragically, the ships weren't the only losses.

The hundreds of dead Purity Knights, most eviscerated, incinerated, disembodied, disemboweled, and dismembered, told of just how many resources the Purity had staked into this.

This wasn't all either.

Vaguely, everyone who looked several tens of meters past the carnage could see a mesmerizing blur. It was like a chunk of obscure glass dropping from the heavens like a veil and barring travel past it.

If one looked east and west, they wouldn't be able to tell where it ended.

It looked extraordinarily sturdy, especially with its sporadic flashes of silver – which contributed to how those who looked at it could even notice it.

It seemed to click for some why it was hard to see from a distance. It was likely made so purposefully. If the Purity were to mark the Central Boundary with something that could easily be seen from a distance, worse, with its outrageous size, that would no doubt attract more attention to the Central Boundary, the very thing they didn't want to encourage.

Sadly, this barrier, even with all its overwhelming majesty, had been broken through.

A large, uneven crack that dropped glassy chunks of itself could be seen right ahead. A greenish-black flame burnt at its inner edges, continuously breaking it apart bit by bit.

Replicus' sockets flashed.

Well, that certainly settled it.

The masked man had emerged victorious in the end and he was still ahead of everyone.

Skullius had expected it and he was sure that after having the initial doubts blown out of the other Faction leaders' minds, they had expected the Paladin Champion to lose one way or the other.

The same conclusions he had drawn about the masked necromancer possibly being immune to Divine energy type abilities were likely known to the other Factions as well. If the Factions were good for anything, it was learning and adapting.

Given their job description, it wasn't strange at all that some of them were likely accepting the fact that they were wrong for doubting the Emissary's evaluation and were now stacking up multiple plans on how to deal with the masked man.

That said, it also wasn't strange that others were concluding that while they were all forced to accept the assignment, with Eaniss having the final say, this didn't have to devolve into a 1 v. 100.

As it was in the Severed Union, whenever a setting that allowed for settling scores and stealing what you could, appeared, it was best to take it.

The fleet had paused temporarily to appraise the situation, but soon, it was moving again with Eaniss in the lead.

Her ship was the first to pass through the gap in the massive blurred barrier.

The rest followed slowly and passed through three at a time at most.

Replicus' ship sank through the barrier which had obscured whatever was ahead.

...!

The Penetrator was awestruck when he saw the major change on this side of the world – the other half of Aigas as he presumed it to be.

The ship swayed, facing some difficulty moving forward.

The waters were darker, and they felt... richer.

They had no steady flow but they clashed against each other constantly in a lightly aggressive manner that contended against the ship's slow cruise.

The waters were the least concerning, however.

Above, the scar Skullius had seen before past the clouds, lightly represented with faint strokes, like a beautiful painting, turned rough and bold. It now looked as though a valley had been carved in the sky, beginning with a narrow opening from where the blurred barrier was, and widening in the skies beyond.

Oddly, the sky had a darker shade of blue on this side, with its lighter tone reserved for the scar over it.

It was this darker shade that was prominent with the ocean and sky that made Replicus a little nervous.

This was it.

Because of it, the mana here felt a little restrained, and with every meter the ship moved through, Replicus spotted slight increments in this limitation on the atmosphere.

'I guess this is what he meant,' Replicus thought, referring to the Emissary's words.

The scrambling of concepts born from that story he had told about Jiggorrhax's atrocious breath, was about to begin.

'I was wrong earlier. I guess it has a specific point where it starts to take effect. I should have let Allora fire off as many Aggrantes as she wanted. <Sigh>...'

As Replicus thought about this while analyzing the similar stunned expressions of his subordinates,...

"Boss!"

Grim suddenly appeared on deck!

He was drenched and pale, looking utterly spent. His eyes depicted a deep sense of exhaustion that wouldn't have been brought on by simple exercise; in this case, fighting.

"Finally. Where..." Allora began, but she suddenly stopped.

Baddan and the rest turned to Grim with odd looks too. Then these odd looks turned into utter befuddlement.

