

## 140 – The Drowned

*“Dragged out to sea by the pull of waves.”*

*Drip*, came the sound, as I let a drop of blood fall into the first of the five circles. I took a long step to the next one awaiting me, continuing the litany.

*“Torn across the abrasive sand and washed in salt.”*

*Drip.*

*“Pumped full of briny water and eyes obscured by the depths.”*

*Drip.*

*“Lungs bursting from the pressure, with no air left to breathe.”*

*Drip.*

*“Drowned so close to the safety of shore and left to rot in the waves.”*

*Drip.* The last drop fell into the fifth circle and I continued back to where the candle sat within the sixth.

*“Hark mine call, like thy heart heeds the very same waters that drowned you.”*

The Black Tallow Candle’s wick burst into a fat oily deep-blue flame that climbed up towards the ceiling, before curling around on a meandering path for a few seconds. Suddenly, it shot straight down into the water of the small ‘pond’ I’d made.

As it struck, a tremor rolled out across the air.

A moment later, *something* began to appear below the water’s surface, as though swimming up out of a deep recess below the floor upon which I stood. The top of the head had long white-grey hair interspersed with slimy dark-green seaweed. As it pushed against the water, the surface tension didn’t break, allowing the full head, then torso, then entire body, to push out before the water burst apart and left behind the summoned Revenant.

It was taller than me by about fifteen centimetres, but its presence made it seem even bigger than that. Aside from its long hair that fell down to its lower back, it had bluish-pale skin covered in purple-and-black bruises and dirty light-brown barnacles that were seemingly alive. Its skin sagged in many regions, almost like it belonged to a onesie that was too large for the figure and thus was baggy near the elbows, knees, abdomen, neck, and face. The stomach was also heavily distended, and I imagined that its belly was full of seawater. Its hands and feet were, like the rest of its body, almost-normal, but the nails were brown overlong claws that curled hideously.

“**Putrid**,” said Armen in disgust, putting word to what I was thinking. Somehow it was worse than the Corpse Tree, perhaps because it was so close to normal that the differences stood out more, whereas the Tree had been so absurdly disfigured and gory that it failed to be impactful in a way, like a caricature or something.

The Drowned opened its mouth, releasing a rattling cough and a spatter of black water that smelled like rotten fish and meat, not too unlike Butchery district.

I sent out my soul tendril to form the Pact, and the moment it connected it was like my entire body was submerged underwater, with the surface above quickly falling away.

Gritting my teeth, I pushed through the feeling.

*I seek in you a Caster to afflict my foes and lend your elemental affinity for water to my arsenal.  
I name you Nami-no-Musuko.*

The Drowned coughed again, then went incorporeal.

“Nasty fuckers they are,” said Ludwig. “I once exorcised one. It nearly drowned me twice. Probably won’t do you much good in a city, but that black water in its stomach is how Drowned are capable of inflicting a unique sickness that cuts off magic.”

I nodded. “I may have some luck infusing my staff with its spirit to use it offensively.”

“It can manifest out of any body of water, so you could probably manage to get the drop on someone if you pick the right place for an ambush.”

“You’re suggesting I *ambush* people?” I wondered if he was saying it because I might have to fight more of the Demonologist’s cronies...

“I’m just spit-balling, but don’t discount the benefit of getting the drop on someone. Fear is a good way to get people to give up fighting.”

“Owl said something similar,” I commented.

“Yeah, well, old bastard wasn’t wrong about everything.”

“**A true hero never strikes their quarry in the back!**” Jules exclaimed sincerely.

“Puppet boy, do you know what happens to Heroes?”

“**What? Do tell me!**”

“They end up like you, turned into a tree or worse. Heroes don’t live long. Honour belongs to the dead, dishonour and falsehoods is how you stay alive. Anyway, since you’re done here and still alive, I’ll go get some shut-eye.” With that comment, Ludwig left the summoning chamber.

There was a brief silence left in his wake.

I wondered if perhaps Jules had upset him.

“He speaks like someone who wanted to be a hero, but was too afraid of dying,” the Petrified Hero commented knowingly, with a kind of astuteness I hadn’t expected from him.

“He wasn’t necessarily wrong,” Armen replied.

“I am aware that honour was to my detriment, but I do not regret the life I lived.”

I let out a breath of air I didn’t realise I’d been holding in.

“You want to help me get rid of a Haunter that is terrifying people and driving them mad?”

“Sleep ought to come first,” Armen advised.

I nodded and headed for the stairwell.

Elye, Renji, and Emily had gone out on the Scalebird quest with a fourth person that had a beige-and-blue aura and who the Brawler knew. She was a Sorceress name Kally and it seemed that my friend hoped she could mentor Emily a little, even though Kally had Water and Mist Affinities.

