

Undead 651

Chapter 651: Lurking Fate! (6)

The BoneTender's Flaw acted on its desire to manipulate, which also happened to be basis for its abilities. Therefore, to ensure that while it was in other worlds, it couldn't simply practise unrestrained dominance, it was forced to use a roundabout method to achieve its goals.

It had a deck of seventy cards, all with various different 'fates' – stored realities that could only be realised by others, targets whom it ensnared in its alluring trap.

There were four special cards in this deck that somewhat balanced this detrimental Flaw. From three of these, the BoneTender could receive a predetermined reward, while from the remaining one, the card known as the 'Royal Ace', it could acquire what it desired, provided a few conditions were met.

Indeed, it was a lot to wrap the around but fairly simple with enough thought.

There was only a single issue with using the Royal Ace card. Unlike the other cards, it was drawn to ambition and desire, much like the Bone Tender itself. This meant that it was the only card in the deck that could willingly choose one of the Bone Tender's victims. Once it had chosen whom it deemed worth, the individual could quite literally make a wish. Anything they wanted would be granted.

In turn however, depending on how the user expressed their wish, the Bone Tender could flip the meaning, using the power of the Royal Ace for itself.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?" the BoneTender asked expectantly.

Bliss?

Why empty bliss?

What did this mean?

The bald man while entrapped in the feeling ecstasy blinked.

Bliss, it said. Bliss that lasts through all undone time?

Did that even make sense?

Ha!

The bonfire lit up within Dionas furiously bellowed. A man of his stature and greed could not pass up the chance to earn an eternity of happiness!

Surely, this happiness, the bliss could be fashioned from the specifics of what he wanted, right? It was supposed to be glorious, right?!

Yet, with the burning itch that drove his actions, his choice of card wasn't needed.

As soon as he said 'yes', a card from the appearing deck descended to reach him all on its own!

It simply could not resist this man's fervour and drive, unlike with the other mediocre humans in this city.

This man actually had desires that transcended triviality!

The card depicting a complex, glittery symbol that gave an impression of unbridled power rested in Dionas' hand, giving him relief even from the weight of the carriage pinning him down.

The Bone Tender grinned.

A soft intent then called within Dionas, whose eyes were sparkling with nothing but greed.

"What is your deepest desire? Ask and it will be fulfilled," this intent urged.

Dionas gulped hard.

Truly?

Glorious... empty bliss that lasts for all time?

If he had to choose...

The bald man opened his mouth and uttered words that made the Bone Tender roar with joy at the sky with a grin!

"I wish to rule it all. To have it all... like a king."

This was all it took.

The Royal Ace shone, making this wish come true but the apparition watching this occur acted first, making the wish, as vague as it was, its own.

To rule it all? To have it all like a king?

That was a wish that transcended Aigas. It had implications spanning several worlds and realities, something that the Bone Tender, who hadn't expected to be summoned in this world, needed.

This was the perfect improvisation!

Dionas' body rose with the Royal Ace above it, the carriage pushed away from his figure.

A burst of Null Life Essence coiled around his body and began to transform it, squeezing the life out of it, ejecting his soul without a care, draining the fat in flesh and empowering this mortal vessel by hundreds of thousands of degrees in a mystical fashion!

Pure blue essence revolved around the changing body, creating a bright lens flared. A different attire from the fancy adornments of man draped over Dionas' changing body.

It was regal attire in a combat sense.

Soon, a new figure stood before the BoneTender.

He was tall, but not alarming so like the apparition.

A dazzling black armour with a soft, rising golden choking mist decked his body, signs of life showing from it as subtly, shallow breaths could be heard, lighting up the crevices and corners of this aegis in a deep golden orange hue.

There were countless triangular sky blue jewels lined up over the chestplate, burning with a fierce light of foreign energy, similar but larger ones showing on the pauldrons, poleyns, carved into shape – the form of a certain insignia.

"Ah..."

A deep breath blew out of this new being's mouth.

It wasn't all bone like the Bone Tender, but had a face, one as pale, dry and ugly as a corpse's yet strangely charming. If one were to look at it, they would want to keep staring for a prolonged period. Narrow eyes with nothing but a tenebrous storm were on this being's face, inducing a dreadful feeling in anyone who into them.

Some, in a far away prison believed a single glance was enough to kill any miserable fool.

Long, creamy hair that almost seemed like a trails of bright light instead rested over this being's head, flowing behind it as if submerged in a hidden sea, at its tips a dull blue colour.

Above all this though, what really stood out on this being's body was a silver crown.

It grew from his forehead with a metallic sheen and rose half a meter from its head, the power it gushed awe-inspiring.

If anyone but the BoneTender had been standing in its presence, they would have been automatically shredded by the might it bellowed out.

When the dark eyes of this being settled on the Bone Tender, the apparition's flame head flared lightly and it gave a dignified bow of respect.

The armoured being spoke first in a voice that carried immense weight, the power within it seeming to be affected by its master's mood.

"You went ahead and made plans of your own? Did you distrust me that much?"

"I would not dream of it, O Null Devil King. I have binds on me that even I cannot control. However, I have made the most of them in the moment. Look around us," the Bone Tender said.

The creature who had been addressed as the Null Devil King glanced over the surroundings. The screams, the rain, the lightning, the torn infrastructure.

"Are we truly outside Serenity's prison? And in a rich land as well?" he asked with a tilt of his head.

"Indeed."

"Fascinating..." the Null Devil King said before chortling. "I suppose you remain loyal then? Winning worlds for Serenity despite being discarded?"

"All have purpose. My old one is all I can live for," the Bone Tender replied.

The Null Devil King nodded.

"Honourable. Then I shall honour my promise. I will forfeit my existence in this shell and leave it for you. Use it wisely. My strength is enough to alert Divines."

"Thank you..."

As the brief exchange ended, the shallow signs of liveliness in the body of the Null Devil King vanished and what was left was a powerful, stationary husk emitting enormous waves of power that only the Bone Tender could sense.

Without wasting time, the Bone Tender's tall frame rose and sank into the vessel that had been left for it. A perfect vessel.

The dark eyes of the Null Devil King's body showed signs of life again, and it moved craning its neck and whirring its arms.

The BoneTender had inhabited it.

"Magnificent.... So this is the power of a Null Devil King?" the Bone Tender spoke in its usual, alluring voice, but the difference was that there were devastating levels of authority in it now. Authority that could be exerted on the physical world and its people.

It seemed all the perks of the Null Devil King remained in this body, making the Bone Tender, a sort of proxy Null Devil King.

'It paid off...!' the BoneTender, no, the Null Devil King thought with a smile blooming on its lips which parted to reveal rows of shining, razor sharp white teeth!

To get himself accustomed to this body, the Null Devil King proxy raised his hand which was hidden under the glossy black gauntlet and execute a small ability.

A blast of Null Life Essence washed over the city and some – over the mourns of dying, over the crumbling infrastructure and even over the terrible weather spawned by the man who had crawled into a ball, bawling his eyes out.

Everything stopped moving, just like the Bone Tender had done before.

Even the rain hung in the air.

This was a simple application of Null Life Essence.

A basic skill known as [Static Limbo].

'My power is overflowing and running through this body perfectly. Ah... Thankfully, the Kings and Blood-Risen Emperor cannot be bound by Flaws. I can do as I please... for now,' the Bone Tender thought.

As all this absurdity ensued, Yuyui had watched it all.

The burst of Null Life Essence had stalled everything in the city hadn't affected her because of the Eye of Dispersal which had been open all this time, though the strain on it kept getting worse, almost forcing it shut.

And this was all with it unable to fully nullify the powers of the Bone Tender completely when they were directed at her.

She couldn't hear what was said between the Null Devil King and the BoneTender but she knew it was all bad. Very bad.

Ferex had suddenly turned into... and then...

It was all surreal!

She had slowly regained her senses as things progressed and now, she knew she had to inform Replicus about this if he didn't already know.

With rapid action, she pulled something from her storage and gripped it in her hand.

It was a grey cube, the Forced Displacer – the Legendary grade object that Black and Brown under Kenno had used to teleport around back in the Isise!

"Now, it appears you have quite a lot of secrets," the authoritative voice of the Null Devil King smashed into Yuyui, causing blood to start leaking from her eyes, ears and nose!

She kneeled down and grunted in pain as the regal figure, a king with no renown of this world walked towards her and crouched down beside her.

"You have a master, the same one who made this host. He is kin, a special existence whom I have... several guesses about. Depending on how it goes, I might kill him in jealousy," the Null Devil King said. "Hmmm. Curious..."

it's hard to glean more information from this host's mind but I can feel a tug in two directions from its body. A connection to this kin of mine. One greater, one lesser..."

The Bone Tender knew he was talking to himself but he couldn't help it. It was a habit that he did not do anything to change.

He narrowed his already narrow eyes at Yuyui.

"What relationship do you have with this kin, I wonder?"

The lime haired girl continued to spill blood as the voice of this transcendent being smacked against her. However, she mustered the strength to insert mana into the Forced Displacer and in the next moment, she vanished.

The Null Devil King smiled.

It was of no consequence. He already knew where to go for answers anyway.

With everything silent, overpowered by [Static Limbo] into motionlessness, the six presences that the Bone Tender had sensed earlier grew closer, causing the Null Devil King proxy to grin.

Thankfully, he was afforded a few soldiers by his victims, which had been his secondary objective.

These six were powerful warriors to boot.

As direction would have it, they were beings that were flocked wherever royalty settled in Serenity's prison – her jealously sought for and desired treasure.

There six were the infamous Null Badubs...

Chapter 652: Moving Pieces

Back to present time in Genhuis City.

...!!!

Within the Governor's manor, everyone except the Governor and his son grew tense, their eyes shooting towards the same direction. Even Rearren wore a look of surprise as he felt it.

At the gates to the city...

Six outrageously powerful existences had suddenly appeared outside Genhuis!

Ornamont, Gillear and Ruhrees shot up from their seats, the shield carrying woman looking out the window to see if there was already conflict brewing but from the looks of it, it seemed that wasn't the case.

Thank goodness!

"We can continue this later. Something is wrong. We have to get to the gate," the velvet haired woman declared.

