

# Undead 791

## Chapter 791: Truly Unlimited (3)

Kenno dashed back from the surging flood of mana.

His shirt and pants were sizzling and torn, which was a feat on its own for the new development from Allora, as these two pieces of clothing had a decent amount of durability that wouldn't have been compromised by a simple strike of mana.

But that was the thing.

'What's happening here?' Kenno thought while squinting his eyes. Past the glaring glow, he could perceive Allora's blue core letting out volumes of mana that it shouldn't have been able to.

In fact, no mana core could do this. None could expel a limitless amount of mana!

'Are you telling me that she got a Class that grants her an unlimited amount of mana?'

Allora, while covered in the intense glow took steps from the wall and looked down at her abdomen.

A smile appeared on her face. She then turned to Kenno, her confidence still burning bright.

"Third time's the charm," she said, and then got into a stance. But this time, she didn't wait for Kenno to come to her. The reckless glow and flow around her was reeled in, and layered around her body, an audible grunt of effort leaking out in the next moment.

With a great thrum akin to that of an explosion, Allora shot towards Kenno who frowned and swiped away a straight fist that demanded to meet his face. Another came from below his chin and he swiftly moved his head out of the way only to send his elbow towards Allora's face.

Bhup!

...!

Kenno felt a thick, shock resistant layer swallow his blow before it reached Allora's nose. In the micro moment he took to express surprise, he was forced to groan as a nasty, unseen presence rammed into him like a giant bat, and the next thing he knew, Kenny struck the wall at the end of the wall with a greater force than that which he had punished Allora with earlier!

The former common bandit didn't listen to the pain, however. This would have been case even if he hadn't seen Allora practically soar through the air to pile on the attacks on him while he was down.

His mana surged as he extended a straight palm right where Allora was approaching from, and then he released a blot of it in a precise, unbelievably fast blast that caught the former Shaman off guard, and struck her in the solar plexus.

Allora groaned bitterly.

The packet of bright light around her had been pierced for the blow to reach her, but it immediately reformed itself. Allora did the same.

While a blow like the one she had been dealt would have ended the fight for most, she only took a second to stifle her body's weakness and then proceeded to continue her charge. The second she took was enough for Kenno to reach her, however. He wasn't naive enough to believe conventional blows would work anymore especially after...

...!

As Kenno's foot was about to strike at Allora's side, once again...

BAM!

Kenno was sent flying so fast towards the end of room that it looked like he had teleported coarsely to bash against the wrong destination.

'What the hell is going on?' Kenno once again ignored the pain he felt to focus on his opponent. Allora didn't rush in to attack this time fortunately.

'I thought she was just using some kind of wind attack, but... no. Something's not right.'

Mana continued to leak out of Allora's mana core fiercely, with no end to it in sight. The thick coat it formed around her had managed to block Kenno's elbow swing easily, but the mysterious blow he had sent to her chest had pierced it easily.

She wasn't satisfied given that failure from her mana reinforcement.

The layer of mana around her turned brighter, but thinner with her will. Her muscles seemed to grow tauter and firmer as this occurred.

'Come on,' she said, her eyes pinned on Kenno.

Replicus looked amused.

It was normal for most sessions of combat to start with basic physical attacks or in the case of Mages, basic elemental attacks. This battle was following the same principle. Neither Kenno nor Allora seemed keen on revealing more than which was necessary.

Allora in particular was stubbornly using a combat style she was weakest in as a main form of attack while sprinkling elements of her new abilities.

Said new abilities, it seemed, had more to them than the seemingly insurmountable volume of mana gushing from her mana core.

"You've changed a lot, Allora," Kenno said with a weak smile.

"Yeah, I have," the tall, thin woman said.

"Glad to see it. Let's get to what the new you can really do now."

"Sure."

Allora saw Kenno opposite her in one micro instance, and in the next, she felt his leg hook around her neck to pull her to the floor. The tall woman groaned defiantly, and in a shocking show, her hands blurred to grab Kenno's leg and push it back.

Kenno's eyes shone.

'Her strength suddenly increased to match mine!'

Then, he felt it.

A walloping blast of unseen energy rammed into him again, this time with twice the force.

However, Kenno didn't budge.

...!

Sadly for Allora, Kenno's leg around her neck grew heavier.

"I'm starting to figure your powers out," Kenno told the ex-Shaman before he speedily grabbed her arm, pulled it up, and pushed her face to the floor where he trampled it with his foot.

While her cheek scrapped against the floor, Allora's eye turned up to Kenno with a rebellious light.

"Are you really?" she said as a distorted grin appeared on her face. "Then did you figure this?"

Kenno felt alarms ring within his body.

The mana which had been bursting freely out of Allora's mana core suddenly vanished, and at the same time Kenno felt a violent flame and its immense scorch explode right in his face!

Allora's arm which he was holding up had sent a fireball slithering his way, and it caught him off guard, causing him to loosen his grip and footing on her head. That momentary lax in firmness was all Allora needed.

Once again, a furious, unseen force blasted Kenno in the head and he staggered back a few steps. He recovered quickly, however, and was about to hammer down on Allora the instant he located her from derision when...

WAAA!

Kenno felt Allora's mana explode out once again, growing in volume each second. When he got a clear view of her, he found a radiant sword in her hand that spat out misty spores of mana.

Wait. The sword itself was made using mana!

Allora used her exceptional mana manipulation skill to create it, and without waiting a moment more, her teeth ground hard against each other as she raised the mana sword and brought it down with all the might she could conjure!

"HAAAA!"

There was a tremor and an unreal flash of light!

Pherdanta who had been silent and unresponsive to the fight since the start, showed a glimmer of a reaction, finally. Even she hadn't expected this, and now she too started to understand what Allora could do now.

A straight but slightly rugged cut traced the floor from Allora to the wall on the other side. Kenno was a few inches to the left of it, a stunned expression on his face.

Allora grumbled, seeing that Kenno had managed to dodge. She panted heavily and she was sweating buckets. She raised the sword again and Kenno wore a funny smile, preparing to lunge.

"That's enough," Replicus' voice suddenly came.

Both combatants turned to their boss.

Already?

Allora looked particularly shocked and disappointed.

Why did the boss suddenly call for them to stop? Was the boss not impressed by what she had to show? But she wasn't done!

Allora's state of mind was only made worse when Grim popped into the room with an excited face and said:

"What did I miss?"

#### Chapter 792: A Word of Advice

To Grim's enthusiasm, there was no reply or even acknowledgement. No one turned to give him any attention, and he simply shrugged and walked to stand beside Pherdanta, even though he didn't notice that she was there.

"Boss? I was actually starting to enjoy this. Why did you stop us?" Kenno said with a half pleading face.

Allora wanted to say something too, but she decided against it. Kenno's complaint was enough. Besides if it was because of her...

Replicus didn't answer immediately.

As always, it was difficult to see where he was looking and what he was thinking, so for a moment, some manner of tension rose before he cleared it with his next sentence.

"Allora," he said, turning his head so that she didn't think he was staring at the wall a distance away. "You are more than capable as an Unlimited. You have just demonstrated your prowess well."

"Really?"

Allora was relieved to hear this, but she wasn't particularly exhilarated. After all, she didn't feel like she truly got to reach her limit.

"Your new abilities are clear, I'm sure, to most of us here," Replicus continued, taking silent steps towards her.

"Your Class allows you to gain varying degrees of mastery in ANY basic Class, right? Along with giving you an infinite amount mana after a certain condition has been met?"

Allora couldn't help but smile brightly.

"That's right!" she said cheerily.

Indeed.

These two aspects Replicus had mentioned were what the new Hidden Class Allora had awakened granted, and Kenno had started to get invested in the fight when he figured out why Allora was insisting on opposing him with hand to hand combat.

The fact that Allora was actually using Mind Casting to send him flying at times, while at others, distributing her immense strength through her body as efficiently as prodigious, physical Form Users, had turned Kenno's switch on.

