

Undead 1091

Chapter 1091: Meeting The Sky (1)

There was once a young man born to a very wealthy family, in a rather prosperous world.

He lacked nothing in his infancy to his youth. From toys, to food, to education and strength, his household was powerful enough to secure him with the means to acquire all he desired.

He never lacked anything but a father, yet even that seemed to be a luxury he didn't need, as his mother was the only family he ever needed.

She was enough.

She had always been.

Because she too never lacked anything all her life, she made sure her son would never have to expend effort in order to get what he wanted. All would be handed to him on a platter.

However, she had more to impart upon her son.

Knowledge. She did not want him to be a simple rich boy from a rich family.

She wanted him to understand the common forms of power in their world and outside it, so that when he was ready he would make the most of it.

Thus, each night she read to him tales of the experts from their world who breached the barrier that kept them bound to mortality, becoming Divines.

Many from their world had achieved the so-called Divinity and vanished into the void where they made names for themselves.

The boy's mother wanted him to attain the urge to attain something similar, after all, he had yet to lack anything.

However, she also had another lesson to impart.

'Death is a gift. It is the only thing our family cannot afford to take lightly and give wantonly. Death is sacred,' she had said. 'That is why, our mission in life is to heighten the value of death by prolonging our lives as long as we can. After centuries, after millennia, after eons... that is when death is worth seeking, for us or for the common man. That is why I want you alive and healthy, my son.'

The boy had taken this to heart, after all, when his mother spoke of it, he could see that she too carried this message in her very soul, and day after day, she would bring him to the roof of their mansion and have them look at the stars after the blue sun set, dreaming about what could be out there; what others who had left found the great void to be.

Actuass and Vohnvolt's bodies were pulled on by a heavy suction force into a dark space littered with star-like lights. However, these lights soon turned into elongated threads because of the sheer speed the two were travelling at.

It was unclear whether they were headed forward or backward, but it was certain that they were going somewhere.

Somewhere that was inside Aigas apparently.

Because of the constant motion, Vohnvolt soon found that his hand, which had borne through the necromancer had been forcefully pulled out and the two were now spinning in their own patch of the dark space.

The amalgam was mortified.

What exactly was this place?

This wasn't Stagnant Space.

From the irritation raiding his body just from being in this unfamiliar space, the amalgam could tell he wasn't supposed to be here.

What was Actuass after?

Vohnvolt had had guesses but most of them were voided after he discovered that the necromancer didn't seem to want keep these powers he had sought for so desperately for the long term. His body was a mess, yet he seemed elated when he created the tear in the sky, as though just that had been enough.

So, what was it?

He tried his best look at the necromancer.

To his surprise, Actuass looked as though he was... afraid. Or perhaps nervous.

Now that he was out of the thick of combat, he could afford to be more honest with how he felt. There were no longer benefits to hiding his emotions and thus he wore them on his sleeve now.

Seeing this made the amalgam anxious.

What were they about to meet?

At that moment, Actuass turned to him and said in a barely discernible voice:

"I was rather surprised that we share similar circumstances. I would have never dreamed that you too are chasing the past in order to move on."

Vohnvolt's sockets flared.

He didn't want to hear any crap about how they were similar from this bastard. Not after what he had done.

Actuass chuckled at the amalgam's rage.

"Of course, in this life we can never relate to each other," he added.

A few seconds later, the dark space around the two seemed to collapse or perhaps come to an end.

The two felt their feet land on solid ground.

However, in the next instance, they found their knees buckling, forcing them to kneel.

...!

Vohnvolt was shocked.

When he took the time to inspect his surroundings, he found that all of it was nothing but...sky.

Thick, bright clouds on a blue canvas of space made what was above and what was below, and they moved rapidly as though fast-forwarded.

However, this wasn't the most shocking thing in this place.

A gigantic figure stood above him.

It was difficult to describe and even try to make sense of it. The only thing Vohnvolt could truly say about it, was that it was humanoid and even then, he wasn't completely sure. It was hard to explain where it began and where it ended; if it even had one.

The amalgam wanted to back away, but his knees seemed glued to the ground.

'WHAT IS TH...WHAT IS THIS...?' he asked himself in horror.

There was something awe-inspiring about the pressure coming from that figure in the sky. Once he felt it, Vohnvolt felt something within him brighten and also collapse at the same time.

This great presence, so vast that it almost seemed to be absent altogether...

Was this a...

Was this what he thought it was?

In contrast, Actuass by the amalgam's side didn't seem all that flustered. His eyes remained glued to the figure above sternly.

He didn't even pay attention to the dozens of men and women with carts and carriages bowing to the giant figure around him, like Vohnvolt.

In fact, he boldly opened his mouth to address the deific existence with his face growing solemn and hard.

"I have come to save you, mother."

Chapter 1092: Meeting The Sky (2)

...

Vohnvolt was bewildered by the words Actuass had just said. For a second, he thought he heard wrong, but as Actuass continued to speak, he realised that the man meant what he had just said.

"I have come to save you mother. After all these years, I've finally managed to reach you. I am here now," Actuass said.

Vohnvolt's sockets nearly exploded with flame as he looked at the necromancer, and then hesitantly looked at the figure above them.

'...What?' he asked himself.

His... mother?

Strangely though, there was no sense of elation or urgency in Actuass' tone as he spoke. In fact, he almost seemed to say these words hesitantly, as though he didn't mean them.

This confused Vohnvolt all the more, as did the fact that no response came from the gigantic figure above them. Heck, there wasn't even a response from the many individuals bowing before it. They all seemed to not care that there were visitors in their abode.

Yet, Actuass did not seem to be impatient for an answer.

He waited, his eyes unblinking.

Only after a full minute passed did a reply finally come, carried by a voice that seemed to belong to choir of gifted female bards.

<I have been waiting for you.>

As Vohnvolt shook, so did Actuass, but not because he was caught off guard by the beauty and intensity of the voice. He seemed to tremble in fury instead.

To his dismay, the figure he had addressed said nothing more.

This was when even his centuries worth of patience failed him and he bared his fangs.

"Is that it, then? You still won't even acknowledge me? After all I've done to get here," he said, his voice growing sharper.

No response came again, and Actuass ground his teeth. He couldn't help but think that what he feared was coming true.

What he had hoped wasn't true.

"I never imagined attaining powers beyond belief would turn you into this passive introvert. All that talk about making ideas come true, yet here you are. You acknowledge nothing. You say nothing. You do nothing!" he barked.

No response came for a while, but then the gigantic figure seemed to draw a little closer.

<You have grown rather well. The child I knew so long ago did not have such a sharp mouth. You are so bold now, and you are even making a conscious effort towards something.>

Unlike Vohnvolt who felt every part of his pulse as though it were a heart, Actuass did not shirk away from the approach of the Deitess Suzamete.

Indeed, it was. The maker of the skies.

If he had listened to his instincts, Actuass might have quivered in fright, but he had long prepared his mind for this interaction.

<You should have stayed back home, my boy. There is nothing for you here. You are in a land where you do not belong, fighting a battle no one asked you to fight. There was never any meaning in it.>

As the voice of Suzamete came, Actuass had already begun laughing before she even finished her sentence.

He laughed.

He cackled.

He guffawed.

And then his eyes, pouring faint lilac blood, turned dark.

