

Undead 1201

Chapter 1201: The One Left Standing (15)

POW!

For Tulnas, the blow couldn't have been anything less than the mightiest burst of thunder he had ever heard proceed a streak of lightning.

He gawked at the two figures that had suddenly appeared in the empty streets of Surloin, which had been swarmed by frantic souls only a minute ago.

The trembling of the world, shattering noises crackling from every direction imaginable, had cast everyone in the small stronghold of a town into their homes, with Tulnas and other able combatants stationing themselves outside for what they expected to be another Great Trembling.

But it wasn't.

It was worse.

A second ago, Tulnas had been rendered completely immobile by some invisible sludge that seemed to have manifested all over Pelian at the very least (he imagined). He had no way of fighting back if something monstrous attacked. He was helpless. Only his eyes were livid with motion.

With said frantic eyes, Tulnas saw something even more harrowing than what he had expected to proceed the trembling.

He saw a monstrous ebony creature that suddenly regrew two of its arms, completing the set of extra limbs it had. Aigas was warping around it, as though the creature was a humanoid manifestation of a black hole slowly guzzling the spatial canvas that the world was fixed on.

Tulnas also saw an unnaturally dark monstrosity with a red mask. Well, there were six of them and two robed folks behind them. One of the creatures took a heavy blow just now that neither he (Tulnas) nor it could see, and sustained a fair bit of damage. The dark monstrosity's mask broke into pieces that loudly clattered as they landed on the ground.

The shuddering winds that came afterward sent chills down Tulnas' paralysed spine, but what made him turn pale, was the face that was revealed after the hideous mask left its original position.

The dark-haired young man, no longer twisting his hair into a man bun like he used to back then, when he was the prestigious Guild Master of the Harem Guild and then the Vice Guild Association Head, was lost for words.

The face he saw had changed considerably since he last saw it, though this was only half of what made him realise that the individual he was looking at... was indeed Festos.

The darkness that odd little man had used back then left a deep impression on Tulnas, and though it was different now, the look of fury in those white eyes seemed to be the very same he'd seen in that little Mage who had been – for a short time – a partner of his on a mission to defeat the Evenfall cultists outside Inhone City.

On top of this, there was a familiar sword held in one of Festos' ghosts. Demion's Dance.

'It must be... him!' Tulnas thought, his eyes unblinking and bulging.

Then...

POW!

POW!

POW!

POW!

Tulnas turned paler as the town was suddenly drowned by gusts from the rapid impacts and shockwaves.

He mustered all the power he could into his throat and screamed "LOOK OUT!" on instinct to everyone, but his voice was like a whisper. Besides that, none of his fellow combatants could have mobilised any sort of resistance against becoming collateral damage.

Tulnas watched as one of his mates, a hard-faced woman with a shield, was swept away so quickly by the gusts that one would have thought an abhorrent creature had swiped her into the dirty, windy air.

Tulnas gritted his teeth.

The view of whatever was happening with Festos vanished and he couldn't find the courage to keep trying to spectate.

*

Skullius was disgruntled.

'How does he know which one is the real me?!' he thought furiously as the Inverted-Mana-infused blows he received, repeated through the manipulation of time by Replicus, punctured through CREATURE's defences and blasted his flesh apart. But then his thoughts cycled towards something more important. 'Those two better not have been disrupted by this... this...! Wait! Is this [Static Limbo]?''

At once, Skullius activated [Null Life Aura], just like Replicus had done against Caxellac.

He had received this skill for use in his human form after managing to evolve [Flesh It Like You Mean It] once.

Upon activating it, there was a considerable degree of ease on the pressure surrounding Skullius, and as his ghosts did the same – some vanishing only to be replaced by new ones – they were able to resist [Static Limbo] loosely as well.

But Replicus didn't allow Skullius to gain any sort of relief!

On top of the hasty utilisation of Integral Time just now, he cast one of his hands forth and used [Maximum Reach]. Like before, the real Skullius – as Replicus could see with his enlightened eyes – didn't react to it in time and was once again gripped firmly by the massive purple-gold hand!