"I assume you have a time limit for how long these two abilities last for, and to access other Class masteries, the infinite mana has to be active, correct?" Replicus asked.

"Yes, yes, that's right," Allora replied enthusiastically.

Grim blinked a couple of times while wondering if he was hearing right.

'Infinite mana? Any Class? What?' he thought, but couldn't afford to butt into the conversation between the boss and Allora.

"If you knew this, why did you stop of us, boss?" Kenno chimed in. "She was getting used to fighting in different styles and slowly showing all she could do."

Replicus turned to Kenno.

An answer came immediately.

"Because Allora has already run out of steam. Conjuring a limitless amount of mana is exhausting to her body and mana core, especially since her previous Class did not encourage her to build up her stamina and endurance. Allora's new capabilities also can't be fully exploited if she has never tried out other Classes.

In short, to fully show what she can do, she has to Class Branch more than the average expert."

Allora shrank.

Replicus wasn't done though. He turned to her.

"Because you didn't consider how much strain you'd be putting on your core, you made a mistake that got you even more exhausted. You know what I mean, right?"

Allora nodded. She knew exactly what Replicus was talking about.

"What do you mean?" Kenno asked while alternating between Allora and Replicus. "I don't get it."

Replicus pointed at Kenno's face which had traces of burns. He had blocked the fireball Allora had sent him with his mana so the damage was minimal.

"Allora cannot use her previous abilities – as a penalty, I assume – when her mana grows infinite. Her mana core will immediately revert to normal if she does, for instance when she used the fire on you. The fact that she went back to using other Class abilities after that, seriously strained her."

Kenno wore a look of realisation. So when he felt Allora's mana core stop spurting out as much mana, it was because she had this kind of limitation.

No wonder the boss had stopped the fight.

Allora was trying to hide it, but it was clear that she was very tired. The boss was as perceptive as ever.

"I see," Kenno said with a nod. "Well that explains it."



"I have a lot to work towards, huh?" Allora said with a dim smile, but it was more indicative of her exhaustion which took full effect now that her adrenaline plummeted, than her mood.

"Not as much as you think. I will make you an Armament with stamina and endurance boosting properties. Even without learning about many different classes, you'll be able to fight for longer while wearing it. It's only a temporary solution though," Replicus said.

Allora felt rejuvenated. Because of her earlier doubts, she had almost forgotten that not only was she going to get her own custom made Armament, she was going to get one that covered her weaknesses and bolstered her strengths.

It seemed the boss had already seen how best to do this.

"Thank you very much, boss!" Allora squeaked and even did a tired leap.

Replicus nodded and turned, exiting the room.

Grim had still been trying to ride the conversation when it ended without entertaining a newcomer like him.

He gave Allora another quick congratulations and followed after Replicus.

"Ah, boss, can I have a word...?" Grim began when he was suddenly jabbed in the gut by something hard.

"Watch where you're moving," Grim heard Pherdanta's voice, and her figure fully manifested in his sight. He had almost been close enough to be grinding against her effectively, which explained the hint of hostility in her voice.

"Sorry," Grim said a little annoyed himself.

Couldn't she turn off this pesky ability?!

He then streaked to Replicus' other side.

"What do you want to talk about?" the dark cloud asked.

"Well, I've had the new... 'recruits' settled in, but I was wondering, how much value do you place on them really?" Grim asked curiously. His red eyes showing genuine concern.

"Quite a bit, actually, especially that silver-furred one. I have been looking for a strong-enough subject to test out one of my Class skills. If he endures well, he will be rewarded generously."

"Well, I don't doubt that, but what about the others? They are significantly less special. Wouldn't it be better if I... you know?"

Replicus emitted what sounded like a chuckle.

"It won't be of any use. You see, some Cluster beasts gain their powers from the world they are created from. The ones you brought in are the same. Even if you were to employ the traits of your Class, you'd find that you wouldn't be able to extract anything now that their world is destroyed. And besides that, I have sufficient roles for them, as I promised."

Grim nodded vigorously with his finger under his chin.

"Hmm. I see, I see. That makes sense. I completely missed that," he said, glad to have learned that his thinking had been littered with errors. At the end of the day, Grim was yet to earn the same level of insight his boss had.

That said...

"I have something else I wish to speak to you about."

"Speak."

"It's more of a favour really. A great ask that obviously intrudes on personal boundaries."

"Do tell."

Grim gulped.

"Boss, please speak to Yuyui. I know you have been busy, but I think you need to patch things up with her. You've been purposefully letting your relationship grow worse. I can see that. I don't think it's right."

As soon as the words left his mouth, a voice in Grim's head chanted, "You sir, are very bold," and he believed it.

Replicus stopped.

This gave Grim an even more ominous feeling.

He seemed to have really crossed the line.

Chapter 793: The Boss' Hidden Thoughts

Boldness had never felt so wrong. It tended to incite different, negative emotions when one faced someone stronger than them, and spoke out of turn, especially if the speaker knew he was crossing a line.

The light coming from Replicus' sockets turned Grim a bit damp of his previous resolve. Perhaps, he should have just left well enough alone. It wasn't like Yuyui and the boss hated each other, right? Why did he have to butt in?

The gall!

Grim began scolding himself inwardly.

Seriously, who was he to even talk of this, giving advice to his boss? That was so wrong and probably crushed a few brownie points from the stack he had been carefully piling from the boss . In fact...

"You're right..."

"You know what, boss? I'm so... what?" Grim blinked while in the middle of a genuine bow.

"I said you're right," Replicus said as his head turned to face up the corridor leading to the room they had just been in. "I was indeed neglecting her."

Grim was shocked. He was actually right to confront the boss about this? Well, ahem, of course he was. He had known for sure that the boss would realise his mistake all along. It just went to show he too made mistakes.

"I wasn't purposefully ruining our relationship, however. The matter of creating bonds in itself is not a subject I am familiar with that much, when it comes to humans..." Replicus said. "I met Yuyui at a time when she served a vital purpose. A Trial of mine."

"After that, she became a companion I valued, because unlike others, she could be by my side, aiding me as much as she could without dying. Well, not permanently. I suppose since overcoming that hurdle, I have piled on the things I needed, which I hadn't been able to attain before. Allies. I almost replaced her... In a sense, it was intentional, now that I think about it."

Grim's eyes widened.

Even Pherdanta showed some emotion. Surprise, primarily.

The Unlimited, in addition to Yuyui, were the only ones who knew that Replicus wasn't actually human. The others saw it as some gimmick the boss employed to make himself look mysterious or to cover his identity, as other leaders of Factions within the Severed Union did.

That said, while privy to how authentic Replicus' form was, the Unlimited were not that familiar with Replicus' personality, except for Grim who knew a little about it because of Yuyui.

Seeing the boss freely expose his emotions and thoughts like this was a bit foreign.

'Now that I think about it, Yu did say there was a lot she didn't tell me about the boss. I guess his circumstances were deeper than I imagined...' Grim thought.

"Uh... Well, regardless of what it is boss, I'm sure you can patch it up. It won't be hard either. Yu isn't the hardest person to talk to."

It was hard to tell whether or not Grim's encouragement actually meant much to Replicus given the obscure way the boss showed his emotions.

"In that you're right..." Replicus said, making Grim feel a bit better about himself.

His words had reached his boss successfully. And that was enough.

Now that he had survived the encounter, Grim decided not to push his luck. He excused himself from Replicus' presence, and headed to the large mark on the third floor where he was transported to the fifth swiftly.

On appearing on the aforementioned floor, Grim gave out a heavy sigh.

That was scary, but he managed somehow, at the very least thanks to the fact that Replicus wasn't some generic villain boss who would have popped his head for speaking out of line, just for dramatic effect. Well, perhaps Replicus just didn't know that he had a lot more screen time than he imagined.