"Meaningless? You say there was no meaning in what I had to live through till now? There was no meaning in my grief when I saw those Aspiring to Divine mercenaries take you away from me? There was no meaning to my sorrow when I was left alone thinking you were going to perish – to die in the most unfulfilling way possible, the very antithesis to what you believed in?!" Actuass barked.

"Was there no meaning in all the decades I spent after that looking for a way to reach you, mother? Do you know what I had to give up in order to get a chance at reincarnating in a world that was

closest to you?! I experienced death once! I felt the fibres of my very soul shatter inch by inch and traverse an immeasurable distance to find you! Was there no meaning in that?!"

Actuass felt his body which was close to shattering bind together. His rage motivated it. The aching of his soul empowered it.

It wouldn't break until he was done here.

Surely, the deal he made with that perverse Priest back on his home world in order to be reborn somewhere close to where his mother would be, hadn't been all for naught.

The treasures he had acquired, all equipped with a way to track his mother's very soul in the expansive void, all exorbitantly expensive... Surely, they hadn't been for naught.

Starting life again as an infant centuries and discovering to his utter joy that his mother was on Aigas... Surely that was not for naught!

Actuass' body seemed to burn. Literally.

"Does it not matter to you how many evils I did on this world to grab your attention? How many of your people I killed. I hoped the millions I sacrificed would be enough to drag you from your perch in the sky, but no. I had to do more evil and get here myself. You just waited and watched," he said.

Once again, there was no response.

Vohnvolt no longer knew how to feel.

His mind went blank.

Even his thought phantoms were at a loss.

To think Actuass was...

<I know, Actuass. I have been following your adventures. I know the toll it took on to do all you did. You truly believed you were doing it all for me, up to point. However, the reality is, the people you sacrificed... I did not make them. The evils you did, are your own to bear.>

<You are still a mortal, after all. You crave like a mortal. You think like one too, my son. You should have realised I was never in need of saving. I was never in need of your help.>

<You should have also realised that I left you of my own will. I was not coerced. I was not cheated or bribed. I saw a path to achieve the goal we shared and took it. I hoped that someday, you would do."

Chapter 1093: Meeting The Sky (3)

There were many worlds in the dark void that existed outside Aigas.

The sheer degree of variety among them was staggering, but because most living things spent their lives within the boundaries created by the Deities who made their own worlds, it was usually difficult to fathom just how broad and diverse the species and power systems that existed elsewhere in reality were.

Mana as a concept was universal, but different Divine beings wove into something that matched the vision they had for the world they wished to create; this included the supernatural power structure, the species that would thrive on their worlds and the natural characteristics of the world itself.

Other than this, almost nothing was the same, especially when considering that some Deities were stronger than others and had different ways of creating worlds.

The ones responsible for creating Actuass' home world were particularly generous when sorting the upper limits of what a living thing could achieve strength-wise.

Faaminl.

On this world, a hunger for power that disregarded all else was never punished. There hardly ever seemed to be karma's flag over those that killed whomever they wanted to, enslaved whomever they desired and extorted as they wished for own sakes.

All was fair in love and war.

Faaminl was rather rich and many exploited this, overcoming the annual wars that exploded on the sturdy surface of this world, extracting the powers of vanquished souls and reaching Divinity.

The abundance of resources, rather, their naturally quick rate of replenishment only served to increase conflict, leading to the rise of thousands of Affiliations, groups of allied individuals structured quite like Guilds in Aigas, but a hundred times more competitive and driven. These Affiliations fought to claim and defend rich lands, and the daily doses of strife created monstrous combatants.

Actuass' father had been part of one of these Affiliations. Sadly, like many other men and women who joined one, he died defending it, and his wife was not particularly shocked by this reality.

Countless widows on Faaminl shared her sentiment.

It never really came as a surprise.

Half the time, a will was set in place when one joined an Affiliation.

Following this death, Actuass' mother used the resources her husband left for her to cultivate not just her strength but to amass wealth enough to build a safe haven for her and family.

She was particularly fierce as a fighter, having learned from her husband. And perhaps because she dreaded Affiliations – for reasons so obvious – she decided to fashion herself into a one-woman army. She defended her haven on her own for years, attaining rich battle experience. She refused allies unless she had learned all there was about them in a process that lasted years.

Patience was a combatant's scarcely appreciated virtue after all.

'Make doubly sure,' was her motto.

Her son, as he grew, learned from this.

One mistake could be the difference between life and death.

Actuass also grew to admire his mother's strength.

Unlike most mundane women, it was proper for children to be made to watch the bitter, savage glory of combat as they grew. To become callous and in-tune with how much control unfathomable power granted.

But that wasn't all.

Power was one thing, but a goal was another.

What was the purpose of strength without an idea to give it direction?

This too Actuass learned from his mother.

Death was the goal, but only when the time for it was sweetest.

Death was undeserved until one had hidden, dodged and escaped it countless times. Only then was one to meet death not as its victim, but as its companion.

This was what Actuass' mother believed.

For the longest time, Actuass didn't know what spurred this believe in her.

As a teen, he hadn't known that his mother's grief for her husband's common, uninspired death – same as that of billions of others – went unnoticed. Perhaps because she feared to show weakness, this bitterness manifested as a dream fashioned by months' worth of suffering in silence, enduring the pain through dreams.

Why die now?

Why die like everyone else?

How could one only live for a mere 300 years and claim that they welcome something as sacred as death?

Or perhaps it was simply ignorance?

Death to a Divine and to a mortal couldn't be the same.

Yes. Yes!

The value of one's life should be judged by how long it takes for death to catch them. Yes!

This was the belief. One passed from mother to child.

However, it wasn't this ideology that attracted many powerful Affiliations to Actuass' mother.

It was her power.

Some coveted it deeply, but none other than a band of self-proclaimed 'interworld mercenaries' who called themselves Aspiring to Divine wished so much to gain such power on their side.

They, unlike Affiliations, sought to create a group of powerful experts that would ascend to Divinity and leave Faaminl as a collective instead of continuing the bitter struggle for the world's resources.

They called Affiliations 'the poor man's way to get by' and looked down on them.

Actuass' mother refused their proposal at first. Actuass was there on this day, frowning at the unfamiliar faces with broad smiles.

He was, however, absent for several secret excursions his mother went on to meet the mercenary group, where she was convinced to finally join them after she saw with her own eyes that the Aspiring to Divine leader, was a step away from reaching Divinity.

This made her yearning to leave Faaminl burn rather bright. Only after leaving it and broadening herself could she chase her ideals properly.

But, she had a son and relatives, all who were unwelcome in the mercenary group.

She would either stay with them on Faaminl or leave them in the safe haven she had created as she journeyed beyond.

Of course, she chose the latter. However, perhaps to fight off the guilt or perhaps to motivate her son, she orchestrated a plan to make it seem to her fourteen-year-old son that she was forced to leave after a threat was made to raze her family to the ground if she did not follow the Aspiring to Divine.

Whichever she had hoped to achieved no longer mattered.

After all, when watching her leave, Actuass burned with both grief and longing crying for her not to leave him.

He did not recover from this loss. He couldn't have.

However, he didn't take it lying down either.

After all, if he allowed himself to die just because there was no longer anyone to protect the haven, he would be dishonouring his mother's ideals.

What else could he do other than raise his strength through any way possible?

Hunting for treasures, stealing them, joining Affiliations only to leave brusquely without a care for the many who came chasing after him, were but a few of the things a young Actuass had to do.

But a hundred years of just this wasn't enough.

