

## Undead 771

### Chapter 771: What's Buried There? (1)

The air turned chillier for some reason, drained of any prospects of hope as Actuass arrived, and compelled the five contenders not to move. The hazel gleam behind his mask shimmered as the souls continued to fall, and were fed into the intricate symbol below.

From here, the masked man dared not let his attention be stolen by anything else, as when he had extracted the souls of those who had given enough authority to their Control Seals.

There were stragglers who resisted, most of which either survived because they were simply that strong; such as Incandescent Stage experts, and some who were exempted because perhaps while not as strong, they had given less power to the Control Seal by refraining from entertaining whatever else the Royale offered besides the consistent transportation.

Actuass couldn't be bothered with them. Fighting with them had higher chances of leaving him too weak for what he needed, and thus he left them to run around. He would choose what to do with them, if he so wished, after acquiring what was buried here.

Revia looked at the towering mass of Undeath energy with a look of discomfort.

She remembered that she had been the central piece to bringing what was here to 'life'. She hadn't had a choice back then.

As a Spirit Warden, Actuass found a use for her. Even though she was barely in touch with her rare abilities, he had invested a tremendous amount of Creeds to enhance those abilities, and used her to fetch something from a place she had not known of until a few months ago.

A place hidden from her knowledge by the Purity and their false teachings that post death, there was a place for reward and one for punishment.

Revia hated herself for it, but she couldn't undo what was about to happen here. She could only keep convincing herself that she wasn't on Actuass' side, but was using him to correct, at least, some wrongs she wanted righted before a reckoning.

Her 'condition' could be cured after all, and she was a piece in his hands.

A complex look showed on her face, and she gazed at the five people behind them.

As her eye fell on Darwel, she shuddered a little.

'We'll be invoking the wrath of Opungale too, it seems...' she thought.

Fulina, the other woman by Actuass' side kept an eye on Revia, and could seemingly see right through her hesitation, a look of something resembling reproach swelling in her eyes.

Rias descended from his height, and bowed reverently to Actuass, though with his face remaining as hard as a rock.

Actuass didn't turn his head to him, but as his voice came, it was clear who he was talking to.

"You did well. Though, I can tell you had a hard time."

"I had it under control," Rias said, a little disappointment hidden in his tone.

Actuass remained silent to this, but then said, a moment later, "Go join your father. Your work is done."

Rias nodded.

He gave the five contenders one last look, dispersed the deer head and summoned an Arcane Teleportation Scroll from his storage which he used to leave.

Actuass then extended his hand upward, and the opening from where the souls fell from grew larger, the speed with which the souls descended increasing many fold, such that the green and black tower of energy turned to a whitish green from the sheer quantity of gleaming souls travelling through it!

It seemed tens of thousands of souls passed into the glimmering engraving on the ground every second, and with such a rate, muffled wailing howling throughout the entire process, setting up an

eerie vibe, it wasn't all that shocking when the tail of the vast mass of glow finally showed from the gaping pit in the sky.

Then all the souls were finally consumed.

The tower of Undeath energy turned weak, and feebly receded from its height to also sink into the engraving on the ground, branded over a large bulge of dirt.

The large formation carved on the ground gave an excessively bright glow that seemed to announce that it was fully saturated, or everyone aside from Actuass guessed.

What was this?

The trembling light in Skullius' eyes depicted that he was truly curious about this. Warily curious.

First, he hadn't had the time to digest Actuass' appearance. The last time he had seen him, it was when he was burned alive by Somanda manifesting through the object known as SoSei.

Naturally, he couldn't have known that was not Actuass' real body.

However, he hadn't exactly believed that Actuass was dead since then, but in his mind, he had begun to think that perhaps the man behind the mask, was an idea, not a person. Perhaps he had been replaced.

But evidently, that assessment was sorry.

The person in those robes and mask... it was the same man Skullius met back then.

The voice was the same.

The presence was the same.

He had a formidable pressure of Undeath about him, one that by far exceeded that of the Death Knights that always came in for roll-call back in Deadmanland.

And as if his intense apprehension wasn't enough, he recalled Aurolio's words about Existential Parallels and their bearers.

'...You, and some Undeath user or users out there are my enemies...'

Actuass... he had to be the bearer of Undeath here in Aigas, right?

There had to be one given that Undeath had solid roots in this world, ones that he had first learnt from his time in the Tremur Forest (where he appeared first after escaping Somanda).

However Actuass met Somanda, and was given the power of Undeath was beyond Skullius' guess but...

But what was the masked man up to exactly?

It was nothing good, Skullius was sure, and it seemed that this was only the Green Neolists' plan. Then what about Guissepo?!

Where had he gone?!

A long sigh broke Skullius' train, and chain of thought.

It came from Actuass.

"I'm finally here. After all these years. It's ready," he said, a bit of sentiment in his voice. "But... we still a few more souls remaining behind us. Might as well..."

He turned to the five, and the hazel gleam behind his mask gave a suffocating blast of pressure to the captives.

"You are the only ones remaining with the Control Seal," he said, yet his gaze seemed to turn elsewhere too, and then return to them. His eye hovered over them, and in an instant the group knew he was gazing at their Units.

Skullius '12,550', Darwel '8,100', Maxim '7,500', Vali '2,410', Gabel '3,200'.

"The Units were a way to liberate yourself from being a part of this. Leave this place through the gateway, and you would even be rewarded. But, it seems only one of you qualifies. The rest..."

...!!!

The Control Seals on each of the five took on a bright glow, and their owners felt them start to burn away, but with an unpleasant sensation building up!

Yet...

There was a ripple from Gabel so light it could hardly be seen.

With a nasty jerk that looked as though he had cracked every bone in his body, he moved... and so did the others.

Using a force of will foreign to normal human beings, Gabel had reversed time on the instant they had all been compelled into turning still by Actuass!

Indeed, it had been more than three seconds ago, but Rias had been right about the dark-haired, dead looking man's capabilities possibly being much greater than the ones his saber had managed to emulate!

A Veneration art was not a simple Technique with reasonable limits, and thus, with enough sacrifice, it could be used past what one was capable of even in the feeblest of states!

This was such an instance!

The moment everyone turned free, with Gabel grunting blood from the very bowels of his body, it was as if the cells within their bodies were set alight.

If given a chance to survive...

Maxim seemed to be fastest to act. Her watery Aura roared and she funnelled every fine unit of mana she had into creating her paper thin Centipede Incarnation which zipped through the sky and blew out a wave of Aura.

In almost the same instance she had kicked into high gear, Revia and Fulina found themselves turned flat, panes of a thin glass-like material around them!

It was an astounding feat, but...

Actuass remained unaffected.

He merely stood there, watching the group, no visible signs of alarm from him.

Skullius was next. Like a streak of lightning, he had rushed towards Actuass and swiped mightily with his sword, and Darwel behind him had called for a large, humanoid tree from seemingly out of nowhere, while in her hand, she kept squeezing at a ring-like object eagerly.

Vali summoned a lilac flame behind her, and her mind raced as she thought of what to imagine.

Her previous powers were already wearing off after lasting for roughly two minutes, and that was after she had something to help her imagine what she desired. What would it be now? Would it even work?

She had thought to mobilise her clones which were still holding the surprisingly tame Cluster General, but thought against it.

Actuass obviously knew about them, and was ignoring them because they were likely no threat to him.

"Stop," Actuass said again, in a tone of voice that sounded exasperated, and everyone was forced to stop again; Skullius as he slashed, Darwel with her ring in tight grip, Vali with the flame on her hand, Maxim concentrating on her Incarnation and Gabel kneeling down.

"A fine effort," the masked man said.

As he spoke the Control Seals over the five continued to burn away, and the number of Units above seemed to start flickering, with the exception of Skullius'.

It was happening as Actuass said, as Rias had said.

Without enough Units, the others would die!

Their souls would likely be added to the formation on the ground, and from Actuass' tone, they weren't even necessary.

It started with Maxim.

From her mouth, a glowing globe began jutting out, and her eyes rolled.

Then Darwel followed, her body starting to turn limb even as she was forcefully frozen stiff.

Then Vali, and Gabel.

Skullius sensed all this, and he shuddered!

'NO! he cried from within, desperation strangling him like a noose.

They were all going to die!

They were all going to die!

Skullius' soul ached at the thought. Even if he didn't have much connection to most of these people, it was still a dreadful loss, especially with Maxim and Darwel, not to mention Tallo, wherever he was!

He imagined this was happening to him too!

Skullius knew he would carry a bitter, tragic feeling if he survived this ordeal like this!

It couldn't be...!

A distinct feeling pinched from his soul!

This couldn't be!

It couldn't...

...!

"Be free!" a feminine voice crashed into Skullius' ears right then. His body suddenly became light, and he was no longer restrained.

Someone had countered Actuass' compulsion, and the light steps that sounded behind Skullius announced the arrival of the help he so desperately needed right now!

With veiled faces, two powerful, loyal guards had burst onto the scene.

But could they change anything?

Chapter 772: What's Buried There? (2)

As Sevil called out to free the five, she immediately rushed to cover Darwel's mouth, pushing back her soul back into the enclosure of her body successfully!

Unlike Masters, Incandescent Stage experts could manipulate souls and handle them like tangible objects if they so wished, but the circumstances here were different. The Control Seal kept pushing out the souls of those without enough Units, and the struggle didn't seem like it could be stopped with a mere palm acting as a blockade.

Vicil, on arriving, glared at Actuass who didn't look quite as surprised with her arrival. He merely looked exhaustedly at her. Thankfully for him, the incapacitated figures of Revia and Fulina were restored, and after they wiped off the slightly dazed looks on their faces, he turned to them.

"Stall them," he ordered.

Fulina nodded, and Revia turned to the assigned foes reluctantly.

Viccil tore Skullius back, and pushed him towards Seville.

"What took you so long?!" Skullius found himself blurting at the Sif guard just as she was about to bound towards the enemies.

"I'm sorry Lord Luminant. We couldn't escape that stadium to come here until 'the game ended', as that masked man said. Even he seemed to be bound that," she explained curtly what was a complex story, before rushing ahead.

Skullius and Darwel's plan to survive the Royale's extra (main) purpose, had mostly depended upon the two guards. They had guessed that there would be a lot of unpredictable obstacles, and had thus simplified to their plan to:

Find each other if separated.

Call for help when things start looking bad.

Darwel hadn't lied when she said she was sent here from Opungale without any powerful treasures, but she did have a special ring that allowed Viccil and Seville to know her location and state of mind. Squeezing it was the signal for them to come rushing.

At this moment, Seville with her free hand, imposed her will on the souls of Vali, Gabel and Maxim, stopping them from flying out from them.

She didn't have to, but felt it would be better if she did.

Skullius looked on as she grunted heavily, struggling to keep a hold. The gears in his Omniscient Thought Cracker spun, and he tried to find a solution.

'Think... think... think...' he thought, as he looked for anything useful.

Were any of the items in the Royale useful?

He only had Draw Bubbles mostly, and they didn't look to have much use. Perhaps if Grutus had shared his stash of items, but it didn't seem like the EverSword House would place anything which could counter their plan within the Royale grounds.

Wait!

Skullius looked at Maxim, and then at Darwel.

The former had '7,500' Units, and the other... she had '8,100'.

What had that Hun guy said again?

Units could be shared, right?!

You just had to either touch or gesture towards the person you wanted to give said Units to, right?

Skullius turned to Maxim, and then to Darwel, then Seville. The Sif guard looked to be about to let Maxim's and the others' souls slip since she wasn't actually holding them!

The Hybrid Luman could save only one with his Units... but he wanted to save them both.