"Well, I expect a formal thanks for toying with death. It'd be better if Yu even thought the boss said she could come for a chat... Yeah, no," Grim thought, imagining the voice from earlier giving him a stern warning.

He walked towards one of two objects that were visible on this floor. They were massive pools that stood at the centre of the floor, taking up most of the space.

Both had square-ish shapes to them – with beautifully carved rims that followed their outlines at the edges.

The sixth and seventh floors were reserved for the Unlimited, with the former housing their personal training spaces, while the latter had their living quarters.

As for these pools...

Grim faced the first, which was nearest to him. It looked to be empty.

The magical tiling within it could be seen without obscurity.

The white-haired Unlimited leapt into the pool nevertheless, with his armour still on.

As he did, the pull of gravity that should have taken him to the bottom immediately, was diluted. Grim's body lazily dropped, slowly descending until it touched the bottom roughly three meters from the top.

Grim sat down. He took a breath. Even he felt nothing, and saw nothing, but he knew, as the others did as well, that this pool wasn't empty.

It was full of Null Life Essence, the bulk of which began to be greedily devoured by his Granted Armament.

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Replicus' quarters could be found on the topmost floor, the ninth. Unlike the mark with groves, like those on every other floor, the ninth floor had a complex sigil which required high clearance to activate whether when leaving or otherwise.

The Unlimited were allowed to reach the ninth floor, as seen with how Pherdanta stood on the sigil with Replicus, while facing a giant set of double doors.

"You can leave now. I'll inform you when it's time to leave for the Severed Coliseum," Replicus told her.

"As you wish."

Pherdanta bowed, and using the sigil, she disappeared.

Replicus kept his gaze where she had stood.

This woman was a very unique individual. Stubborn and strong. So strong in fact, that she was the only one among the Unlimited who didn't have a Hidden Class, and that did not even place her below the others in terms of power.

Her insistence to stay by his side always, had eventually worn down Replicus, and now, he found himself feeling a little vulnerable without her around.

"Hmmm. It's true. I have been replacing Yuyui, it seems..." Replicus said to himself but quickly brushed this subject away. This wasn't the time. He pushed the giant double doors and entered his abode.

"Well... let's get that Armament over with in the meantime..."

#### Chapter 794: Pastime

Quite like the bottom most floor, there was no wall at the end of the ninth floor, which allowed the turbulent view of what happened at the peak of the stout mountain, to be seen from within Replicus' abode.

The rising stone pillars that sometimes shot in the sky, the grey shaded lightning that made said pillars vanish whenever it struck, and the thick mana laced with 'spices'... All of it appealed to Replicus.

Behind the giant doors, the enormous space that led to the end was littered with fat columns of dark marble that extended from the floor to ceiling... and that was it.

Nothing else decorated this place, which was fitting, since a harsh wind blew in from the other side right that moment.

[High level concept detected. 'Distorted Gravity'. To learn the greater essentials, an investment of 55,400 Null Life Essence is required]

[High level concept detected. 'Spatial Lightning'. To learn the penultimate secrets, an investment 111,345 Null Life Essence is required].

[High level concept detected. 'Stagnant Space. To learn the greater fundamentals, an investment of 40,230 Null Life Essence is required]

"Stagnant Space is still very tricky. These fundamentals are hard to grasp..." Replicus said.

His powers had grown more than considerably over the past two months.

Splitting with Skullius had proven to be the right choice. Replicus' goal had never strayed from increasing his power with each waking minute every day ever since he separated from the original. Naturally, it had started with the mission that Skullius had signed up for those months ago and hadn't been able to complete. Replicus had completed it for him and given him the spoils.

From there, it had been grinding and grinding and grinding to the power of five.

Replicus' black, bony hand extended from the clouds, and snapped its fingers. Barely noticeable to even a Master's eye, a spark of grey lightning ran down his phalanxes, and then dashed onto the air.

Where it dipped, a dark void was opened for a micro moment, and a large chair dropped onto the floor.

Replicus sat on it.

A sigh of relief left his mouth.

The clouds around him grew more tame, and then became very thin wisps that awaited his call to bulk up again.

"Maintaining a respectable image isn't fun at all. I bet Skullius has had it easy all this time... Well, before what happened to him, I guess..." Replicus said.

His appearance seemed extra, but it was all a product of him advancing to Tier 3, and graduating from being a mere Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator. The benefits he had accrued from eating the Chubby Remnant Child of Polarity back then, and making his luck incredibly positive to his existence, still bore fruit even now, since when evolving, he had ended up getting some rare evolutions.

The consequent racial variations spawning from the option he chose – Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator – offered greater additions in stats and other quirks.

Replicus placed his hand under his chin. His dark body was in full view now, and after all was said and done, he didn't look that different from before.



There were only two differences with him now.

The spikes that had risen from his collarbone to cage his head before had grown very small, but at their tips they still passed on a streak of Levin indefinitely. Second, the white cloud that would always feature over his head was also gone, though he could summon it whenever he pleased.

Only his clouds seemed to grown more ferocious after evolving, and they kept growing excited whenever he made a great leap towards Tier 4. And he was already very close.

The Tier Serenity encouraged him to reach.

"Will I even see her the next time I evolve?" Replicus said aloud, lazily. "There better be something good waiting for me."

As it turned out, Replicus didn't get visitations from Serenity when he had met the cumulative experience required to ascend to another Tier. Thankfully, this didn't have any effect on the evolution, so Replicus' concerns were moreso on whether if he reached Tier 4, there was some sort of step only Serenity could help him with.

Then again, as close as he might be to Tier 4, he was still far. The experience required demanded Replicus to hunt purple Clusters as frequently as possible, and that was a burden by the incarnation of treachery itself.

"Onto the pastime..." Replicus said.

While he had told Allora that he would be working on her Armament, it was more of a passive declaration than the new Unlimited had realised. Replicus was waiting for something else eagerly. It was the other reason why he was a bit irritated today.

And thus, armour tweaking would have to do for now, as he waited.

With the snap of his fingers, 90 pieces of Legendary grade armour dropped to the dark floor.

Replicus scanned them all lazily with his guidance field, checking what they could do, and the focus of their skills in relation to the user.

"Let's see here. About thirty have heavy focus on stamina and endurance. Good. I'll have to pick which ones to extract from, and which one to... oh, that one looks nice. Hope it keeps its slim design afterwards..."

Replicus split the sets, reserving five of the forty which he found to have the best benefit to stamina aside and then selecting three out of the rest which had skills that amplified the user's individual abilities.

Afterwards, he took a slender looking armour with a brass-like tint and drew it to himself by guiding the mana around it. He set it aside, drew the eight he had selected before him, and then dismissed the other sets of armour he didn't need.

"Alright. Let's have the first," Replicus said, and he grasped one of the armours by the helm.

His bony hand became wrapped in the blue glow of Null Life Essence only he could see, and then the armour he held lit up, showing the traced paths of runes etched into it, key points for the abilities inscribed into it.

A moment later, the tracings turned dim, and it seemed even the armour lost a bit of its lustre.

"Seven more to go."

Replicus did this with the other selected sets of armour. He held them, and his Null Life Essence would force them to reveal where the craftsmen had inscribed the armour's complex abilities.

Of course, what Replicus was doing, was simply extracting the abilities of the armour and branding them onto himself.

Unlike what he had often done before; applying Null Life Essence manually into treasures to extract skills, Replicus had earned a skill for it.

A skill worthy of the Vehement Bone Nullmancer, and exclusive to them alone.

[Wealth of Spoils], an inspired name.

With this skill, Replicus could steal the skills AND stat boosts from any armour under Mythical Grade for now. But that wasn't all [Wealth of Spoils] could do. Obviously.

After he was done, the Null Lifeform disposed of the sets of armour and drew to himself the slender one with the brass hue quality.

"Bones crossed," he said to himself, and with a fierce imposition of Null Life Essence, he activated [Unbound].