But Skullius' ghosts didn't stand around and do nothing.

One of them chanted "DHYIESMYK BLACK, [Mages]" and the two Mages under their control were suddenly swallowed by darkness, taken into the Melanoid Prince's safe keep. Yet of course, they were still in use.

Replicus quickly spotted an unusual twisting of space beside him and...

The Stolen Angel's fist flashed from it, detached from its main body to strike at his face!

Replicus dodged in time, but found another one of the Angel's fists blasting for his gut from below!

His eyes saw through the sneaky offensive, however, and he vanished, appearing several meters away.

'One of the Mages is using some kind of space spell to help the Stolen Angel get a hit on me,' Replicus thought as he dodged another series of punches. It was annoying that the Mages could still attack despite being in a separate dimension.

Replicus was forced to release Skullius who immediately sicced his ghosts on him.

Thankfully, they weren't as freakishly fast as before because of [Static Limbo], so he (Replicus) could handle them much easier, and furthermore...

'It seems while using this dark power, he can't use a lot of those ghosts or clones or whatever. He can only use six at a time.'

Empowered slashes flew at Replicus just as another one of the Angel's fists missed him by an inch. The Progeny was unwilling to take hits from the damn thing. There was something off about the creature's fists. He surmised that they were enhanced by a spell from one of the Mages somehow.

Replicus saw Skullius summon more Soul Spawn and cast them all throughout the town to look for victims to bond with.

The bastard was trying to create more Masterpieces and the Progeny understood why. None of the combatants in this town could help Skullius in combat directly, but bringing them under his influence would help him very, very, very much.

Replicus harrumphed.

'You're not going to get the chance!' he thought and his phantoms went livid with creativity!

One of Replicus' hands shot forth and...

[You have created a new skill, 'Cold Time'!]

A series of lightning bolts coloured in a sexy midnight blue exploded from Replicus' finger and smote all of Skullius' ghosts at the exact same time!

At once, the ghosts, along with their immediate surroundings, were turned into black icicles that hissed of cold steam!

They were imprisoned in a mix of Absolute Frost and Integral Time!

...!!!

Skullius was alarmed.

'Damn it!'

Replicus dodged another blow from the Stolen Angel and...

[You have created a new skill, 'Impartial Mirror'!]

What looked like an ovular pool of silvery waters spawned before Replicus, reflected within them the figure of the Stolen Angel standing in Genhuis City, where he and Skullius had been fighting only a few seconds ago!

Replicus dipped his hand into the pool and grabbed the image of the Stolen Angel. What he touched was merely a reflection of the real thing, and as he overdosed the mobile Attegoth on potent Ju`wtte, making it explode from the inside, the real Stolen Angel in Genhuis City was blasted apart as well, only with three times the amount of violence!

[Impartial Mirror], a skill created by fusing Lambent Phosphor, Coordinated Disruption and Spatial Lightning, allowed Replicus to manifest the image of an enemy as a reflection and whatever damage he did to this reflection would be compounded threefold to the original, provided he had met and interacted with said enemy.

The momentary reprieve that this skill gifted Replicus allowed him to once again use [Maximum Reach] on a scurrying Skullius!

A burst of intense light exploded from the Hybrid Luman, repelling the skill successfully!

He had used the Heart of Revelation while adding his 'trick'!

But Replicus now understand enough about how it worked.

Thus, he had already set in motion another attack!

The purple-gold light of Maximum Catalyst's Reversion fell on the Hybrid Luman from the sky before he could even speculate on Replicus' next move!

However, the countless disembodied slashes that surrounded Skullius were the ones that bore the full wrath of the ability!

Skullius felt his defence of unending cuts vanish... along with all other passive effects of [Infinite Sword God]!

He panicked.

He was disoriented. He didn't know what was coming next.

[You have created a new skill, 'Selective Time Rewind'!]

At the same time, Replicus used another newly formed skill on his evil counterpart.