"You go and stop whatever it is that's coming," Gillear said with a grim expression. "Something else rushed into the city just now. If it weren't for my surveillance, I would have missed it."

"Very well," Ornamont nodded and bolted out of the room for the gates immediately.

"I'll deal with evacuations near the gate. With what we just sensed, this is sure to get messy," Ruhrees said to which Gillear nodded before watching him leave.

"And you?" the City Guardian asked Rearren who remained seated somewhat relaxedly. "Won't you help?"

The EverSword House head smiled calmly.

"The six Houses do not respond to threats that people of your calibre can handle. Besides, I don't have a tag that says 'Guardian' now, do I?" he said, hints of mockery smothering his words.

Gillewart scoffed and vanished from sight, choosing not to waste any more time with the bastard.

The Governor rose and went to the window overlooking the city with a tense face.

What kind of threat could garner the attention of four Incandescent Stage experts like this?

A matter of this severity... It had never happened under his governance.

Rearren who remained seated was wondering the same thing.

He remained idle but whatever those six presences were... they were no trifling matter.

On the other hand though...

'What an unexpected turn of events. I had plans of my own for getting out of this but this could work as well...' he sank in sly thought.

*

Aurolio was resting on his bed while drinking a hot beverage, the cover of a white fluffy blanket giving him warmth enough to combat his shivering.

...!

Suddenly, his senses flared, having detected something particularly nasty from the far distance to the gates of the city.

With a single step, he appeared downstairs where Idline was reading a book as she sat on the couch and yanked her outside the mansion.

The woman was used to being dragged around like this and whenever Aurolio did so, more often than not, it was something serious.

"What is it?" she asked.

"My answer is here," the white haired young man with a naturally pale face said nonchalantly.

"What answer?"

"Why I came here. What the old creep said," Aurolio explained in the most vague of ways possible.

His body shuddered a little and he turned in the direction of the Bryne Family Residence, his face hardening a bit.

'That confirms it then. But first...'

"Let's go," he said to Idline, his and her figures turning into blurs that streaked towards the gates.

Along the way, the two passed another speeding individual headed in the opposite direction.

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"Ah, kin. So you are the one settled in this rich land..." an authoritative voice sounded with selective immensity.

Skullius collapsed from his seat, the strength in his body seemingly struggling against an unseen dominion!

Still, Silrat and Stylla couldn't see what he was seeing for some reason and had even rushed to him with concern as he laid on the floor, struggling to muster the strength to rise.

The Hybrid Luman groaned in frustration.

He watched as this mysterious being, the Null Devil King, approach Silrat and Stylla from behind with an eerie smile, its tenebrous eyes then focusing on Stylla with intrigue.

"Curious..."

In the Null Devil King's sight which still saw humans as hazy outlines with flames within them, Stylla appeared with a brutish blue fire buried within her. It was large but not nearly as large as Dionas' yet at the same time, it seemed almost equally as eager.

The BoneTender in the Null Devil King's body could still recognise emotion very well as an entity well versed in the art of manipulation. From Stylla, it could feel the fire burning within her screaming with confusion, rage, depression and most of all... a yearning for strength and clarity!

"Truly curious... a different brand of ambition..." the Bone Tender said as its touch fell on Stylla's cheek. It just couldn't resist. What fate would befall such a cretin?

Instantly, the red head who had been showing concern towards Skullius relaxed. She wore a smile and drowned in a state where she was very receptive.

She then felt a harmless intent vibrate through her body.

"Do you wish to gamble on it? Glorious, empty bliss that may last for all undone time?"

The question was posed, requesting Stylla's decision.

Bliss?

Stylla only wished she could taste it.

Her apprehension towards the direction she had decided to go with for the Bryne Family, her father's curse and the treacherous brother of hers who had brought down the waning light of the Family...

Indeed, she wished it could be dealt with. If that was what bliss was supposed to be then so be it!

Who cared if the bliss was empty, whatever that meant?

Despite her hesitation and critical thought, Stylla affirmed.

She wanted this bliss.

A deck of cards unfurled itself before her, giving her options for a different fate.

Skullius' eyes widened.

What the flesh was happening? What was this creature and what were all these cards for?

What was it doing with Stylla?!

Silrat turned to the red head, surprised by her sudden shift in behaviour. He didn't know what to make of both Skullius and Stylla behaving so strangely.

"Damn it!" Skullius cursed. "I don't have time to be cautious now!"

Instantly, several luminous golden white bones tore violently from his arm, at their ends giant skulls with different numbers of sockets!

The Precept of Light was being summoned, but only partially as it merely touched the ceiling, the mouths of the skulls on it hissing out bountiful white mist!

The Null Devil King watched in surprise.

"Curious, dear kin..." it said while turning from Stylla who was reaching out to grab a card.

Skullius frowned and inserted mana into his storage, a slender suit of red armour appearing – the Conforming Trickerteer – the symbol of a half a skull on it. It immediately took on Skullius' appearance and raced towards Stylla while the original Hybrid Luman tried to stand.

"Ah..." the Null Devil King expressed his amusement, a look of recognition shining in its dark eyes when it saw the rushing, transformed armour.

At the same time, the roof to the house burst into small chunks, a blinding, pristine light shining inside the lounge where all was taking place from a massive sun that sat directly over the Bryne Family Residence!

Chapter 653: Rapid Response! (1)

Capital Knights and Capital Order Knights were already rallying towards the gate, all thanks to an inconspicuous signal that had been sent by fellow Capital Service combatants stationed at the lookout posts. This was done in order to not cause panic among the larger majority of civilians in the city.

For the most part, it worked.

The Capital Knights lead those who had been waiting to go through screening outside the gates inside promptly, and quarantined them so that they wouldn't spread news of the silent approach of an unusual enemy.

Each delay of the inevitable burst of panic counted, and the full force of the Capital Service began to mobilise, prompted to such drastic action by higher level combatants in the hierarchy who recognised the true level of the threat.

Other than Capital and Capital Order Knights, Honoured Level personnel rose up the wall, looking beyond it.

Four Mages decked in pristine white robes, in their hands tall staves of different quality, stood over the mighty height separating the outside and Genhuis, their silence telling of the fact that they were reading the situation through the ambient mana.

Two Tamers could also be seen, the lustre of their ivory armour, different from the silver that the lesser ranked members of Capital Service wore, giving reassurance to their capability.

The dash of flair as the colour matched the snow also made them stand out, though that wouldn't contribute to the fight ahead.

Despite the large number of combatants ready to guard the city, their collective presence could not be compared to that of a tall and aloof woman who stood at the highest point of a large building

close to the gate in the city, her velvet hair featuring playful curls billowing in the wind while a thick shield rested on her back.

With her eyes that saw it fitting to give the current crisis their attention, she identified six enemies in total, approaching Genhuis from two miles out.

Their slow march was incredibly eerie.

It was like a march performed by the incarnated forms of despair, terror... and emptiness.

To make matters worse, it wasn't actually slow.

It only looked slow to incompetent eyes.

These things were pretty fast, but something around him distorted the weaving of mundane reality to give the illusion that their grand approach would last for an hour and some.

They were spaced equidistantly from each other, the space they covered surrounding close to a third of the city wall.

"What are those things?" Ornamont frowned, her caution and apprehension melding together to bring her focus to its peak.

These creatures had different appearances and sizes, but it was obvious that they were part of a similar collective.

The tallest among them was 3,5 meters tall and strangely muscular while the shortest was no more than a meter in height and unnervingly thin. While these creatures had humanoid appearances – for the most part – they had varying excess... additions, to their forms that rubbed everyone that looked at them the wrong way.

Despite the plentiful differences though, the look in these creatures' eyes as they marched towards Genhuis was the same. Be it from narrow slits, or large, circular sockets, the same dim, sky blue glow suffused from their eyes.

That calm light... that calm light made Onarmont's frown grow deeper.

While she was looking over these creatures, she heard the ring of thousands of feet trampling over the ground within the city, their destination seemingly being far away from the gate. Ornamont didn't need to turn away from the threat ahead to know that a certain Paladin Champion was evacuating the civilians deeper into the city.

That worked.

There was most certainly going to be a hard fight here from the looks of it.

A few seconds later, a vibrant dash of orange light painted the city generously, along with a terrifying explosion from deep within the confines of Genhuis.

A massive sphere emitting dazzling radiance had descended from the sky, leaving it with only a single sun. This ball of light which had acted as surveillance sat over one of the mansions in the distance and shortly after, the residence was smashed apart with startling viciousness.

For this, Ornamont had to give glance.

'What Gillewart was talking about... He must be dealing with the other enemy,' she thought before jumping to the wall where one of the Mages raised his staff, a treacherous amount of mana gathering at its head with an ominous hum.

He pointed his staff at one of the creatures in distance, completely ignoring the disturbances behind him, and a single spot of unsteady energy the size of a finger nail emerged at its end before draining the light in the surroundings voraciously. It turned to a refulgent golden red hue, a blistering heat so fierce that it caused a whirling mirage all around quickly accompanying it!

In the next split moment, the spot of hot energy shot out at the speed of sound towards one of the enemies approaching the city from the direction of the gate.

The creature saw the spot of a light approach but did not move even as the hurtling radiance bulged with every passing meter, becoming a giant ball of dancing fiery death that smashed point blank into it!

An explosion of epic proportions ensued.

The ground would have a tale or two to tell afterwards, as a scorching wind blew from the point of contact to lick the combatants on the wall while plumes of smoke that rose high and frankly too far obscured the view far ahead with sparks buried within them.

Did it work?

It didn't seem like the Mages or Ornamont believed so.

When a pair of luminous, sky blue sockets emerged from the thick, intangible dark left behind after the ground was charred, no one showed surprise.

The creature that had been aimed for, one with uniformly deformed skin that looked like tree bark, all in a dark blue hue, was unfazed and unharmed. Its face which looked like it had been halfway gnawed through by rot, leaving what looked like a skull beneath its ugly skin showed nothing but cool indifference... as did the two, short horns on either sides of its head.

With its continued march, the other two Mages stepped forward and extended their staves.