Chapter 795: How To Make Excessively Powerful Armour

The guidance field spawned in Replicus' sight.

[What would you like to upgrade with 'Unbound'?]

"Armour," Replicus responded lazily while also admitting the amount of Null Life Essence he wanted to use.

[15,000 Null Life Essence points expended for 'Special Bonus Random Upgrade']

[Upgrade processing...]

[Special Bonus Random Upgrade decided]

[Random Upgrade complete]

With Skullius evolving to Tier 2 a long time ago, the reserves of Null Life Essence he could store increased from 6,000 to 12,000. This allowed him to get benefits only attainable after using [Unbound] with 10,000 or more Null Life Essence on.

Said benefits were obtained through a Special Bonus Random Upgrade, which, different from a Permanent Random Upgrade, gave a higher grade reward, and added a bonus quality that was usually equal to, or higher in quality than the main profit reaped.

In this case...

The slender armour of brass tones lit up as [Unbound] blessed it. Under the gaze of Replicus, it gained additional design features, and grew slightly bulk-wise, shapes and contours added to its overall body.

In the next moment, what was revealed was a... 'porous' sort of armour. A series of fist sized holes could be seen at its sides, though their purpose seemed to be far removed from subtle ventilation.

It had a bold chestplate that pushed out proudly, as though to force whoever would wear it to be proud too. It seemed to have layers to it in the form of bladed plates, because the holes on its lower torso exposed four sharp plates aggregating within to pronounce why it was so heavy.

Overall, the armour possessed a sullen golden hue, with a faded sky blue to its interior. By all accounts, at least in terms of design, it was magnificent, and power-wise, the creepy, yet dominant force of a Mythical grade tool rushed from it.

But of course...

[A Special Bonus Applies!]

The bonus came.

[The skill 'Not Today' has been added to the 'Maiden's Chattering Husk']

"Hooo. To think it has feminine origins..." Replicus remarked.

With his finger, he called upon the mana around this place to move the armour as he pleased, making it stand before him.

It was a beautiful piece, but it still wasn't worthy of being called a Granted Armament yet.

Replicus leaned forward, and touched the armour.

His hand blazed with mana, and [Wealth of Spoils] grunted forth from his hand, imprinting the skills and stat bonuses he had extracted from the sets of armour which he had selected prior, onto this new one, the Maiden's Chattering Husk.

The armour gave a gush of light, and trembled as it inherited aspects that were not inherently its own.

Replicus tilted his head.

Often, sets of armour could be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of stats or skills he granted them, and watching as the armour started vibrating violently as he imparted gifts onto it – and making clear why it had 'chattering' in its name, a result of the loud noise it made, probably because it had multiple plates, and was uninhibited – he removed some of its own abilities.

As he did, the armour stabilised.

"There..."

But still, it was still not worthy of being called a Granted Armament.

Replicus snapped his fingers, and pale grey flakes of lightning smote the air to open a void momentarily. A set of coiling tube-like objects and three large cans dropped to the floor.

"Now, let's get to the real work..."

Replicus leaned to the side from his chair, and touched the floor.

A pulsing flood of energy turned the entirety of the ninth floor blue, attracted by the call of the Vehement Bone Nullmancer.

It then rushed to gather under Replicus' hand, and started to funnel into him rapidly.

This... was Null Life Essence. After expending a significant amount of his own reserves with the use of [Unbound] just now, Replicus replenished them to full.

How?

Well, that was a funny, but long tale that could be succinctly explained by saying Replicus had created a storage system inside the Honing Fortress, where he stockpiled Mana and Null Life Essence, all of which could be accessed by him and his subordinates. When he wasn't using Null Life Essence, but gathering it during hunts, he would send it all to storage, from wherever he'd be.

By now, the total reserves Replicus had in storage were...

"Nice and full..." the Penetrator said as he then turned his focus back to the golden armour. He leaned forward, and with what seemed like an ungodly level of focus, he gathered mana to the tip of his finger and extended his hand out, close to the still slender armour.

The mana turned so bright, it became a white glare like that of the distant summer sun on the tip of his finger, and then began to turn dark like the lightless night. Only mana so condensed it looked like darkness worked for this next bit.

Replicus then began to scribble in the air, what he wrote remaining as black etchings hanging up like wireless laundry.

It wasn't a language, but a command.

Scribble scribble dash, scribble scribble dash...

The mix of what looked like gibberish and a sharp, neat line at the end, showed.

Four piles of text carefully separated into four parts hung in the air after fifteen minutes.

Replicus emitted a sigh. But it was only out of habit. His endurance was still limitless.

This part was done.

All that was left was...

"Null Life Essence to connect it all into a fluid network..."

A shocking burst of Null Life Essence was expelled from Replicus at once, and he quickly shaped it into blue chains that connected the four piles of mana text together.

Ah... if only Skullius could see how easily his avatar manipulated Null Life Essence, as if it was second nature, which it was...

What was the difference between the two in that regard?

That's right. After so long, Replicus, simply by exploring his Class, the Vehement Bone Nullmancer, had managed to awaken a skill that allowed him to manipulate Null Life Essence, and evolve it with intense and monotonous practice.

[Greatest Null Weaver].

As soon as the texts were bound by the chains, Replicus pushed the whole construct into the armour. As he did this, he also pulled on the tubes he had summoned, and had them meld into the armour which he carefully disassembled and reassembled for perfect fitting.

All was done simply by Replicus twiddling his fingers, his non-existent butt on the chair.

The four texts and chains were branded into the armour, and it gave a groan of acceptance as well as a hiss, as if it had been burned thoroughly.

Now, it was complete. Some of the tubes Replicus had placed showed from the exterior of the armour, and in some places, they were a glaring distraction from its overall beautiful design.

But that could all be fixed with the final touch.

The three cans left on the floor opened, and the blue, silver and white contents within them were emptied out over the armour which rotated as it was rained on by different colour on every single spot, hidden and otherwise.

Shortly after, it embodied what its lord intended, and soon, it would be settled over the newest Unlimited.

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[Maiden's Chattering Husk]

-Mythical Grade-

The daring Lady of the Seven Serene Seas carved out this armour for her unwanted follower, a clingy maiden with a loyal heart. As the fierce Lady would not have a liability on her quest, she gave this armour to the loyal maiden, both to test and to protect her.

-Defense-

300,000

-Durability-

635,000/635,000

-Special Effects-

- Informs the user about how to use all its skills
- Heals itself with Null Life Essence
- +270,000 to Stamina with Absolute Conversion
- +195,000 to Endurance with Absolute Conversion
- +102,000 to Agility with Absolute Conversion



- +250% efficiency to Innate abilities

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[Skill: Not Today]

Each hit the armour takes, lethal or harmless, increases the effectiveness of all skills and boosts stat bonuses proportionally, with the minimum increment being 1.5%. Effects last for two minutes per hit, and can be stacked.

-

[Skill: Granted Compound Seal]

...

-

[Skill: Aggrante]

...

-

[Skill: Granted Restoration]

...

-

[Skill: Limited Granted Warp]

...

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## Chapter 796: Shall I....?

Baddan had grown to settle inside his living quarters quite well.

Sad as it was, being a beast that was used to living in nature – at least that which came with his Cluster – and relying on its bare abundance had almost led him to underappreciate the epitome of luxury that human ingenuity could bring.

Almost.

There was a bed that could have easily fit him and all his kin even if they had laid sprawled out in an attempt to steal space from each other.

There was fresh air and a cool breeze, both with unknown origins.

There was a revolving contraption on the high ceiling which gave different settings of light according to who or what the user was; it had long adjusted to what it presumed Baddan would appreciate given the dark shade of his eyes.

There was even a compartment on the walls that had a series of weapons, and a designated space for personal exercises – which also announced how exceptionally large this room was.

When it came to food and drink, there was a fitted table close to the wall that would dip down, disappearing into the floor, and return with different assortments of foods atop it, all still fresh and all very appealing to any whom nature had granted the ability to eat.