Darwel was crucial to his growth, and beyond that, he didn't consider her a mere nuisance anymore. He couldn't just let her die.

While not that connected with Maxim, Skullius felt a firm, foundational bond between himself the pink-haired woman. Ever since they rallied together to battle Baddan, Maxim had had his back, and they had interacted naturally from then slowly growing to know each other.

Ever since extracting the UNCoddled curse from himself, Skullius had regarded creating a network of friends and allies highly important. That was why he and ... and uhm... that was why he had decided to meet up with other Families at the Bryne Estate to discuss terms of partnership.

To finally grow where he had failed before.

Discarding someone like Maxim, felt wrong given his resolve. Or perhaps there was excess sentiment involved that even Skullius didn't recognise.

Perhaps, perhaps not.

Still, on seeing Seville struggle, Skullius rushed to Maxim and willed – with immense hope – 2,500 Glass Units to be added to her own!

As soon as he wished it, the flickering counter above Maxim showed a '10,000' and her soul, which had been struggling to leave slipped back into her mouth, and consciousness was restored to her.

With a jolt, Maxim panted, and looked frantically around before laying eyes on Skullius.

"It's alright! It's alright! I've got you," he said to her with a slightly complicated, albeit soft expression, and Maxim opened her mouth to speak, only to not find what to say.

"What did... what happened...?" she asked.

"Later! Not now," he dragged her to her feet and rushed to Seville who looked to have her burden relieved a little. The other souls didn't look to be close to sprinting away.

Skullius, concerned, turned at the numerous Vali clones. They were all conscious, which was rather strange, and he figured that they knew that fighting Actuass was probably a stupid idea, but one of them seemed to be gesturing something to him.

Vicil on the other hand, on seeing Fulina and Revia approach as they had been ordered, extended her hand towards the large humanoid tree which Darwel had summoned, which was now standing motionless, its eyes looking to its tamer who was held by Seville with what could only be concern.

'Thank you securing this for me, Lady Darwel...' Vicil, pleased that she at least had something to use, thought.

She was limited to her raw physical prowess whenever high quality natural elements weren't close, just like when she fought the Maqi assassin months ago.

However, whenever needed, Darwel, with her Fauna Keeping abilities, usually awakened rare plants for her to use.

After all, Viccil was a Form User. The rare kind that only Opungale could produce.

The tall, humanoid tree turned its gaze to Viccil, and leapt up to reach Viccil's position where her extended hand touched it.

A vicious, steamy glow ruptured, and the large tree turned bloated up, as if filled with an enormous amount of energy, more in quantity than that which had been sustaining it for hours. It didn't just grow bloated though, it turned from the dirty-brown colour it normally had, to a golden-brown and parts of its branches stretched to Viccil and sank into her, as if the armour she wore didn't exist.

Astonishingly, Viccil's body became decked in a ragged, golden-brown wooden crust that somehow managed to not look like a ridiculous coat of bark, but an archaic suit of armour without the neat for stylish add-ons.

But that wasn't the thick of it.

The rest of the humanoid tree burst into small, brown buds that rained all over the place and in an instant, exploited the mana rich ground to birth large, slanting trees with strong, golden-brown barks livid with what seemed like boundless Aura.

A thick, crooked woodland had suddenly formed around Seville and the others, with the trees that made it up wrapping protectively around the vulnerable Gabel and Vali.

The sense of fortification the closely knit domain of trees gave was unparalleled, and Revia, as well as Fulina didn't dare approach it casually.

Viccil got into a steady stance, her palm extended before her, and she spoke with a chilling voice.

"Keep still."

Both Fulina and Revia were stunned, compelled to not move.

However...

"Keep going," Actuass, who was behind them, commanded and they were set free. Viccil frowned behind the helm of fortified wood. She had expected this, but anyway...

Without warning, she punched forward, and with a crackle in the air, and a hazy, violent ring of air roaring ahead in fragments of time hard to discern, an unknown force shot towards Revia!

Right before it reached her, its invisible mass suddenly turned into a pointed mass of interlocked branches that erupted, stabbing wildly, and expanding madly like a contagious disease!

The force of it was astonishing, probably powerful enough to impale the Cluster General easily, but...

Revia wasn't skewered within the mass.

As soon as the tangle of branches had shown itself, she had already sprung forth, flying at hot speed towards Viccil and, with her sword which quivered, making the blade look like mist, she slashed dozens of times at Viccil before the Sif guard even imagined to send a counter attack.

'Nothing at all...!' Revia thought before dashing away, almost unseen. Her attacks had accomplished nothing. Barely any nicks could be seen on Viccil's wooden armour.

'She's fast. Too fast...!' Viccil gave her own appraisal of Revia. 'Attacking her directly might be futile, but...!'

Viccil stomped on the ground, and a sleek stream of Aura bore through it in a ripple, and where Revia set her foot, a root shot out and wrapped around her ankle!

Revia looked in alarm, and in a moment, she slashed tens of times at the root, but barely any scratches showed on it.

'Damn it!' she cursed, a disgruntled look on her face.

"You could try to be a better actor, Revia," said a voice from behind. "However you try to convince yourself to not kill 'innocents' won't exempt you from being one of us, as YOU decided."

A loud thump followed Fulina's words.

A broad, armoured figure suffocated in a light, red mist stood before her, a pitch black plate armour covering its exaggeratedly short figure.

Four spindly, blistered arms that sprouted from its chest gathered, and summoned an irregular ball of howling energy that, just from sight, set itself apart from mana and Aura.

It was Divine energy. Primus!

...!

Revia frowned as it appeared and at Fulina's words. As the Primus was fired past her with the same force as dozens of cannonballs towards the armoured target...!

Vicil didn't cower from it. Instead she burst forward, crossed her arms, and ran up meet it!

The bizarre explosion that followed on collision left the air and sparking, as though something was disturbing its usual flow. Yet, this didn't last long.

Skullius having witnessed the entire exchange gawked at the armoured midget, and its spindly arms.

'That looks like...' he thought in horror.

He recalled a creature that looked much like this dark armoured monster. An armoured undead creature that had a longer arm fitted with multiple other smaller arms to hurl curses and elements in addition to what it could already do!

He, Elita and Red Rage had fought and killed it!

So it was this woman that made that thing?!

Soon, it was revealed, after the obscurities passed, Viccil, half her wooden armour torn, as well as burnt. The same was true for her armour underneath.

Fulina didn't look surprised.

She was more surprised by Viccil rushing to meet a ball of Primus than her surviving it.

She locked eyes with the Sif guard, and in the temporary lull, she understood that to contend against Viccil, she would have to empty her current storage of creations, and get Revia to fight with the intent to kill, which, she seemed to not have towards people she was still too soft on.

...But that wasn't part of Actuass' plan.

Surely they weren't going to engage in full.

Fulina turned to Actuass, and saw him crouch down and place his hand over the shimmering engraving.

Slowly, she watched it crumble, along with ground on which it was branded onto, to reveal a large pit where faint wisps of energy rose.

Fulina's eyes narrowed, and she relaxed.

Right.

When she saw something rise from the pit and stand before Actuass, she knew... it was all over.

Chapter 773: What's Buried There? (3)

No one could have expected the tension to suddenly soar as much as it did then. There was already a lot going on; Sevill trying to stop the souls from flying off, Viccil facing off against Revia and Fulina, Skullius trying to decipher what one of Vali's clones was gesturing to him for the distance.

Yet, what Actuass was doing forced a pause and drew much attention from everyone else.

What this had all been for was finally revealed in the figure that appeared from where the large formation had been. A large hole stood in its place now, after Actuass had activated the complex seal that.

Actuass had had something buried here from the very beginning of the Premium Age Royale, and now, as it seemed, it had acquired enough sustenance.

First, Actuass had smothered the seal with a massive amount of Undeath energy to facilitate a reanimation process, and then, to draw what he needed from a place far, and deep, he had supplied his process with an unfathomable source of energy.

Souls.

Souls without consciousness. They were a very efficient fuel as Actuass had discovered.

After all, no human alive knew about souls better than him.

Skullius gulped. He didn't dare shut off his Crude Vision. It almost seemed as if he had been compelled to stand still, as his body refused to move out of place.

However, [Primal Caution] was issuing a consistent warning in his mind, at times trying to force him to just run away, something that hadn't happened before.

Maxim at his side was sweating profusely, her face turned pale. Her hand was squeezed into a tight fist, and it didn't seem like she was doing so to get ready for a brawl.

Sevill also looked deeply concerned, and it went without saying that Viccil too was stunned. The two, as the only other Incandescent Stage experts here beside Actuass, could see what the rest weren't paying attention to.

The blue clouds were swarming above Actuass and whatever had stepped from the pit, seemingly against their will. The mana in the air vibrated as if it was part of a spectrum leading over to what Actuass was facing.

Something was terribly wrong.

Something powerful was here.

Revia had turned to Actuass, a concerned look on her face. She knew what was coming, and it wasn't what most were expecting and assuming at all.

It was worse.

Actuass took a few steps back, and gave the figure before him, some room.

It was a man.

A tall man with a rather chiselled body proportioned well enough to not make him look too burly. As he wore nothing on his torso, his sand toned skin revealed the taut muscles underneath, and his arms powerfully threaded with thick veins that seemed to supply more mana than they did blood, wildly increased the feeling of superiority he gave the willing and unwilling audience at a mere glance.

His heart shaped face, packed with nut brown upturned eyes, a button nose and a light stubble could not have looked more ordinary, especially with the ruffled up black hair over his head.

Yet, past the appealing physique, everyone who could see, spotted something unusual about this man's body.

There were cracks on it, tinged with a fiery glow, as though his body was a heated pot. Worse yet, these cracks spread every second, and where they intersected, there was a light hiss of burn that turned his skin dark.

It was impossible to tell if this man was aware of this or not, but since Actuass didn't pay it any mind, nowhere else could.

Not a sound could be heard for several seconds.

Everyone had quieted down, the whole vibe in the air seeming to have forced them to witness what occurred next.

Skullius in particular felt overly disturbed.

His <CURSED HEART> thumped fiercely the more he kept looking at that tall man, and [Primal Caution] was practically fighting him for control.

Run.

Run.

Run.

Skullius couldn't understand. Sure, he was greatly frightened by the whole thing, but so was everyone else from what he could see. But why...

Run.

Run.

Why was he getting this feeling of dread and...fury?

What was that man to him?

Who was that man before Actuass to him?

Skullius' hand jerked forward, and his feet almost sprang backward, devoid of his control, but he held himself back.

Run.

No.

Run!

No!

RUN!

NO!

Actuass then spoke.

"As I promised. The view is quite different outside the den of spirits and souls isn't it? Not as crowded, and not as dangerous..." he said.

The tall man's eyes stared sharply at him, and for a moment, it looked as though Actuass nearly buckled under the gaze. The man then looked up at the clouds gathering.

"This isn't Aigas. I remember it being the sky that was blue..."

As the man spoke, it was as if his voice inspired an image into the minds of all who heard, showing exactly what he meant by his words.

Everyone saw the picture of a bright sky with white clouds and a shining sun that wasn't partial with its light.

The natural Aigas sky.

"It isn't," Actuass said, his voice attaining a deeper tone. "But you can have a look if you please."

Skullius' heart thumped wildly again, such that Maxim turned to him with an anxious face, wondering where that drumming sound was coming from. Even Seville was partially distracted by the beat from her withholding the souls, which for some reason, insisted on running even when the formation that drew them was gone.

Perhaps that was related to why the last contenders had the number of their Units still showing above them.

The Hybrid Luman felt a part of him drawl out from within.

[Evil Darkness].

[Just Light].