He needed more to survive latter perils.

That was why he then resorted to the most foul treacherous thing any living thing on Faaminl could do.

He went to find a Priest.

Priests on Faaminl were rare, powerful individuals. Unlike on Aigas, their powers weren't granted through classes.

All of them were conduits, or rather, servants of the Alternates.

The Deities that created Faaminl were only able to create it as it was – with unnatural abundance and fewer limitations than most – only after creating creatures known as Alternates.

They were less kind versions of themselves that inhabited several landmarks on Faaminl and had certain sway over how the world worked.

On a good day, they could cause an earthquake that killed millions just for the fun of it, and on a bad day, they could infect a whole race with a plague that altered their biology and turned them into mere fishes that thrived in the sea for decades before returning to their usual livelihoods.

Priests were born attached to these Alternates and were bound to carry out their will anytime they felt the Alternate's call.

Fortunately for them, when given a duty by an Alternate, no Priest could be stopped.

It was as though they were cursed or possessed, which was an apt description when considering that the powers they were tied to were not exactly holy; but it was ironic that they were given the name Priest.

They always seemed to be protected by powers that resisted even basic Divine influence, and this also meant they had more freedom than all other residents of Faaminl.

Actuass visited such an individual. Granted, the lengths he had to go to even find one cost him six decades of his life.

It was shunned upon to even interact with a Priest, but he did it anyway.

In his eyes, there was a very thin line between what shouldn't be and what should.

This world had tuned him to the extreme.

His world view became even more skewed, or rather broad, when he found the Priest he had sought for and served him for 134 years before he got what he wanted.

Indeed.

As though what he had had to do before then wasn't enough, Actuass was made to do even more atrocious things to himself and others for a chance to go and find his mother. A mere chance.

Thus, it wasn't quite surprising when he burst out laughing again after hearing what she had said to him just now.

His mother, the Deitess Suzamete, had just declared that she never needed saving, that this path was the one she had longed for all along.

She had watched him toil anew on Aigas, watched every step he took, every crime, every atrocity without intervening, only to shut him down.

Actuass, as he bled profusely, coughed hoarsely.

"It's fitting, I suppose. Unlike Faaminl, you seem to have imposed some righteous Rule to punish those like me on Aigas," he said as he looked at the indescribable form of his ascended mother.

Then, his fake mirth disappeared.

It seemed there was no longer anything tying his mother to him and the other way around.

"I guess this means we can dispense with all familial connections and proceed as enemies?" he said suddenly, his voice livid with hostility.

Suzamete said nothing.

Instead she drew back and settled herself in the comfortable canvas of sky further beyond Actuass and Vohnvolt.

Actuass sneered.

"I guess I got my answer."

Chapter 1094: Meeting The Sky (4)

"Can I be honest?" Actuass said as he somehow stood up, disregarding the powerful force that had kept him kneeling all this time. "Ever since I found out that your soul was imbedded in the very skies, I was thrilled. I knew instantly that it meant you had ascended. However, the more I learned about the other Deities, the more I grew disappointed in what you had become."

"My fierce, mighty mother, who had been as powerful as legions upon legions of experts equal to Transcendents here on Aigas had become the Deity with the least renown. Suzamete, the skies. Suzamete the Deitess without anything to her name on Aigas, save for a few fools who run around doing her small errands! How pathetic!"

As Actuass shouted, his arms pointed accusingly at the individuals around him and the amalgam bowing before Suzamete.

Vohnvolt glanced at them.

His sockets burst with ferocious flame.

He was only now paying them much attention.

'Wait...' he thought. 'Are these the same people who...'

Indeed. It seemed they were!

The carts and carriages around these figures jogged his memory.

Back when Skullius had met Bek, the Spirit Warden, the two had been hunting down a strange group of people who stole the sick in a town called Harifrast and left strange dolls in their wake. These people had been very odd to Skullius back then.

When using his Projected Form, where he would exit his physical body as a being of darkness, his vision identified everything in black, white and grey. Humans usually had measures of black and white, signifying righteousness and evil according to the criterion established by the Insurgent Magnus class.

However, in his eyes, these people appeared as entirely black, as anomalies.

Skullius had seen their tracks in Evic as well, when he had gone to save the city from the bandit group led by Kenno back then. Once again, he had seen traces of their dolls, all supposedly found close to the injured and ill.

Now, Vohnvolt could see those odd, blank dolls in the carriages around these bowing individuals.

These people served Suzamete, but what exactly did they do?

Why did the Deitess have them kidnap the sick and ill?

'Now that I think about it, didn't I also find out that the All Eater Scroll belonged to these people too?' he thought.

His sockets drew back to Actuass and Suzamete.

The necromancer was mocking a Deitess without fear.

"You sent out these mortal men and women with mythical tools to do your bidding. Why? You're just too damn inferior to the others, aren't you? You can't even exercise any kind of decent interference on your own. Do you even have Priests that have sworn to you? You lack authority and power when compared to your peers and that's why you have never actually created anything on Aigas, right?"

And why did they leave you behind? Why are you alone supposed to welcome Boron when he rises to the surface? How can you even call yourself a Deity in the face of this? Is this what you left me for?!"

Actuass had felt deeply about this as he grew anew on Aigas.

He grew to understand that Suzamete had no real renown and wasn't known as anything other than the sky on this world.

Actuass wasn't too sure what his mother did after leaving Faaminl. He assumed she probably didn't achieve Divinity while on Faaminl, but left when a member of Aspire to Divine reached Divinity and took the entire mercenary group away, finally earning them the title of an 'interworld' organisation.

He wasn't sure if Quintess and Listafelle were members of the original group, but it was a possibility. The two must have been close to Suzamete, and she must have left the Aspire to Divine mercenary group with them somewhere along the line when she too achieved Divinity and sought to become a Deity.

But this collusion of hers seemed to earn her little as it appeared.

Actuass scoffed when no response came from Suzamete.

"You seem to think that stomaching my insults only proves that I'm just a raving mortal but you're wrong. It's easy to see the truth from the lowest of the low rather than from the highest of the high. You have just resigned to one of those Affiliations from back home. You've regressed, mother."

<Is that all you see?>

Suzamete finally spoke.

"Yes," hissed Actuass. "I see someone who abandoned not just mortality but reason when they ascended. You should have kept your original name at least, not this pretentious, meaningless placeholder."

...

Vohnvolt was stunned.

Suzamete seemed to churn. Perhaps she was irked slightly by Actuass' words. However, she didn't commit to the discussion he was setting her up for.

<You claim you came to save me. But I see it differently. I see it clearly. You were prepared. You split the world, the sky. Did you hope to subdue me if worse came to worst?>

Actuass flexed his arm which had turned to a nasty shade of purplish-pink.

"Subdue? No. I'm not stupid," he said.

The biology of Deities was known on Faaminl, albeit at a rather basic level. Quite like the Stages on Aigas, a Deity's body grew stronger and stronger until it evolved into something like a world in itself, a fortress where they could manifest their selves in different forms and manifest ideas.

When one reached the Divine state, their body and souls, which normally learned from each other, became separate entities that could work completely independent from each other, both equipped with different characteristics.

However, to maintain the status of a Deity, both were required. A Deity's soul alone wasn't quite as powerful.

This was why Actuass had split Aigas. He split the world and the sky, Suzamete's body, so as to isolate a greater portion of her power – the larger part of the world and sky with Feinheath, Opungale thousands of kilometers worth of ebony sea.