Baddan had been enticed into trying different kinds of foods despite his reluctance at first. That in itself was a testimony to the quality here.

What was that saying again? Fresh is fresh?

When it came to Cluster beasts, the quality of their Cluster determined how strong they would grow and at what rate this growth would take place.

During early stages, the Cluster would supply all kinds of energy to raise the beasts, and slowly, with time moved differently within the enclosures of these spaces, the beasts would evolve and grow on their own until they didn't need to be fed as much pure energy.

With time, the energy provided dwindled, but remained in a limited capacity over another stretch, acting as cumulative mana experience which all things needed to augment their powers one way or another.

Of course, there were exceptions.

Some Clusters continued to dot on the native beasts, and with as much abundance as in the early stages, which grandly increased the quality of beasts born.

Most of these were purple Clusters and above.

Ahem, all this tangential exposition to say that, as peculiar as the diet of a Cluster beast was... it could be still be enticed by human culinary arts at their finest.

It had been a while since Baddan had been escorted here. While he was a little worried about his kinsmen before, as they had been given different rooms each, he had grown to calm down.

'To think I have left my home and my culture... to join hands with the same breed that invaded our livelihood...' he thought. 'But... is that creature even one of them? Is it perhaps from another world like me?'

Baddan had yet to understand it all fully, and could afford to wait until he learned for anything else, but this...

It was strange.

Up until now, the most fierce foe he had ever met was the young, lean distant kin who had wiped out his own, and even tamed the most powerful among his race.

That young one.

He was a lot more dangerous than he had appeared at first.

From when the Royale had begun, Baddan had been convinced that nothing, absolutely nothing could stop that spawn.

That deer head he had summoned.

The large saber he conjured next.

And then that dreadful...

Baddan frowned.

How was that even possible?

It wasn't watching his kinsmen's abilities getting copied and used against them, which had frightened him. No.

Heck, when the Keeper, the strongest among all his kin to exist, was bested and torn of his sanity, Baddan had been burned of his faith, but he had accepted soon that truly, there would always be those more powerful than him and those he called kin.

What truly made him turn docile, was the fact that the young one... had tamed even the All-Guiding Appairitoni, the deific existence that ruled his world.

The mountain.

The Sky Watchers governed the skies, and the assegai Baddan had possessed, allowed him to even abuse some of the concepts that only Appairitoni could wield. However, Appairitoni could do all those things and more on its own.

Yet, when the young one invaded... Baddan had felt Appairitoni churn to purge the intruder, and then... nothing

It was only after all hope was lost when Baddan finally understood. That moment... yes, when Rias had said to him:

"That is the task you have. And that's right, when I came here... that force that tried to keep me in place... I will have that sacred mountain of yours recreate it. For the contenders. Wouldn't want them to reach the GOAL too quickly...."

....

Baddan sighed.

'Taming the gods... How big is this world?' he thought to himself in defeat.

A large head drooped onto his lap. A great, dark beast with numerous tails and stripes over its body was with him on the floor.

Thankfully, he and his kin were allowed not to part with their bonds, the Beckoned Retrievers, which were Beckoned no more.

Sigh...

All that thinking about Rias crushed Baddan's mood. This was especially so, when Baddan thought of the monster that lorded over the monster that brought him here.

The master of this Fortress...

Aside from Rias, Baddan felt that this monstrosity was the greatest calamity he had ever faced, even though he didn't feel anything from it.

'Oh Pioneers. I pray that you have rested well...' Baddan gave a silent prayer, unsubscribing from further morbid realisations.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door to his room. He frowned parted with his Beckoned Retriever, and opened it.

A young female with pronounced lips stared at the Sky Watcher unfazed from the other side.

"Evening, good sir. The boss requests your presence on the highest floor," she said politely.

"Boss?" Baddan mouthed.

"Yes sir. Take this," the lady said and passed a small wooden object that gleamed with polish over its smooth, fine red to him. "This is a Granted Token. It will take you to the ninth floor."

Baddan, of course, was yet to gain a firm grasp on how things worked here. He could, however, understand the concept of being given something, and thus he took the token the awfully polite woman gave.

The moment he touched it, his felt himself soar rapidly for a second, which brought him to panic, but he hardly had the time to turn hysterical, because in the next, he was standing before a set of giant double doors, a beautiful sigil under his feet.

Baddan gulped.

He did not need added education to know that he who summoned him was just beyond those doors.

Thus, he moved towards them.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, he didn't get to push the doors open, because they groaned to reveal a path forward on their own.

The first thing Baddan met, was a blast of rich mana, then a gust of wind and an odd tangle of chaotic powers that dashed forth from the bare space at the end of the room he had just walked into.

Baddan could hardly focus on all that for more than a moment, however.

His attention was stolen by a chair turned against him, before it, a magnificent set of armour that floated to the side seemingly on its own, and stood against one of the tall columns.

"It's good that you are," Replicus' voice came. His chair rose and turned to face Baddan who was alarmed by the Penetrator's form without the veil of clouds.

"Pay my likeness no mind, Baddan," the Penetrator declared, and leaned forward, the phalanxes of his hands locked together.

The Sky Watcher tried to heed, but failed. He could not stop his eyes from taking in the dark figure and wondering quite a lot about it.

Replicus didn't attempt to stop him a second time.

Rather...

"Shall I earn your loyalty now? Or rather can I?" Replicus said, his head tilting slightly. "If I make you stronger than you were... STRONGER than the Keeper you admired so much.... STRONGER than the child that bested you and your kind... STRONGER than the most ideal version of you branded onto your mind..."

"Will you, without the need of a magical bind, submit to me...?"

With this, Baddan's attention finally shifted.

Chapter 797: Commendable

What?

Such a bold declaration.

Baddan didn't know how to respond, or how he was expected to, really. It hadn't been that long since he had been brought here, and made to form a pact with Replicus that had him join the Penetrator's cause.

Now, his loyalty was being summoned in exchange for power?

What kind of power was being offered here, exactly?

The Sky Watcher looked to Replicus while hiding his stack of questions and doubts.

"Being a Sky Watcher is so deeply rooted into who am I.... and what I am. Even though I have lost most of my powers, I still desire to hang onto my identity," he answered firmly.

Replicus was unfazed by this subtle rejection.

"I assume your outfit is also representative of that?" he asked.

"Yes, it is. Only the heads of clans and higher can ... could wear this attire. Discarding it... would mean discarding the responsibility that fell on me to keep those that remain of my people alive..."

Baddan's voice grew louder with each word he spoke, as if what he declared emboldened his belief and resolve. He would not budge.

"Hmm..." Replicus hummed, his head laid on his fist. "You throw this argument out with such certainty, but let me ask you. What use is your attire if it sits on a corpse?"

Baddan's eyes narrowed, and his nostrils bulked.

It was no surprise that he felt insulted.

Yet Replicus continued.

"Cast my need for you aside for a moment. You are holding on to bold resolve. Commendable. But, what do you have now that is enough to defend yourself, let alone what remains of your people? Even if you fight like the incarnation of all Form Using styles, you no longer have any innate abilities, from your race or class. After all, those are one to you, are they not?"

Baddan frowned.

It was true.



"Worse yet, with the abilities carved into your body now useless, you cannot even form a meaningful Territory. It will be a literal blank slate that only augments your physical prowess. Believe me when I tell you... That is not enough in Aigas. I speak from experience..." Replicus continued, his four sockets gleaming brighter.

He wasn't lying.

He had first hand experience with this.

Back in the Labyrinth of the Yoke, he had possessed an Incandescent Stage expert by the name Eldris Traven. At the time, he didn't quite understand the mechanics of how living things cultivated strength, but now, Replicus found that the Territory he used that time, was a blank one without an Imaginary GeoScape. It only augmented the efficiency of his abilities and boosted his stats.