The Fruit of World Myths.

He felt the three dish out a forceful wave of intent that forced its way against his consciousness.

'What is going on with me?!' Skullius wondered, furious at why he always had problems with his powers like this.

Control over his own body was getting tragically difficult right now, and it seemed to have been triggered by the sight of that tall man.

For a moment, Skullius thought perhaps...

'It's not me tomato flinger! IT'S...!' Sila began but failed to finish his sentence, as his voice was drowned out by an influence as vast as a sea rising from within the Hybrid Luman's body.

As his heart pounded harder, Skullius found himself getting drowsy, his thoughts slipping.

'Come on! Not now!'

This seemed to be the trend with him. Whatever powers he encountered always seemed to want to take control of him.

Undeath.

Null Life.

And now, the Insurgent Magnus powers were rebelling.

Though in this instance, Skullius couldn't help but remember something he had heard about legacies. Something he heard from a rather insignificant person he had met in Inhone City, Frock the merchant.

He had been the first to tell him about legacies rarely leading to anything good. That legacy creators always seemed to have unfinished business.

But why was Skullius thinking of this right now?

Was this what was happening to him?

As Skullius thought on this track, he got a frightful realisation as to why this could be, but as he set his eyes on the tall man again after nearly submitting to this ongoing struggle, he found that the tall man... was looking right at him unblinkingly!

...!!!

Actuass was surprised to see the tall man turn his focus.

He followed the man's line of sight, and saw what had taken his interest.

"What is the meaning of this?" the tall man suddenly asked, his voice like loud thunder that exploded near the ears of those who heard it.

Actuass turned back to the tall man.

"What?" he asked, confused. What was it about that auburn-haired man that was so upsetting?

"That young man..." the tall man said, and he walked past Actuass, taking a few slow steps before coming to a stop.

Skullius dropped to the ground, but his eyes didn't look away from the blackish-whitish view of the tall man.

Slowly, he was starting to recognise it.

The body was different, which was probably why it was burning away, but the soul was the same. The same unbridled soul that he felt every inch of his Insurgent Magnus powers react against.

Maxim tried to help Skullius up, but he stopped her with a few words that left her surprised, and pulled himself past the small woodland Viccil had made. He trudged forward, and came into unobstructed view.

Everyone was turning to him now.

The tall man wore a deep frown.

"Is this a coincidence or was it a part of your plan too?" he asked, but Actuass who had followed him, recognising that this was a question for him couldn't understand.

He had been about to ask when...

Skullius couldn't hold on anymore.

'I...can't... hold...!'

He felt the WILLS of Fulgardt overwhelm him, and soon he was crying aloud to the sky, his body bellowing with an astounding show of power that far exceeded his current.

A torrent of blacker than night darkness and golden-white, almost sacred light poured incessantly from Skullius in all directions, burying everything it touched!

The same wave gushed towards the tall man, and Actuass, quite alarmed by this, hid behind the man's broad figure, which, as it seemed, was like a plague that the powerful mass of darkness and light avoided!

Sevill, blinded by a mass of darkness had almost lost her grip, but she persisted, at least with Darwel in her grasp.

She felt Viccil's conjured woodland around her crumble instantly, and in her attempt to keep a calm thought process, she found herself wondering...

What was going on with Sir Festos?

It seemed she didn't know him as much as thought she was getting to.

And this, may have just been his biggest secret!

For a full minute, everything was hidden behind the chaotic clash of colour and might, and when the outpour had started to die down, a loud scream that shook the world violently sounded from what had been the source of the fierce rush of power!

The clarity slowly started to slip back to the senses, but it was still muddled by the ear-splitting noise.

Roaring into the sky with his arms spread out, was not the auburn-haired figure that most had expected.

It was a man, if it could even be called that, with very long dark hair that reached his waist. Another face different that which everyone else knew, could be seen now, but it could have just as easily been an intricate mask because of how solid and firm it was, morphing strangely.

The crimson black armour Skullius had worn was gone. His torso was left bare once more, and tufts of darkness like hairs could be seen on his wrists and ankles, and over his waist, a thickly dark band of clothing, like a towel that reached his knees, with a golden white strap to its middle could be seen; it was the only form of clothing he had left.

The tall man wore a grim yet nostalgic face before he started pacing towards the figure which turned to him and hunched over, as if its spine had suddenly been damaged.

There was a momentary silence.

Silent eyes looked at this meeting in shock.

What was going on?

"And here I thought you too died back then, Fulgardt," the tall man said, "I merely thought human Divines like you had a separate place in the Yormuness..."

The long haired figure shook, as if trying to contain its rage, its face that was hard to describe somehow depicting emotion.

The tall man formed a complex gesture with his hands, and a weak smile appeared over his face.

"I remember 'fondly' how you liked to fight in this form. I won't give you the advantage," the tall man said as an enormous amount of mana blew from him and rapidly formed a bright Nitros layer that coloured the world in solid white.

At the same, a loud, croaking voice shot from the long-haired figure.

"| You will die like before, Rayn! |"

An eager torrent of darkness spun like a mini, ball-like tornado before the long-haired figure's face, and fired off to meet the incoming wash of paint-like Nitros!

When the two met, the world around them could only submit to the excessive powers battling within it, and give up in its attempt to contain them.

...And then an enmity that dated back millennia was reignited, unexpectedly.

Chapter 774: Beckoned Ancient Powers!

The unstably flying ball of verbally powered darkness clashing against the tremendous wave of Nitros was disastrous. All the onlookers only remembered the world whirling and breaking when the two powers met.

Massive chunks of land broke off and spun, trees were hurled messily in all directions, and the sky seems to crack and crash like a broad, dark board while the clouds swayed as if they were soup in a circular bowl!

Those still alive felt as if they were pulled on violently for five long seconds and then...

The Cluster burst like a bubble, and its distant horizon filled with a variety of landscapes shattered as it was merely an depthless canvas of glass!

...And as this world's many pieces flew out vibrantly, the bright sun of Aigas shone on all things, its cloudy sky overlooking what had just occurred.

Yet, as it turned out, with a keen eye, it became clear that this place, where the purple Cluster had been, was a large island surrounded by the blue sea.

It was far from Feinheath, its coordinates known only to Actuass and his operatives who could flit in and out of the Cluster, the location of the Royale, as if it wasn't a ridiculous feat when the Cluster General was still standing.

Sadly though, the location of the Royale was of very little concern when compared to everything else going on right now.

While mounds of the Cluster world which had exploded fell all around them, the figure spawned by one of the Nine Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths, [Seramoro Oblivion's Edge], looked on at Rayn, the blessed child from eight millenia before, the most trusted Royal Knight of King Edricus Royan!

Was it fate that they had made again, and so unnaturally?

The latter's soul had been packed into a different body, but his power was as vibrant as before, though, evidently it was eating away at the inferior flesh it sat within.

Rayn's body had been the only one that could contain his soul, and with how he had grown during the Second Grand War, his soul coming to be baptised with more power when a portion of the Deity Quintess dwelled within him, it was only natural that the vessel Actuass had provided, after successfully having found Rayn within the Yormuness with Revia's help, and making a deal with him, would not be enough.

No other body could match his original mortal vessel.

For now that didn't matter though. Rayn almost hated Fulgardt as much as Fulgardt hated him, though right now, the former Royal Knight couldn't ascertain whether or not what he was facing was Fulgardt or remnants of him.

He remembered this form of Fulgardt's.

It had been a staple of evil since that one fateful day when he had banded with other vessels of the Deities to fight Fulgardt and had him cornered.

It didn't seem to be nearly as powerful as it had been back then, but with that verbal manifestation...

"Veneration..." Rayn said, his eyes calm. The large clot of Nitros around him had clashed with Seramoro's 'voice' and diminished somewhat.

Just because of that ability alone, he couldn't relax, even if Fulgardt was weaker.

[Evil Veneration], it was called.

~~~

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration | 1% ]

<Verbal Veneration Type>

Words delivered with an evil and cruel intent will be actualised to reality to a certain extent. Due to the art being a lesser form of the true 'Evil Veneration', the use is limited to short phrases and the efficacy varies depending on luck and how cruel the intent propounded is. Differences in strength barely matter, unless opponent has reached a high Realm of power.

~~~

Rayn's wariness soared.

'Must be because he is using a vessel. We might in a similar boat.' he thought, feeling his body crumbling as he exerted his strength.

Another mystery.

This body was too weak. Why had he been placed in such a significantly inferior body? Did it belong to a lowly Incandescent Stage expert?

His eye darted to Actuass who was a distance away, watching closely.

This body.

Fulgardt.

'How much of this did he plan?'

The look under Actuass' mask would have answered one of Rayn's suspicions. The masked man was quite surprised.

With his knowledge of very old events, he was able to recognise the truth behind this coincidental occurrence.

'Fulgardt? Fulgardt's legacy... So it was taken after all?' he thought, as he looked closely at Seramoro – Skullius' form. He hadn't had even the faintest reason to think that one of the contenders would have it. He didn't recognise Skullius for that matter, since the Hybrid Luman looked vastly, vastly different from when he had last seen him.

Besides that, he too had suspected that Skullius was dead, since, as he recalled, his master Somanda, after manifesting through the treasure he had given him, SoSei, had pursued him.

Actuass didn't know why, but he had imagined that Skullius was dead. There was no way he could have survived.

Thus, he couldn't tie this form to him. However, that didn't change the possibilities that could come from the plethora of outcomes riding on this conflict he hadn't foreseen.

'In the end, as long Rayn comes out on top... Better yet, if fighting such an opponent can weaken him further with that deteriorating body, I'll consider this another stroke of good luck,' Actuass thought, and he then eyed Revia, and Fulina who were hidden in different locations over the island.

At that moment, there was a mad ploughing noise, and the island shook.

Seramoro had leapt up, and zipped like flash that caused a heavy, chaotic winds all over the island towards Rayn!

Rayn ran up to meet the long-haired figure and the two smashed into each other, causing a large chunk of the island to crack deeply!

The two locked fingers, and stared dead into each others' eyes.

Then...

"| Let it warp you! |" Seramoro exclaimed in a croaking voice.

Around Rayn, the space whirled, twisting exaggeratedly to distort the former Royal Knight's body along with it while a scratching, rhythmic sound echoed.

The part of the island they were on twisted, the land arching to the side like rubber!

But...

"Cheap," Rayn mocked, and his Nitros burst out fiercely in solid white, forcing the turning space to straighten back to stability!

**BOOOM!**

The power behind his expelling of Nitros split the whole island into four rapidly, and the waters around it poured upwards!

"|Your mana revolts!|" Seramoro called again as the two detached from each other.

Rayn's terribly powerful mana core groaned, and mana gushed out of it before beginning to rebel within his mana channels, attempting to rip his body open!

To this, the Royal Knight looked a bit concerned, and as he stalled for a micro moment...

"|Raaaaar!|" the long haired figure simply screamed in his face, and a warping mass of revolving darkness blasted tremendously against him, forcing to skid along the ground yonder!

This was quite the mild effect on an enemy, but to everything else, it was as if the world had turned dark when Seramoro screamed, and the tree littered lands behind Rayn were turned to dust!

Again, Seramoro followed Rayn, its movements like the incarnation of angry winds, and it called loudly "|Crush!|".

Decked in unfathomable darkness, Seramoro locked its fingers and hammered down on Rayn with an unreal crushing force that forced the Royal Knight to get dipped into the ground which slithered inward like mud!

Rayn blocked the attack with his arm which was layered with Nitros. He was less concerned with this physical attack than he was with his mana within, which was out of control.

"|BLOAT!|"

Furious darkness sank into Ryan and attempted to make him blow up from within.