"I was wondering if it really was him..." Replicus said to Grim.

The Unlimited was not alone. He was lugging four figures whom he immediately set down.

Allora rushed up to these people and crouched down. She looked at them all closely, noticing that they were all Purity Knights and all alive. However, her sights – like those of everyone else – were set on one particular individual among them all who looked anything but alive.

It was a man decked in a white suit of glossy armor, fancy in some ways, but with emphasis on functionality, given all the parts added to its design. The man had medium-length cherry-colored hair and a large, curved nose that almost met his thin lips.

These features actually made a rather riveting face, but currently, they were marred with second-degree burns that glittered with faint dark green sparks.



His beautiful armor as well, which purported a chilling feeling, had a good portion of its chest plate to the right broken off, along with the part of the man that it had once protected. There were also small sparks gleefully popping on this gruesome injury.

"Is that...?" Allora said, addressing Grim who plopped to the ground with several heavy breaths.

Grim simply nodded.

Indeed it was the first ranked Paladin Champion.

#### Chapter 857: Immortal Injuries

"It wasn't my plan originally," Grim explained with a dark face unseemly for someone who was usually cheerful and cheerfully impulsive like him. "I had almost forgotten about the unusual scimitar the bastard I had been facing was using. It fell into the ocean, so I wanted to go get it."

Grim's eyes fell on the man who was laying in a bed, now stripped of his armor. Unfortunately, his wounds still looked the same, and he was still missing a limb, his flesh open and burnt.

"After that one blow – which really hurt by the way – I wanted to return to the ship, but I got a glimpse of something that got me curious. Well, the Avhanar variant I was riding did. I used Warp to appear closer to the fight between the masked man and the Paladin," he said, his face scrunching up. "One of them had just landed a critical blow. It was him," Grim gestured towards the Paladin Champion.

Replicus, Allora, and Pherdanta who were present here with him were intrigued.

"Is that so?" Replicus said.

"Yes," Grim responded. "Despite how he looks, I think he had an advantage, at least as per what I managed to see. It hadn't been as one-sided as I thought. The masked man... he didn't look too good. And I mean in the worst sense.

It was like he was sick or something. How he managed to one while looking like that, I don't understand."

"What do you mean you don't understand? Weren't you watching the fight?" Allora asked.

"Watching? Yes I was, but barely saw anything when they moved. Even from what I did see, I couldn't comprehend how the Paladin Champion was brought to this state. Whatever blessing he uses, it attracted me to get a better view of the battle, but I can't understand what it does exactly. The same goes for that masked man."

Replicus' sockets blazed continuously.

"Did the masked man have any injuries from the battle?" he asked.

"I don't know. His robes were a bit bloodied and a little torn. My initial thought was that he had been dominating first and had then lost his advantage because of whatever made him sick or weaker..."

Replicus looked at the Paladin Champion.

That was odd.

"So the masked man landed the final blow and walked off?" he asked.

Grim looked at Replicus.

"I don't know about 'walked off' but he told the Paladin Champion something before dropping him into the ocean. I couldn't hear what it was. I dreaded getting closer than I already was."

"You would think he'd want a Paladin Champion as an undead to fight by his side," Pherdanta said, startling Grim and Allora who had forgotten that she was there.

"I thought the same. I wanted to report at the first sign of such a thing," Grim said.

Replicus nodded.

Truthfully, he had been thinking along the same lines. In fact, this was something he dreaded to see from this battle.

When the fleet bearing the Severed Union Factions was closing the bloodspot in the ocean, he had attempted to find any semblance of the Paladin Champion's presence. While he had found small blotches of it spread out wide in spots where the Paladin Champion had used great bursts of output in his abilities, he had not found the source.

For a time, this had confirmed to Replicus that the masked man had likely the Champion to add him to his army, but thankfully, no.

The fact that the masked man was weakened somehow also interested Replicus. It would have sounded good to him if it didn't imply that the masked man had fought and won a battle with a very powerful opponent while handicapped.