While Baddan's circumstances were different from Eldris', who had skills of his own, but was just unable to create an Imaginary GeoScape yet, the result was, and would be the same.

Eldris (with Skullius inhabiting his body) had been overwhelmed still, with his foes not even resorting to their own Territories.

It was all a matter of skill.

"What of it then? I am still powerful enough with that same Territory. Is that not what you need? I will not discard who I am." Baddan barked.

"And like I said, commendable..." Replicus said before he rose from his chair. "But... how would you feel if your kin grew stronger than you instead?"

...!

Baddan's face turned fierce.

"What?! What have you don—"

"Watch your tone."

Baddan instantly shrivelled. He felt no malice or power rush from Replicus, but those words certainly made him relax, somehow.

"I'm not the type to scrounge for loopholes in our agreement just to benefit myself. I guaranteed you that your kin would be put to work in a way that didn't compromise their lives. I have kept my word. However, they are far too weak to be of any use. Thus, I gave them an offer. Individually."

Baddan wore a complex expression.

"They wouldn't accept anything without my approval..." he said defiantly.

"Wouldn't they? Let me make something clear here, Baddan. As long as you exist in my service..." Replicus said while drawing closer to Baddan, who took a step back, "...you will not be a lord, or a leader, or even a head. Your kin are individual units now, not part of a racial collective. I have made them aware of this, and they have accepted it.

To benefit from our arrangement, they will be tried and bettered for the good of OUR collective."

"No exists outside my rules. What you seek to protect is already protecting itself UNDER me and BECAUSE of me. They have no need to discard who they are, but are prospering, while you... Well..."

Baddan, at some point along Replicus' speech, had started to sweat, which really didn't show that well because of his fur.

Still, it didn't take x-ray vision to find that the conflict in his heart had turned into a war.

If his kin had truly been made to accept that the clan they had existed in the form of until now was irrelevant, and were already on the way to getting stronger while working under Replicus...

What did it mean?

Baddan was quite enraged.

Perhaps it was because he didn't get the chance to speak to them after he agreed to Replicus' deal that they shifted their beliefs.

But did they really?

Perhaps, unlike him, his heavily furred kin had lost hope.

Who could blame them?

Their home was destroyed.

Their god was put on a leash before their eyes.

Perhaps it was only Baddan who still clung to an inferior concept. One of the millions that spawned all over Aigas within enclosures created by the Deities' excessive powers.

Should he let it all go and accept a path forward, as a new being?

Wouldn't that be the same as claiming that the last 200 years Baddan had lived, represented nothing at all? What kind of clan leader discarded their culture and tradition instead of reinforcing it?

"You are thinking too hard, Baddan."

By this point, Replicus had arrived just in front of Baddan, towering over him but without the authoritative pressure of a ruler.

The Sky Watcher looked up at the Penetrator.

"I'll say it again. Your resolve is commendable. That is why, I have not asked you to part ways with your attire, tradition and racial branding, even if most of it is lost."

"What do you mean?" Baddan asked with suspicion.

What sounded like a laugh sped out of Replicus.

"You see, there's an experiment I want to conduct. If it goes well, and I'm 90% sure it will, you will not only gain innate abilities without any permanent form of consequence, you will also not have to discard the main themes of your previous powers," he said.

Baddan frowned.

"You can grant abilities... that aren't different from what I had before...?"

"Well, I have been making attempts at such for the past month and now... I have full confidence in being able to. But I need someone physically strong enough to withstand the process. A sound mental fortitude is also required, to imbed the powers I give their bodies without doubt."

"You are my best bet."

Chapter 798: The Boss' Exposition

Replicus was not entirely confident. That was a lie.

However, it wasn't because there were still a lot of flaws with this process he had suggested. It was because the subject used determined the result, and since he didn't want to sacrifice his human subordinates, he went with a beast.

One that arrived conveniently at his doorstep, through the conveyer belt that was Grim.

This wasn't to say Replicus was fine with Baddan dying.

That was the thing. Baddan's Tier and mana core more than suggested a severe degree of tenacity and overall tough body. He wouldn't perish even in the worst of cases. His mental strength seemed formidable too.

Besides, Replicus would be there to stop anything bad from happening.

Needless to say, Baddan wasn't instantly on board.

"What kind of powers will you bestow?" he asked.

"I can't tell you that unless you agree. If you don't, I would have shared a secret of mine for nothing. In any case, I'm sure this will be more powerful than your original abilities. And trust me, I know. I have already read all the skills... abilities, in your body."

Baddan somehow felt naked when Replicus said this.

Read all his abilities? What did that mean?

While he wasn't at all that familiar with the practical placement of skills, and their relation to the body, Replicus was, and more than that, his level of perceiving and manipulating mana was at the peak of the Special category.

When he first met Baddan, he could already tell because of the lightless skills etched into his flesh, that his abilities could not be accessed anymore. But that wasn't the end of the line for the Sky Watcher, if he should agree.

Baddan contemplated.

"If you do not wish to partake, you can leave. The token you were given will return you where you were before," Replicus said as he moved back to his seat.

Baddan felt the conflict within reach an all new high.

What was left to do?

Should he remained weak while his fellow kin went on to get strong? And for what reason was there? If Replicus said this new set of powers wasn't that different from his original, then...

"Very well. I will do it," Baddan declared reluctantly. At the very least, he needed to stay relevant, and the only way to do that....

The Penetrator's everlasting smile seemed to grow wider.

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Forty minutes later, Baddan was standing naked in the middle of the room.

He didn't feel much in the way of shame. Rather, his conscience, bred from his traditional values fought aggressively.

But there was no turning back.

If this worked, he wouldn't mind practicing a practical form of loyalty to Replicus.

Then again, it depended on what this power he was about to be given was all about.

The moment Baddan agreed, he wasn't given the chance to ask further questions and thus some answers were not yet revealed.

The Sky Watcher stood in the middle of a vast and complicated formation that Replicus had made. In fact, the Penetrator was inputting the final details to it at this moment.

With the tip of his finger lit with dark mana, Replicus scribbled the last set of commands, which looked like a paragraph of gibberish text as tall as himself, all hanging in the air.

Piles like this surrounded Baddan in the dozens along with strange shapes in between, and some soaring above him.

The Sky Watcher also had the feeling that there were other things he couldn't see which Replicus had drawn. What could they be?

The most astounding details in the room right now however, were the six, huge sigils marked on the ground around Baddan. Pools of text surrounded them, while strings of dark mana traced their way to him from the sigils.

Baddan felt dreadfully powerful energies screaming from the six sigils.

Oh how he wished Replicus would explain what all this was exactly. He had never seen mana applied this way.

The Penetrator finally finished and his sockets flashed.

"There," he said. "Are you ready?"

Baddan was flabbergasted. Ready for what?

"What?"

"Ah, right. Let me explain a few things..." Replicus realised and dialled back.

"I'm not quite familiar with how the soul works in relation to mana, but I do know how the body reacts when it comes to this substance. After handling it for a thousand years, I feel like I get it better and faster than most."

Baddan nodded slowly and unsurely.

"You have lost your connection to your abilities, but their marks can still be found on your body. They are written all over it. For someone skilled, reading these skills, as they are etched onto you with mana, isn't that difficult, and manipulating them can be quite easy. I am one such skilled person, but I can't restore your original powers."

This had been made quite clear to Baddan, and he wasn't agonizing about it anymore.

"To be able to temper with the natural order like that requires skill that pertains to not just man though, but all forms of energy. This is what I'm using. I'm mostly using mana, but I have to condense it so finely that the result of what I want to do almost reaches the capacity of a Super skill."

This part went over Baddan's head, but he kept listening anyway.

"Tempering is one thing. Extracting is another. You wouldn't believe how many things I have learned. I have an ability that allows me to steal the special properties of objects and imprint them

onto other objects, but it has so far been ineffective on living things. I couldn't extract or imprint things onto other living beings with this ability, until I decided to abuse another one of my abilities..."