"I'm fighting a mere husk," he said with a deeper frown on his face, his body expanding only for a second before it reverted to normal.

A flurry of punches that threatened to atomise the whole island – broken as it was – rushed from the rampaging Seramoro, but Rayn blocked them all, gripped his opponent's neck, and leapt high with him.

He flung Seramoro hundreds of miles away, and watched it bounce on the surface of the sea before it made a sharp brake and raced back towards.

In the meantime, he gathered his control over his core and resisted the earlier 'You mana revolts.'

Looking at the incoming Seramoro again, Rayn scoffed, unamused.

The way it moved, running wildly, but with purpose as the long, dark hair flew every which way.

The hatred was its fuel.

Too bad the one who was used as its vessel, was going to be a victim.

Actuass had hurried to move out of the way of the great battle given that the scale of the clashing powers were enough to turn him into collateral damage. He sped over to Revia, grabbed her and then raced with her over to Fulina.

"What do we do now?" Fulina, her trust firm in Actuass, asked.

"We wait," he said.

"And the others?"

"They never mattered."

Speaking of these others...

When the Cluster world shattered, Seville had been separated from Maxim, and the still incapacitated Gabel and Vali. Thus, the two's fates seemed to have turned for the worst.

For Vali, many of her clones had been destroyed when the Cluster was destroyed, but a few remained, split from the Cluster General they had been holding down.

One of them however, had kept track of the main body's location, and this was the same clone that had been gesturing something towards Skullius. The clone had seen the original body's soul start to flow out seconds ago and had sent out all the mana it had been given back to the original, as most of the other clones had done before getting destroyed.

And now, as the soul was moments away from slipping out...

'Hopefully, this works...' the clone anxiously thought, trying to steer activity for its unconscious main body.

Singular Cellular Extract.

The clone activated this ability for the original body, and with all its focus on the mana reserve, it intended to use the Singular Cellular Extract traits to the fullest – extracting her 'truest essence' from this original body into a flesh bud that rapidly grew into the new original Vali – and that included extracting her soul too. Or least, part of it.

Right then, with Cellular Extract active, the original body was made into the clone, and a flesh bud started to fall from it. The soul which had been escaping was pulled on; both by the influence of the Control Seal, and by that of the skill.

In the end...

RIP!

Vali's soul was torn, a larger chunk of it flew from Vali's body, and the smaller part was absorbed into the bud.

The flesh bud rapidly grew into Vali, and she emerged screaming at the top of her lungs from the agonising pain.

Called by her scream, the figure of Maxim dashed towards her, and with a dark face, she recalled Skullius' words before he turned into... whatever that was, and what he had placed on the ground.

'Give this to Vali.'

In Maxim's hand, was a vial of golden potion that Skullius had dropped from his storage. A Supreme potion.

The larger chunk of Vali's soul flew towards Rayn, and sank into his body as he wrestled Seramoro. It created a ripple of light as it dissolved through him, and the former Royal Knight narrowed his eyes. Unfortunately, he couldn't afford to tear off his attention from his opponent longer than that.

In the same moment, he thought he saw another soul hurtling towards him as well, but somehow, it didn't reach him. Or perhaps he was too distracted by another booming roar that came from Seramoro to see properly.

Rayn swatted the blast of darkness away.

'His moves aren't at all complex. Neither are his words,' he thought as he blocked a powerful punch from Seramoro that rocked through the sea, and extracted dead sea life that floated on its surface.

'This is a waste of time. He doesn't seem to have any of his other abilities,' Rayn said before dashing back. He made another complicated gesture with his hands, and his Nitros rushed out to cover the other broken chunks of the island!

In a second, the entire space where Actuass, Revia, Fulina, Vali, Seville and Viccil were, was covered in a solid white coat, as if all worldly detail was erased. And then...

"Majestic Territory Expulsion: Deific Moonlight Paradise," Rayn softly called.

In an instant, a ripple of colour, a sandy gold hue, replaced the white, different gradients of it showing with height. Specks of hazy golden lights flew in the massive space, their source being largely clear.

Every living being felt a powerful suppression.

Vali, Maxim, Revia and Fulina felt their mana rebel against them, refusing to spill from their mana cores and into their mana channels.

It was only natural.

The basic function of a Territory, was to cancel out lesser forms of energy and break away the possibility of the enemy countering with their techniques.

As for what else it could do...

Rayn, with a solemn look on his face, then clasped both hands together, and in a dreamlike sequence, a massive city began to materialise from behind him, covering the entire golden horizon with a cluster of different sized buildings stacking up with the distance.

They all bore a brass-like, golden colour, a polished shine glittering over them whether they featured the lining of bricks or were plastered. Rich palm trees showed from the streets, and small pools of clear water could be spotted in secluded areas.

Just over the city, a gigantic silver moon showed off a faint rainbow halo over the city, and shockingly, several human figures could be seen bowing or raising their hands towards the large construct from different spots around the settlement!

The beauty of the image was stunning, but it wasn't a mere background. It was all real, brought to life by skill and power.

The walls of gold turned transparent after the image was formed, showing the outside of the Territory – the real world – vaguely.

With the Territory fully realised, Rayn glanced at those trapped inside.

'Impressive. Incandescent Stage experts who can block the passive effect of my Territory...' he thought at the sight of Viccil guarding Maxim and Vali with a solid, bubbly white Nitros, Sevill guarding Darwel, and Actuass guarding Revia and Fulina with the same.

Rayn's eyes then turned to Seramoro whose body seemed to be turning into an illusion.

"You are not unkillable in this state are you, Fulgardt?" he said, and the moon sitting above the city swelled threateningly.

Chapter 775: Deific Moonlight Paradise! (1)

A notification flashed in front of Seramoro, though it could hardly care for it. It all spelled one thing with extended specificity, though in the same casualness as when Skullius was still an Undead in the Tremur.

Immense danger.

[Congratulations! You have royally screwed yourself by entering a Majestic Territory!]

....

Seramoro let out a blood-curdling screech as the light from the enormous moon above hit it with its smooth, pale glow. The effect on the long-haired figure, was that it was turned hazy, like an illusion. But that wasn't all.

Far from it.

Seramoro wailed and knelt down, huddling against itself like a foetus. Upon closer inspection, it seemed that only its physical body was turned into the see-through apparition by the moon. A solid, short form with a bright glow was revealed under the mortal vessel!

A battered and incomplete soul that couldn't even fill the body.

Around the soul's edges, a ghostly steam rose softly, and as it did, the pitiable soul was eaten away, parts of it seeming to travel as gorgeous flakes of white up to the moon.

This was what caused Seramoro great pain.

Rayn looked at this vessel with an uncaring visage.

"Time has been eaten away, Fulgardt. Histories, Families, and legacies as well. But, this moon... Under its bare light, even the sturdiest of concepts have to reveal their most delicate weaknesses.

You are NO exception. You NEVER will be..." he said coolly, and the moon seemed to swell once more, as though Rayn was its sun.

Seramoro writhed.

Majestic Territories were among the fiercest powers in Aigas.

Incandescent Stage experts and above were the only ones with access to them, but it was no small feat to project a Territory.

Even the most talented Incandescent Stager could only conjure a murky-textured colour scape around them when they finally learned to express their Territory for the first time.

Besides arbitrary inflations to their physical ability as well as technique efficiency, their Territories would have nothing else special about them, and could even be countered easily by similar Staged experts without them having to express their own Territories.

It took skill, past layering the solid white Nitros, to colour it as one pleased, and to create an Imaginary GeoScape; an extraordinary structure of the user's desire that allowed them to exploit the strengths of a Territory.

Only by laying out a vivid environment encrusted with personalised objects could one develop the Primary, Second and Tertiary abilities of a Majestic Territory. These were entirely separate from the ERASURE of energies that occurred as soon as a Territory fully enclosed around its target. That was simply an effect of creating the Territory shell.

What was exerting over Seramoro at this moment, for instance, was a Primary ability of the Majestic Territory, Deific Moonlight Paradise.

Moonlight Revelation.

It was a passive Primary attack that made the physical body of the target irrelevant, and slowly dealt damage to their soul. Though 'slow' was subjective. It depended on the opponent.

Primary abilities were usually passive, and a stronger user could create multiple of them. However, within the Territory, the Passive effect was limited in its power. It was supposed to be an environmental effect at best, not a world breaking attack or defensive mechanism.

Sevill and Viccil watched with hard, hidden faces as Seramoro cried out. Seeing the revealed form of the soul captive in this vessel, and how far it was from looking anything remotely close to graceful was a great blow. The two Sif guards couldn't help but feel a pang of fury on Skullius' behalf.

Sevill was preoccupied with withholding Darwel's soul, thus she couldn't even dream of racing to help Seramoro, or as she saw it, Skullius. Viccil on the other hand, she felt an increasingly growing dilemma within her mind.

A bubbly, solid white coat of Nitros was around her, encompassing Vali and Maxim as well, and any offensive strategies she had which she thought would work to save Skullius, could only work if she was moving alone. And if she left these two, they would undoubtedly fall prey to the Territory's Moonlight Revelation.

It wasn't a question of loyalty. Besides this reason, Viccil didn't know if she could change the situation. This Territory was incredibly sculpted, and absurdly powerful. Her own couldn't even venture to clash against it in the best of cases.

Even now, the Primary attack, Moonlight Revelation, was devastating her Nitros layer quickly, even though she wasn't being actively targeted.

The tall man definitely wasn't an Incandescent Stage expert, otherwise she wouldn't be this nervous.

All a weaker Incandescent Stager could do against a stronger Territory, was to guard with Nitros. Because of the physique attained when one reached the Incandescent Stage, it was possible for an expert to delay the effect of energy ERASURE within a Territory long enough to transform their mana into Nitros.

With just this, Viccil could only hope to defend against a Primary attack from this Territory. Anything else...

Actuass, a distance away in this massive Territory, observed. He too was decked in Nitros, but like Sevill and Viccil, he felt it rapidly crumbling, forcing him to exhaust more of his mana to replenish it. Luckily...

'The cracks on Rayn's body worsened since using the Territory, but not by much...' Actuass thought, a hopeful look showing from under his mask. 'It's adjusting. Both effects will calm it.'

The moon grew brighter, and it got worse for Seramoro. It grunted, and curled but nothing changed. The pain grew more severe, the agony harder to endure. And this was before the Secondary attack came.

The Secondary ability of a Territory was rarely ever ready to use as soon as a Territory was projected. It wasn't a problem for beasts who were able to constantly express their Territory in a dormant state, like Azila the Great Mane Mountain Ape, or the Grinning Jester Fox, but not humans who had a limited usage to their Territories.

Rayn was waiting for the Secondary attack to charge, which showed by the swelling of the moon, but he didn't take pleasure in the prospect of killing Fulgardt. After all, this wasn't exactly him, and he didn't know if it was the ONLY HIM.

Suddenly, as he gazed at the writing Seramoro, he found it standing up.

'Not going down that easy, huh?' Rayn thought unsurprised. But he didn't approach.

The moonlight intensified after a ripple of added power droned from under his feet to push the Primary attack of the Territory further against Seramoro. It could be bolstered manually.

Seramoro howled once again as the pain turned even more excruciating, and the soul visible through its body was reduced in size by a third!

The outside world, visible through the transparent sandy gold walls of the Territory trembled at the moan of pain.

...And Seramoro persisted, standing upright even as it screeched disturbingly.

For while the pain increased, Seramoro's hatred and fury for Rayn, the very thing that summoned its will, grew.

It was like a stabbing sensation that bit behind its second face, causing it to become restless. And as a result...