Replicus didn't know if this weakness was the masked man's own or if it was caused by the Paladin Champion, but either way, it seemed like the masked man had enough heavy-hitting abilities to overwhelm people at his own level.

A trump card maybe.

If only Grim had seen what exactly happened.

It could have been anything.

It was certain that the masked man was either an Incandescent Stager or something beyond that. This meant the tools in his arsenal possessed an array of options for killing moves like a complex Creed, which could have gone over Grim's head.

Replicus sighed.

Goodness.

Each of the Unlimited took some time to mull things over with concerned faces, much like Replicus.

After a while, Pherdanta broke the silence.

"The masked man left after this, right? How come you didn't come back to the ship afterward? After retrieving him that is," she said, gesturing to the 'him' lying in bed.

Grim sighed.

"I saw more survivors. I also deliberated on which would be the better option between sending having the Paladin Champion aboard with us or sending them elsewhere," he said.

"You could have left the decision to master," Pherdanta said sternly.

Grim frowned at her.

"The other Faction leaders can see through the ship's shield. There's no way they wouldn't notice this guy's presence. Or at least his soul. I thought it would put targets on our backs if we brought him along," he said.

Allora slapped her forehead.

"And then you brought him along anyway?"

"Yeah! I then thought that if the boss could heal him somehow, he'd be an asset or at least a deterrent, which would offset the risk. And well..." Grim defended himself only to deflate.

He knew of the numerous flaws in his logic, but in the end, he had decided that the benefits would likely outweigh the costs.

'If the Paladin Champion isn't friendly to us even after we saved his life, he probably still won't turn hostile until he has caught the masked man. For that, he needs a vessel like ours...'

This had been Grim's central argument.

However, he hadn't imagined that even Replicus couldn't do anything about the man's wounds.

"It's fine," the Penetrator said as he lifted his hands to stop the back and forth. "It's not like his condition is getting worse now. The Supreme potion is working. At least he won't die for the next 24 hours."

The Paladin Champions' wounds were odd. Every injury on his body, fractured bones, torn skin, burnt flesh, gashes...

Everything spotted small green sparks that didn't go away, like the Undeath version of pixie dust.

Even a Supreme potion couldn't heal him.

Skullius had several ideas he would love to try to see if he could save the man's life. There were benefits to having him alive, but he could also work with his corpse.

"Let's leave him here for now," Replicus said. "First, we have a few scores to settle. It's best to deal with them before our supply to Null Life Essence and Mana is cut off from Deign."

Chapter 858: Loosening Up! (1)

Eleven minutes later...

"I can't believe we're doing all that now. I thought it would be a bit too soon, but... you're the boss," Grim said with a shrug after Replicus' detailed explanation.

"Like I said, the tides are growing stronger and more resistant and the air is starting to grow turbulent, which means what the Emissary said about the way to Edagon is coming to pass. For now, we'll use the fast depleting calm while it lasts. I'm sure others will too," Replicus said.

"Won't we keep trailing behind the masked man at this rate, boss? If we start fighting amongst ourselves now, we'll never catch him," Allora said, visibly concerned. She had taken the tragedy that was likely to happen when the masked man reached Edagon, to heart, more so than anyone else.

The Paladin Champion lying in bed in their midst would have shared the same sentiment, after all, he was evidence of the danger that the masked man posed.

Replicus looked at the man.

Oddly, his presence, which was supposed to be vast and mighty even his sleep, had become a mere fantasy after his bout with the masked man. Replicus didn't know which Stage he was in, or what class he had since he was outclassed by a severe gap, and thus couldn't tell with the guidance field.

He imagined, however, that at full health, it would be difficult for him and his Unlimited to be casually talking while being so close to him.

The Penetrator then gave a response to Allora's fears.

"I said it before. You'll find that most of the Factions won't be joining in on this race. There's hierarchy among the Factions that most respect. For instance, if Eaniss is intent on catching the masked man first, few will oppose her. Of course, she probably can't handle him alone, which means that the lot of us will need to help, but she'll probably grab the prize in that case still," he said.