It carried the same capabilities as his Reversion in some sense, which made it perfect for the plan he had concocted against Skullius just now. Even if Skullius managed to wiggle out of one, he would get him with the other to produce the same result!

And thus...

"NO!" Skullius screamed.

His form, which had been that of a handsome, auburn-haired young man was gone, replaced by a pitch-black skeleton with Levin crackling from the thunderclouds that covered its body!

The Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator was now matched against the Warmoth's Progeny!

In a flash, Replicus had his grip on Skullius' neck and was raising him in the air.

"It's over," he growled coldly.

Chapter 1202: The One Left Standing (16)

"Are they even mortals anymore...?" Dellan managed to say through his gnashed teeth.

He couldn't believe what he had just witnessed Skullius and Replicus do in the last few minutes. Hell, he couldn't even describe some of the things they had done. They went beyond the scope of his understanding of what was possible.

Quite to his surprise, Erlton wore a similar look of shock on his face, a bit of sweat dripping from his temples.

He couldn't believe that time, one of the concepts ensnared into the Rules that made Aigas a habitable world, was casually being manipulated by these two monsters.

They did it with staggering ease as well, and he wasn't sure what he and the other remaining Herald could even do if these two started doing things wilder than they were already doing on a wider scale, as that would certainly bring Aigas to an end.

Karima had on a deep frown. Part of him now understood why Erlton had stopped him from engaging in battle with Skullius earlier. That bout wouldn't have ended the way he had thought it would.

Yuyui had perhaps the least tense look out of everyone here. In fact, the only reason behind the slightly strained look on her face was the surge of excitement she felt at seeing the powerhouses in the Dormant Territory recognizing her master's strength!

Replicus had told her and the rest of the Unlimited about how the Empyrean Bosom and the Warmoth's Progeny had items and places that he was deemed unworthy of obtaining and reaching. In the last two months Replicus had worked furiously to debunk the glib, arrogant declaration of the gigantic Strawler he had met in the Third Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher – the one that had called him unworthy.

'You haven't seen anything yet! You can't even begin to imagine what my master can really do when he is going for the kill!' Yuyui thought excitedly just as Replicus – on the mirror everyone was using to spectate the battle – caught Skullius with [Maximum Reach].

Her enthusiasm burned up to her forehead, where a strange symbol was embossed. It looked like a tiny tree made of Ju`wtte, four branches reaching out from its trunk. A star was perched on the end of each branch.

At the moment, the symbol was sparking, spitting out copious bits of lightning. It become distracting at some point. Even when the battle on the screen reached a high climax, Yuyui yelping as Skullius was turned back into the Penetrator, Soidon turned to look at her forehead curiously.

He couldn't help but wonder...

What was that symbol on it, and what was its purpose?

Replicus gripped Skullius firmly and manifested strings of Ju`wtte to bind every bit of him. The Levin that shot out of the Penetrator was no match for the might of Ju`wtte. It simply crumpled when it attempted to wrestle against the Warmoth's powers!

Replicus would have bound Skullius with even better means, but this was it. He had to find a way to make the Penetrator use [Brisk Storm Avatar], and that required some means to compel him forcefully to activate the skill.

Despite what he had just growled to Skullius just now, Replicus was only one step towards his goal.

The best way to compel Skullius in any way, was to appeal to his soul.

Unfortunately, however, Skullius' soul was not in his body, or the Stolen Angel or anywhere else his eyes could see.

The great vision the Progeny had granted himself with a Rule couldn't tell him where his counterpart's soul was. This was especially terrifying because this would have to mean that Skullius' soul was not on Aigas at all!

"Just what did you do?!" Replicus barked. Skullius' four sockets blazed with vibrant, blinding flames defiantly.

He didn't speak.

Replicus scoffed.

His eyes scanned everything around him. Though he had gotten the better of Skullius now, he couldn't relax.

Even if Skullius didn't have access to his Hybrid Luman skills through this body, the Stolen Angel did. Replicus was well aware that the Attegoth had become its own separate entity that would continue to exist even if Skullius was not in his Luman form. This was the grand boon offered by his blessing: Graceful Monolith of the Eminent.