"Apostle Summon."

Indeed. A skill from Replicus' class that allowed him to reanimate prey he had killed himself.

If Replicus were to count the number of abominations he had created as Apostles only to...

Replicus' sockets dimmed.

It was worth it in the end, though.

The true prowess of the Nullmancer had been revealed to him at that time.

He ended his advanced monologue here and began to actually educate Baddan.

"The powers I'm about to grant you are modelled after what my own are capable of. Depending on how strong you are, you may be able to leave this floor as a master of SIX creatures that I made and carefully groomed. What's more, you will be able to summon them and cater for them on your own terms. And that means..."

Baddan's eyes bulked. He got an inkling of the meaning.

"Are you going to somehow tie my powers with these... creatures?" he asked, shocked.

"Why, of course. That's where the tempering I mentioned comes in," Replicus said with a chuckle, and brought his hands together.

The entire floor trembled, and became bathed in an excessive amount of Null Life Essence.



Mana also flooded in, called upon by Replicus' advanced mana manipulation skill. But it wasn't only for mana anymore. It was a Special skill that allowed him to freely manipulate others energies also.

[Sorcery of Essence].

The commands he had written started to move and shine as they approached Baddan. Their movements made him feel as though he was being crushed by thick blocks weighing hundreds of thousands of tonnes from all around him.

"Arghh!" Baddan grunted aloud, and called for his purple core to erupt with powerful volumes of mana that strengthened him.

It seemed to not be of much use though. While his body held on, Baddan felt his mind assaulted by the whispers of a myriad of monsters. His consciousness started to fade as the formations pressed hard against his body.

It was beginning.

For some reason, information on what was happening and what he was supposed to do rushed into Baddan's mind and even gave him brief details about the six sigils he had seen.

The beasts were trapped in those sigils, and all they could do, was manifest their thoughts into his. These thoughts, were going to be hostile, however.

Whatever these creatures were, they were not going to submit to him without a struggle.

Baddan, after the information dump passed, felt very revealed.

It helped to make his goal clear.

He was starting to believe.

If he somehow overcame this hurdle, he would truly be strong. So strong that he wouldn't have to fear losing a home and kin again.

## Chapter 799: Walk With Me

Replicus exited his expansive room from the giant double doors. Waiting for him outside, was the gallant figure of Pherdanta whom he had called just now. The mostly stoic woman's punctuality, along with the great sheer zeal radiating from the minute twitches in her posture, conveyed that she was ready for any task her master wished to give.

"I ended up having more errands to run than I had initially planned," Replicus said to himself before turning to Pherdanta, "Keep an eye on Baddan, will you? When he wakes up, send him to his room."

"As you wish," Pherdanta acknowledged, but the slightest hint of uncertainty showed from her face. "And if he doesn't awaken?"

"He will."

Replicus stepped onto the sigil on the floor, and in a blink, he was transported to the seventh floor. As it appeared, even Replicus had to use the sigils and marks to travel around the Honing Fortress.

While this compressed world had its merits in terms of security, Replicus wasn't so arrogant as to believe that any enemy's attempt at invading Deign could be foiled by the inherent settings this space allowed.

Because of that, there were other measures he had put in place.

Even an advanced Mage would have a difficult time navigating the floors of the Honing Fortress. After all, getting in wasn't the biggest problem. The struggle was with manoeuvring within and getting out.

On the seventh floor, which was designated for the Unlimited, Replicus reached a luxurious door that was similar in likeness to three others spaced within the vast corridor.

He knocked.

Because there was perfect noise cancellation for privacy, even Replicus did not hear anything going in within the room until the door swayed opened to reveal a lime green haired girl who leapt at sight of him.

"M-m-master!" Yuyui stuttered and took a few steps back, her face turning into all shades of colour. "What are you... doing h-here? Oh no-no. That's not what I meant! I mean...I mean you own this place..."

so of course you can... uhm... Please come in..."

Replicus didn't say a word as Yuyui put on a show in gestures and unintentional dances. He glanced past her into the vast room littered with musical instruments and junk he knew she collected from many places whenever she got the chance to leave Deign.

There was practically no order within the room, and the best example of the degree of scruffiness featured within, was the bed sheets, which were so untidy that it looked as though Yuyui had left a dirty animal tap dance and sleep on them.

Replicus sighed.

Yuyui never did manage to completely restore her sense of civilised humanity it seemed.

"Dress up into something proper. I want you to accompany me," Replicus said.

Yuyui opened her mouth to speak, visibly intent on refusing one way or another but then...

"Al-alright," she said sullenly and retreated into the room.

Replicus closed the door to allow her privacy. Yuyui seemed so estranged with him that asking him to turn while she changed or casting the door in his face seemed too arrogant. Well, Replicus had seen all there was to see, and from what Yuyui knew, her master was as close to a eunuch as any creature could get.

Soon, she popped out in a sleek leather armour and docilely followed Replicus to a mark that led them to the lowest floor. Walking through the exit, the two silently marched into the pathway sandwiched by two pools and kept going.

At this point, Yuyui realised that her thinking until now had been flawed. She gazed at a distant structure that always seemed to be calling her each time she saw it.

The Temple of Unlusted Tears.

She thought Replicus had wanted to take her there, and had dreaded that he would finally decide to act forcefully, confronting her about not making any attempts to awaken her third eye finally since Ferex's disappearance, but...

"Is that what you thought?" Yuyui heard Replicus speak without turning to her.

She somehow felt embarrassed about being read so easily.

"I can't blame you. We've essentially been living in two different worlds for a while..."

A moment later, Replicus and Yuyui were out of the void onto which a sun was painted, and they appeared on the island, just in front of a large arch painted in red.

Replicus beckoned to Yuyui and they started moving towards a corner of the island that had dense greenery all packed away from the majority of the landmass.

It was only when they were a little less than a kilometre of the way that Replicus spoke again.

"I don't feel anything against you about Ferex, Yuyui. What happened was neither your fault nor Ferex's."

Yuyui didn't provide any verbal response. A sniff was heard from her, but it was neither from emotion nor ailment.

"If blame can be placed on anyone, it should be placed on me. I'm responsible for you all in one way or another. Getting too confident in Ferex's ability to overcome his flaw on his own... that is my burden."

"You're just trying to make me feel better," Yuyui said in a sombre tone.

Replicus stopped, and turned to her while dimming his sockets so she could meet his gaze without squinting.

"Now that... is my fault," he said, much to Yuyui's surprise. She eyes, which were livid with conflict bulked and shimmered.

"What?"

"Making you feel better. I don't do it as much I should. I never did. I've failed at conveying many of my thoughts and emotions, Yuyui. Especially when I learnt how to. My goals have taken precedence ever since I got rid of my curse.

How I viewed things... changed for a while and when I realised how many mistakes I was making, I didn't want to give myself the time to fix them. Grim reminded that I could."

Yuyui faced the ground.

"I don't think you're wrong, master. I really wanted to become someone strong. I wanted to become dependable. But I just can't. I was born a normal person. I turned slightly insane, but I'm still a regular girl.

All I know is music. Fighting and killing... That priest. I dream about it all the time. I can't forget and I can't get past it. And then Ferex...

It's different for you because you weren't there. I was. I... failed him. Maybe I'm just not cut out for this..."

"Maybe not," Replicus said, and with a sigh following after.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have forced you to tag along with me after you were free. That First Trial had a lot of loopholes. I could easily have kept you at a distance. I still can."

Yuyui shook.

"What? Can what?"

"If you wanted, I could let you go free. For you to live the way you want. Away from the things you feel... aren't meant for you."

"But no. I can't..." Yuyui's face turned dark. To just leave after everything. To go somewhere and pretend as though the past two months hadn't happened?

Her denying this possibility contradicted what she had just said but...

"I can't do that! That's not... I mean..."