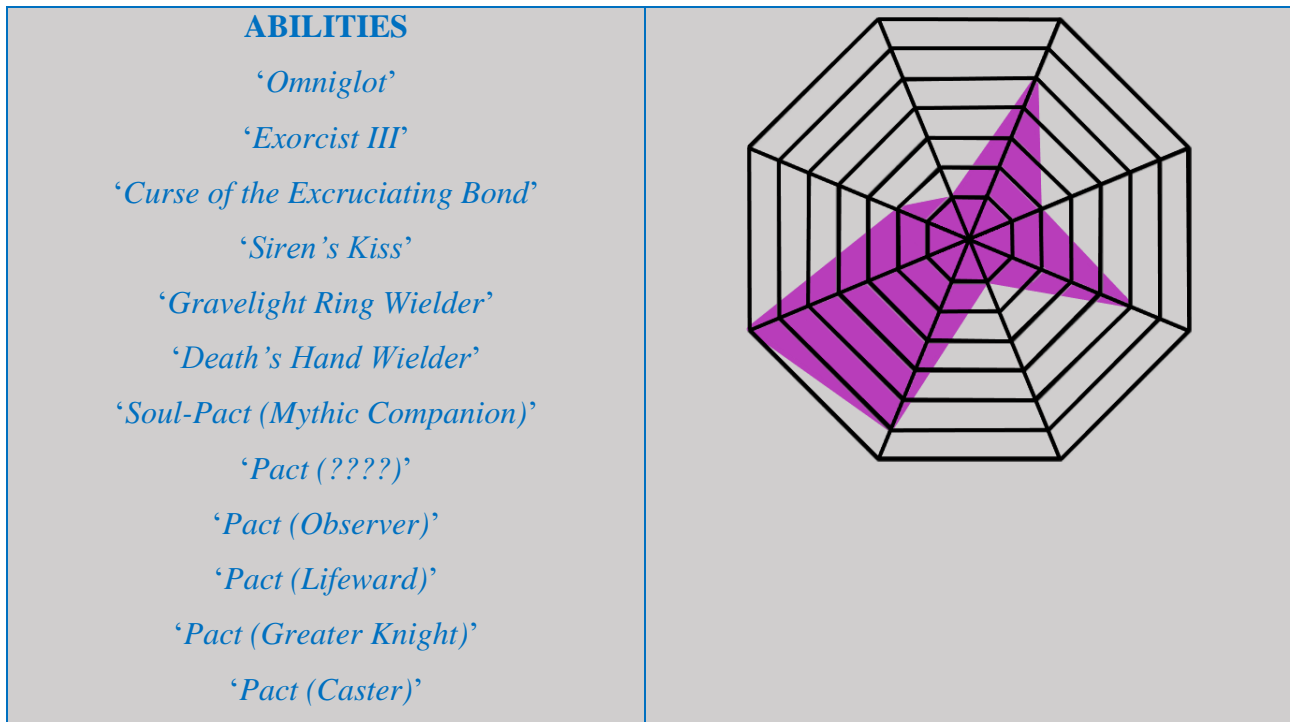
So, since they were all gone, I decided to just grab one of the available rooms in the Necromancy Guild.

The following early morning, I got out of the bed I’d borrowed, which was essentially just a porous volcanic rock slab with about half-a-metre of stacked furs. It seemed they hadn’t thought about making mattresses yet in the Guild, even though many taverns and inns already utilised something pretty close to it. Though maybe it was a thematic limitation they were putting on themselves?

After eating a breakfast made by Letthorr, which was a strange combination that seemed mostly designed based on whatever sweetmeats and preserved foods were in stock in their larder, I exchanged a few words with Ludwig. He told me to not be reckless and said that I could use the Necromancy Guild as my temporary shelter until my friends came back.

I spent about ten minutes preparing myself for the Exorcism Quest by checking my gear, such as my various ashes, incense, Possessed Items like the Scenting Whistle and Gravelight Ring, and also my Guild card.

<i>‘TEMARU RYUUTA’</i>			
<i>ROLE: Exorcist</i>		<i>RANK: Eminent</i>	
<i>GENDER: Male</i>		<i>AGE: 18</i>	
<i>ACUMEN: B</i>	<i>DEXTERITY: E</i>	<i>INTELLIGENCE: B</i>	<i>LUCK: F</i>
<i>PACT: A</i>	<i>SOUL: S</i>	<i>STRENGTH: E</i>	<i>VITALITY: F</i>



Once I was satisfied that I had made all the right preparations, Armen and I left through the Demon door, which grumbled angrily at us, unlike when Saoirse had opened the way the day before.

After coming out into the air of early-morning Butchery district and getting a waft of warm putrefaction, I quickly hurried back towards Great Marketplace and then took a long detour north-east to Easthall. I could’ve reached it faster if I’d been inclined to go through Butchery, but I also needed the walk, so it was a good excuse to go through the less-off-putting-and-depressing Taverna district that bordered Butchery and Easthall.

After arriving to the district, I was greeted with a quaint and orderly part of the city with several apartment blocks placed at an equal distance from all their neighbours, with many of the ground-floor apartments turned into small stores, bakeries, and such.

I’d thought that locating the specific apartment would’ve been difficult, but I found it fairly quickly thanks to the screaming.