But the Stolen Angel alone wasn't enough to defeat Replicus.

It just now regenerated in Genhuis City, and was assessing the situation, likely sharing thoughts with Skullius, Replicus imagined.

'I better seal him in the prison within the Empyrean Bosom before deciding how to move forward,' the Progeny thought.

But then, he realised something.

...!!!

It seemed that Skullius, through the way Replicus' curved blue eyes twitched, noticed that the Progeny had caught on to his plan just now.

'Dammit!' Replicus cursed as he set to activate [Impartial Mirror] once again.

But it was too late!

Skullius had been wielding his two swords just before he was caught by Replicus' [Selective Time Rewind].

Replicus only now realised that the swords were gone.

They were now in the Stolen Angel's possession in Genhuis City!

Of course, the fact that the mobile Attegoth was now the one open to use [Infinite Sword God] in tandem with the powerful swords couldn't have scared Replicus as much as it did in this moment.

No.

What scared him was...

"DO IT NOW! ANGEHEEL!!!" Skullius screamed with a passion, but the Stolen Angel was already acting swiftly.

Replicus couldn't see it, but the monstrosity suddenly sprouted two extra arms below its original pair, and its body bulked up a little bit more.

In its top arms, it raised Demion's Dance and the Bashful Abomination, but only the latter was immediately brought down with astonishing speed!

Replicus felt what he had been dreading from this distance: an attack that didn't need fuel.

The slash that hurtled his and Skullius' way had freakish power that transcended the power of Supreme Skills!

Skullius had concocted a method to get rid of the cost required to power attacks, and Replicus had recognised that the chipped zhanmadao – the Bashful Abomination – was one of the components required for this 'trick'.

Aigas rumbled as something terribly unusual, something never seen before, occurred.

In the path of the Bashful Abomination's elegant stroke of a downward slash, the world was ripped in two!

Suddenly, it was as though Aigas had been nothing more than a gigantic drape that could be sliced apart all along. The world split while printed on the two pieces of this drape which flew upward casually, leaving below them... another Aigas?

Replicus gnashed his teeth.

The Aigas sky he knew from a second ago was cut in two and it flew up, leaving behind a long-passed predecessor.

The ground and the state of the town he was in just a moment ago, rose as a giant drape.

The degree of mana he was accustomed to from Feinheath changed.

Instead, a richer, denser sort of mana blasted out from all around him. It was almost a hundred times richer than that he knew from the current Aigas!

"This is...!" Replicus cried, astounded.

Only he remained as he watched time get cut down on Aigas.

The present time had been sliced in two and raised upward like a curtain!

Now, all around him, he saw great structures, and great men and women who had died a long time ago.

He saw great temples, great faceless statues erected in what had been a small, dingy town just now!

He felt the presence of powerful men the likes of which Pelian had never known since... since...

Replicus was flabbergasted.

Aigas had been wound back 4,000 years, to before the Ashing of Time... to before the departure of Listafelle and Quintess!

"That old man wasn't the only one who knew how to mess with time!" Replicus heard Skullius, who was in his grip cry out ecstatically. His socket flames burned bright.

Shockingly, a soft, clean stroke of light split the Penetrator in two, like Aigas!

The Stolen Angel had struck him too with its slash!

"I inherited those two Mages' memories, and when I saw you wield time so easily, I was inspired! Nothing is over yet you damned, arrogant FAKE!"

And right then, the skeletal form of the Penetrator slid off in two from Replicus, revealing his handsome Hybrid Luman form once again!

The reversal of time Replicus had imposed on him was undone by Stolen Angel's slash!

Replicus hurried to activate [Cold Time] on Skullius to suspend him. The form of the Luman was blasted into a shape of dark ice, but it was too late.

Skullius had slipped away, replacing his real self with a ghost!

"Even Time isn't good enough to subdue us! It's not worthy! Don't you see?! It's all meaningless! Past, present, future!" he cried jubilantly.

Replicus readied [Maximum Reach] but Skullius was a step ahead.