Currently, Suzamete only had access to less than half of her body's strength.

"I took extra measures in case you decided to kill your son right here. I know you knew I was coming. After all, everything that happens and will happen in this world you helped make is already known to you, isn't it?" Actuass said.

...!!!

'What...?' Vohnvolt thought in surprise.

However, this was quickly glossed over by the two before him.

<Indeed, I knew you would come, but I would never choose to kill you. For now, that isn't worth doing. However...>

"You want to keep me here," Actuass interjected.

A sigh seemed to come from Suzamete.

<Listafelle and Quintess will not be pleased if I allow you to keep causing mayhem. I owe them this much. Yet, I also know you won't stand for it.>

At this, Vohnvolt's sockets blazed.

Really?

He spoke for the first time since coming here, reminding everyone that he was within this odd space too.

"You're just going to let him get away?" he said coldly.

At once, he felt the whole attention of a Deitess press onto him, but he didn't shrink docilely this time.

He wasn't going to stand for letting this bastard get away just because he had 'friends' in high places.

If he had to avenge Allora himself, he would gladly do so!

Chapter 1095: Meeting The Sky (5)

<Anomaly.>

Suzamete's voice was quite imposing. There was an accusing tone to it rather than the neutral rhythm one would expect from someone simply identifying what is in front of them.

An anomaly.

Suzamete had been aware of Replicus' movements since he came to Aigas. She had seen every path he took and every action he made, deciphering his entirety as a result.

Funny enough, despite the powerful Rules that existed to keep the world free from invaders who would seek to dive in from the dark void, it wasn't impossible for more sly enemies to sneak their way in. Rules weren't perfect and infallible after all.

It didn't take the shattering of Rules, as what occurred when Listafelle and Quintess left Aigas millennia ago, for hostile invaders to finally have access to the world. Powerful means existed outside in the form of bewitched treasures, uncanny powers at the same level as the Deities, just to mention a few.

It had come as no surprise to Listafelle that the Undead lot had means to breach said Rules. They were known for invading weaker worlds in hordes, after all. They had even done so in Aigas before the Ashing of Time.

When Skullius first arrived in Aigas, he was an undead and Suzamete had initially chalked up his arrival to be a meaningful ploy to ravage her world, only to change her mind shortly after.

Skullius hadn't been what she thought he was.

Vohnvolt kept gazing coldly at Suzamete's unusual frame.

<I had hoped your leave would take place much sooner, but as I see it, it is still a little distant.>

Suzamete shifted ominously.

<There are two portions of you on Aigas, both impacting it in grand ways, one more so than the other. I had warned my people to steer clear of you, I had wanted you far away from the pieces set in place to keep the world sturdy, but you seem destined to meddle, just like other anomalies out there.

Your other self has already bested one of these pieces, and together, you have ruined two in all on Aigas.>

Vohnvolt's socket flames condensed.

Pieces set in place to keep the world sturdy?

What did she mean?

He had thought she meant the Heralds, but that didn't sound right. Could Skullius have killed another Herald too?

Vohnvolt didn't concern himself with this all too much, however.

"I don't know what you mean. All I care about is how you will deal with him. Your son," he said as he pointed at Actuass. "You're being awfully reluctant about punishing him for what he has done. Do you really mean to tell me you can't stop him, or you just won't?"

Suzamete sighed.

<Who are you to interject and decide what happens to him? He bested you, the caravan of glorified thieves that Herald forged, another anomaly and the last Giant. You have no right to speak to me of this.>

Vohnvolt's rage surged.

Why did it sound as though Suzamete was proud that Actuass had overcome the number of enemies he had been faced with?

"Is that right?" the amalgam hissed boldly. "Now, I understand why people on this damned world only believe in you all superficially. You really are dead, and in more ways than one."

There was a bit of silence.

Actuass seemed to scoff and heave at the same time.

Suzamete's figure lurched.

<I have met many anomalies before. None quite like you. You're lost, bold and aggressive like the others, but I suppose this is the first time I have seen one of your nature. I wonder, is that why you speak to me as if you were my equal? All of you have yet to see the truth. You are confined to the benefits of Aigas.

You still have room for hatred, revenge and soul-searching.>

Suddenly, the sky world shook, an unbearable pressure bearing down on everything within it.

<Do you know why no one dwells in the void and its innate forms? That's because it is vicious and terrifying. The greatest fear, even for a Deity, is a boundless chasm that can't be explored even by the heights of our strength. That's why most of us choose to settle in enclosed spaces and cultivate our powers through them and the beings we create. Reality is too broad.

I, who has tasted infinitely more of it than you should know, and you should be a little more conscious of the difference between us. I, who has met that darkness outside should be the source of your dread, anomaly. Your petty quest for revenge should be the least of your worries, and you shouldn't let it allow you to speak so boldly against me...>

Vohnvolt grumbled hatefully as his body crouched down from the force that exploded from above.

Between Actuass' mockery and his own jabs at the Deity, Suzamete seemed to have finally had enough.

But Actuass seemed pleased. He fought that crushing might and leered.

"You're not as detached from mortality as you think, mother. Or should I say, Kaella Seinold. Look at you! You really are deluded! Words still rile you up!"

The pressure from Suzamete grew and Vohnvolt felt as though it would crush him to bits in the next few seconds.

However, an overwhelming force of Null Life gushed from him and engulfed him in a cushion of protection.

Actuass grinned at this, and Suzamete seemed annoyed.

Serenity was protecting her chosen bearer!

Just when Vohnvolt felt like he could stand, Actuass grabbed ahold of him and sharply glared at Suzamete.

"I'm thankful. Now I can begin anew or rest in peace without regrets," he said, and in the next moment, he and the amalgam vanished after a tear opened in the sky space, and swallowed them!

Suzamete sighed for the umpteenth time.

A hint of joy seemed to carve itself within her soul.

<Just as I expected.>

She had lived this entire ordeal before it happened.

She had been proud at seeing how determined and strong her son had become.

That was why her son's words didn't hurt her.

However, those of the anomaly annoyed her quite a bit. She was experiencing them for a second time.

She had met a lot of anomalies in the wide void and all of them were as powerful as they were... coarse. Existing outside the natural order made them adopt insufferable traits.

While Actuass was an anomaly, he was a unique one.

Actuass had the power of Undeath, but he wasn't a devoted bearer.

He didn't have the recognition of the Voice of Worlds and he didn't have a Book of Alignment.

He had been using his powers only as a means to an end without adhering to what whoever gave him those powers desired, unlike other bearers.

<Now which path will you take? The lot I can see has yet to tell me whether you will live on or die.>

Indeed, even to a Deity who could see the timeline of events; everything to happen in the future on Aigas, it was yet to be shown whether Actuass would be among those of the future, or if, following the events of today, he would become a relic of the past.

Of course, even now, Suzamete couldn't see where Actuass had went.

He and the amalgam were no longer in Aigas.

Chapter 1096: Unsatisfied?

Two figures landed in a massive space, primarily made of a dry, rocky ground.

Large tombstones of different colours could be seen sprinkled all over on the barren dirt and pebbles, a harsh wind that blew from west to east not fazing them in the least.

In the sky above, a shade of blue could be seen that didn't seem to have any ties to the Aigas sky. Instead, it gave off a foreign feel that only the owner of this domain could have relished in somewhat.