The Elemental Patch had proven ineffective, so they chose to try more advanced forms of Magecraft.

One of the two swept her staff through the air from the direction where the first blue creature was to where the last could be seen.

As she did, the details of the daylight lit world vanished, becoming smothered by a darkness so firm that it was as if the very horizon had been painted into a lustreless black.

Quickly, everything five hundred meters away from the city was obscured by the dark veil, burying it within the absolute black.

It would certainly be unamusing for a regular human to see such a thing, as a feat like this was godlike but...

The Mage who cast the darkness frowned a little.

All six creatures walked out from the darkness at the same time, unperturbed, resuming their approach.

Ornamont narrowed her eyes.

These creatures had been cast into absolute darkness. From the looks of Mage who cast it, the targets were supposed to lose their sense of direction while submerged but these creatures... these creatures were immune to the absurdity of her powers.

The other Mage had been prepared to take a shot.

He funnelled mana into his staff and...

A rumbling ensued.

The ground ahead groaned over the stretch of land where the beasts were walking on and soon, the thick snow rose into the sky, followed by pebbles, then small rock, then large masses of the once intact ground!

An overbearing force heaved everything on the ground up, creating a reversal of a natural law that plunged the world below into the world above!

Gravity had been reversed!

The sheer scale of the power was frightening as for the mundane eye, everything it could see was flung up at an untamed speed, as if to relocate the vast expanse of Pelian elsewhere!

Yet...

'That settles it...' Ornamont said as she took a step forward, dropping below from the wall.

Six beasts continued to walk forth.

Even as the ground beneath their feet shot up, they continued to march ahead unperturbed, their footing looking to be the uninhabited air itself.

The Mages couldn't believe it. There wasn't even any struggle.

Sure, they had other advanced tricks but they were based on what they just shown and from the looks of it, these enemies seemed to be immune to magic!

"Stop. I'll take care of it," Ornamont ordered as she took unhurried steps to meet the enemy.

Her lone figure as she trudged through the snowy ground, her velvet hair and like-coloured leather armour pitted against it in colour, was strangely picturesque. Adding the fact that she was about to face six unreasonably powerful – or at the very least resilient – enemies, only made it even more of a legendary view.

The seasoned veteran drew her shield from her back and held it in one hand.

It was at least six inches thick with an oval shape about it, three stripes of crimson, silver and gold on its face which looked to have weathered through countless battles.

Ornamont took a deep breath.

'It would have been convenient if I could use my Territory but I don't have the skill to control the Nitros perfectly yet. I'll have to pick them off one by one, which won't be easy. Hopefully Ruhrees lends a helping hand soon,' she thought.

Generally, Incandescent Stage experts did not use their Territory near areas with other lesser combatants. It was an unspoken rule.

The blast of Nitros from their bodies could erase matter, superimposing itself on the nearby environment and unless an Incandescent Stage expert reached a sufficient level or better yet transcended the Incandescent Stage altogether, they wouldn't be able to effectively use their trump card around civilians without killing everyone and everything.

And indeed, unlike the Full Body Aura of a Advancement Stage expert or the Genuine Incarnation of a Master Stage expert, Majestic Territories were trump cards. They would more often than not sap every last drop of energy from their user, leaving them vulnerable and as such weren't used lightly.

This was the main reason Ornamont wasn't willing to use such a thing yet.

The velvet haired woman stormed forward, the hard ground under her greaves exploding into shards as she, a rare of breed of monster called a Shield Master, viciously went for an attack.

Her body was dyed in a radiant white light for a split second as she reached the horned creature that had been attacked by the Mages just now, leapt up and brought down her shield!

The speed she showed was disorienting for the onlookers.

Her arm blurred with a film of beaming white light slicing through her enemy from above.

At least that was what should have happened.

That was what the eyes of seasoned Masters saw.

Yet... it was false.

Ornamont struck an afterimage.

Her enemy had moved slightly, angling their body to the side to dodge the blow.

The Shield Master was not dismayed.

From the ground where her shield had plunged, causing an unrestrained shockwave to roll outward, she tensed her muscles and followed up with a series of swipes with the item's edge, a crackle of the shrieking air spawning each time... each unsuccessful time.

The creature dodged minimally, which was an incredible feat considering that by the time five seconds passed, Ornamont had struck close to four hundred times.

'Its nimble. In a match of physicality I'm outmatched. Worse yet, this bastard is only using the slightest movements to dodge. In that case...' Ornamont thought, '...just for a single moment...'

She leapt back and smirked, guarding her body with her shield before...

"O graceful maker of the skies, abolish all weakness from this vessel and grant it a moment of omnipotent respite..." Ornamont chanted in a low voice.

Before she even finished the last word from her sentence, the skies above had already cleared of cloud and cover, a sharp brilliance that highlighted Ornamont's body, as if spelling to everyone that she was some kind of beckoned for the heavens, descended and with it...

The Shield Master roared, a look of longing... and eagerness on her face.

White, illusory flames burned lightly over her body, entralling the Capital Service experts on the wall and almost doing the same for her enemy.

The Shield Master didn't waste time appreciating herself though.

In fractions of stalled time, she had crossed the short distance between her and her enemy, a trail of furious fire left in her charge. She rammed into the enemy with more than five times her normal output of mana, explosive strength and speed.

The result was nothing short of cataclysm.

The three Mages hurriedly erected a barrier around the city before the avalanche of snow, dust, flame and rubble bashed violently against a third of the city without care, a painfully devastating shudder humming through the ground.

It was madness.

It was unthinkable that one human, without enhancing themselves with Aura or Nitros could unleash such might.

But it was so, and this impact was subdued because Ornamont was an expert at utilising her power without wasting the majority of it.

Incandescent Stage experts, besides being blessed with nightmarish physical abilities and the ability to create a mini world of their own, were also capable of fully manifesting their blessing.

To graduate from being common to the Foundation Stage, one had to see a Priest, get their Direction read and receive a blessing from any one of the Deities of their choice.

It wasn't a grand blessing by any means, like for the Paladin Champions but it was a blessing nonetheless.

This blessing was usually dormant and would only grow when said individual raided Clusters to be gifted the Conqueror's Halo and an augmentation of their blessing for their service.

Most did not even know what their blessing could do till it grew from clearing countless Clusters.

However...

When one reached the Incandescent Stage, the blessing would awaken on its own, becoming free for them to use.

Ornamont had such a thing in her pocket.

The ground beneath the chill broke, webs of fracturing extending miles from the origin of the deafening and vibrant explosion.

Within the cover of obscurity that wouldn't blow over for a while, Ornamont stared unblinkingly at the ridiculousness before her.

'I put my back into that... dammit,' she thought as a droplet of sweat trickled down her brow to touch the corner of her sheepish smile.

The edge of shield was stuck against the jaw of her blue enemy but the monster remained still, unfazed and unmoved by her fivefold increase in strength which had smashed into it just now.

This was... this was unreal.

Ornamont drew back her shield and regained her cool, aiming to attack again but...

For the first time, the blue creature before her moved.

It cocked back its arm, moulded its hand into a fist under Onarmont's bewildered eyes... and threw a lazy punch.

Chapter 654: Rapid Response! (2)

"Urgh..." Ornamont spat a ghastly mouthful of blood as she jolted back from unconsciousness. She heaved in deep breaths and pushed against the shield which was lying on top of her.

It was dented and cracked miserably, but she couldn't spare it any concern for now.

She rose from the ground and coughed violently, the remnants of her bodily crimson flying off. She then looked around her and paused.

A torn roof was over her head, its remains still spitting out dust while a crumbling wall dropped pieces of heavy, broken stone from time to time.

Under her and unfortunately on the walls as well as the corridor to this house where she had seemingly invited herself in without knowing, blood, innards, bones and torn clothing were the fresh new interior design.

"Son of a..." Ornamont murmured with a horrified and dark expression.

It didn't take long for her to realise what had just happened.

She pulled her aching body from the floor, trudged strenuously towards the exit to this house and looked outside.

Her heart skipped a beat.

A long trail of destruction traced the small town from the east, stopping its march at the house she had just landed in.

A corridor of blood, torn and mangled human flesh – human attachments too – made its way in this direction as well while screams, some of sorrow and some of intense agony echoed all around town.

Ornamont gritted her teeth and looked past it all as if not caring for the damage. What she saw made her take a deep breath, realign her broken bones and tense her muscles as she heaved her shield.

'Duty before sentiment...' she thought as she rushed ahead.

In the distance, past the carnage, a barely visible blotch could be seen... a blotch too familiar for Ornamont to even bother guessing.

It was Genhuis City, far, far...away.

Two minutes ago.

Ruhrees walked through the streets full of crowded people going about their business close to the entrance to Genhuis, some curiously gazing at the large group of people who had been hurried pushed into the city and quarantined near its wall.

"What's going on? Did all those bastards just get free passes into the city without any screening?!"

"Relax you idiot. Or... maybe panic. Something bad is obviously happening outside. I thought I saw a few Knights rushing to the gate. They must want to keep it a secret."

"Dammit! What do we do?!"

Ruhrees raised brow as he heard the two civilians talking in hushed voices.

'I guess they aren't all oblivious...' he thought.

This served as his cue to act before the panic spread. The Capital Service obviously couldn't mask all their activity, especially if they were all mobilising towards one, painfully obvious position.

Ruhrees came to a stop and opened his mouth to speak.

"Everyone... Form orderly lines and retreat deeper into the city."

The Paladin Champion's voice wasn't too loud but not too subdued either. It was just loud enough to be heard by most of the people within the vicinity.

After Ruhrees spoke, everyone around him stopped moving and tensed, their bodies standing erect. They all then hurriedly formed multiple, slightly crooked lines and started marching away from the wall with deadpan expressions.

The sound of thousands of feet trampling against the ground resounded through a great portion of Genhuis and those who hadn't been affected by this surprisingly unnerving effect were startled but cautiously followed along.

The presence of Capital Knights in their midst as well as a Paladin Champion in his beautiful armour that sparkled magnificently, dazzling shimmering spots of starry light leaking from its chest plate and pauldrons as if to make him easier to spot in the commotion, put the remains of the civilians at ease.