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration | 5% ]

...

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration | 20% ]

...

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration | 65% ]

...

Its prowess grew.

Seramoro's body started to shrivel up, as if being wrung from the inside, something pulling on what it could to sustain itself. Its soul was even rapidly drawn on, as if a portion of it – besides from the damage from Moonlight Revelation – was also used to give strength to something else.

Rayn frowned.

'The vessel it is using isn't capable of resisting the lock on its mana. How is it...?' he thought frustratedly.

In the next moment...

"|RAAAAAAAAAAR!|"

Seramoro roared at Ryan, and large ball of distorted darkness spawned and flew at the former Royal Knight so fast that the rest didn't see anything but a crippling shadow a moment before a loud bang! The depth of the darkness had been so great it had temporarily shunned the golden glow within the Territory!

Rayn emerged unharmed though.

Before him, what looked like silvery golden sand was whipping on and on in a messy tangle, dismantling what remained of the dark attack just now.

This was another Primary ability of his Territory. A defensive one.

Moon's Guardian.

The tall man's attention was drawn back to Seramoro, and he found it trembling, withering even further.

Then...

"|@#&\*!" the figure uttered unknown words with excruciating emphasis, as if speaking from its gut. A mass of darkness spilled from before its second face, and slid to the ground like a dark liquid.

...!

The darkness then turned solid after flowing to Seramoro's side, and began to form a tall, blacker than night stalk that rose to hang limply over the long-haired figure. With what was most definitely immense difficulty, drape-like objects, coloured in the same dark matte, emerged from the tip of the stalk and cast a deep shadow over Seramoro.

The shadow was quite wide, and it discontinued the flow of the moonlight from anywhere near the long-haired figure, cancelling the Moon Revelation over it!

"Absurd," Rayn remarked, disgusted.

He was looking at a terribly ridiculous feat, yet all he could think of was revolting it was; the payment to achieve this.

Veneration again.

A Veneration art was not the same as a technique branded onto the body. Limits could be surpassed by giving sacrifices and supplying power that wasn't the usual requirement.

Rayn had seen it. The shrivelling of the flesh, the usage of soul energy. Mana wasn't the only way to power a Veneration art.

And the results of the sacrifice couldn't be denied.

Seramoro knelt down, his body now fully physical again, and the outline of its soul safe and hidden within it.

And then...

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration | 95% ]

The darkness around Seramoro grew stronger, the spreading shadow blocking the lunar enmity lorded over by its greatest foe, granting it more strength and reckless resolve.

A suicidal resolve fuelled by hatred.

Chapter 776: Deific Moonlight Paradise! (2)

'TOMATO FLINGER!'

Drowned in the influence of Fulgardt's legacy, Sila could only call out to Skullius who was buried under the thick, sea-like prison with him. Probably.

The Tower General couldn't see where he was, and he hoped he could find him soon. The situation had turned more perilous than before. When they had died, at least the two had had a plan, and wouldn't have been delivered to Somanda's hands.

That had been the brighter path.

But now...

With the constraining of the dark sea Sila was trapped in, which spelled that death – true death – was approaching, it was the worst time for the true owner of this body to be missing.

What was coming wasn't simply the destruction of the body.

The soul would wax into nothingness too.

Even Somanda wouldn't get what he wanted!

This was gravely concerning to the Tower General.

'Tomato flinger... Forgive me if this goes sideways,' he called pleadingly.

...

Outside the stifling inner world, Sila wasn't the one only concerned about Skullius' state.

"He's hurting himself..." Viccil said as she watched Seramoro kneeling under the makeshift tree. The soul she had thought pitiable before, had grown smaller, and constrained. After being exerted recklessly and chunked off by Moonlight Revelation, she could only imagine how it looked now.

Viccil didn't know the circumstances surrounding this transformation Skullius had undergone, but so far, she had no love it.

She couldn't believe that someone could survive with their soul as it was before it started getting battered within the Territory, and now...

"Will he even be alive after this?" she tried to imagine how that was even possible.

Behind her, Maxim was feeling the same. She had her focus taken by the change in scenery since eleven seconds ago, and only now, after Seramoro's cries ended, did she finally turn to Vali who was convulsing in pain after her soul had split.

A dark look showed on her face, and she finally used the golden potion she held in her hand. A Supreme potion.

Maxim hesitated to use the potion, but in the end, since Skullius had told her to so, she had Vali chug it down. Given the state of Skullius' soul now she had wanted to turn and save it for him – if he survived – but Vali's condition continued getting critical. After all, living with half a soul was impossible for normal living beings.

As the golden, sludgy substance slid down Vali's throat, her body was decked in a bright blow.

The effect of one of the most potent recovery means known to man showed immediately.

Maxim had seen it a few times. Supreme potions were generally created by Mages who focused on alchemy; most of them being Arch-Mages. They were extremely difficult to manufacture and a single one could cost a fortune depending on where one bought it.

Skullius had only managed to buy one from the Guilds Association after pre-ordering, as the last two months had taught him that the potions seldom stayed on the shelf – and if they did, they were already taken.

Vali's body started to change, fluctuating between expansion and contraction as a pale, viscous ooze poured from it in droves. Deep within her body, the roughly third of her soul remaining was gripped by the potent glow of the Supreme potion's effect, and with a grand explosion of soul light, it began to heal rapidly!

Yet, this hardly seemed like the most astonishing thing occurring within the Territory.

The light from Vali healing was far outclassed by the sudden blinding radiance of the enormous moon in the sky.

No one needed to be told.

The Secondary ability of Deific Moonlight Paradise, an attack, was ready, and only after a little more than a dozen seconds!

Behind Rayn, within the paradisiac city, the human figures within started chanting loudly, as if praising the moon and urging it into growing stronger. As they did, it grew larger, and cast its silvery gloss in such a way that stretched the shadow of the city, merging it with the one that grew from Rayn's feet.

Seramoro's stalk was challenged, as was the shadow it hid under.

The light from the moon grew so intense that it became impossible to fully keep it away from the long-haired figure's body.

And thus...

"|!@#&!|" Seramoro muttered incomprehensibly again, and a thick, mist-like darkness bellowed from before him. It squirmed restlessly, its lustreless matte wading here and there. Then....it blew high and quick!

...!

Suddenly, Rayn saw the bright light of the moon dim.

No!

It didn't just dim.

It vanished, almost leaving behind none of the silvery glow about!

The former Royal Knight turned with surprise towards his moon, and found... a thick matte of darkness was revolving around his moon like a thick, black cloth.

...!

A micro moment later, Rayn heard a comprehensible scream.

"|SHUDDER!|"

It was as if the golden sky of the Territory was susceptible to the night.

With Seramoro's scream, a harsh darkness that brought with it a chilling wind bashed down on Rayn, intent on making him shrink in its cold!

With the Moonlight Revelation gone, Seramoro also threw himself forward, madly flying from above to crush Rayn under his axe kick.

The Royal Knight didn't seem fazed.

The darkness and the cold didn't affect him, but it did start to infect the entire Territory like a disease, drowning everyone else within its chill!

Sevill and Viccil found themselves unable to move as thick, white ice grew over them despite the Nitros guarding their bodies. The same was true for Actuass and the rest.

Their view was dyed black on top of this, and they couldn't resist any of it.

It was ferocious.

They shuddered.

In one moment, they were within a golden Territory, and in the next, they were buried in a sea of black that threatened to freeze them to death, without the possibility of a counter.

'Dreadful thing...!' Actuass thought, growing a bit impatient. With a thought, he summoned a great, deep flame of Undeath that bellowed around him, Revia and Fulina. Sadly, it did not add any warmth.

From the darkness, the spectators heard another bellow, and another boom that made the wind even worse.

The bits of gold that had always been flying in the air showed up here and there, but the view of what was happening skirted their vision.

Actuass grew anxious.

To think that a Territory as strong as this was being countered like so...

It went to show that his plans had been right on the money. While Rayn was the thing he desired most, Fulgardt had been the best alternative.

The power of the Immoral which had contended against the Deities in the Second Grand War... It was mighty indeed. In some ways, it could have even been better than obtaining Rayn, as the current circumstances showed.

But...

The blindness all had faced, was suddenly parted.

A part of the whole Territory was opened up, revealing the blue sky above, and the broken land and sea.

This wasn't the Territory rupturing.

It was under Rayn's command.

The moon which had been cloaked in darkness shuddered with a mightier light that set it free, and the advent of the Secondary attack grew imminent.

Seramoro shrieked and scurried to its stalk, away from Rayn whose mana core could be seen burning through his body as it expelled a vicious stream of mana that was transformed to strengthen the Territory.

Shockingly, Deific Moonlight Paradise grew to cover twice the range it had before, and its Imaginary GeoScape expanded as well; indeed its moon included.

It was a dazzling sight.

'I can't go any further. This body likely can't handle it...' Rayn thought as he clasped his hand, a hard look on his face. He scoffed and then glared to Seramoro.

"An unpleasant surprise you've been, Fulgardt. Now be gone from my sight."

...!

The moon gaped, an opening showing at its centre, and the chanting of the humans in the city grew even louder.

Seramoro screamed and darkness flew out of it like a flood to guard, as even in this state, danger was easy to recognise.

No one could properly articulate what happened next.

A bright flash that overcame the Nitros shrouds of the Incandescent Stagers bathed the world, and its call of fury turned them deaf.

Everyone felt as if they were made to float for a full minute that followed, their senses made void and then...

It became clear.

No wonder Rayn had opened up a section of the Territory.

It was staggering what the moon could do.

The sea had been parted for as far as the eye could see, the ground underneath dug and burnt.

The gap, roughly ten kilometres wide, was rapidly getting filled with the waves of water that somehow created a soothing tune as they bashed against each other.

A glaring mirage could be spotted in the air, creating the illusion that the waters could sprout human bodies and dance, and that the mana had a sturdy form over said waters.

It was appalling, yet beautiful.

Rayn looked at this nostalgically.

Deific Moonlight Paradise then crumpled unceremoniously, leaving everyone that was alive on the tattered island, scattered about.

All of them were beginning to defrost and from the looks on their faces, the last burst of moonlight had harmed their souls quite a bit, though not enough to cause permanent damage, as they hadn't been the targets.

Vali was the exception.

Shock was palpable, as well as fright. But...

Viccil and Seville didn't waste time. The moment their bodies were capable of movement, they took action. Viccil, still decked in the wooden armour, struck her hand into the ground, and large roots extended from the wood, digging into the ground.

Not a second later, a great, golden brown tree burst from the ground and carried them all up – Vali, Maxim, Darwel included – into the air with its ever-growing trunk and branches!

Viccil was its end, steering it wayward ahead where it grew at lightning speed, shooting out branch after branch.

By the time a second passed, the group was already passing the spot on the sea where Secondary attack of Deific Moonlight Paradise had lost its might; close to sixty kilometres away, and the tattered island from whence they came was reduced to a distant dot.

Rayn looked at the fleeing group.

His eyes then fell on the thick trunk of the golden brown tree.

"A very high level technique. I recognise it. Rather unfair that the self-preserving Sif gained such abilities..." Rayn said with a bit of a frown that spelled his dislike for the kind he had seen just now.

But he didn't have the heart to pursue them, nor the reason.

The tall man merely looked into the distance a final time, as the waves crashing close to cover the gap made all the more noise.

Actuass approached him, his bloody robes wet from the defrosting.

Revia was still incapacitated, as was Fulina, but both were mostly fine.

Rayn turned to gaze at Actuass, and finally asked.

"I had the wrong idea, it seems. You don't want to enslave me, do you?"