Pale figures, like ghosts, also littered this world, standing on the ground with their arms wrapped around their bodies. Most had human forms but with no discernible life or consciousness.

When Vohnvolt saw them, he was startled.

'Where am I?' he wondered.

His encounter with a Deity just now seemed like a dream, but the aching of the very roots of his existence told him that it had been very much real... and enlightening.

Beside him, the one who had dragged him away from that encounter collapsed face first into the dry dirt, and then rolled to look up as he laid on his back.

Actuass breathed out heavily.

"This is one of the gifts Somanda gave me, you know?" he said without looking at Vohnvolt, who was stunned by this revelation. "It has served me well. Its existence is one of the reasons why I was able to actualise my plans to begin with. It all began with one unwilling Paladin Champion whom I had a pretty fun fight with."

There was a nostalgic tone in Actuass' voice.

This was the Outworld Attic, a storage space of sorts where he kept the souls of deceased Green Neolist members.

It was located directly over the Yormuness, which was just outside Aigas, smothered by vast swaths of Stagnant Space.

The last time Actuass had brought someone here was when he took Revia and exploited her dormant Spirit Warden abilities to safely make a trip in and out of the Yormuness to make a deal with Rayn.

In that sense, it truly felt nostalgic.

Vohnvolt narrowed his socket flames at Actuass.

"So that's all you wanted to do in the end? Your big plan? It was all to meet your... mother?" he said, a barely veiled burst of fury in his voice.

Even if the amalgam didn't particularly care for the many people who were killed during the Premium Age Royale, or even Aigas as a whole for that matter, it staggered him to think that the goal all along had been as simple as this.

Allora died for someone to have a simple catch-up with their mommy?.

Sensing the judgment coming from Vohnvolt, Actuass spat blood and rolled his blood-drowned eyes.

"Oh, please. I saw what you are all about too when we melded together. You are Somanda's slave. Your whole goal is to reconcile with your past otherwise you will go mad. How has your journey till now been so different from mine. We both didn't give a damn how many people we killed – and you killed a whole bunch too.

Just as long as we survived to find closure with who we are, we were satisfied. You have no right to judge me," Actuass said. "We both don't belong here, so we couldn't care less."

Vohnvolt's socket flames flared madly.

He wanted to say Actuass was wrong, that somehow when he killed the goblins in the Tremur Forest, when he slaughtered innocent people in the library in Inhone City, and when he killed his fellow contenders in the Premium Age Royale, he was justified, but he couldn't.

Not like this.

"It wasn't senseless murder," he said with a sharp voice. "This world would have devoured the weaker version of me. I had to fight back. I had to kill. What you did was vile."

Actuass laughed and coughed up a pool of pink blood.

"Senseless? Sorry. Where I come from, murder is the first step towards boundless accolades. It is a way of life. It is never senseless. Denying that there is meaning in killing is how fools reject this reality."

Vohnvolt scoffed.

"You are delusional if you think your version of killing is similar to mine. Now that I think about it, you aren't so different from your mother. You think your ideals should swamp over the entire world regardless of how disgusting and how wrong they are. Just because you are stronger than everyone else, or that you beat everyone who opposed you, doesn't mean you are right!"

Actuass' frowned slightly and finally turned his head to the amalgam.

Silent tension crashed between them for a few minutes and then Actuass went back to gazing at the sky.

"Ah. What does it matter now? I'm right here. Kill me. Kill me and avenge that woman I killed. That's all you want, right?"

"What?" Actuass said, befuddled.

Actuass chuckled hoarsely.

"It wasn't really my plan before, but since you decided to butt in at the last moment, I thought you deserved that much. I didn't intend to get killed or trapped by my mother, but I knew I was going to die anyway. Since you are here, you might as well put me out of my misery. How does that sound? Be my executioner."

"..."

Vohnvolt was lost for words.

What?

Something seemed to explode inside him.

"What?" Actuass said. "Not satisfying enough for you? Haha. I figured. You probably wanted to beat me to a pulp with your own hands and have me at my knees before you gave the finishing blow. Sorry.

You should be proud though. You did interfere with my plan significantly and even stole a whole dragon from me. That was good, right? To top off all that, this is as much as you will get... Skullius."

Vohnvolt trembled at the mention of his name.

He balled his hands into fists.

Actuass was right.

This wasn't what he hoped would happen.

The first time he met Actuass all the way back then, he had frozen. The bastard had been too powerful for him.

During the Premium Age Royale, when he encountered him a second time, he had also held a strong advantage.

Now, Vohnvolt had given Actuass a run for his money, but still...

Is this all he could get?

"You better hurry. I'm fading fast. And when I die, this place will probably crumble shortly after," Actuass said.

He didn't seem to be lying.

His body, in addition to having an unnatural colour, was now convulsing horribly.

Actuass had expected Vohnvolt to deliver a crushing blow with indignance and frustration, but the amalgam sat down instead.

"Hm?" Actuass found this odd.

Vohnvolt spoke.

"Before that, how about you tell me about how you met Somanda?"

Actuass frowned.

Chapter 1097: How I Met Your Master

The question took Actuass by surprise.

While he was fading rapidly, heading towards his inevitable end, the six-armed creature he had designated as his executioner was more interested in languidly asking him such a question?

"I see. Of course you'd want to know," he scoffed and smirked.

"You apparently travelled here from another world and were reborn as a denizen of Aigas. How exactly did you come into contact with Somanda then? It should have happened after you had matured in your new body, right?" Vohnvolt asked.

Actuass dazedly stared into the sky.

"Yes," he said. "That's right."

Vohnvolt's socket flames narrowed.

"And?"

Actuass sighed.

He might as well indulge the creature. He lost nothing in doing so anyway.

"I've always been taught to be thorough. That's why I did my research on this world from a young age. I tried to learn things that most people seemed to be disinterested in.

The thing I found particularly unusual was the fact that everyone seemed to think eighty millennia had passed since the Grand Wars, but that didn't make sense to me since such a lengthy period of time should have caused a lot of progress in technology and all in Aigas."

"Mundane research didn't work. Back then, I had a Mage Class. I was talented enough in Magecraft to gain access to higher institutes and their secrets. The stronger I got, the more I got to learn secrets that most people didn't know. You see, Mages are a very secretive bunch.

They do a lot of fact finding, and if anything they discover has even the tiniest lick of significance, they keep it for themselves. When I earned enough repute, I was introduced to the large stores, collections of unusual treasures and remains from olden times.

There were even maps detailing where to find some of the larger pieces of interest that couldn't be rooted away from where they were perked."

Actuass remembered those days.

Like him, some Mages also seemed to be suspicious about the timeline that everyone else knew.

Carbon-dating played a role.

Some of the things found around Feinheath, Opungale and the old seas weren't nearly as old as they should be.

Worse yet, some of them – treasures primarily – were even still active, meaning the resources used to make them hadn't reached their limit. Surely, their limits didn't cap at eighty freaking millennia.

A great of example of this was the tower in Harifrast, which Skullius and Sila had encountered, with the latter claiming that it was the last place he ever defended before Fulgardt's forces captured him and his men.

"I was more interested in maps pointing towards spots that weren't fully explored yet, either because they were too dangerous, or because they didn't hold anything worth the Mages' time. I spent my years exploring these spots, some at the very depths of the sea and some in areas I couldn't approach lightly because of fierce Cluster beasts... That was until I found the treasure SoSei.

I'm sure you are well acquainted with it," Actuass said.