"What about us?" Allora asked. "Are we going to defer to only getting rid of our targets and earning their loot then?"

"Yes, but we are also going for the prize. Unlike the others, I see no point in wasting my time just to settle a few scores and earn some land and wealth. No. We're going to aim big. If we can't do that, then the whole purpose of gathering a strong force for my future goals is pointless."

There was a bit of silence.

Allora didn't ask further questions, but that was not to say she felt differently. Unlike Grim, Pherdanta and Kenno, she had just joined the Unlimited rank, and was experiencing one of its greatest perks for the first time – understanding the boss' true self.

"I wonder though, if we keep killing each other, how in the world will we beat the masked man. Is Eaniss monitoring the losses? Won't the Severed Union be crippled if we take each other out?" Grim said with his face making a series of expressions.

"You don't need to worry about that," Replicus said. "Besides Eaniss, there are several Factions that probably won't perish nomatter what. As long as they remain standing along with the Head Faction, the Severed Union will be fine. Like most of the other Factions, I'm hesitant to have at them. Unfortunately, there is one we are going to have to fight sooner or later."

Among the Factions regarded very highly and immensely feared, were the Mad Bishop's Faction, Round Arrow, Dryad of the Scarlet Desert and Four Meridian Hands, which belonged to the man who had worn the circular jewel around his neck – the Harmonic Ember taken from the Bryne Family.

Somewhere along the way, Replicus wanted to retrieve it. He owed the Bryne Family that much. He owed Stylla that much. Perhaps Skullius had already paid for her help, but Replicus felt he hadn't.

And if not for charity's sake, he wanted to at least use that jewel once.

Its abilities, as Kenno explained, were very, very interesting.

"I see," Grim said, evidently choosing to trust in Replicus' words.

The Penetrator turned back to Allora.

"I've been wandering. Your Hidden Class allows you to generate an infinite amount of mana from your core after fulfilling certain conditions. You said you can't share this mana with other living things, but what about objects?"

Allora wore a difficult expression on her face. She had indeed mentioned it when Replicus had been briefing them on the plan a few minutes ago, but she didn't think he would still be thinking up new possibilities for using her unique power.

Since it had only barely been a day after she got them, there was still a lot to figure out.

"I've tried it. It's possible, but the object I imbue the mana into has to be really strong. I can't properly manage the output of the mana yet, so even Legendary grade objects are likely to break," she replied.

Replicus' sockets flashed.

"I see... Not bad..." he said absentmindedly. " Alright, all of you go prepare. And Pherdanta, make sure to show Baddan how to properly drive the ship."

Pherdanta gave a verbal acknowledgement, which once again startled Grim and Allora.

The former however, was reminded of something important he had almost forgotten to do.

"That's right, Pherdanta," he said, using this chance to grab her arm so that she didn't slip from his view.

The swordswoman gave him a sharp gaze.

"What?"

Grim felt a chill down his spine and immediately handed to his fellow Unlimited what he intended.

He drew a white-bladed scimitar from his storage and gave it to Pherdanta whose eyes showed hints of surprise.

"It's Mythical," Grim said proudly, "The original user is dead... gone, so you should be able to bond with it. It's a pretty good sword."

Pherdanta seemed to get a better grasp of that idea with a mere look than Grim who had been cut by the scimitar.

She blinked several times before realising that she was getting a bit too engrossed in familiarising herself with each part of the weapon.

She coughed.

"Thank you very much," she said.

Grim grinned broadly.

"Aha! So you do have a soft side after all!" he said while pointing a finger at Pherdanta who quickly grew unamused.



Before he knew it, her presence and figure vanished from his sight.

With a shake of his head, Grim left the room along with Allora, leaving Replicus and the Paladin Champion alone.

...

The Penetrator took another look at the Paladin Champion.

He felt odd seeing another one of these blessed Knights.