He had gotten used to that bit of preparation required to use Maximum Catalyst outside of Replicus' body.

Shockingly, he leaped up and dived into the gigantic drape above, in the skies, which was the present Aigas!

Replicus hurtled after him, but he was forced to make a quick pause when a deadly slash came between him and the Hybrid Luman, which gave Skullius a great lead.

The Stolen Angel had rushed appeared close.

The Warmoth's Progeny got his first glance at its current state.

He narrowed his eyes for a moment before continuing to shoot after Skullius.

'What's with the extra arms? Is it copying me? Has this got anything to do with those strange eyes?' he questioned himself before sinking seamlessly into the present Aigas.

...

Skullius appeared in the town where he and Replicus had been fighting, and then he teleported away.

He appeared in a great estate with a shocking number of combatants waiting along its pathways and fields, battle-ready. They were all stunned by Replicus' [Static Limbo], (which was still active) standing stiff, hands on their weapons.

Skullius rushed towards two women standing on the balcony of one of the mansions in the estate, and immediately expanded his [Null Life Aura] towards them. The two women were quickly able to move, though almost as if stuck in slow-motion.

Skullius gazed intensely at Vali.

"Is it ready?" he demanded.

The voluptuous woman wore a sweet smile – surprising Skullius – before handing him the key to 'certain victory'.

Chapter 1203: The One Left Standing (17)

Replicus dodged another slash just as he flashed into the town where he and Skullius had been fighting in before the ridiculous parting of Aigas into past and future. As soon as he saw that the Hybrid Luman was no longer here, he cursed and teleported out of the way of another slash that threatened to split him two.

'I messed up. I should have immobilised the Angel with [Cold Time] instead of destroying it earlier,' Replicus thought.

He was now standing opposite the giant with its four arms and the two powerful swords that had been in Skullius' possession.

'That [Infinite Sword God] skill is capable of cutting time itself. Skullius doesn't even need swords to do it. I imagine he won't fall for skills that involve time now and neither will this thing,' Replicus thought. 'In order to beat either of the two, I need to throw a series of rapid attacks that bypass their capacity to use that trick of theirs.'

And indeed, this was the only way to get around Skullius' 'trick'.

With his enlightened eyes, Replicus had figured out that Skullius was increasing the output and power of his attacks by removing their cost requirement.

In Aigas, the power system designed by the Deities limited the power of combatants by designating a cost for the activation of each attack.

A Normal skill could be performed with a basic white mana core.

A Special skill could only be cast using a blue core or higher.

A Super skill needed a purple core or higher.

A Supreme skill required a gold core.

The nature of the fuel required for the activation of a skill was what limited its power.

So, Skullius, upon talking to Ashema in Opungale, and learning that his entire race (the Carven) did not require the use of mana or any energy source to use their powers, had devised a method to replicate this unique trait.

Initially, he had only wanted to get rid of the bother of needing a predetermined amount of mana for his skills in battle, but as he worked towards achieving costless casting of skills, he realised another advantage of this.

If he got rid of the cost of using a skill, didn't that essentially mean he could adjust its potency to no limit?

Skills with no defined parameters other than their costs in particular, could be made far stronger, raising their efficiency past Supreme and towards the borders of the Divine!

Of course, reaching beyond even that with a mere skill wasn't possible with a mortal body, but Skullius realised that being able to fight using capabilities beyond Supreme without needing a gold core was a priceless quality!

It wouldn't matter what Stage he was in or what Class he had if he could accomplish a feat like that!

Nomatter how powerful an opponent like Replicus became, he would always be able to match him!

That said, achieving costless activation was easier said than done.

Skullius had surmised that no mortal combatant could gather enough Creeds to make it happen in their lifetime.

Perhaps a Rule could work, but he didn't have access to those. He doubted one, two or even ten of those could achieve it anyway – permanently, at least.

After agonising over the subject for a while, Replicus finally figured out how to do it. It was a rather lengthy process, but he learned to do it nigh instantaneously over the last seven days.