"Yeah," Vohnvolt said coldly.

He was acquainted with that treasure alright.

It was the green skeleton Actuass used against Revia back then, and it was also the same treasure that Somanda's consciousness spilled through and used to attack Skullius the very first time he encountered Somanda in the 'flesh' on Aigas.

"When I grew capable of conducting better research, I came to know that SoSei was left behind after Quintess' and Listafelle's departure, when the Rules of the world weakened. There were many undead invading those days, and many factions of them left behind bits of their tools, not just Somanda's brigade. I just happened to find SoSei first and the moment I handled it, Somanda spoke to me."

As it were, the necromancer groups that came before Actuass also received their powers this way.

Many Undeath related treasures, some with violent effects and some acting as bridges between living things on Aigas and undead abominations elsewhere, were scattered around Aigas and they fueled the greedy Undeath parties that ravaged many settlements for years.

"Let me guess. You didn't have any issues accepting Undeath powers as long as they helped you find your mother?" Vohnvolt said coarsely.

"Exactly," Actuass said without the slightest hint of hesitation. "In typical undead fashion, Somanda tried to coerce me, but I was willing to attain more power. My enthusiasm helped me get a few lessons on the soul from him. Liches are true masters of the soul, after all. Haha. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, Somanda couldn't abuse the ability to project his consciousness through SoSei.

This meant he wouldn't meddle in my affairs too much. If he did, well, SoSei was a treasure only slightly above Legendary grade. The more he used it, the more it lost its powers. It had a limit. I presume those powers were exhausted when he fought you that time."

Actuass now knew that the unusual young man he met in that cave, the man who had caused Somanda to hijack control of SoSei so suddenly, was the same creature he was faced with now.

It was truly mind-boggling how Direction and chance worked.

Vohnvolt scoffed.

'So that's how it is,' he thought.

The funny thing in all of this was, Actuass didn't know that the treasure SoSei was in Vohnvolt's possession!

It was one of the items Skullius handed over to him when they split so long ago.

Skullius had kept it after he bested Somanda's consciousness which had been hanging onto the treasure.

"What is it that Somanda wanted you to do anyway?" Vohnvolt asked.

He saw Actuass' eyes droop. He was probably reaching his limit.

"Right. You don't know about Rich Worlds. Well, I doubt it really matters if I tell you. Those two – that kin of yours and the other bearer – probably realized the answer lies in Edagon. That's why they headed in that direction as soon as we were all free. If you want to know so badly, you might want to chase after them," Actuass said with a dull chuckle.

Vohnvolt remembered Actuass saying something about this when they were still entangled with the Herald Jerthrax.

Rich Worlds.

Was that really why Aurolio and the Null Devil King had suddenly launched themselves further North?

"I see..." Vohnvolt said and a porous ball of purple-gold appeared around his hand, a handle visible within it around which his fingers grabbed onto.

He raised the hand holding this odd shape.

"Any last words?" he said indignantly.

Actuass smiled.

"We'll probably meet again. Soon," he said with an unerving certainty.

Vohnvolt scoffed hatefully, and was about to sent a bolt of [Maximum Acumen] – the offensive form of [Neutral Maximum] – straight through Actuass' head when...

"Wait."

Serenity's voice came, and she manifested as an odd blue, human-shaped flame beside Vohnvolt.

"What is it?" the amalgam asked.

"There is a better way," Serenity said. "You can utilize him for something better. Something you will need after all this."

Vohnvolt was puzzled by this.

What could she possibly mean?

Chapter 1098: Sweet Agony

Serenity's appearance caught Actuass' eye.

Her words, on the other hand, gave him a sense of foreboding. What in the world did she mean by 'there's a better way.'

Serenity turned her vaguely defined head towards Actuass and then back to Vohnvolt before speaking in a voice only he could hear.

"Turn him into an artefact. A soul-based artefact," she advised.

"What?" Vohnvolt said, stunned.

Turning Actuass... into an artefact?

"I don't even know how to do that. Maybe to non-living things I can, but how do I go about doing that to a living creature?"

The amalgam's concerns were expressed in a low voice as well.

"Don't worry. I'll teach you. You already have the means to do so right now. The last piece you would need, you acquired it during your battle with this man. [Soul Sense]."

"What about [Sense]?" Vohnvolt asked before reeling. "You mean I can use his soul to create an artefact? Not his body?"

Serenity nodded.

"But before that, you need to seize his soul. The best method for that, is to use [Greatest Executive Arbitration]."

Vohnvolt took a moment to think, and then it suddenly clicked for him.

Of course. That actually made sense.

[Greatest Executive Arbitration] was Red Rage's skill.

It wasn't entirely offensive, but it fit perfectly with the Apostle's entire justice shtick. Its powers allowed Red Rage to take something from its target as long as they were guilty of any crimes. The greater the crimes, the more the Apostle was able to extract from the skill's victim.

As Vohnvolt understood Serenity's suggestion completely, he immediately activated [Greatest Executive Arbitration: Full Release], as was the skill's full name.

A circular boundary of pristine light expanded from Vohnvolt's feet and covered a twenty-meter radius.

Actuass was included in this glowing range as well, much to his apprehension.

What was this?

What was about to happen?

Unlike Red Rage's previous victims, he managed to quickly identify that this glowing boundary wasn't a simple shed of light marking the area, as normal conventions would have him believe, but a forced shift in vision, as though someone was forcing him to see what they saw.

Vohnvolt then became garbed in a robe of Null Life Essence that seemed to establish him as a judge. It swept over his [Nullmancer's Royal Raiment of Acclimation], but didn't make him look awkward.

Actuass' eyes narrowed.

"What is this?" he asked.

Right after he spoke, Actuass was suddenly blasted by a cacophony of loud screams in his head!

"ARRRRRRRGHHHHHH!" he screamed.

The torrent of grating sound caught him off-guard.

Wails, screeches, groans, cries and mourns rocked his brain and caused his eardrums to explode violently.

It was as though a few tens of thousands, no, millions of people were shrieking in his ears, some in agony, some in grief!

Actuass convulsed.

"I guess your crimes are that heavy, even if you don't seem to think of them as such," Vohnvolt said casually. He didn't hear the noises. They were all for the necromancer to taste in his last moments.

They were the echoes of his victims.

[Greatest Executive Arbitration] judged how guilty its target was in this way. After all, the metric for incrimination was largely based on how many lives its victim had taken in a distasteful manner, and Actuass just happened to be a vicious murder responsible for single-handedly killing millions upon millions of people for selfish goals over four hundred and some years.

Actuass' eyeballs seemed to swell, or perhaps they were close to popping out of his skull.

They bled.

His insides hemorrhaged fiercely and there was nothing he could do about.

The venom from Grim's fangs had been killing off his bodily functions little by little.

Allora's mental attack had done some serious damage to his brain and Pherdanta's constant hacking at his neck had done a number on him that hadn't been subtracted.

Actuass shook.

Vohnvolt scoffed.

The necromancer gave him a dark, hateful look.

"Heh..."

It wasn't much. It was much at all, but Vohnvolt was pleased this bastard got to suffer for a bit.

Regardless of what he had planned for the 'after', as he seemed to, for now, he was paying dearly.

Soon, the amalgam opened his mouth and spoke in an authoritative voice.

"I will permanently claim... your soul."

Almost instantly, Actuass' radiant, powerful soul was extracted from his body!

It was larger than his body and almost blinding to look at.