"You're in conflict with yourself. That won't help either of us. If there are wrongs you want to right, you can't fulfill them in this state. The way I see it, you can choose what kind of life you want going forward. You can't remain as the funny bard of the group forever. That won't help anyone.

And trust me, the coming times are going to need you to decide soon."

Chapter 800: The Bright, The Bard and The Bird

Yuyui wanted to raise as many arguments for herself as she could, but she found none. The sheer degree of contradiction she felt between her heart and mind made her feel as if she was about to go insane.

At one point, she directed all that rage at Replicus.

Why wouldn't he just admit it? After getting rid of his curse, he could finally get more reliable combatants to his side, so now he was just trying to get rid of her, wasn't he?

But an opposing thought crashed against her rage almost immediately.

That wasn't fair. After what he had just admitted a few minutes ago, it was apparent that Replicus cared for Yuyui's emotions more than she had thought. He even exposed his vulnerable sentiments and gave her a choice.

Even though she was bound to his service, he was giving her the option of getting away from this world that she herself had said she wasn't fit for.

Argh!

Yuyui silently battled it out against herself while following behind the mass of clouds that buried within it a pitch black skeleton. Replicus knew she had a decision to make, and didn't bother her with idle chat since he had spoken his piece.

Yuyui only gave a quarter of her focus to where they were going.

Her current mood drove away any intent she had had to ask Replicus where they were going. Had he called her along just so he could have her make a choice, and in the meantime he could completed his own vague missions?

When put like that, the thought that Replicus just wanted to get rid of her grew stronger within Yuyui's mental opposition.

Soon, the duo were exiting the grassy plain they had been passing through, closing in on the first line of green leading to a forest that felt as though the trees and shrubs it held were the backdrop for something more wondrous within it.

"Do not approach any further, Bright Storm!"

A powerful, agitated voice blared from the edge of forest, prompting Replicus to stop and Yuyui to hurry closer to his side with a yelp.

Replicus raised his head to the thick canopies of the trees and expelled a visible breath of mana.

"How did that name find its way onto your tongue?" he said to something that couldn't be seen, the originator of the voice from just now.

"Pfff. Hypocrite. Your men call you that, so why shouldn't I?" the voice came again, sounding grumpy and a bit raspy.

Replicus turned to Yuyui, genuinely wondering if this was true, and the lime haired girl gave a weird shrug that implied that it indeed was.

'I guess they can't always call me boss,' the Penetrator thought exasperatedly. To think that stupid name...

"Why are you here? It is unlike you to suddenly pay a visit without warning me, pfff," the voice said, and a slight shift through the trees yonder gave the impression that its owner was moving.

"I grew bored of waiting. I know for a fact that IT must be ready, or close to it at least. By your previous estimations, today was the day, and right now was the hour. You should have already called me," Replicus replied.

"Pfff. So powerful yet so impatient. I have never known such a combination. Or maybe it is because you are unnatural in your own right. In any case, you are right. I was only minutes away from calling."

At that moment, something flew from the forest and perched on a branch visible to Replicus and Yuyui.

It was a bird. A stork with red feathers, its whole as large as a man. Strangely, its eyes conveyed emotion just as well as a human too, as just from the way it looked at Replicus, Yuyui could tell it wasn't feeling jovial.

"Alright, follow me, pfff. I wish you hadn't brought another stranger though. My fellow beasts are this close to thinking I'm submitting to outsiders."

'This close' was represented by a raise of the stork's feet.

Replicus didn't pay the stork's words too much mind. He had already started to walk forward by the time the stork dropped its foot, a 'Curse you, pfff,' leaving its beak.

Yuyui assumed the 'pfff' sound the creature made was because it had a cold. Ooze dripped from two holes on its beak, after all.

To no surprise, this forest, was a Sacred Forest.

When Replicus was awarded this island as the base for his group, he had found the matter of the forest a big problem, because unlike with Sacred Forests on the mainland – Feinheath which was



closest, for instance – the creatures within this forest liked to roam outside their habitats from time to time, because there were no threats on the island.

When Replicus and company had arrived, they had felt threatened, and some of them made to defend their home.

Replicus had been warned about this by his 'peers', and had been advised to eradicate any Sacred Forests anywhere in his territory, since more often than not, there would be one guardian beast or more protecting the creatures inside, and such creatures tended to be difficult to deal with.

Of course Replicus knew this.

He had met the Great Mane Mountain Ape Azila and had almost met the Aqua Ripper too, in the Tremur Forest. As guardians, he had gauged that their kind were no easy opponents. But that was another matter.

Instead of resorting to violence, Replicus chose to try a more peaceful approach. His desire to increase his power, and his knowledge about how reasonable beasts could be, told him of opportunity, and he had turned out to be right.

The stork that was leading them right now, was a guardian, rather the guardian of the Sacred Forest, and Replicus shared a fantastic relationship with it.

"I feel your trust in me is slipping, Bright Storm! Your respect too! Last time, you sent that straight-faced monster to check up on your things instead of coming yourself and now, you just drop in unannounced! I demand compensation, pfff!" the stork complained.

"I was busy then, and I would think Pherdanta is the perfect messenger. She gets right to the point, doesn't she? If I had sent anyone else, they would have explored this forest wantonly," Replicus explained, thinking he would never trust Grim with something like that.

"Weave all the logic you want, Bright Storm! You might find that next time, I might not be too inclined to do you anymore EXTRA favours, pfff!"

Yuyui could have sworn the stork looked back at them with a sly look, its beak almost contorting into a smile.

Replicus sighed.

"Sorry Timmit. It won't happen again," he said in as hollow a tone as possible, but the stork, whose name was Timmit, apparently, seemed quite satisfied.

Yuyui was shocked to see Replicus apologise. Granted, this was her first time getting anywhere near the Sacred Forest, well, except for that one time she got close enough to almost be chunked in by Grim after she lost a bet with him.

Suffice it to say, she didn't know much about Replicus and this bird.

Around their party, Yuyui saw, through thick forestry that obstructed the light from the sun at times, groups of beasts mostly of similar kind going about their business. Some of them fought, those that were intelligent discussed unknown topics. Several could be seen feeding, and not in the express restaurant sort of way.

Most of them turned as the trio passed, but they depicted a certain level of aggression that made Yuyui kind of understand why Timmit did not like having visitors in the forest. Human visitors.

Unlike most guardians, Timmit didn't seem like the type the other beasts feared to the point of keeping their dissatisfaction to themselves.

"Look at them! They are already forming doubts in their minds about me, pfff! I should remind them that I could destroy them and their habits just as easily as they gawk at me with those stupid eyes!" Timmit raged. "Maybe I should advertise our friendship more, Bright Storm! Yes, we could make a concession about that."

"I'll consider it if you stop calling me Bright Storm. The other Factions call me that, apparently my men call me that in secret too, but I can't have you joining in too," Replicus said.

Timmit scoffed.

"Uh, master," Yuyui finally found the gall to chime in. "Why did you bring me here exactly?"

Given the circumstances, it truly seemed Yuyui's presence was more bad than good. This pushed her to ask.

"Just wait and see..." Replicus replied simply.

Yuyui pursed her lips. She missed the days when her master was very expressive and authentic, being open about his homicidal tendencies and dissatisfactions. He often killed her just to prove a hostile point.

Maybe she had been right to miss Skullius when he split to create Replicus.

They were turning out to be very different.

A few minutes later, Yuyui recognised a change in the environment. The different geographies within this one Sacred Forest that had spotted a menagerie of very different beasts clustered in carefully separated habitats; magic habitats that accelerated the growth of one species within them, disappeared.

The trees that had spotted a green to a yellowish shade with brown barks, turned entirely scarlet the further she, Replicus and Timmit went.

Yuyui gulped.

Space started to warp as the miscolouring persisted, and the vast forest disappeared in the next moment.

The first thing in the new view which Yuyui saw, was a giant nest within which two, large familiar eggs sat, smothered by crystals brambles and leaves.