Surely this wasn't some enemy attack.

But... an evacuation?

A safe one at that, it seemed!

Ruhrees gave nods to those that hadn't been affected by his compulsion after sensing their gazes. That one gesture gave an astounding level of relief, to no one's surprise.

Incandescent Stage experts, above all their unique capabilities were able to compel lesser beings with speech. At their level, they gained a profound understanding of the soul, and a massive augmentation of that unseen inner self as well. As a result, they could reach others' souls with mere speech at the very least.

Sila, the Tower General imprisoned and melded into Skullius' soul had demonstrated such expertise before in Inhone.

Naturally, there were beings like Bek, the Stray Knight whom Skullius had met in Harifrast who could compel with speech despite not being at the Incandescent Stage. Spirit Wardens, a curious and out of place existence born during the Ashing of Time... but that was a separate matter.

Ruhrees frowned as he sensed a massive spike in energy coming from the mansions designated for the visiting Families. A massive ball of orange light rested on one of the mansions, bringing with its descent a mildly blinding radiance that hid its actual outline.

Following the controlled fall of this massive sphere, the mansion exploded violently.

Ruhrees turned away. He couldn't afford to worry about Gillewart.

"You said a city guardian is nothing if not the first line of defence, right?" he murmured to himself with a smirk.

Gillewart had indeed said that when Ruhrees had first come to Genhuis.

Though given the current situation...

Ruhrees chuckled as he made his way forward, making sure that no one was left within the cluster of buildings – stores, inns, brothels, administration headquarters for various groups.

After making sure that everyone was accounted for, the Paladin Champion was about to leap over the wall so that he could ascertain if the flurry of attacks he had seen and heard moments ago had done justice to the threat when...

The wall suddenly shattered as a speeding figure obliterated it from the top and streaked through the air like lightning, covering the vast stretch that was Genhuis City in an instant while remaining airborne!

The wall on the other side was smashed apart as well, this flying figure whom Ruhrees had recognised to be Ornamont, keeping most her treacherous momentum in this unguided flight!

Ruhrees' face hardened but he didn't pay the Shield Master any more fleeting glances. Not that he could do so again anyway.

His eyes darted forward.

Whatever was out there...

Whatever had just sent an accomplished Incandescent Stage expert flying off like a ragdoll... was charging towards the wall.

Ruhrees leapt back a great distance and just when he landed on his feet, a massive chunk of the sturdy wall was blown to bits, making way for a figure that was more than two meters tall, half its face looking like it had been eaten through by an otherworldly rot... not that it had been appealing before.

Its blue, bark-like skin flexed as it skipped across the ground from its charge, its calm, luminous sockets looking around the empty portion of the city... before zooming in on Ruhrees.

The Paladin Champion's eye twitched.

'Strange... I can tell that it's monstrously powerful but... I can't actually feel any form of energy coming from its body...'

The silver armoured man cautiously examined the opponent and the Knights on the wall.

The fact that they ignored this particular creature's intrusion into the city after seeing that he was here to fend against it, told of the fact that they weren't faring well against the other five enemies.

Ruhrees promptly took action.

First...

His body brimmed with an archaic, golden light that carried a sacred, blameless feel to it... with a touch of overbearingness that sought to overwhelm without violence. For the onlookers not compelled by Ruhrees' voice, it was like staring at a calm, never ending ocean.

It was magnificent.

The Paladin Champion looked up at the sky and raised his left hand above his head. He then brought his right hand close to it and slowly made a pulling gesture.

A sharp, swelling beam of silvery white emerged bit by bit between Ruhrees' left and right hand. It grew as he continued to draw with his right, as if pulling the string to an invisible bow.

By the time his right hand reached his chest, a steady arrow as thick as his thumb with a sharp head that resembled a solid golden triangle with a striking golden gradient pointed to the sky. Immediately after it stabilised, Ruhrees released it.

'Beacon of Ardour.'

The arrow soared and quickly touched the cover of clouds above. As it did, its blinking figure shattered, producing a wide, circular ring of silver light that surged, shook and shot down a glaring pillar of resplendent light with a milky white glow onto the city.

Before anyone knew it, everything was painted in a luminous white, with hints of a rainbow here and there over the city. Streaks of colourful, erect lens flares gushed from the city walls, as if it couldn't take any more of the fierce might and had to let some out.

Ruhrees stood amidst the gorgeous scenery undaunted.

Now he felt confident enough to face the enemy head on.

With this cover of light, he could go wild and fight unrestrained without worrying about damage.

There wouldn't be any, now that he had used one his arrows, the Beacon of Ardour which enveloped everything in a protective light so potent that it could resist the crushing might of a falling moon!

As a Paladin Champion, the third ranked among twelve, Ruhrees had a Divine blessing.

It was called the Primordial Twilight Beacons.

Ruhrees could produce five arrows of light... Beacons, each with distinct and tremendously powerful effects, some of which the Paladin Champion was reluctant to use.

He could only use one at a time with a brief cooldown in-between, said cooldown usually being where he incorporated other facets of his powers in high level fights.

For this occasion though, he would trust his Divine Blessing first.

Unlike mercenaries, combatants from Families and Houses... Paladin Champions predominantly relied on their blessing after all.

Not that it was a bad thing, especially for Ruhrees whose blessing had much in the way of variety.

The blue, unsightly enemy a distance from him nonchalantly looked on, unfazed by its glowing surroundings – the radiance did not envelop it – took a step forward and then charged.

Ruhrees brought his hands forward and drew with his right hand, a bluish golden arrow shimmering within the grasp of his fingers.

"Beacon of Extirpation."

As Ruhrees uttered its name, the overbearing storm of light blasted towards the blue creature in less than an instant.

However, before it smashed into the enemy, it shook vibrantly and lost its lustre, which prompted a strange reaction from the blue Null beast.

No.

That wasn't it!

The arrow of devastating blue and gold light did not just turn dim. It shrunk!

It became so small that it was nigh impossible to see even for an Incandescent Stage expert and for its target who momentary lost sight of it, that turned out to be...

Devastating.

With a deafening crash akin to two worlds colliding, and the mercy of a golden blue hue painting the already light-burdened surroundings, the blue Null creature was send flying by something it didn't see.

It hurtled far and fast but not fast enough for Ruhrees to fail in catching up to it in the air moments later, his figure that was bathed in a starry glow of Perfect Aura – which any Incandescent Stage expert could use – flashing above the soaring enemy to deliver what would have been a definitive killing blow to any opponent as strong as or weaker than Ruhrees!

But that was just it...

The mad straight punch that sent the blue enemy streaking vertically towards the city, plummeting unto buildings protected by a divine radiance... did nothing.

Ruhrees frowned as he saw his enemy lying on bright dirt unfazed.

'Tsk.'

In the distance, a man with pale skin and white hair tied into a ponytail smirked condescendingly. He watched the whole thing and couldn't help but snort.

"Idline... none of it will work on that thing..." he said to the woman standing by his side among the crowds of glowing human beings, some still under Ruhrees compulsion and conscious enough to appreciate what was going on.

"What will you do?" Idline asked.

"I'll handle it..." Aurolio replied, his smirk growing more skewed and twisted.

"... then I'll have a little chat with that young man."

Chapter 655: Twists and Turns

One minute ago.

"Go... make sure Festos is alright," Darwel commanded.

Sevill was reluctant to leave the El Sif's side but she also placed utmost importance on Skullius' life. After finding out that his blood was purer than that of the High family, she would have guarded the man she thought was a Luminant till the end of her days, however they ended.

However, she was sworn to Darwel of the High Family, and this brought no small amount of hesitation to her heart.

Yet, she was also sworn to Darwel's command.

Whatever she wanted, she would execute.

Besides, Viccil was enough to protect the princess in her absence, after all she was every bit as strong as she was.

"Yes, Your Highness," Sevill said as she darted out of the room and Governor's Manor.

Darwel who was looking out the wide windows in her spacious quarters – a shuddering explosion of the city wall and the emergence a radiant sun over the Bryne Residence having drawn her attention outside – was relieved that she didn't have to spend more time convincing Sevill about the importance of the matter.

Something was very wrong.

Both her loyal guards had sensed it way before the commotion started.

Powerful, unknown enemies were raiding the city.

Darwel's crimson gold eyes sparked with a solemnity as she watched the crowds moving closer, congregating near the manor which was at the very heart of Genhuis City.

The humans seemed to be decent with their response to threats but the Sif were better. Nature tended to assist them in times of need, even when they did not plead for the advent of its grace.

The El Sif caressed the sunflower in a vase by the window absentmindedly.

"Viccil..." Darwel said. "...if you sense that Seville in danger, do not hesitate to go after her."

Viccil shuddered, as if she had just heard the most vile of words.

"Your Highness... She wouldn't dare die away from your side..." Viccil proclaimed while clenching her fists, the veil she wore obscuring the strained expression she made. "Has your faith in us begun to wane?"

Darwel wore a sheepish smile and turned to face Viccil with an answer.

The moment she did, a vast shadow covered her figure, blocking it away from the light outside.

The glass on the window shattered as a speeding figure shot through it, her tall, muscular frame hunched as she soared towards the daughter of the High Family.

Darwel only managed to catch a small but meaningful glimpse of this sudden enemy.

She saw a dark, exceedingly cruel grin and an ugly but deadly axe that reached her neck in a breath.

...Then blood flew.

Bryne Family Residence.

The sharp flares of light that brightened the lounge as a massive, warm sun settled on the roof of the mansion, crushing it uncaringly, attracted the attention of all – obviously – except for Stylla whose eyes were enthralled by the 72 cards placed before her and her alone.

Silrat was bewildered, but still ignorant to the enemy's presence, his sight rising to the new treachery that was collapsing on his head right now.

Skullius, with the Preeminent Attegoth growing from his arm like a huge, cancerous lump, split his focus with the Omniscient Thought Cracker and quickly deduced that the arrival of this unknown enemy had not been missed by the City Guardian, hence this descending sun.

Sadly, this wasn't exactly good news.

The Conforming Trickerteer he sent forth with an imprint from the Precept of Light, its likeness the same as his, reached Stylla but couldn't make her budge.