Actuass remained silent. He perused Rayn's body and saw that it was in a dire state, but held on still. He had found the perfect vessel, after all. The strain from fighting had broken it further as he had wished too.

"What makes you think that?" he asked calmly.

Rayn scoffed.

"Crafty," he said, looking at his body. "When you reached me in the Yormuness, I thought the greed of mankind had reached the summit again. Extending to the resting place of souls to call me back... I imagined you had a strong resolve, but a feeble sense of self. I acquiesced to the arrangement you offered, thinking you'd be loose..."

"What do you think now?" Actuass asked with a firm tone.

Rayn shook his head.

"Whatever it is you aim to achieve... it's not for yourself, is it?" he said with a stern look into the hazel glow behind Actuass' mask.

The masked man remained silent once again.

He then drew back the hood to his robes, and removed his mask.

Rayn's visage shifted slightly.

"If there's anything history – yours, and that which came before, has taught me..." Actuass said.  
"...it's that selfish desires can't burn the world. It's only that which isn't burdened with self that will break even reality, to reach its destination..."

Rayn narrowed his eyes, and watched as Actuass placed his hand on his chest.

Then...

Chapter 777: Master of Souls!

Two and half months ago.

...

"How did you venture here?"

"Does it matter?"

"..."

"..."

"What are you offering then... stranger?"

"Time in the Aigas sun and sky. Surely, you'd want to stand on the bodies of the Deities you served for a change, would you not?"

"..."

"Even your soul, blessed by once playing host to Quintess against Fulgardt yearns to leave this place, doesn't it? I'm giving you the chance."

"...What do you get in return?"

There was a pause.

"Options."

\*\*\*

Rayn remembered it clearly.

It hadn't taken a lot of convincing. There was no need. For a conscious soul like his, empowered when he was chosen as a host for the mighty Quintess back in the day, the lucidity he had, which allowed him to feel the passage of millennia unlike the other wandering souls...

A chance to inhabit a new body and walk on Aigas again was perfect, and being confident in his ability to resist whatever means that could be used against him, Rayn had agreed to what Actuass had offered.

Yet now...

As soon as the masked man (now not wearing the mask) touched him, he felt his powerful soul stagger weakly.

This feeling... he had felt something like this when he was clashing with Seramoro, specifically when a rip-ended soul had swam its way into him randomly.

"What are you doing?" Rayn asked, curious and surprised.

"I took many precautions before reviving you. Pulling back a soul that died millennia ago, and was trapped in a place 'outside' Aigas, required a lot of energy," Actuass said casually. "However, all that energy – the souls I used – were dipped in my own Undeath essence, and a large portion of them were used specifically to keep that body you inhabit under control. Any other soul after that..."

added to the effect."

Rayn narrowed his eyes.

Come to think of it...

He tried to move his hand against Actuass.

Nothing happened. His body refused to move, as if it was a taboo to willingly harm the one who catered for it.

"Hmm. I see. That's why you also gave me a weak vessel? In case I broke free of your control still?"

That would make a lot of sense. Even among Incandescent Stage experts, this body was as weak as they came.

"No." Actuass answered.

He expressed a lot of effort through the contours of his face, and Rayn felt his soul constrict terribly, which made him grunt and kneel.

A look of shock appeared on his face, and he glared at Actuass helplessly. The necromancer looked down at him with a condescending visage.

"Your understanding of the soul seems a bit too shallow for you to imagine something as simple that," Actuass said. "The soul and the body learn from each other, as well as the things they bear. The body learns the soul's information, and the soul learns the body's. You no longer play host to the Deities, but your soul is still as strong."

There's a fragrance of Divine power on it that you seem to be unable to use. Let me guess, you relied on Quintess' guidance to use the deep power when you were alive, didn't you? And now, it's essentially sitting there within you, collecting ethereal dust."

A shuttle of rage burned in Rayn's eyes, but Actuass went on.

"This body I provided couldn't contain you, but it could learn. And your soul could learn to be less... expressive, as it would have been in your original body. Your soul ended up mindful of the fragile outline of this body, and became more tame."

Rayn frowned.

What the hell was this man talking about?

This body couldn't handle his power. That was why it was burning away in the first place!

"You're wrong. This vessel has been breaking since it held me," Rayn argued.

"Yes it has. It was prepared for this very situation. Belonged to a rather powerful Form User I killed long ago. He had a Hidden Class, that allowed him deflate and inflate his power as he saw fit. EVERY aspect of his power. You see, Classes, Stages and Mana cores all influence the soul in different ways.

This man was able to influence his body and soul with the power of his class."

"Since getting preoccupied with fighting, you didn't notice that your soul was being guided by this vessel's instinct to contain large amounts power into fitting within it, even though realistically, the vessel should have broken apart the moment you used your Territory. You're burning and cracking, but you're still standing."

Another constricting crunch strained Rayn's soul and he emitted a growl.

His soul... Indeed it was less fierce than before. Had it truly been turning docile all this time? It could be. After all, Rayn had been born with an unusual body back then, so perhaps he could have never known how to pay attention to the behavior of his soul.

How could he compete with a necromancer like Actuass in that regard?

Undead were very adept at manipulating the soul. Liches, for instance, had the power to split souls and create loyal, powerful minions while creating phylacteries that held their souls separately from their bodies.

This was the path Actuass pursued, and it had led him to discover astounding things about the soul and body.

He had shared a sliver of this knowledge with Revia, and helped her attain her speed again even when she had lost her blessing.

And now...

"What is it then... that you seek with me?" Rayn asked exhaustedly. He felt himself grow wiry.

Actuass gave a short, hollow laugh.

"YOUR history can tell you. If you can think back, you'll realise it. After all, you did the same to Fulgardt's Chosen..." the answer came.

...!!!

Actuass' words struck Rayn like thunder.

What was done to the Chosen of Fulgardt...

But that... that was insane. That didn't make any sense. Why would someone desire such a fate?

Before he could question how, or why to Actuass, Rayn found his vision going dark, and in the next instance, a large mass of bright light that was his soul, was extracted from his body!

Actuass hurried to clutch it with both hands, though, the large globe was hard to contain in his grasp. Now that it was free from the body, it was moments ago from growing fierce once again.

A furious green and black flame exploded around Actuass, and he drew his focus once more, drowning out anything that didn't help him focus right now.

If he messed up, Rayn's soul would burn his body and both of them could very well perish, as the Undeath energy Actuass was summoning for what came next, in its depth of volume that was almost as much as that which he had invested into resurrecting Rayn, would pulverise the former Royal Knight's soul without his control.

Actuass then pushed the large soul into his body without delay.

It was like pushing a large lump of heated coals into one's flesh, and it wasn't pleasant.

Actuass didn't react as much to the pain though.

He remained steadfast. The effect to his body paled in comparison to what his soul had to go through. After all, his soul had to assimilate Rayn's!

During the Second Grand War, the Capital Service and the Purity conjoined the souls of Fulgardt's Chosen to those of volunteered Incandescent Stagers, which drove both to madness.

With Actuass' extensive research, he knew that this was done using a certain powerful artefact. He didn't know its whereabouts and neither did he pursue the object.

Like Rayn, he too was confident that when it came to the soul, he would come up on top, nomatter what!

The large mass of a soul, still possessing traits of Divinity from the Deities, clashed against his own which was wreathed in Undeath.

It was as though two large marbles were bashing against each, to one who could look at what was occurring within Actuass' body.

The necromancer's soul was vastly smaller, and he could have easily been outmatched if not for the sea of Undeathly energy surrounding his and Rayn's soul.

His soul blanketed itself in Undeath before bumping heavily into Rayn's own, whizzing to another side, and doing it again, then to another and another. With each bash, Rayn's soul turned less and less vibrant.

To the struggling, large soul, this battle was akin to a common man trying to fight a shark underwater!

During this process though, Actuass' body had also started to crack, and burn. Flames burst from his chest, and arms and flared incessantly!

Revia had been watching from the beginning.

A part of her wanted to rush towards Actuass and behead right now, but she wasn't sure that would kill him.

She had boldly declared to Actuass, after he kept her, that she would kill him, that him helping her restore his speed was just him training his own assassin.

This felt like the moment to act on her words. It wouldn't change what she needed to do, but she wasn't a loyal underling of his.

She was much faster than him, and she could mince him up while he was distracted, and experiment with what would keep him down. It was extremely dangerous to attempt it, but a part of her urged strongly.

Yet..

"That rebellious light in your eyes. It's always amusing, you know."

Fulina by her side said.

Revia deflated.

The two of them looked to Actuass with different thoughts.

"Tell me. Do you think the world would be a better place with or without mana?" Fulina asked.

Revia originally intended to ignore, but after a while, seeing as Fulina didn't pursue the topic of what she had been about to do – what she had been thinking to do right now – she reluctantly answered.

"No. That wouldn't have made my father any less of an asshole, and it probably wouldn't have stopped my mother and brother from dying..." she said.

Fulina wore a shallow smile, and harrumphed.

"It just occurred to me. You don't know why Actuass is doing what he is doing, do you? You've only been focusing on the how," she said.

"Does knowing why make him any less of a monster?" Revia asked angrily. "Or any of us?"

"Yes," Fulina said firmly. "It was hard for me to accept too at first. But... I finally started to." She turned to Revia. "No one cares about your perspective, Revia. Only what you see, what you do, and why you do it, matters.

This world of mana... that's how you brave it."

The former Paladin Champion heard these words ring over and over and over again as Actuass came to, and began walking towards them with his body smoking.

His robes had burned away, leaving some glimpses of torched clothes he had worn underneath. His skin which had been turning brittle from the flames erupting from the struggle within him, healed visibly to leave his skin perfect again.

Both Fulina and Revia couldn't tell what exactly changed from Actuass as nothing could be seen or felt from him. The cessation of the extended damage to his body meant that he had must been successful in subduing Rayn's soul though, at the very least.

Fulina gave him something to wear. It was a simple shirt and pants.

Actuass donned his mask again.

The hazel glow of his eyes seemed brighter, and more menacing when coated with the shadow of the white and green mask.

"It's finally done," he said, and his voice sounded crispier, a warm relief flowing with it.

"Can you sense them?" Fulina asked hopefully.

Actuass seemed to wear triumphant smile under his mask.

Before he could answer, Feinheath shook.

With his eye tracing a hazel line when he turned, Actuass set his sights to a distant direction. Revia, Fulina... and the series of Cluster beasts who had hid from the monstrous powers when the Cluster broke also turned from their hiding spots.

It seemed Actuass wasn't the only one achieving what he set out to do.

Another 'tide', possibly wider than the one he would cause in the short term, rose from the distance.

Chapter 778: Herald

Guissepo cackled.

He had not been back in this place in a long time. In fact, he hadn't been anywhere but on the white platform used for the Preliminaries in the Premium Age Royale for a while, and his arrival here a little more than four minutes ago, was his first taste of a different air in months.

As for where HERE was...

It was an enclosed space. Cavernous, was apt term for it, but the walls and floor were too smooth to disdain it with such a description.

This place had been reworked by Guissepo's company to look a little more elegant.

The whole place was expansive, and it was here where a massive seal was engraved in deep groves over the ground.

The Extreme Formula.

Since he joined the Evenfall, when it was still under the previous leader whom he replaced more than two and a half months ago, Guissepo had been made known that this large brand, was the thing that kept the Deity Boron, hailed as the Traitor, bound below Aigas.

Not a soul who was part of the same cult could describe to him what the place known as the Under was like. Did Boron live there? Was he the one who made it? Were there other living creatures there?

Well, the last question, Guissepo could probably answer.

In his hand, the extravagant cultist was holding a dark sack that kept pouring out multi-coloured lights in the thousands every second, into the centre of the large seal.