It rose while seeming as though it was bound by invisible chains.

Vohnvolt stared at it for a while. He couldn't help but think that if Actuass had strength enough to resist, this might not have worked at all.

[Greatest Executive Arbitration] wasn't anything more than a Special Skill after all. The fact that Actuass was at death's door was the only reason this had been possible. That, and the fact that his soul wasn't from Aigas, otherwise the Yormuness would claim it as its own.

Beyond that, he didn't fight back even in this form as he had before, because his soul was bloated and hard to control. Unlike Deities, mortals couldn't exist as souls alone for long and Actuass was no exception.

Now that he had no body, his soul had lost its tether, and had already begun the process of deterioration which he couldn't stop because he was bound.

"Now what?" Vohnvolt asked Serenity.

"You will need to use your [Soul Sense] for what follows," she said as she extended her hands and grabbed ahold of Actuass' soul. Null Life Essence flooded from her and encased it in a glass-like construct that seemed to keep it frozen, as though time didn't exist within it.

"However, the problem is, you aren't strong enough to perfectly handle this soul and I can't quite help in the whole process of artefact-making in this state. You need to evolve and do it yourself."

"I see," Vohnvolt said.

He didn't have qualms with that now.

He had mostly achieved what he had been hoping to do with a few more minutes in his amalgam form.

To evolve, he needed to deactivate [Bringer of All], after all.

"Alright."

Without wasting another second, Vohnvolt released the skill and his tall, dark, six-armed form turned into what looked like a porridge-like mound of darkness and stars before splitting into three figures: Replicus, Red Rage and Araeyn.

Red Rage had a lot he wanted to say, but since he had been aware of everything happening while entangled with his master, he decided to shut up. Now wasn't the time to catch up.

Replicus, still adorned in the Hollow Dusk's Prison, immediately called the guidance field.

[You have broken past many hurdles and reached LV80. You are now able to evolve into the Fourth Tier of Power. Do you accept?]

"Yes," Replicus immediately responded, and a flurry of notifications flew before his sockets.

[Congratulations on this grand achievement!]

[As the first bearer of Null Life Essence, a few pre-evolution options will be granted to you as a reward]

[Personal Configuration has been granted!]

[Flaw De-demonization has been granted!]

[Class Reinforcement has been granted!]

[In-Verse glimpse has been granted!]

Replicus stared at all these options in awe.

He didn't know what any of them meant, but it seemed they did more good than bad.

Infinitely more good!

Chapter 1099: Personal Configuration

"Rather than explain what all these are verbally, it's probably better for me to impart understanding instead," Serenity said as Replicus gawked at the notifications, his thought phantoms scrambling to find what they meant.

Serenity then sent a soft stream of Null Life Essence into Replicus' head, and before the Penetrator knew it, he understood what Personal Configuration, Flaw De-demonization, Class Reinforcement and In-Verse glimpse were!

An indescribable burst of excitement rocked the Penetrator. Each of these things...

Replicus stared at Serenity with flaring sockets.

"Really?!" he said, awed.

Serenity merely nodded.

Only the dark void knew how long she had been waiting for Replicus\Skullius to reach this Tier so he could enjoy all these benefits and finally stand proud as a bearer worthy of contending with the others she had seen.

Replicus had been anticipating to see just what was so special about this Fourth Tier, and even before seeing the evolutionary options available at this stage and choosing one to adopt, he was already gushing with elation. It seemed worth it.

Just Personal Configuration alone blew his mind.

He couldn't wait to get started.

"This is a nice surprise," he said, his hands rubbing together maniacally.

Usually, when evolving, other than the actual process of evolution, Replicus would only get to speak to Serenity, but that hadn't even been an option for his third evolution since Serenity was with Skullius before a while ago.

Replicus came to appreciate the anomalous situation between himself and the original him. This reveal setup was twice as enthralling this way.

"Let's do this. Should I start with Personal Configuration?" he asked.

"Whichever you want to start with," Serenity said.

After a determined nod, Replicus had the guidance field begin the process of configuration.

However...

[Additions have been noted in the host body post 'Bringer of All' activation]

[Please wait...]

"Oh, right," Replicus said.

He didn't factor in that the guidance field was going to identify the tweaks he had done to his original body using the elements he had borne as the amalgam.

There were more than a few, after all, and it seemed the guidance field had to familiarise itself with these before proceeding with the Personal Configuration.

[You have learned 'Null Life Demesne']

[You have learned 'Reflective Null Cage']

[You have learned 'Soul Sense']

[You have learned 'Soul Resistance']

[You have learned 'Greatest Manamation']

[You have learned 'Manastanding']

[You have learned 'Manamorphosis']

[You have learned 'Budget Tug-of-War']

[You have learned 'Offender's Vacuum']

[You have learned 'Manalarity']

[You have learned 'Essence Deconstruction']

[You have learned 'Mana Centurion']

[You have learned 'Resource Vault']

[...]

[You have gained an affinity with 'Absolute Frost']

[You have acquired a Null Core]

Replicus would have grinned if he could.

Indeed, he had been learning all these skills when he was the amalgam through Red Rage's [Blessing of Serenity]. Some of them were too good to let pass, especially [Mana Centurion] and [Resource Vault] which practically made his mana reserves inexhaustible.

Unfortunately, he couldn't learn class or race specific skills from Red Rage and Araeyn, but that was fine. That would only render them useless as Apostles.

Even better than skills, Replicus had learned through having Araeyn's Null Core how to create one of his own. The process was vastly different from that of creating a mana core, and it had taken pretty much his entire duration as Prisma Vohnvolt Exonn to learn it.

Now, his hard work had paid off.

~~~

[Null Core: 150,000/150,000]

~~~

Currently, this was all Replicus could manage. His independent reserves of Null Life Essence from before, and his use of [Greatest Null Weaver] had allowed him to expand the core to this extent, but this was his current limit.

"Now," he said excitedly.

The guidance field quickly continued.

[Personal Configuration enabled]

[Please note, you will only be able to configure your body three times, which each configuration (modification) giving a single allowance for a special trait]

[Please choose Configuration 1]

Personal Configuration was simply an allowance given to Replicus for him to add physical modifications to his body.

After he added said modification to his body, he was allowed one chance to give the modification a special trait – something supernatural or mystical.

Replicus already had a few ideas.

"I want to configure arms," he said.

As he was inspired by his Bringer of All form, he decided that having more than two hands was quite beneficial. However, he felt that the six he had before were a bit overkill.

"Give me two more," he said.

[Processing...]

According to the rules of Personal Configuration, modifications done to one specific part of the body with a specific change in change in mind, like Replicus' current demand, only counted as one modification. This worked very well in his favour.

A second later, Replicus felt his body churning, and his torso experienced several width and length adjustments before two arms identical to his original two spewed from it!

Because of the Hollow Dusk's Prison's properties, these two arms were also covered in the smooth, starry design of the armour, which made the figure of the Penetrator look a lot more monstrous than regal – as it had looked before.

"Not bad," Replicus said as he tried to move his extra arms. At first, it was slightly difficult to coordinate them all, but soon he got the hang of it because of his experience as the amalgam.

Red Rage and Araeyn stared at Replicus with amazement, the former more so.

"You look truly evil, master, and perhaps a step away from deserving an exorcism," Red Rage commented.

"Shut up," Replicus barked.

At that moment, the Outworld Attic shook, and a few cracks appeared on the ground before everything quickly settled again, as though there hadn't been a disturbance to begin with.