The Purity was a shady organisation, but Replicus had always thought that there were a few models of righteousness among the Paladin Champions. This sentiment was heavily inspired by the first Paladin Champion he had ever met.

Elita.

She had turned out to be a good person, different from what he thought initially.

Even though he had met another Paladin Champion in the Isise, a very low ranked one, he hadn't felt the same about him.

Elita had just been different. Maybe she appealed to Replicus a lot because he had only met 'cruel' examples of humans before then in the Tremur.

Maybe...

Replicus often felt a little guilty for getting Elita killed through UNCoddled. Perhaps it wasn't his fault but, his feelings remained the same...

Hmm.

Emotions. Feelings.

He never thought they would continue to plague him at the heights of strength he had achieved now.

'Speaking of strength...' Replicus thought with a sigh.

His stats were displayed in front of him through the guidance field.

~~~

[<Stats>]

[ DUAL MANA-SOURCING FORCE (I) : 95,940 ]

[ ASTRAL BLIZZARD MOTION (I) : 78,000 ]

[ SUBJECTIVE PHANTOM INFERENCE (I) : 4 ]

[ TRIGGER DEVIANT BUILD (I): 7× ]

[ LUCK : Atrocious? ]

-----

[ PRIME PERPETUATION : 60,750/60,750 ]

-----

[ MANA (I) : 351,670/351,670 (On Sage Strain + Sage Save) ]

-----

[ Mana^ : 899,900/899,000 (On Sage Strain + Sage Save) ]

-----

[ Null Life Essence : 24,000/24,000 ]

~~~

In terms of physical properties alone, Replicus was already on a different level. Just like he had done to achieve his second mana core – using [Unbound] on his mana stat – he had done the same with his other stats, except luck.

The result was that his stats changed completely, no longer being defined by simple notions like; inflated numerical value equal stronger physical attribute.

Now, his stats adopted properties akin to pseudo racial qualities or skills, the only difference being that they didn't require any fuel to power them, like mana.

For instance, what was supposed to be his Endurance, had been replaced with the Trigger Deviant Build.

Replicus' Endurance had been infinite before, but it had more appealed to his ability to endure strenuous activity than his ability to take damage. In any case, it hadn't been much of a boon.

Now, though, his Trigger Deviant Build allowed him to return any damage he took to whoever dealt it, and with several degrees more potency!

This added potency – speed, strength, efficiency – had an upper limit of 7 times currently, but it also depended on the gap in strength between Replicus and the opponent.

This is what had happened to the old undead Incandescent Stager when his strike hit Skullius. It had returned to him four times as strong, causing his heart to get crushed.

Unfortunately for Replicus, if the enemy was stronger than him and couldn't invoke the full might of the 7 times rebound, he would still take damage, though it was lessened according to how much of a multiplier was sent back to the enemy.

"Alright. I've had this on for a while now. I think it's time to loosen up," Replicus said while looking at the tags attached to both his values of mana – [Sage Strain] and [Sage Save].

Since he was about to fight some troublesome opponents, there was no longer a need to reserve his strength.

The moment he commanded the two tags – limiters really – to be removed from his mana...

Chapter 859: Loosening Up! (2)

He was rather bored.

The sights were bland. The people were easy to break, and the quality of their blood had been disappointing so far.

The so-called humans... how were they a grand creation by a Deity with the same might as the one whom he served. It was preposterous!

His tall frame angled back from the top of the circular tower which leaned a great deal to the side, casting its sharp shadow into the ruined city below.

He had been sitting here for hours, awaiting further instruction over the orders of restraint issued by his superiors.

Do not make too much trouble, they said.

Keep in place and send out the polymorphic scouts and disposable livestock to explore, they said.

By Lord Boron, the higher echelon were so uptight!

And for what?

Because a human who removed the seal that separated their world from this one said so?

He even had the gall to warn them against invading a neighbouring nation called Mak-ki or whatever!