She was stuck in place, glued there by a firm authority that Skullius couldn't contend against.

'Damn it... My body is still sluggish...' the Hybrid Luman thought with a grunt as he faced the terrifying enemy currently being bathed in vicious sunlight just like him as the mansion shook.

What was this creature?

It definitely was Null kind but... different.

It exuded a heavy presence, one that Skullius was sure no one else could feel as well as he did.

He was susceptible to its mere gaze and its voice.

His body... no, his soul was tempted to submit to it.

What was this? Some kind of Null royalty?

'How the hell did it get here?' Skullius wondered with a tense look.

The Null Devil King gave a twisted smile to Skullius and then languidly gazed up with its hollow, tenebrous eyes.

"Ah... marvellous," it said in a voice that further crushed Skullius down, as if a mountainous weight had been dropped onto his shoulders.

The creature, decked in a beautiful, black, regal but ominous armour turned behind it where a split of a split second later, a man in sharp lapel-like suit emerged, a monocle on his eye.

He stretched out his hand and in the next stretches of infinitesimally miniscule time, blobs of sunlight streamed from the giant sun overhead to smother Skullius, Stylla and Silrat protectively.

Then, the orange sun above, a construct of his powers, dropped onto the Null Devil King without mercy.

The mansion was destroyed in an epic show, its burning pieces flying off as a dusty, incandescent mushroom rose high.

The disaster could be seen and heard from all sides of the city, the power behind it, while subdued having a lasting impact.

However...

A pulse of sky blue energy rolled from where the explosion began and tinged everything within a stone's throw blue.

Before long, everything was stuck in place, as if frozen in damned time wherever it was.

The burning rubble.

The glittering sparks.

The chaotic dirt.

The suffocating dust.

And then...

"How rude of you to destroy my kin's shack... boy."

A menacing voice sounded in the stalled destruction.

As if its uncomfortable rhythm and weight wasn't astonishingly powerful enough, the serene energy that had been expelled just now was sucked back.

With that movement of Null Life Essence – masterful as it was in another place – a breath later, Gillear, Silrat and Skullius found themselves within the clean, sturdy Bryne Family mansion again.

As if it hadn't been destroyed just now.

The city guardian was startled by this at first but hurriedly contained his surprise.

"The hell just happened?" he thought while properly scrutinising the nature of his enemy for the first time.

The Null Devil King with its long hair and golden crown that grew from the old skin on its forehead, raised its chin with extreme disgust, its focus being on the city guardian.

"Now... Kneel, boy."

One of the rulers of Serenity's treasure said.

If Skullius had felt like he was carrying a mountain, Gillear in that moment, felt like he was carrying an island.

He grunted and his sharply dressed figure smashed into the floor of the restored mansion helplessly, a look of deep surprise etching itself on his face.

However, he wasn't a City Guardian for no reason.

Gillear flicked the monocle on his eye away, revealing behind it not an eye, but a miniature sphere of unbearably scorching and hellish heat nestled his socket.

...!!!!

When it was revealed, Skullius' hair stood on end and he shuddered at the excessive pressure it produced!

If the Hybrid Luman didn't know any better, he'd think that the ferocity of the power in the miniature sun was nearly as terrifying as Somanda's ascended presence!

Nearly...

The Null Devil King – the Bone Tender – grinned with amusement.

"The living... you always have something fascinating to show..." it said, before its gaze drew away from Gillear and his immense hidden powers.

The Null Devil King disregarded its opponent, and looked at Stylla instead, an expectant glint showing in the dual hollows on its face.

In that moment, the redhead, captive to the powers of the Bone Tender, picked a card from the presented deck and unlike the rest, it showed itself to everyone within the room.

The BoneTender, on seeing which card she picked turned to Skullius with unparalleled glee.

"Null Life is wasted on you, kin. Now, dark flowers like this... yes, they are truly deserving of it."

In the next moment, as a bright white radiance flooded from outside, Stylla rose, her once lost eyes filled with purpose.

Chapter 656: Assassin

Drip, drip.

Blood dropped as Darwel stood with her eyes wide open, staring back at the figure behind her who had just swung an axe to her neck with nigh palpable murderous intent.

Darwel's eyes slowly rolled down as she panted, perspiration running down her face and back ominously. A foreign arm had been the only form of defence she had against the ugly axe, the only thing standing between her and sudden death. A slender, familiar arm.

The axe's jagged head had bitten into Viccil's arm which was wrapped around Darwel's neck. The guard had come to the El Sif's rescue just in time, which, while no one was thinking about it right now, vindicated her confident declaration moments ago.

The veiled guard pulled Darwel back, creating distance between the duo and the assailant. Even blood though was leaking from the narrow and shallow wound on her limb, Viccil barely showed a reaction, as if unfazed.

In truth, she was a bit concerned, for several reasons.

All she paid attention to right now though, was appraising the assailant in front of the shattered wind.

'An assassin?' she thought. 'That was too close. If I was even a little bit late in my response, Lady Darwel would have lost her head.'

Standing with a weird tilt of her torso was a tall woman of approximately 2,4 meters in height. She had long, wildly ruffled up leather black hair with natural strips of silver that reached her waist and downturned eyes spotting different colours – black and silver as well.

The woman's gaze was striking and one would find meeting it earnestly, with its unblinking intensity, a truly tall task without exposing the same amount of bloodthirsty vigour that was silently burning within it.

Thick white, furry hides made shockingly revealing covers for this woman's chest and waist, exposing her shredded torso and tantalising legs – part of her generous hills too. A tight leash could be spotted around her neck, but she didn't seem to mind its abusive grip.

Not at all.

Viccil moved Darwel who had recovered from the initial shock behind her and faced the enemy.

The tall woman tilted her head.

"A Deity sent opportunity just fell from the sky and I fucked it up. Hahaha... He might really have my head now," the woman said with a semi-bestial voice that resounded powerfully across the spacious room.

Viccil and Darwel frowned at the woman's words.

"Who are you? Who sent you here?" Viccil asked.

The tall woman tilted her head the other way and grinned.

But she gave no answer.

She merely pointed at Darwel with the grotesque axe in her hand, seemingly fashioned using a dried, relatively small human skull from which the triangular axe head spawned as well as a withered human heart attached to the where shaft and head of the weapon met.

This weapon emitted a horrid energy and putrid stink but that wasn't enough to faze Viccil.

"Have it your way then," the guard said.

The tall woman tensed, but while her tough muscles riddled with lengthy scars hardened before movement, Viccil was already upon her.

Darwel's body shivered at the sound she heard...when Viccil landed an overhead punch straight into the tall woman's head!

She heard the sound of breaking bones in the splits of time the attack connected and watched as she the tall woman shot with shocking speed headfirst into the floor!

However...

...!

The tall woman bounced off the floor as if it was made of some extremely animated rubber, her body rising just as quickly as it had fallen. A mad look was scribbled on her face as she returned the favour that Viccil had given!

The female guard was smashed square in the face, which made her... stagger back a bit.

"Hahaha! You really went for the kill!" the tall woman screamed in joy while throwing her axe from one hand to another. She then struck at Viccil who looked a bit distracted with the ghastly weapon only for her opponent to sidestep and take a few paces back.

Viccil frowned.

Something was terribly wrong.

'How on earth is she still alive?' she asked herself.

Looking at the tall woman now, one couldn't help but shiver.

The left side of her forehead was a bloody mess, her hair stuck to the skin and soaked in blood as well as flesh. Her skull was fractured horribly from Viccil's punch but she didn't seem to care at all.

But therein lied the problem.

This woman was a Master Stage expert.

Nomatter how powerful she was in that stage – even at its peak – even when accounting for the fact that she had a purple mana core glowing in her body, that shouldn't have saved her from Viccil's attack.

After all, Viccil was a peak Incandescent Stage expert.

She could afford to shrug off a blow from anyone not in the same stage as her but the opposite couldn't be true, especially when she hadn't sensed any complex applications of energy coming from the tall woman.

That had been the basis of her confidence in this fight but it was rendered moot for some reason.

Also...

Viccil looked at her arm and saw streaks of dull green rapidly flowing under her skin from the axe wound, searching for her blood vessels.

The axe... it had a deadly poisonous effect.

"I get it now..." Viccil said as she stared down the assassin who seemed to have paid attention to her arm as well, a mocking chuckle coming from her.

Viccil scoffed.

A flood of Perfect Aura concentrated around her right hand and she used it to slice off her infected arm!

"Viccil..." Darwel called in surprise.

The guard maiden's arm hit the floor and in the next moment, it was consumed by the green infection, turning from its ivory hue to a nasty metallic grey that bordered on black.

"You weren't aiming for Lady Darwel, were you? You were counting on my timely intervention. To eliminate me first," Viccil exposed.

The tall woman's declaration about her failure was a lie.

She wanted to mislead Viccil into disregarding hidden details. Like the poison for example. If Viccil believed that the assassin had failed at chopping off Darwel's head, she would probably dismiss the fact that she was the target all along.

The tall woman offered no objection or confirmation.

Her grin grew wider though.

As a deific light suddenly spawned from outside, bathing everything in pristine white, the tall woman stood in a strange combat stance, her figure casting a tall, dark shadow in the room. She hunched while her long arms, one of which was gripping onto her axe, feigned limpness.

A neon, dark blue glow rose from her body and then hurriedly sunk back in.

Slowly, the woman grew taller but thinner, her skin turning darker. An extra set of arms and legs rupturing her body to free themselves, creating an utterly unappealing image.

Worse yet, her four arms each spawned the same ghastly axe, holding it firmly in their grip while her legs bent to better steady her body, like a spider.

This woman...

She was a Peak Master Stage expert, capable of fusing her real body with her Genuine Incarnation!

"Viccil. Be careful..." Darwel said as she made gestures with her hands, preparing her own means to fight.

"Relax, Lady Darwel. I'm not so fickle that I would falter and fall by simply losing an arm," the guard reassured while getting into a simple stance of her own.

Could a Master Stage expert truly tank her raw physical might?

Well, if it was so, then she would see how she fared against her skill instead.

Chapter 657: All At Once

Skullius had a bad feeling as soon as the card manifested in Stylla's hand.