The first step to his 'trick' had been to finally use the affix on the Bashful Abomination that was still engraved with Hobbu Gobbu's desired effect: to increase the power of the Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art by 475%.

To suit his needs, Skullius had changed the affix to one that allowed him to reduce the cost of all his powers by 55%.

The next set of requirements following this needed to be achieved in rapid succession each time he wanted to unleash unrestricted output attacks.

To start, Skullius had to apply the Unmotivated Bender Divine Sword Art. This sword style's forte laid not in slicing things apart, but in sabotaging their very functionality. Skullius had used this sword style to cause Arch-Mage Ryte's Cross Time spell to fail earlier.

The Hybrid Luman would apply this sword style on the skills engraved in his body, sabotaging their need for a source to activate them.

Of course, this alone wasn't enough.

Next Skullius would simultaneously use the Absolute Severance Divine Sword Art, which had allowed him to cut even something as intangible as the Ode's voice back in Opungale, to finely slice at the junction between a mana channel and the skill it fed into within his body; his goal was to separate the mana channel and the skill only momentarily, cutting off their connection.

Of course, this wasn't enough. It was only the first half of what Skullius needed to do within a split of a split of a second.

Next, Skullius employed Creeds.

Through a complex mechanism that had taken his greatest bits of ingenuity yet, he made it so that at the beginning of every battle, touching the Bashful Abomination would begin a process that stabilised his 'trick'.

Skullius made a Creed that allowed him to temporarily remove the cost of any skill, provided that he managed to successfully ISOLATE and SABOTAGE the need for an intended skill to use any kind of fuel.

However, this Creed wasn't a one and done. It was perpetual – there was no end to the number of Creeds it consumed.

While in combat, the mechanism Skullius had set in place would consume fifty Creeds every ten seconds in order to keep him open to the benefits of costless activation!

He borrowed this mechanism from the same design that allowed Incandescent Stagers and above to automatically expend Creeds for a Territory's activation simply by calling its name!

Normally, even the ridiculous cost of Creeds he expended wouldn't have been enough to achieve his 'trick', but the trade-off in its use, which made it so that Skullius on his own couldn't use the 'trick' consistently (spam it), and could only activate it for a little more than a second at one time, finally enabled him to cement his standing as a combatant worthy of standing toe to toe with the Warmoth's Progeny!

'No Incandescent Stager on Aigas could do this, other than perhaps the Bishop,' Replicus thought with a hard frown. 'And like her, to ensure that he has enough Creeds to use throughout the battle...'

At that moment, the skies were suddenly littered with Soul Spawn racing in all directions, some spilling over below, where Aigas' past was!

Masterpieces were made out of both individuals from the past and the present, and in the Hybrid Luman's vision, the guidance field cried:

[You have received five new Creeds!]

[You have received eight new Creeds!]

[You have received twelve new Creeds!

[You have received six new Creeds!]

[You have received...]

...

Skullius grinned.

For Incandescent Stagers and beyond, there was a plethora of other ways to earn Creeds other than conquering Tasks and Trials.

As long as a combatant did something to impact Aigas on a large scale – particularly in a way that was... godlike – they could earn Creeds. It was a kind of rite of passage towards Divinity.

Replicus had seen firsthand how one could easily earn Creeds in the Mad Bishop.

She essentially created her own faith on Aigas and each individual she indoctrinated earned her a Creed. This was why she was so feared in the Severed Union, especially when it came to Territory battles.

Now, Skullius employed a similar means of earning Creeds despite never having met the Bishop.

The hundreds, no, thousands of Soul Spawn that immediately began latching onto victims far and wide earned him enough Creeds to keep on abusing his trick.

Furthermore, a slew of information flooded his brain and body!

Skills.

Memories.

Spells.

Affinities.

The ins and outs of different categories of Classes: Energy Formers, Arma Users, Form Users, were revealed to him.

Skullius instantly began learning the powers of combatants from the present times and those of the past, transcending the boundary that Rayn and the Immoral had reached in the previous millennia, when they had been known as the greatest fiends of their time!