The dormant blessings.

With each batch of flooding blessings, a pulse of light thrummed through the seal, urging it to light up consistently. No soul was as extravagantly elated, patiently awaiting the moment the seal was rejuvenated, as Guissepo. He thirsted for this eagerly.

As far as he knew, this seal had been set up by the Deities, and only the essence closest in relation to them could even dream of activating the seal; these blessings he had collected were such an essence.

Led by the visions he saw on that day in Inhone, Guissepo had set to achieve what he had been proposing long before he was the leader of the Evenfall. Instead of hunting down Paladin Champions for their Divine Blessings – which were more potent than others individually – he insisted that all that was needed was a large amount of dormant blessings, which were easier to acquire.

One of his visions had shown him Actuass, and urged him to stick with him.

That had proven to be the correct stance.

And the most vivid vision Guissepo remembered, was about to come to pass at any moment.

Behind him, a large group of people could be seen. Some wore dark hooded robes, while others did not, choosing simpler, freer clothing.

The latter, were the group Guissepo had allied with before fulfilling his agreement with Actuass.

Summoners.

Summoners were outlawed in Pelian by the Royal Family; the Royan Family.

Unlike Tamers who brought under control beasts from Clusters and forests to fight for them, Summoners were different.

Even they did not know what realm it was from where they called forth the odd creatures they could. It was because of this that, rather frantically, the King had ordered all Summoners to be killed on sight.

Most Summoners, rather fewer in number from the rest, lived in seclusion.

They could not masquerade as Tamers, since, unlike Tamers who had varying means to expose the beasts they summoned, which could conveniently be stored within their bodies, Summoners had to be conjure portals to draw the creatures they made contracts with; and such a deed was no easy feat.

The old man who had transported Guissepo out of the Cluster led the group of around a hundred Summoners, with the several dozens more Evenfall cultists.

There was an express silence as they all watched and waited.

The results of this would determine how valuable Guissepo would be to them, and how valuable they would be to him in turn.

...!!!

Finally, it began.

When three-fifths of the sack of blessings had been emptied, the seal turned bright with anxiety-inducing hum coming from it. It lit up, exposing a bright glow onto Guissepo whose eyes shone, as well as everyone a distance away from him.

Yet Guissepo didn't stop.

Vigour consolidated, he continued to expel the blessings, and when the last finally slid out, the Extreme Formula... continued with its hum.

Then... a violent quake ensued.

Guissepo backed away from the seal.

It shone brighter and brighter until it was difficult to look at. The shaking caused by it grew worse, turning to rumbling, as if several giants were stampeding below them.

It grew worse still until everyone, at Guissepo's instruction knelt down and waited.

It didn't seem like only this odd chunk of land that hid the Extreme Formula was quaking at this point. Guissepo was sure the whole of Pelian was, if not more.

Well, he wasn't afraid of what it could cause.

He wouldn't be as helpless as he was now, that was for sure.

The Extreme Formula seemed become a torchlight in a spherical outline that illuminated the ceiling, and melted it off slowly. Several colours danced at its end, giving a picturesque, beautiful look to the dangerous beam.

One by one, large and long, meaningfully carved stone stilts rose from around the circular borders of the Extreme Formula – even though it had turned to a boundless light.

Numbering seven in total, the stilts floated in the air and started turning in place. There a loud kathunk, and the ground stopped shaking suddenly.

It felt like some door had been opened with difficulty.

Guissepo beamed.

It seemed so simple. As if the seal was meant to be opened!

The beam of light pouring in a column from the seal, suddenly broadened, and then...

Everyone forgot to breath.

No.

The air vanished.

The mana was subdued, as if it too was made to prostrate or disappear.

The ceiling of the cavern was vaporised – hundreds of meters of it to the surface – allowing the sunlight to pour into the cavern.

Still, the air refused to fill everyone's lungs.

The light flooding from above made the stage even more appealing for what rose from the circular bounds of the Extreme Formula.

Perhaps it was a statue, or a living rock... even Guissepo couldn't tell, but he celebrated it.

It was enormous.

As its head alone appeared, slowly rising, Guissepo hadn't known what he was looking at. But then its torso rose, and then its slender legs, to fly above the seal.

Made of what looked like black amethyst sculpted into the fine figure of a pulchritudinous woman, the being halted its ascent and floated in place.

It stood at more than twenty five meters in height, radiating a thick pressure so outlandish, it couldn't be ascertained casually.

It had still, wavy hair that reached its neck, and unlike the rest of its body, its upturned, heavily lashed eyes had a bright ruby glow to them.

Its face was perfection, and over its torso, a heavy, seductive armour, also in the same black, could be seen reaching to end at its thighs where it sat with an alluring V.

From there, heavy, high greaves with a stunning design were settled over its legs, bypassing the intricately carved thighs which remained 'exposed'.

A terrifying, long lance was in the being's hands, extremely sharp at both ends, but what humbled the spectators more, was the most unique feature about this creature.

Two pairs of massive wings were folded over its chest, and above its head.

They whipped out to spread wide at that moment, and everything Guissepo and the others had been seeing from peripheral sight vanished, leaving the surroundings open. Some force had exempted them from destruction, they all could tell.

If not, that simple unfurling of the wings would have decimated them all without compromise.

Guissepo gulped, and then laughed.

He raised his hands and called out even though he couldn't take in breath.

"Herald! Oh Herald of Lord Boron! I'm right here!"

The winged stone being set its eyes on him without a shift in its visage. A look of recognition somehow showed with the blinking of the ruby glow in its rough eyes.

Then...

The rumbling of the world continued again.

In Pelian.

In Maqi.

In Emeradis.

Great structures that looked to be as old as Aigas itself rose, bringing about a new order to the world.

Chapter 779: Reassured

The quaking of the ground was what woke him up from a rather terrible dream. He couldn't tell where it began, and what he had been doing before he sunk into it.

When had he slept to have been pulled into such a dreadfully deep and immersive dream?

There was a sudden, hurtful pull from his body.

Something within seemed to be compelled to leave, but as he laced his full control through his body, whatever it was calmed down for a moment, only to attempt to break through his body again.

What was this?

Why did it seem connected to the dream he had been having?

"It's time to wake up, glaive-man. I'm not going to babysit you longer than I need to. Wait, I actually might," a voice spoke to him.

The dark-haired man opened his eyes wide, and saw a pale man come into view, his figure rickety, as though it was leisurely swinging on a rocking chair.

The sound of waves came next, and Gabel grew suspicious. What was this scenario?

"Don't give me that dumbfounded face," Aurolio said with an exasperated sigh. "I really don't want to have to explain this from the top. Please tell me you remember who you are and what you're doing here."

Gabel sat up. He found that he and Aurolio were on a modest chunk of earth that was heavily swayed by the perturbed sea. A powerful quaking caused the waters to turn restless, and as they quivered, they made the prospect of being stuck at sea with nothing else in sight quite horrifying.

At least that's how a common man would have felt.

"What is this trembling?" Gabel asked calmly while reaching for his glaive, which thankfully, had been retrieved.

"Don't know. It's the reason I'm reluctant to leave the sea. Something teeeeerribly bad is going on," Aurolio said, a small, charming smile on his face.

Gabel then turned to him.

"How did you stop it?" he asked Aurolio who breathed out a sigh of immense relief at realising that the dark-haired man hadn't suffered some convenient case of amnesia.

"I didn't," the pale man replied. "I tried stuffing your soul back into your body, but it just kept trying to sneak out. It stopped struggling as hard a few minutes ago, but... in all truth, I was not about to keep it up, especially with one hand. Maybe I would have resorted to using my foot."

Aurolio wiggled the stump on his right arm. His hand was missing.

Gabel wore a quizzical expression.

"Almost bit off more than I could chew. Your soul had flown off, and I guess it was about to be absorbed. To save it, I had to put myself in harm's way. And well... let's just say I underestimated how easily I could have lost more than this. <Sigh>.

What monsters!"

The dark-haired man couldn't exactly piece things together. He only saw the image of the masked man from his memory, and assumed that whatever he had done had led to this.

"Why save me? How did you even manage it? I assumed you would be the one person who managed to reach the GOAL," Gabel expressed.

Aurolio shrugged.

"I thought about it after getting close to that gateway, but I stopped. It wasn't me. I had a feeling the true mastermind behind the Premium Age Royale was going to show himself. And I was right. That Undeath user sure is something," he said with a grin. "I also got to see a few other mysteries concerning our mutual friend.

He's more interesting than I imagined."

The pale man then swung his head close to Gabel.

"As for why I saved you... I figured I undervalued you before, my friend. I've taken an interest in that Veneration art of yours..."

Gabel narrowed his eyes.

For the first time since he acquired that power, he had found someone else who knew about Veneration.

\*\*\*

"Sorry for the delay, Sir. Rummaging through the cache of items we've collected over the years to look for what you asked for, was rather challenging. Also, that nasty quake caused a few heavy items to fall on me, hahaha," a neatly dressed man walked over with a long object wrapped in quite the pristine linen cloth.

"Exactly as requested, Sir."

He handed it over.

Tallo looked the object suspiciously.

He drew the linen cloth, and the first thing that smote him was a chilling presence that swept from the object the servant was carrying.

From a glance, it seemed to fit the grade that he had requested at least. A brief appraisal later, and Tallo confirmed that he had been given what he asked for.

The servant saw his hesitation and smiled wryly.

"Sir, you were promised a reward if you played through the games and survived. You were the only one to emerge with full Units through the gateway. That is all that matters to us," he said encouragingly.

Tallo, scoffed.

"What about everything else that happened? Everything I saw. That flame and all. Even though I saw it, you're still willing to let me go?" he asked.

Indeed, Tallo had been the only one to pass through the gateway in the end. After being separated from Skullius, Maxim and Baddan, he too had made his way to the green and black flame and found the vicious battle occurring between Rias and the other contenders.

His sense of urgency intensified, and he didn't think twice before killing Liura just as she and Grutus were about to help the rest, obtaining her Units which were added to his own, allowing him to reach the full 10,000 Unit requirement, and teleporting in a mass of colour to the GOAL.

Yes. He had seen Maxim and Skullius struggling, but in his opinion, what he came to the Royale for had been accomplished – somewhat – and above all else, self preservation when possible, was to be considered as a top priority. He hadn't grown too attached to risk his life.

That argument about what to do back when they were headed towards the mountain... it really was pointless in the end.

After entering through the glowing gateway, Tallo had emerged here.

To his shock, he was in the EverSword Mansion, a magnificent structure which floated above the ground.

Currently, he was within a rather stale looking room – a waiting room for odd guests as described by the first person he had met when he warped here; this sharply dressed servant.

Said servant looked at him with a surprised look at his question. If Tallo didn't know any better, he'd think this man thought he was an idiot.

"Sir. The only thing bothering US is that you refused to join the EverSword House as promised by Lord Rearren. Nothing else matters to me. Regardless, you can walk free. You are not being forced to stay here. But I must again ask...

is this all you really want? Substituting the opportunity to join a prestigious powerhouse for... this, is rather underwhelming. We could give you 50,000 Plasma Coins on top, or more. We value our position, you see. Whatever you tell the world about us, must end with a 'But they kept their word, and were very generous!' Haha!"

Tallo wasn't as amused as the servant. He swiped what the man had brought him and stored it in his storage silently.

These people didn't care at all.

Supposedly they thought they could go against the entire world.

How bold.

At that moment, there was another quake, and even though the mansion was elevated over the ground – a great lake to be precise – it shook lightly.

"There it goes again. Nasty business, Sir," the servant said brightly.

Tallo didn't like it.