Yet, the higher echelon obliged, and ordered all of them to mind their movements and only act when Lord Boron finally possessed a fitting vessel to traverse well enough in this world. Unfortunately, that would take no small amount of time!

...

A sigh came from his mouth, a scorching heat latching onto it.

The shiny grey skin on his face wrinkled as he wore an obscene frown that mirrored his frustration perfectly. The great ebony horns on his forehead, twisted unnaturally into menacing shapes that even reindeer would gawk at, shook as his rage built up only to fade away like vapour.

Another sigh came from his mouth, this one cool.

He raised a finger from his charred looking hand, and the sound of many feet, bare and otherwise rang out as hundreds of corpses marched out of the city of Eofel. They swayed and wobbled in an unnatural manner, their bodies moving as though they were merely being tugged forward by an unseen force.

Soon they all stood before the tower and dropped to their knees, haggard and worn, their eyes turned ashen and brown from dirt, as was their clothing.

He looked down at them all with his lone red eye.

With a flick of his finger, a horrible scene transpired.

Streams of thick crimson turned cold and thick post death, flooded out of the corpses' facial orifices and spread on the ground to rise on the walls of the tower!

The blood travelled quickly to reach he who called it at the top, and as it arrived, he welcomed it all into an ugly gourd in his large hand that had the likeness and stiffness of stone.

In no more than a minute, the blood of hundreds had somehow all fit in the gourd, and in the next moment, he took a large swig, draining at least a third of the liquid in one go.

A disgusted look appeared on his face.

Vile.

It was vile.

Coupled with the boredom, it seemed so...tedious.

Was there ever going to be any fun to be had?

Where were the strong amid the rabble he had met so far?

What else was so special about this world with its light and boundless sky?

Surely...

...!

Something interrupted his sulking.

The skies suddenly turned dark despite the sun's harsh bombardment just a moment ago.

He looked up.

Thick clouds covered the skies above this nation, their hue a bit more like the soot stuck to a chimney than anything else.

No.

That wasn't right.

While straining the glinting of his red eye, he saw that the whole sky as far as he could see, even above the ocean past this land, saw the same darkness overhead.

In every direction, the thick clouds had suddenly spawned, and as a second passed, something bright raced through them, tracing a path elsewhere in the distance!

It was happening everywhere!

The clouds fed something far off!

Something beyond his capacity to see.

What was this?

What was going on?

Then, without warning, a sharp glow that looked more like a spark far, far, far away showed to his advanced sight.

By Lord Boron...

Ashema found himself grinning like a fool, and his feet whipped the air multiple times with excitement.

He couldn't feel it.

He couldn't quite see it.

However, he knew that somewhere far, someone was having fun.

\*\*\*

Aboard a vessel much like the others sailing before and behind it, a woman adorned in a stylish armour that looked to be made of clear glass rushed to her leader's quarters below deck and gave a heavy knock to the door.

"Sir, sir! We have a situation outside!" she called.

A lazy snort was heard from behind the door which soon opened to reveal a man wearing only loose robes and a pair of shorts over his athletic body.

"What is it?" said the man impatiently as he pushed back his untidy blonde hair and massaged his green eyes.

Without another word, the woman in the glass armour placed her hand on the man's shoulder, and in a blink, they were in deck.

The protective glow above their heads receded from view as the woman pointed up at the sky, directing her leader's attention to the startling cloud-like darkness bounding in a massive, heavy swirl above them!

The blonde-haired man's expression instantly switched from relaxed and slightly irritated, to wary and focused.

He snapped his fingers and his casual bedroom attire faded like mist, replaced by a suit of black armour that had its joints aglow in a flirtatious blue hue.

Looking at the twenty and some trusted members of his Faction on deck, all awaiting his orders with veiled worry, he wore a stern, confident face.

He had opened his mouth to give his subordinates instructions when...

...

Light.

It all became light.



His ship became light.

The air became light.

The seas became light.

His subordinates became light.

Everything was bright.

Then a deafening crackle and boom that seemed to come from below everyone's feet rocked their bodies so viciously that some bled from their eyes – which were temporarily blinded – and from their noses!