Chapter 1204: The One Left Standing (18)

Boron's scowl made him look less stone-like than even he could have imagined. Watching Aigas take on a rather unusual shape that most of the mortals on it couldn't even recognise, much less comprehend, was almost appalling on several levels.

This was what most would have called the end of the world, and to Boron's disgust, it was coming about not because of him, but because of two oddities that he had severely underestimated.

Boron gazed at Suzamete. The expression on her face hadn't changed. This, to him, spelled that the current state of Aigas wasn't going to lead to its extinction. Or would it?

Boron hadn't missed the fact that Suzamete was hiding a lot of details, probably many more than she had admitted to. There was something more than just the ending of the fight between these two anomalies, something else hidden in the future that only she could see.

<Quite impressive> Boron said as he gazed upon the two canvases of Aigas' past and present – or was it present and future? <They both have a capacity for rapid growth. I'm almost envious. A little more of this and they might achieve Divinity in the next few minutes.>

Suzamete merely smiled at her lover's words.

Vali and Maxim had returned to the former's estate shortly after accompanying Skullius to Maqi.

Before the Royale – the final event of the Premium Age Royale – had ended, Vali had instructed all the Families that had agreed to become her underlings during the event (choosing to withdraw from the Premium Age Royale in exchange for bringing one of Vali's many cousins, blessed with her genes, into their fold) to gather at her estate and await her return.

Of course, since the end of the Premium Age Royale, she had not returned home for a while, but now, she asserted her dominance with an authority that made it seem as though she had been here all along.

Maxim joined her not because she didn't have a home to go to, but because Skullius had shared with them the rough details of what was to come: his battle with a 'malevolent version of himself', as he worded it.

Quite like Replicus, Skullius had believed that defeating Replicus wouldn't be too hard, but he had prepared contingencies, just in case. He was aware that his abilities would be leaked by Serenity, after all.

One such contingency he prepared, was something he noted to be the key to certain victory should Replicus prove to be stronger than he had imagined.

Skullius had abused Vali's incomplete Imaginary Technique, which she had taken from Rias EverSword during the final stages of the Premium Age Royale.

The Kinn beauty had used it to help Skullius before by adding an extra Affix to the Bashful Abomination during the battle in Opungale.

Now...

"Yes, this will do," Skullius said as he stood on the balcony to a great mansion with the two ladies. Soul Spawn were shooting out of him incessantly.

He held in his hand what looked like a small, thin square piece of transparent glass.

This was a product of Maxim's technique, Planate High, which allowed her to preserve and suspend anything – even techniques – in a glass-like plate as simple two-dimensional objects.

Within the glass plate Skullius held, a white ring with a bluish-silver zigzag pattern engraved around it could be seen.

"I did the best I could. If it doesn't deliver, well, I guess you can chew me out for it later. Provided you're still alive, that is," Vali said with a sweet smile.

Skullius nodded, his blank gaze still on the ring.

Maxim pursed her lips.

"You remember how to bring it out, right? And I hope you don't release it until you need to use it. Otherwise—"

"I have a good memory, thanks," Skullius cut her off.

Some of the Soul Spawn around him were flying down and latching onto Vali's subordinates, old and new, turning them into Masterpieces.

Vali had agreed to help Skullius with this, though she didn't understand the significance.

"You will return them to their normal state afterwards, right? You said you didn't need them to fight for you," Vali said.

Skullius grinned.

"Yes. I'll do so as I promised."

Maxim – more than Vali herself – was compelled to doubt this promise. She couldn't put her finger on it, but there was something inherently distasteful about the way Skullius was speaking. She had already found him oddly changed ever since that night in Opungale, but now...

"Will this world still be standing after you two are done fighting? It's already feeling like the end of Aigas as it is," Maxim asked apprehensively.

Skullius chuckled and did something rather unnerving.

He slid his index finger down on the space before him and a fine cut was made on it.

He then grabbed it, pulled it to the side and spreading it wide. He had ripped the fabric of time in the present Aigas!

Neither Maxim nor Vali could understand what he was doing, but they both gaped at the sight of what was beyond the rip Skullius had made: another place, another Aigas.