Something terribly bad was happening.

"Shall I escort you to another portal, Sir. We can't allow you to leave on your own, after all."

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All hell had started breaking loose outside.

Even though the Royal mansion was wide and large, as well as its compound, the King could almost hear the distant screams of the common folk in their common streets and suburbs as the world rumbled, shaking violently.

Yet, the mansion was calm, unfazed, as if it wasn't part of Pelian.

The King trembled on his throne, and gripped the armrests which were masterfully encrusted with the rarest jewels, and gilded with the hopes and dreams of...

Actually they weren't.

Very few actually believed in the Royal Family anymore.

The Capital Service, the Families, and the Guilds Association ran everything outside, and rarely did they ever come to involve the Royal Family unless the King demanded it, which was a very rare sight.

"Aaargh!" the King yelped anxiously in the empty throne room. He had cast his Knights out as usual.

Almost immediately a bird flew from out of nowhere and landed on top of his throne. It was a rather large, mysterious bird.

The King looked at it, and he felt his anxieties wax lightly.

"Whatever happens outside... It will not harm me and my family as long as you are here, right?" he asked with a trembling voice.

The bird gave a slow, reassuring nod, and the King felt at ease.

Yes, whatever happened out there... it didn't matter as long they were safe, like everyone else than came before.

Chapter 780: Timing!

12 hours after the rumbling.

...

Opungale.

Vicil pushed open the thick double doors to a wide corridor, and allowed Darwel to pass through before her.

The sheer mesh of naturally garnished stone and small trees lined on both sides of the corridor, all with their absurdly large roots extending through neatly arranged channels to the ceiling, was immaculate, especially when considering that weeds and flowers of various kinds somehow grew over the aforementioned roots in harmony.

Darwel craned her neck and bent it forcefully to the side with her hand. She felt absolutely horrible. Something within her kept bouncing against her flesh, the painful reaction keeping her skin tone pale.

Thankfully, she wasn't hanging limp with her mouth agape anymore. The disappearance of the illusory frame, the counter above her and the Control Seal, had spelled the end of the aggressiveness of her soul like before, and frankly she appreciated it.

"So fussy. I wish she had actually provided solutions instead of doing all those meaningless tests," Darwel said, irritated.

Viccil turned to the Sif princess with a hidden concerned visage.

"She was trying her best to heal you, Lady Darwel. It was really eating her up that she couldn't stop your soul from behaving this way," she said.

Darwel sighed.

"I know, I know," she said and turned to Viccil, "I sound terrible, don't I? Not really the voice of appreciative royalty."

"I can understand how you feel, Lady Darwel. It's not a crime to feel frustrated. Your parents... felt the same, didn't they? They tried to cheer you up by calling your guests.... steps you took towards consolidating diplomatic relations with the humans."

"Dear Listafelle... I can remember that look on mother's face!" Darwel slapped her face in her palms.

Her parents had come running when Viccil and Seville had arrived with her.

While she had been attended to by one of the best Healers on the continent – in the nation – a carrying, ancient Sif who was universally loved because of her fussy nature, Darwel's parents had stayed by her side till she woke up, and discussed with her several things before attending to another crucial matter that Viccil had explained briefly before.

"Any more news about what that rumbling was all about. It was concentrated around Feinheath, right?" Darwel asked.

"Well, my guess is, it was related to that Game Master. I was there when he collected something other than souls from most of the spectators. He left right away. Considering what that masked man went on to do, I wouldn't be surprised if the other disaster to happen today was related to him," Viccil replied.

Darwel turned to her.

"When you were in the stadium... did you fight him? The masked man I mean?" she thought, shuddering a little at the thought.

"No. He didn't care about any of the survivors. Sevill and I didn't see a merit in attacking him at the time. We would have been outmatched, even if we teamed up with the Paladin Champion who was there. We bided our time and attempted to escape the stadium instead to rush to you instead."

As Viccil thought about this, she couldn't help but think about the fates of everyone in that stadium, not to mention the massive construct itself. She hadn't seen a trace of it when the Cluster shattered. The Cluster beasts, she sensed, but the stadium should have appeared dipping into the sea or something.

Her face turned dark.

All those corpses....

The time to mull this over ended quickly, however.

The two reached another set of doors and this time Darwel insisted on opening them on her own.

A wide, beautiful and fragrant space was revealed.

Nature was a main part of the decor, similar to the winding corridor Viccil and Darwel had been walking through. Several long-eared Sif were stationed close to the walls, waiting to serve, and two distinct human figures were sitting by a large bed at the end of the room.

One of the two was Vali, and the other, was Maxim.

Both had been given a change of clothes, the long, silky robes that draped their shapely figures looking to have been received differently by either of the two; Vali quite happily, and Maxim not so much. She didn't like this type of fashion. The robes seemed to emphasise the bosom and loathed them.

But she couldn't bring herself to complain.

At Darwel's entry, both stood up, yet not a speck of relief could be seen on their faces. It didn't seem like Darwel's well-being was one of their concerns, but because they considered Darwel to be their host also, they both knew enough etiquette to respect her in her own home.

The same lack of concern for their well-being was shared by Darwel also. This wasn't the room Maxim and Vali had been placed originally.

In the end, the reason these four ladies were here was because of one man.

Said man was lying on the large bed.

Darwel looked at him and her face strained.

"You said there's a chance he'll live?" she asked Viccil, her eyes sparking with uncertainty.

Viccil didn't reply right away.

The man in the bed, Skullius, was in terrible condition.

Thankfully, the transformation he had undergone had receded, given away by how his usual auburn hair could be seen.

However, Skullius' hair was practically the only thing about him that was intact. His face was... broken, dented like hard concrete with what looked like black smoke trying to force its way out.

Half of his upper torso was missing, and a series of special bandages and artefacts had been placed there to stop the bleeding and try to encourage the body to heal, but nothing was working.

He was missing his legs too, and they too seemed to spot the dark air from the stumps.

Vicil sighed.

It was actually surprisingly that Skullius was in a better state than when she and Sevil, while gliding in the same general direction that he had been blasted in by Rayn's Deific Moonlight Paradise, had found him in.

They had hoped to spot him on the way, and that hope had paid off, yet despite the odd defence Seramoro had tried to use to guard against Rayn's attack, the damage received was still immense.

It was thanks to Maxim's store of restorative consumables from her Family that Vicil imagined Skullius survived the several hour long trip to Opungale.

And after all that treatment he received, Vicil didn't know if the encouraging, 'They say he will survive' that she had given Darwel, was valid.

It really didn't look like it.

"You said his soul was damaged too, right?" Darwel asked another question, seeing as Vicil refused to answer the last.

"Yes but—"

"His soul seems to respond poorly to advanced restoratives..." Maxim answered for Vicil. She seemed to eager to share the latest updates, which the Sif guard didn't have.

Darwel turned to her.

"On another note, recently, his soul seems to have started slowly regenerating on its own. But I'm sure it's not because any of the things your people tried," Maxim continued.

"What do you mean?" Darwel frowned.

"He has strange soul," Vali chimed in. "Somehow, parts of it... are restoring the rest bit by bit, as if feeding it. That's the best way I can describe it. Honestly it barely makes any sense. I've never known souls to be like that.

That said <sigh> , it doesn't seem like he's out of the woods. If this continues..."

Darwel's face turned hard.

"I'll talk to my parents," she said.

"They were here, Lady Darwel. They already assigned a lot of people and resources for your guests, including hi—" a maidservant had begun when Darwel cut her off.

"No. They supplied enough help assuming he's a normal human. If I tell them about what he is..."

"What he is...?" Vali asked with intrigue.

Viccil turned sharply to Darwel.

The Sif Princess had not told her parents yet about what Skullius was, and her guards would never reveal such a thing without her say so.

If Darwel told her parents, they would pull every limited and valuable resource they had to save him. There was definitely a way to solve this bizarre set of injuries.

"Uh... are you going to tell us what you mean by what he is?" Maxim said, a frown showing on her face.

Darwel hesitated.

Telling a stranger before telling her parents seemed like all sorts of wrong, but she opened her mouth to reveal it anyway.

"Oh you are sorely mistaken, and misinformed~," a musical voice came with a loud cracking that resounded within the room.

Someone had appeared from thin air behind Darwel.

No. It was actually two people!

A man with blonde hair, a smile and a lute waved at the people in room, staring aghast at him, while another, a handsome with silky dark hair, a mithril shirt over his body and a sheath peaking from behind his back, blinked a couple of times as if not expecting to be here at all.

Viccil was already speeding to the intruders when she saw the blonde-haired man strum his lute quicker than she could reach him. At once, she stopped moving.

A look of realisation popped on her hidden face, and she reluctantly took steps back.

"Viccil?" Darwel said anxiously.

"It's okay, Lady Darwel. He's... he's not an enemy," Viccil replied unevenly.

"What?" Vali who was already conjuring her Aura said, confused. She thought that perhaps Viccil had been attacked, but the reality spiralled in a direction she couldn't have dreamed of next.

The blonde-haired man gave a cheerful smile.

"Like she said. I mean no harm. I'm not an enemy. I shared with her the gist of who I am and why I'm here," the man with the lute pointed at Viccil cheerfully, and the guard nodded anxiously before... looking at Skullius lying flat on the bed.

"And who are you?" Maxim asked brusquely.

"Let's skip to why I'm here. My timing was intentionally impeccable, after all," the man said as he too focused on the man on the bed.

Before everyone else knew it, they were also looking at Skullius.

How could they not?

Dark clouds burst from his body, bright Levin jumping in their midst to obscure his body briefly. The bed Skullius was resting on burst into flame when the Levin that struck every second became too much, and too destructive, and even cast a gloomy light in the entire room.

Everyone gawked.

Soon, what lay on the burning bed, was not a handsome, fleshly man, but a tall dark skeleton with four dim sockets, most of it buried under a thunderstorm of its own making...

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Completely oblivious to what was happening outside, Skullius was standing on a torn island that featured a bunch of pretty flowers, each with a globe of light on top that showed blurry memories.

The skies above were a deep, dark green, and a red, flaming sea surrounded this ravaged island.

This was the inner representation of Skullius' soul.

The Reflection of it.

Skullius was feeling extraordinarily tense.

A giant, dark, bulky skeleton stood in front of him, somehow siphoning around it both Null Life powers and Insurgent Magnus elements. In one hand it held a nasty green bladed scimitar with a golden hilt that possessed a chilling presence, and in another, it held a very, very long sword, chipped at ends, and with a spectacularly crafted brass hilt.

The creature was terribly menacing.

But it wasn't this bulky skeleton that made Skullius nervous.

It was the man this skeleton was guarding him from.

A man with long, dark hair and sharp almond eyes that seemed to see through everything, as if he was a god. His frame, while smaller than that of the skeleton standing before Skullius, was more than ten times more imposing.

When he finally spoke, the time, which had seemed frozen since this stand off began, seemed to start moving again.

"Well, I think it's about time we had a chat, don't you think?" the man said, and Skullius, who didn't like the fact that he was currently a mere Boneman, had no choice, but to heed.

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[End of Volume Three].

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[Author's Note]

That concludes "Volume 3: Congested Evils Raise A Tide!"

This also marks the half-way point into this book!

How did you feel about the Volume, when compared to the other two, and on its own? How did you feel about the Final Arc?

Do you leave COMMENTS and REVIEWS on it. I'd REALLY love to hear your thoughts. For extended talks, you can join the discord to be part of the Sockethole Community.

And if you are feeling particularly generous, happy, anxious or impulsive, please do support the novel with a gracious GIFT. It goes a long way to motivate and feed me!

Thanks for reading!