He knew he wasn't some expert at creatures of the so-called Null Verse, as the guidance field denoted, but his instincts warned him against what was about to happen.

What did this regal creature mean that Null Life was wasted on him?

Strangely, when the Null Devil King said this, even though he remained nonchalant in visage, his tone carried hints of a grudge, as if he was furious... with Skullius.

But how could that be?

The Hybrid Luman had never met the damn thing?!

In any case, Skullius felt that letting whatever was happening to Stylla continue was going to lead to something horrible.

Therefore...

With a thought and slight employment of mana, the Bashful Abomination appeared in Skullius' hand.

The Null Devil King narrowed its tenebrous eyes at Skullius, and glanced at the chipped zhanmadao.

Immediately, a daunting force hurled against the Null Devil King like an insidious, unseen sword striking from above!

It cut from the creature's crown... but failed to even pierce the upper rim of the golden construct before fizzing out like a candlewick!

The Bashful Abomination's basic trait did not work.

~~~

[Bashful Abomination]

<Pseudo-Mythical>

A sword carved deep in the depths of ambitious soils to aid in the growth of a newly risen General. Its origin and birthplace as well as the time it spent there gave the weapon a unique trait where anyone but its chosen master will be fatally wounded if they gaze upon it.

...

~~~

Skullius' face hardened a little and he heard the Bashful Abomination mutter muffled curses.

"Oh..." the Null Devil King voiced, if not intrigued, then somewhat surprised by the failed attack.

At the same time, Gillearth whom the creature had ignored underwent a surprising transformation.

His body became wreathed in an incandescent flame that burned from his unveiled 'eye', the collection of searing flame into a miniature sphere that produced a horrendously powerful presence.

In half a breath, the restored Bryne Family mansion was lit up by the fiendish light that exploded from Gillearth's new form... and also began to burn from the blazing heat.

Strangely, the mansion held.

A soft blue glow still kept the house intact.

Skullius cursed after sensing the explosion of power way beyond his league as well as the flame but found that he, Stylla and Silrat were still under the protection of the sunlight that had been cast from the sun earlier!

But this didn't give him much assurance.

In as much as Gillewart felt like something outside the realm of normalcy, with his bright, orange body that barely had a human outline, Skullius was sure their enemy was far stronger than that.

After all, even now, the Null Devil King showed no interest in Gillewart's terrifying power.

"Ah... you're quite insistent. At least now you may serve as an interlude to the real show," it said.

"What on Aigas is going on, Festos?!" Silrat suddenly screamed while looking at Skullius with no small amount of terror.

The Hybrid Luman couldn't imagine how someone like Silrat was feeling right now.

With all that was happening, added to the fact that he still couldn't see the Null Devil King like him and Gillewart – for some unknown reason – Silrat's reaction was to be expected.

Since the Conforming Trickerteer was left without anything to do, after its mission to rescue Stylla from her trance had failed due to the fact that she was being held down by an unseen authority, Skullius directed it to grab Silrat and rush with him out of the mansion.

And then, since only the relevant pieces were left, all the action blossomed in rapid succession.

Three drastic things happened almost simultaneously.

First, Gillear stretched his burning hand towards the Null Devil King and a ring of blue flame ignited around the creature.

The creature was amused at the showing and chose to see what its opponent could do.

Gillear was not from any Family, but he was a man with an almost psychotic dedication to protecting the city. He was so dedicated in fact, that in order to earn the title of City Guardian, he had strived to develop a technique of his own by abusing how resistant his body became once he became a Master.

He spent 34 years of his life in isolation, in a place north of Genhuis City, near the very boundary between Pelian and Emeradis. There, he constructed what very well could be the largest and hottest artificial furnace in Aigas, a construct he would spend 18 hours of the day in, in order to gain, in his words, a true feeling and essence of FIRE.

With each passing day, he made the furnace hotter and hotter until it destroyed the wide mountain range he had chosen to construct it within.

By then though, he had already gained the enlightenment he needed. Knowledge of how to give and take from fire. What the flames offered besides its immolation – light, heat, protection.

All of it became the very basis of his self crafted technique, Gracious Tinder.

The circle of blue flame around the Null Devil King was not meant to harm, but to encase, not that the regal creature wanted to leave yet.

With another gesture from Gillear's hand, a crest made from fire appeared in front of him with dazzling brilliance and zeal, its resplendent coiled edges seeming to begin a certain process.

Well... the purpose of this crest wasn't revealed just yet because right when it appeared, the second drastic shift occurred.

Skullius moved.

A half a skull mark appeared on his forehead and he used it – the Precept of Light – to move his body instead of actively controlling his own muscles to achieve the same result!

In this way, he beat the suppression he felt from the Null Devil King and brandished his Pseudo-Mythical grade weapon, though awkwardly, since he had to balance the massive tree of bones stretching from his arm.

Many thoughts ran through his head.

If this was a Null creature... no, this calibre of Null creature...

Could it even be defeated with conventional attacks?

The Grand Flame Bringer had killed the blue skinned Null beast Skullius had summoned back then but that creature was in no way as strong as this thing before him.

This thought made Skullius sceptical about whether or not Gillewart could actually harm their opponent.

Thus, instead of staking his life on the City Guardian, Skullius channelled a large burst of Null Life Essence into the Bashful Abomination, saturating its blade with a blue tint!

"Oh...dear Master, what is this unique energy?!" the sword giddily questioned, but Skullius didn't reply.

Instead, he made a serious inquiry.

"If IT affects me as badly as last time can you bring me back?"

The Bashful Abomination didn't need minutes to figure out what Skullius meant, as what he was referring to had happened just recently.

A silent ripple coursed through the Hybrid Luman's hand, acting as confirmation, and Skullius acted upon it.

The Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art was employed as with every fibre of his being, he cut down the air between him and the Null Devil King.

At the same time, he allowed the allure of [Swordmaster's Quiescence] to overwhelm his mind, body and soul.

What was born when Skullius' consciousness slid back from the wheel, was a malignant fiend that only remembered the joys of slicing through immaterial entities and tangible vessels, the edge of its lengthy sword threatening to masterfully butcher enemy and ally alike!

The Null Devil King was grinning in the midst of the violent intent being sent its way, in its hand a weapon materialising from nothingness.

A familiar weapon in fact, but only greater in rank.

The Bastard sword of the Hedonist!

However, before the result of this could be seen, a third occurrence bloomed.

Stylla transformed.

The card in her hand depicted a minimalistic caricature of a bulky man with a mighty air of transcendence around him.

This was the fate she had chosen.

The redhead felt a wild gush of power burn through her like a flood of lava and she shrieked bitterly, the agony she felt so great that it nearly drove her to madness.

But such was the price of power, one of the prices at least.

The card in her hand, was called Knowing Might – at least that is what the Bone Tender named it.

The holder would inherit power equivalent to what they imagined the ceiling of the concept of power was, either through someone they knew, something they had seen or something they deeply desired.

A young boy from the Belvion Union had picked this card also and gained power equivalent to that of a Master Stage expert. Indeed, for common folk, their interpretation of power – since they rarely came across truly terrifying feats of might – was strained. Thus, the child's vision of what extraordinary power was... was equivalent to the Master Stage.

However...

For someone who had seen many terribly powerful experts and many Cluster beasts as well as Generals like Stylla...

Her vision of power was vastly higher.

But more than that, she knew exactly what she would want from said transcendent power based on her current ambitions.

The ability to heal abominable curses.

The ability to build a stronger Family.

...And the ability to attain satisfying vengeance.

As a result...

Stylla's body changed.

Her flesh grew many, many times more refined, some of her features changing to get filled with immense vitality from their previous sullen, weak and unhealthy state.

She grew taller, her muscles more taut and tough, her eyes sharper and focused.

On her back, a pair of dark, webbed wings spilled and unfurled themselves while her mana core shook and discarded its blue glow for a purple one!

The air around her turned devastating and she breathed out a satisfied breath.

Unfortunately, she wasn't above the loss of self that Knowing Might brought.

She too sank into the mesmerising feel of abundant power.

Chapter 658: Take A Good Look

A gloomy Perfect Aura burst all throughout the spacious room in a zealous fashion, dimming down the highlights while imposing a dark blue hue on them.

At the same time, the four armed hideous monstrosity standing before the shattered window grew more pronounced with its four grotesque axes in hand... or rather, hands.

The level of power the assassin had reached was unfathomable.

A complete 1,000% increase to her abilities and stats!

Vicil frowned.

The aura, more specifically the streams of glowing essence spewing from the axes were inducing some kind of effect on the walls and floor.

A moment later, she felt her leg sink into the floor, as if it was a soft sponge.

The ground was turning soft.

It was just for a moment, but her sturdy stance was compromised and sensing that little mishap, the assassin shot in Vicil's direction with speed that far eclipsed the guard's showing moments ago!

A menacing axe cut through the air, aiming at the veiled guard's head from above.

The timing was impeccable and it would have been enough to catch most combatants lacking... but Vicil was not part of this collective.

While her body slightly tilted from the changing composition of the floor, a golden neon brilliance smothered her figure and she launched a palm strike at the assassin's wrist while angling her torso, cutting off the attack's momentum completely!

In the next moment, she gripped the tall woman's arm, pulled her close and send a dreadful jab into her chest!

The tall woman flew, blood gushing from her mouth but...

She grinned.

Her body knocked against the wall... and bounced back at twice the speed she had been launched with!

A breath later, Viccil was trapped at the end of four sharp axe trajectories, all coming in from different, difficult-to-dodge-and-block locations.

The veiled guard scoffed.

She was still an Incandescent Stage expert, a quality one bred to protect Darwel.

With her one arm, she struck at the four hands bringing down the axes, once again knocking down her momentum before they reached her body. This time, she sucked in a deep breath and clawed at the tall assassin, clutching her neck!

At least she attempted to.

The assassin, with her four legs just barely managed to escape the deadly grip, but not before Viccil's fingers pulled off some skin from her neck!

She didn't mind.

She yelped in excitement, her figure throwing itself to the wall which stretched as she smashed into it!

She bounced off it as if it was made of rubber, then from another wall, and another and another!