But that was only the beginning.

Hard to notice with the collage of sensations, the ship had tilted gravely, leaning forward as though to sink into a maw whose location was not yet apparent!

Balance fled from the knees of most on-board!

Panic and shock ensued.

And it wasn't only on this ship, for the thick bolt of blinding lightning drawing from the sky, its size unknown because of its brilliance, was vibrating silently while digging a perversely enormous conical shape into the ocean – a whirlpool of unheard of proportions!

Equally shocking was the bolt's continuity.

It did not stop pouring from the skies, continuing to trap all thirty and some ships on the ocean over hundreds of miles!

The electric brilliance of it travelled through the ocean as well, branches of its mass turning the waters white, with Levin bouncing and bounding against anything it could touch!

Back on the ship belonging to the blonde-haired Faction leader, the woman in the glass-like armour was quick to recover, being only second to her leader who narrowed his eyes while gazing at the towering wall of bright waters where other ships were riding in a loop.

A large bolt of Levin smacked the ship heavily, causing it to jerk to the side, but thankfully, the vessel would not buckle easily.

The blonde Incandescent Stager wore a deep frown.

'How bold of you... Bright Storm!' he thought, tying this tragedy to its rightful owner.

Bold indeed.

"ARRRRRGHHHHHH!"

"Eeeek!"

"Noooo!"

All of a sudden, the blonde expert heard the screams of his subordinates, though eerily belatedly, as by the time he felt the presence of an intruder, ten of his men had been cleaved apart mercilessly... violently!

The killer was a woman in a blue, white and silver armour that ended in a puffy skirt, a large red sword in her hand!

Where had she come from?

How had she gotten through the ship's barrier?

The flashes of lightning around the ship highlighted the woman's murderous, sharp glare, and the daring nature of her stance as blood dripped from her blade.

She locked eyes with the blonde Incandescent Stager, dismissing his subordinates who rushed at her with fury and malice, the woman in glass-like armour in tow.

The blonde man snorted with a vein throbbing on his temple.

What inspired such bravery?

Who the fuck did this woman think she was?

Chapter 860: Loosening Up! (3)

Several minutes before...

"I'll leave killing the fodder to you. Earn yourselves as much cumulative mana as you can," Replicus said.

Pherdanta nodded, her face livid with stern confidence. However, she had to express a little concern of hers.

"What if the Faction leaders are close?" she asked. "Their compulsion and Territories—"

"Don't worry about that. I will be watching from your armour, remember? You'll be fine. I have ways to deal with compulsion, and as for Territories, Incandescent Stage experts have done well to hide the fact that projecting their Territories is not a simple fair. Every activation requires double the total amount of mana they currently have."

"What?" Grim asked with a funny face. "Double? Then how do they do it?"

Allora's face lit up.

"Creeds?" she said in a high voice.

Replicus nodded.

"Indeed. Incandescent Stagers need to use Creeds to double their total amount of mana every time they project their Territories. It's something like an inbuilt Creed when they call the name of their Territory. If they have enough Creeds, they successfully conjure their Territory. That's why it's usually a last resort for many. The energy requirements for it act as a moderating mechanism," he said.

"And thus, you have no real need to worry too much. Just go wild."

\*\*\*

Pherdanta, swarmed by experts of the same Stage from all sides, looked completely unfazed. For a moment, she had stopped to lock sights with the Incandescent Stager tens of paces away.

She recalled her master's words.

His confidence.

He assured her that there was nothing to fear.

All she had to do, was clear the fodder for her own sake.

A formidable fist cracked through the air, aiming right at Pherdanta's face while highlighted by the intense light from the terribly jarring bolt of Levin digging into the ocean a distance away!

The Unlimited merely arched her head to the side at the last moment, allowing her assailant to push his entire weight past her.

Her enemies were well coordinated however, because just as the body of this latest assailant came, a rapier drew a straight path from above towards the current location of Pherdanta's head.