Replicus' socket flames narrowed.

"We should hurry this up, Skullius," Serenity said.

"Right."

Replicus then commanded the guidance field to add another modification he had been passed by his phantoms.

"I need some kind of nervous system that links my thought phantoms to my entire body, especially my limbs," he said quickly.

[Processing...]

This was the second modification Replicus had thought of. If his thought phantoms actually had more to do than just theorise and debate, his reaction speed could be bolstered manyfold. Despite how chaotic the phantoms could be, they actually had perfect synergy. It would only show now that they could assist Replicus in more than one way.

As he thought about the merits of this, Replicus felt a sensation akin to tiny cords of electricity spreading through his body from his head where they pooled, all the way to the ends of his fingers and toes.

His body then shook as though walloped by vicious cold.

"Oh, I could get used to this."

"Now we can all get to have some fun."

"Hey Replicus Prime, mind transforming into your Hybrid Luman form for a bit? I want to...test something."

"All hands on deck!"

As the phantoms joked and yelled excitedly, Replicus' arms swished about, some of them shaking each other and performing strange greeting gestures that the Penetrator was baffled by.

"Enough," Replicus said and took control of his arms.

"Are you going to settle for THAT Configuration we told you about next?" one of the phantoms said giddily. "We have a lot of world-ending threats to beat. This might be our ticket out of one of them. A fresh ticket."

Replicus sighed.

"I don't think we have a choice. We'll probably need it, as you say," he said ominously before calling the guidance field and specifying what he wanted for his third modification.

[Processing...]

[Modification will take 00:02:59:59 to complete]

"Fine by me," Replicus said.

Chapter 1100: I Can Penetrate The Heavens!

After defining the third modification, Replicus went on to quickly brainstorm what special traits he could choose for all the modifications he had made. He couldn't wait and choose later, after all, Personal Configuration was to be done before evolution so that it didn't interfere with the form he would take on; some evolutionary options wouldn't fit with the configurations he had in mind.

His third modification was already underway and wasn't the kind that would interfere with how he looked, so it didn't count.

The first special trait he chose was for his extra arms.

He had the guidance field give them the option to freely move around every component of his body and not just be restricted to below his original set of arms. After the trait was granted, the switch to

a different spot for each of the two arms was a lot smoother than Replicus had thought. It felt natural. His body didn't rearrange itself to accommodate these movements.

What was even more peculiar was that these arms could also operate within Replicus' body. This didn't just include his skeletal insides. It also encompassed the inner works of his mana networks and the skills imbedded within his body. He could interact with them physically – and delicately!

As for the second trait Replicus chose, he asked the guidance field to make the nervous system he had constructed within himself for the thought phantoms to operate four times as fast as whatever skeleton-sensitive system he already had which linked his mind to his body.

Initially, he wanted it to be ten times as fast, but that proved to be an infeasible ask for a mere special trait.

After concluding his second and third special trait requests, Replicus moved on to the Flaw De-demonization. It too couldn't be left hanging before the evolution.

"Now this should be interesting. I had already adopted measures in place in order to make sure I sidestep my Flaw's effect, but it seems at the Fourth Tier, it won't be worth worrying about," the Penetrator said to himself.

Replicus' original Flaw, acquired from the Penetrator series evolutionary path, prevented him from doing any damage that didn't have penetration effects. With this in place, he normally wouldn't be able to punch or slash with a sword.

However, because of his Dual Mana-Sourcing Force, which allowed him to adjust the surface area of his strikes and his precise slashes with Null Life Essence that were methodically executed to pierce the target first before slicing through them devastatingly, he had overcome this.

Replicus also had another Flaw, one he inherited when he became the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator. This Flaw restricted him from ever having more than five Avatars – copies of himself, like the current him.

Flaw De-demonization only applied to the original Flaw, not consequent ones, however. It turned the negative effect of a Flaw into a positive one!

[Your Flaw is being De-demonized. Please wait...]

[...]

[All your properties: Mana reserves, Null Life Essence reserves, offensive skills, Veneration arts, relevant physical attributes, and Affinity essence and concepts, have been inscribed with a passive 5,000% Penetration Damage boost!]

...!!!

Right after the notification came, Replicus felt every inch of his body become strangely... aggressive.

He felt the fibres of his entire being boast a degree of confidence and a desire to prove themselves against enemy defenses; or any defenses for that matter!

"Penetration Damage, huh?" Replicus said before turning to Serenity. "Is this what happens to all Null Creatures at the fourth Tier?"

Serenity swayed.

"No. The release from Flaws takes different durations for different Null creatures. You are just a special case. You have had to gather more cumulative mana experience than anyone else to evolve, so you deserve a quicker rate of Flaw De-demonizing. At least I deemed it so," she said pleasantly.

Replicus nodded.

He then acquiesced to the strong push from his instincts and used one of his four arms to throw a straight punch into the air.

...!!!

To his surprise, the space before him whirled and bore in on itself as if it were a simple layer of dough that had been pressed by a simple, hard force. However, this phenomenon only persisted for a fraction of a second before space returned to normal.

Replicus was stunned by this result.

First of all, the Flaw he had truly no longer haunted him.

And second... a simple punch from him could do something like this now?

His punch counted as a blunt attack. What would happen if he actually used an attack that could pierce through, like the [Nullmancer's Unforgiving Lancet]?

Unfortunately, another tremor in the Outworld Attic reminded Replicus that he didn't have the luxury to think about this. He much preferred to finish everything he needed to do here before travelling back to Aigas. He had an inkling of a suspicion that it might not even be that easy to get back with just his current prowess.

"Since everything else isn't necessary before evolution, I should evolve now. I can take care of Class Reinforcement and In-Verse glimpse afterwards," he thought, and told the guidance field to carry on.

The guidance field had a lot to say before that, though.

[Congratulations on reaching this point!]

[The Penetrator series is a decent racial path within the Null Verse, but its later growth patterns are heavily stunted because of the aggressive competitors that exist at the top of the food chain. Few persist with their olden, pure genes to reach admirable heights.

Most Penetrators, to grow their strength further, often have to mix their purity with that of other, more prominent species in order to create hybrids that can stand toe to toe with the strongest within the Null Verse. However, while there have been a few successes, the process to create hybrids is not kind and it rarely produces spawn that live for a more than few years.

Those that thrive gain the benefit of new evolutionary paths and magnificent compound powers, but at the cost of some of the abilities that make them Penetrators]

[You, Serenity's chosen, are presented with a choice]

[Would you rather commit to the stunted growth path of the pure Penetrator or would you desire to choose the Hybrid selections and rid yourself of the purity of the Penetrator series?]

Replicus' socket flames became subdued.

A pure Penetrator path and a Hybrid path?

He looked to Serenity.

He knew she could see the guidance field.

"What do you recommend?" he asked.

"I have no idea. What do you feel works for you? This will all be meaningless if you can't find what appeals to your style more. Do you want more diversity or do you want more enticing variations of the same powers you have been using until now? Risk and reward. You are the combatant here, it should be your choice," the blue flame said.

Replicus nodded.

He expected that answer.

This either meant Serenity didn't fully understand every single power in the Null Verse or that she simply didn't see the need to meddle in such a decision.

The phantoms thought it was both.

"Well, if it's up to me..." Replicus said before making his choice, and to his delight...

[Six possible evolutionary options have appeared!]