Soon, her figure became a continuous blur flitting across the room without pause!

Darwel couldn't keep up with it at all.

But Viccil could.

Of the two of Darwel's guards, she was the one more proficient in physical combat. She was a Form User, an advanced warrior.

Unfortunately, she could not truly express her full power

Still, she remained calm.

She would be remiss if she couldn't beat a measly Master Stage assassin based on such a trivial reason.

Her duty had no room for excuses.

In a breath, the shuddering noises of the assassin striking at Viccil relentlessly ensued. Somehow, it was as if Viccil was defending with a blade of her own because sparks kept flashing on impact, but this was not true.

Her one hand was coated in Perfect Aura and it was enough for her to deflect the four axes without getting an harm to her body.

'She's still trying to kill me, first? She's bold. Does she simply realise that I won't let her touch Lady Darwel?' Viccil thought.

That was probably the case but... something about this assassin just rubbed her the wrong way.

'I need to end this quickly.'

Vicil's hand shot forward while her body exploded with Perfect Aura that shuttled three meters from her body!

Before the assassin could react, the veiled guard had already gripped one of her hands, heaved her up and smashed her into the floor with a terrifying force.

...!

Vicil was forced to frown again.

The floor... the floor turned soft where she smashed the tall woman and soon, the two began to sink into it.

"Ah... I thought I would be more assassin-like on this assignment but things look pretty bad. At this rate, I just may not prove that I'm fit for this role," the assassin said with a nonchalant smile, seeming not caring for Vicil's grip which persisted.

The veiled guard also didn't seem to care that they were sinking deeper and deeper into the floor.

"You might want to let go. You might not like what you see on the 'other side'," the assassin warned casually.

"I can handle myself," Vicil spat with the same relaxed tone.

If this daring woman wanted to deal with her first, she would too.

Besides, if things truly went bad, she would disregard the unspoken rule among Incandescent Stage experts.

Darwel who was a distance from the two watched on as they sank into floor with concern.

The fact that someone had sent an assassin to kill her wasn't something she had expected. At least after the first weeks she spent in Pelian. She knew that humans were not particularly fond of the Sif, mostly due to their sheltered life since the Grand Wars but for there to be someone who wanted to kill her this late in the game... why?

The alliance between Pelian and Opungale had been signed some time ago and while there had been a lot of tension since, it had quickly died down because nothing relevant proceeded after.

For some reason, Darwel's father didn't send anyone over, even though she had sent a message confirming the success of the meeting with the Pelian Royal Family.

Also, Maqi, the strongest human nation had not responded.

They were known even among their own as racist men and women who were against Feinheath, the human continent, relying on other races.

Factoring this in, Darwel was already quite sure that this assassin came from Maqi. Her clothing played a large role in convincing her that her assessment must be correct as well, as only humans in Maqi liked to dress so... primitively.

'From the looks of it, she must have been watching us for some time. Was she the one Viccil and Sevill sensed yesterday? In any case, she chose to strike at Viccil first and then me. That means she's confident in being able to deal with her somehow. No, something doesn't add up...' Darwel thought.

As Viccil and the assassin disappeared into the floor, she looked at the floor below her feet.

It was turning as mushy as everything else around the room.

Darwel clicked her tongue and turned her focus to the sunflower seated within the vase by the window. She gave a solemn look to the plant and an elegant whistle came from her mouth while she gestured with her slender, glowing fingers towards it.

The sunflower twitched and became encased in a verdant green Aura that accentuated its rather small figure. A moment later, the flower suddenly grew, its stem twisting, its petals and fruit turning to Darwel mysteriously!

Once it grew up to five times its size, Darwel leapt across the room and landed on it, sitting comfortably over the brown, circular fruit of its head.

With a glance all around and on the window, the princess finally realised... that there was no chance for escape.

The room seemed to be turning into sludge over the window too, the light coming from outside turning dim and the objects that should have been clear by sight despite the radiance on them turning skewed and distorted.

'What kind of ability is this?' Darwel thought, hesitating to even analyse this physically.

Fortunately, she had never intended to escape.

She had valuable strengths that would be useful in a fight like this and she wasn't going to abandon Viccil.

After reining in her thoughts, she then waited for the outcome of the fight going on wherever her guard and the assassin had sunken unto with cautious breaths.

....

Deep within the obscurity of the squirming floor, Viccil found herself in an unsteady... reality.

Everything was dark with illusory images of Darwel's spacious quarters seemingly imprinted on the constantly wriggling darkness, like a ghost of the actual room or an inverted version of it.

She frowned.

One of the images she saw across from her was a deformed, barely visible image of Darwel seated on a sunflower while looking on the floor... behind the menacing enemy before her.

'What is this place?' she wondered.

The assassin twirled her axes and grinned.

"I did warn you," she said.

"I'm still not impressed," Viccil spat.

The ground beneath her unsteadily sank and rose but this wasn't a problem for her.

She focused her Aura to her feet and forcefully injected it into the floor to make it easier for her stand stably.

The assassin nodded, as if approving of her decision.

"Good," she said... before throwing away all her axes and sitting down – though a bit awkwardly because of the extra legs.

...?

Viccil wore a confused expression.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

The assassin raised a brow as if equally confused by Viccil's confusion, then a look of realisation swept across her face.

"Ah, you don't get it yet, do you?" she said. "Why don't you take a good look at your little princess?"

Viccil shot her gaze towards Darwel immediately and... she trembled.

Chapter 659: Severely Outclassed

Stylla grinned vacantly.

Her webbed wings whipped the air at hyper speed as her outrageous new powers flooded out like a mad tide from her body.

At the same time she let loose, an eager suction imposed itself on the air, taking in a massive draw that felt like a sharp gust of wind across Genhuis City that rushed towards Gillewart, or more aptly, the crest he had etched in the air... a crest of dancing flames.

The City Guardian had mastered the truth about fire after so many years, his understanding of it leading him to the conclusion that fire was both mundane and divine. Like living things, it needed to breath to achieve longevity and increase its strength.

However... like divines, it required some form of sacrifice and would give reward in turn.

Therefore, Gillewart had offered up his eye and nurtured a flame in his socket that drew on his bodily heat and mana for years. In exchange for nurturing this flame, he could manifest nearly any kind of construct with fire that he desired and have it be an extension of himself that could execute a wide array of functions.

Additionally, if certain conditions he had imposed on himself were met, he could sacrifice any being, offering them to the flame in his eye.

This was the purpose of the flaming crest.

As the immaculate sigil drew on the air, seemingly taking a sharp breath while illuminating the Null Devil King alone, the fearsome creature... grew excited.

To his right, a slender longsword had begun to cut down while a flood of Null Life Essence saturated its blade, and to the left, there was a dangerous manifestation of fire by a being that who had attained a rare form of enlightenment.

'So there are such beings in this land? To think I would spawn in a Rich World so casually...' the Null Devil King thought leisurely.

Indeed, there was threat from both sources... but there was a caveat.

He was vastly faster and stronger than anyone or anything in the entire city!

But still, he was getting used to this body so he might as well indulge in this battle and discover its limits as he went along.

With the bastard sword in his hand – a large, thick crimson blade with a black hilt featuring alluring, human figures – he pointed at Gillear's burning crest.

...!!!

In the next moment, the fiery construct crumbled and shattered like glass, bits of flame landing on the heated floor!

At the same time, Gillear's body that had been wreathed generously in flame, nearly transforming him into a demigod made entire of fire, was cleansed of the element, leaving him with his normal appearance!

The City Guardian's face depicted nothing but incredible shock as he knelt from the remnants of the Null Devil King's authority.

He had not expected that his high level techniques... his hard earned powers would simply be cancelled out in instant!

Even the flame in his eye had suffered greatly, being reduced in potency by more than half!

But how?

That didn't make any sense... did it?!

In the extraordinarily fast perception of the Null Devil King, Gillear's reaction left it amused beyond measure.

The blade the Null Devil King was holding, the Bastard Sword of the Hedonist, was a weapon that was especially cruel to male targets, like the sword Skullius had summoned against the goblins – the Grand Sword of the Hedonist!

The former however, was a higher calibre weapon with exceedingly overpowered functions.

It simply nullified all of the active techniques of a single male target that the user was facing!

'Now...' the tenebrous eyes of the BoneTender in the Null Devil King's body turned to Skullius who had just, in this micro moment, brought his sword down.

The mansion, which had been enduring against the flame because of the Null Devil King's infusion of Null Life Essence within it, finally succumbed.

The sturdy walls, furniture and roof was turned into smoothly butchered shards as a burst of excess Null Life Essence that coursed in every direction eviscerated it all indiscriminately while remaining contained within a limited range!

Simultaneously, what seemed like the true attack, an initially slender slit of dazzling blue, turned the gap between Skullius and the Null Devil King murky.

It grew thick and overbearing the further away it got from the Bashful Abomination, which rang lightly in the Hybrid Luman's hand, turning his vacant eyes into the normal focused, blind eyes.

...!

Gillewart's hair stood on end when Skullius' blade halted near the floor.

In a blink, he had vanished from the residence to appear somewhere distant, avoiding the rampant and focused Null Life Essence dashing from the sword!

Stylla did the same, though almost on instinct.

The Null Devil King outstretched its hand towards the incoming attack with a chuckle. The growing slit of Null Life Essence smashed into its hand with a sharp ring, like that from an old bell!

When its momentum, which had been fairly quick was stopped, the City shook vehemently, causing no small amount of concern in the frail hearts of many!

"Too crude. Too unrefined. Too much power..." the Null Devil King said as it crushed the intangible sword slash with its armoured hand!

Skullius recovered his senses quick enough through the Bashful Abomination to hear the Null creature's words and see his efforts be shattered effortlessly.

'Shit!' he thought.

He felt weak all of a sudden and fell to the ground, the Precept of Light on his arm receding.

"Heh."

The Null Devil King dug the Bastard Sword of the Hedonist into the ground and leaned against its cross guard.

"I'm amused. This is all you amount to? If I didn't sense the embers of Serenity in you, I would have been convinced that you aren't the bearer of Null Life she chose," the creature said in a mocking tone.