At almost the same time, the beginnings of a scorching heat lit up right at her chest, a staggering volume of mana funnelling into it in preparation for an unforgivingly lethal explosion.

Quite the multi-pronged attack that seemingly sacrificed a few members. But that obviously wasn't the case.

Pherdanta's face remained still in the micro- moments before these attacks landed.

Her enemies, while intelligent, efficient and decked in their Incarnations, didn't realise something.

When it came to travel speed, most of them could probably match her, even with her Granted Armament. However, when it came to the degree of dexterity imbued into the hands, none of them could even dream to compare to her.

As the only Unlimited without a Hidden Class, Pherdanta didn't have flashy moves like the rest. Her Advanced Class merely allowed her to merge the characteristics of two or more swords in her possession, creating a perfect hybrid with multiple abilities. However, this required her to grasp the beauty of said swords, if she wanted a truly perfect result.

The numerous experts hadn't seen it, but in addition to the large, red sword Pherdanta wielded, another had begun to appear from her storage a bit before they rushed her.

It was a scimitar with a white blade, its presence cruel and uncaring.

But how could any of the experts here have seen or felt it, when right after it appeared, Pherdanta pulled it towards the red sword she had already been wielding in far less than a blink, merging the two swords.

One sword with the ability to bypass the defensive strength of armour in the same grade and inflict a plague on its target with a touch – the white scimitar.

Another with the ability to strike at the weakest points of enemies with a 250% degree sharpness – the large, red blade.

What was born, was a large, white-bladed hanger with a truly heavy presence.

...!!!

Right when the bright glow at Pherdanta's chest turned brighter and began to erupt, and the rapier over her head started to cleave bits of her hair, carnage ensued.

A true swordsman did not need to swing their blade in order to mutilate their enemies with infinitely more grace than the best butcher.

The new blade seemed to scream, and all who heard, even when they were adorned in Mythical grade armour, and Object-type Incarnations, found themselves hacked cleanly; splitting their faces across, then the base of their necks, their abdomens and then their knees!

And as much as clean grace applied to this brutal severing, the force of four cuts sent blood spraying everywhere!

Only two individuals survived this slaughter fest which occurred only half a second after Pherdanta killed the first batch of fodder. One was the woman in the glass armour, who had been rushing to back up her leader's subordinates; she only survived because she wasn't in range.

The other was the Incandescent Stage expert who wore an even more furious look when most of the subordinates he brought for this assignment fell so abruptly!

He didn't expect that they would to perish like this!

Like common fools!

He wouldn't allow this continue.

The blonde-haired Faction leader opened his mouth to speak.

"Hal—"

But the word 'halt' didn't fully escape his lips.

For a dark gauntlet marred with starry beauty had covered his mouth roughly in that instance.

The Incandescent Stage expert was appalled, infuriated even, when he saw the tall figure with four blazing lights looking down at him. Never before had he felt so enraged.

Unfortunately for him, the Penetrator was determined to continue making a fool out of him.

"Ever bathed in Levin before? It's much more delightful than you'd think..." Replicus said.

The Incandescent Stager whipped his hand out to crush Replicus', but he was a fraction of a moment too late. He felt a cold sensation pressing against his back.

Bright Storm was now standing back to back with him.

Why?

Well...

"Here it comes," Replicus said.

...!

The giant bolt of Levin that had been causing the whirlpool suddenly vanished, leaving everything dreadfully dark.

However, it returned just as soon as it disappeared, only now, it aimed right where its conjurer was, lighting up both him and the person behind him!

...

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[Titan World Storm (Super) | Lv.1]

Turn all the clouds in the sky into loyal subordinates that surrender the bits of mana they have and change their form in order to build an impressively powerful storm of Levin that has a 1% of temporarily defying world rules.

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-Caution-

At the Titan World Storm's peak, the user is unable to control it.

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Mana Requirements: 1,000 (II) Mana; 100 (II) every minute it remains active.

Duration: ---

Cooldown: 20 days

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