"Why are you using a form that limits your powers of Null Life? Why keep an imitation of living flesh? If this was a true battle, you would have fared a bit better in your true form. Haha."

Skullius took a breath and glared at the creature with his blank eyes.

The Null Devil King looked around and then returned its gaze to Skullius with a tilt of its head.

"Are you ashamed of your true form perhaps? Or are you afraid that the humans in this world will hunt you down if you show your true self? If so, I can't help but feel my respect for Serenity drown even further."

"What's it to you?" Skullius finally engaged with the creature, a scowl on his face.

The Null Devil King snorted.

"What's it to me?" it repeated his question.

"It was supposed to BE ME."

Skullius' face twitched.

What?

What the hell was that supposed to mean?

At the same time he was failing to comprehend the words of the Null Devil King, something deep within him shuddered, seemingly reacting to the Bone Tender's words.

'Urgh,' Skullius grunted inwardly.

Was that... Serenity?

A figure flashed to reach his side while another one zipped past him and stood at a distance, glaring at the Null Devil King.

Gillewart had returned, on his face palpable conflict.

By Skullius' side, a veiled Sif was standing with her eyes locked on the figure with a golden crown. She then crouched and held the Hybrid Luman's shoulder.

"Are you alright, Lord Luminant Festos?"

*

A distance from what remained of the Bryne Family Residence, the maidservants and Knights who had been in the mansion before the chaos occurred were bundled up, a ray of golden sunshine without a clear origin illuminating all of them.

Ed was among them, his face hardened by tension.

By his side, there was a bed covered by an encirclement of bright runes, the figure of Stylla's father lying silently within.

The Knight had noticed something strange going on within the lounge a few minutes ago but when he went to investigate, he and everyone else had been teleported outside the mansion as a massive sun fell on it.

When he sensed the calibre of powers clashing in the mansion at that time, he had decided to stay here with the others instead of rushing for Stylla. It didn't seem like he had what it took to make a difference.

Ed took a long look at the bed protected by runes.

Things were spiralling into madness too quickly.

What was even going on?

The Knight clenched his fists.

This sense of powerlessness he felt... it was only eclipsed by his ignorance to the current events!

While lost in thought, Ed blinked and found that he wasn't the only one standing by the encircled bed anymore.

He wanted to unsheathe his sword but when he got a close look at who was near, at the woman who had just appeared in less than a blink, he felt strength leave his legs.

"Lady Styl..."

He paused.

The look in Stylla's eyes forced him to shut up... that, and what she did next.

Chapter 660: Princess Is Not A Damsel

Vicil saw something unexpected before her very eyes.

She had constructed and deconstructed multiple theories about what this assassin's abilities were and what her goals, the more intricate sub objectives of her mission, were.

When it came to said tall woman, she concluded that besides her overly hardened and raw battle spirit, the assassin was exceptionally confident.

She too had deduced that this woman was Maqi, but not in the same way Darwel did.

She guessed it judging by her temperament and style alone.

The ruthless and callous style where even a lethal blow to the head was not enough to wipe off the smug look of ecstasy in the bowls of battle, the daring guts to challenge an Incandescent Stage expert to a fight even while knowing you are not match...

It had to be Maqi.

Worse yet, this woman was quite capable of restraint even though she was an.... 'assassin.'

As far as Viccil knew, and she had done a lot of studying through the extensive records of humans from Opungale, Maqi had NO assassins.

Their brute nature discouraged 'cowardly', overt murder arts and encouraged violent, semi-honourable face to face confrontations. This had been a tradition millenia ago, and Viccil was willing to bet that there were no changes.

However, for this specific event, it seemed someone who had the right repertoire of significant skills – impeccable timing, swift dispatching abilities and adequate containment capabilities – was needed.

The job, as Viccil imagined, was to kill Darwel without anyone knowing who did so.

It was likely that anti-Divination measures were even employed, given how such an assassination order was being carried out.

Thus this woman was sent.

The thing that made her incredibly effective though, as the veiled guard had analysed, was her weapon, which was the source of this uncanny effect on the room.

"Lady Darwel!" Viccil called.

In her sight, the obscure figure of Darwel sitting atop the large flower – the reflection of the princess she saw across from her – was melting!

The El Sif seated atop the sunflower looked at her hand and saw it start to droop like burning plastic.

Somehow, what was happening to the floor, was happening to her body!

"Damn it!" Darwel cursed.

Her legs started to turn soft and rubbery as well which almost made her fall off the sunflower to the floor!

Immediately, the princess responded by decking her body in a verdant green Perfect Aura that reinforced her body, making her several degrees tougher... but it didn't work.

Though the limpness grew a bit slower, the process of her flesh and bones turning squishy did not stop.

Viccil watching the absurdity within the peculiar space frowned and zoomed right up to the tall assassin. She smashed her fist into her face which instantly exploded... into blobs of bubbly rubber that flew far only to whip back to the tall woman and reform her visage back again.

"It's no use. Brute strength isn't going to work," the assassin said with a languid, yet bestial voice.

Viccil drew back and looked for the axes she had discarded in the unsteady, constantly wiggling floor.

The tall woman smirked.

"Looking for my axes? That isn't going to work either. I did make it obvious that they were the ones causing the changes – if they can even be called that – since the start, but I guess you didn't think to take them away from me," she said while placing a palm on her cheek.

"They are Mythical grade objects, right? They are bound to you. So taking them away wouldn't have stopped anything," Viccil said while stealing glances at Darwel.

The assassin laughed.

"Right, right! You're right!" she said with the most unattractive giggle possible. "You were fucked from the very beginning. The princess at least."

Viccil breathed out with a scowl.

'But you threw them away as soon as you trapped me here. You're also afraid that I might do something to them. I could simply destroy them, right?' she thought.

The tall woman looked to enjoy seeing Viccil grow silent.

Luckily for her, time was on her side.

Or so she thought.

'Well, she clearly not stupid,' Viccil analysed. 'She knew she couldn't beat me from the start, even with her unnatural resilience which is likely coming from her axes. Even now, this strange effect from her axe, it doesn't affect an Incandescent Stage expert like me.'

The assassin would never divulge the secret behind her axe but Viccil was beginning to figure it out already.

'The axe probably has the primary effect of producing a very deadly poison that can kill even an Incandescent Stage expert like me as long as it enters my body through the right channel. As for its more advanced effects... it changes the properties of non-living objects? No, living things too, probably if they are close and weak enough.'

What's worse, the axe can allow the user to manipulate the altered composition of the materials, creating separate spaces, like this one. It must be dangerous to try and disrupt it without thinking it through though. What else? The axe also multiplies and grants its user multiple boosts to their physical attributes too, huh?...<Sigh>...'

All this information nearly exhausted Viccil.

This was a troublesome situation.

She glanced at Darwel again.

"You seem a bit nonchalant. Don't you care at all that your pretty, pampered bitch is dying?" the assassin mocked.

Viccil gave a muffled laugh.

"Pampered? You're underestimating Lady Darwel a bit too much," the guard said with confidence.

The assassin raised a brow and turned to the El Sif.

In the original space where Darwel alone could be seen, a complex array that looked like a floral pattern weaved itself before her.

She had her eyes closed as she focused on it, giving it the utmost care she could muster without using her hands.

When it was complete, its layers of intricacy smothered with a verdant glow, the array sank into the fruit of the sunflower she was sitting on and prompted a switch in the mostly docile flower!

A flood of nigh infinite mana burst through the sunflower, its dark green roots breaking through the vase it still struggled to sit in and forcefully plunged into the rubbery goop that was the room's walls and floor!

Hundreds of these roots shimmered and eagerly reached into the room with a dull glow about them.

Some of them also extended upwards to sink within Darwel's body, connecting to her blood vessels tenderly.

The flower seemed to take a breath.

Actually, it did.

Its yellow petals were then tinged with a golden glow, the sunflower gaining another increment in size, this time double its already giant mass!

Slowly, the room's integrity began to restore itself and so did Darwel's flesh, much to the assassin's suspicion.

How was that possible?

This was the effect of a Mythical grade treasure!

For it to be countered by the powers of one individual...

What WAS Darwel doing anyway?

Vicil smirked.

When it came to situations like this, the El Sif, the woman she was sworn to defend was very, very capable.

Vicil and Seville were only there to guard her against unnatural circumstances the princess couldn't beat, but that didn't mean Darwel was helpless. She was a Master with powerful abilities of her own.

Most of these branched from her Class and racial qualities, her class being an advanced one.

The Natural Tamer.

With it, she could tame all plant life – plant-type monsters included – which was extremely simple given the power within her blood that made nature and even mana subservient to her.

However, her true power didn't lie in merely subjugating plants under her will. It lied in awakening them as well.

...And the awakening of a plant, as she and a few other El Sif knew, produced an explosive amount of PURE MANA that raged within the plant, bringing out its latent properties or simply augmenting its pre-existing qualities.

For humans, pure mana was created in the Centre of their mana core and was eventually transformed in the Refinery, but for plants, it was sustenance and the source of growth!

The glowing roots within the room were radiating an incredible amount of Pure Mana that forced the room to turn solid again by literally holding it together. Within Darwel's body, the same effect was achieved.

This wouldn't last forever though.

In fact, the effects were already begin to wane.

A sunflower was only a sunflower at the end of the day and thus its awakening would only last for so long and with poor results.

The simplicity of the plant and its temporary enhancement was seen through by the assassin who stood up from her seat.

"I see now. So that's how it works..." she said. "The plant is still affected by my axe."

The four axes she had discarded leapt up from the floor and shot into her clutches.

"It won't last long. All I have to do is stall until the flower dies, right?"

"Will you be able to live long enough for that?" Viccil said with a dark look on her face, a milky burst of energy starting to rage out from her body.

The tall assassin grinned as she felt the traces of Nitros.

Viccil wasn't going to hold back, it seemed..

"Let's find out," she said with a laugh, not caring for the danger coming ahead.

As the two women clashed in the spacious darkness of Darwel's quarters, a few stories above them, a man seated on a chair with dignified poise suddenly smiled... and spoke.

"Looks like time's up. Talk about impeccable."