"This world will be just fine," Skullius said and he pushed through into the past Aigas from over 4,000 years ago.

Meanwhile, Replicus was in a standoff with the Stolen Angel.

A second went by, and then two.

Then, with shocking speed, the Stolen Angel extended one of its hands towards Replicus, and in an instant, a swath of darkness bound him tight, but only for a split of a split of micro-second before Replicus' Ju`wtte smashed it apart.

Yet it was too late.

The Angel was already upon Replicus, its fist blazing with powerful Nitros as it charged his way.

'Is it... copying my fighting style?' the Progeny thought right as the Angel's fist blasted into his chest.

...!!!

Replicus felt as though a tremor had just coursed through him. The impact from the punch was sharper and smaller than the surface area of the creature's hand, which felt odd. Even worse than

that was the string of explosions that rushed down all of Replicus' mana channels and his mana cores!

For a moment, Replicus' body failed him.

He was alarmed.

The Angel was not just copying his fighting style, it had somehow managed to replicate his physical traits as well!

The punch just now was akin to his Dual Concept-Sourcing Impact (his version of the Strength stat), which allowed him to adjust the impact of his punches and strike even the deeper workings of enemy bodies, like their mana!

What's more, it even had strength enough to completely bypass the rebounding effect of his Empowered Deviant Trigger Build!

The orange eyes of the Angel gleamed and it swept Demion's Dance towards Replicus' face. The Progeny managed to duck his head down, but...

BOOOOM!

A fierce fist bashed into his back with enough force to topple a country!

The enthralled Mages were still assisting the Angel from the hidden dimension of [Benevolent Melanoid Prince]!

The Angel's hand was warped through space, appearing behind him as a disembodied limb!

TSSSSSSSSS!!

Replicus felt his skin sizzle from the blow. A large, black searing print was left on his back, and strangely, because of it, he felt a powerful downward force that increased in potency every second pull him downward, hampering his ability to move!

'This is the work of that female Mage!' Replicus thought as he activated [Neutral Maximum] at full throttle and then used Spatial Lightning to warp behind the Stolen Angel. Right as he landed elsewhere, however, it was already upon him with the Demion's Dance. The sword spat [Courting Death] – a net of sharpened, red Mortal Ruin – all around with the freakish output of Skullius' trick!

[Neutral Maximum] held against the flurry of rending attacks, but only for a few seconds. Replicus didn't remain idle, however. He pulled the essence of Maximum Catalyst into one of his fists and used a skill he had learned while in the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher: [Neutral Impact]!

The effect of the skill was simple, so simple in fact that even the Stolen Angel, which lacked a ton of battle experience recognised the bare danger in the attack.

In a blink, the Stolen Angel, to Replicus' surprise vanished from view and escaped through a hidden tunnel in space which accelerated its movement!

...!!!

'It has even copied my Blizzard Motion?!' he thought.

The Stolen Angel had mimicked even his ability to traverse through private spatial tunnels with Ju`wtte Blizzard Motion. However, it seemed that it couldn't copy innate powers like Ju`wtte or Null Life, so whatever it replicated was an inferior variant. But still...

As he watched the Stolen Angel land far away, and cast a deadly slash his way, Replicus couldn't help but curse.

The Stolen Angel was a problem.

Just to what extent could it keep coping abilities?

Was it only limited to replicating the physique of its opponents?

Replicus dodged the fierce slash and quickly grabbed the wrist to a punch that had sneakily streaked towards his head from above through a distortion in space.

Right as he contemplated the best way to utilise [Neutral Impact], which his opponent had now become wary of, he heard a great ripping noise in the distance, and to his utter astonishment, the present Aigas was torn in two once again!

Before the severed parts flew up like last time, however, Replicus felt his skin shiver as though an electrical current had rushed through it.

'No,' he thought as he cast his gaze beyond, to where a new sky, and new space was swiftly being created under the drape of the present Aigas!

A new timeline was revealed, which meant that Skullius had cut apart the time in Aigas once more!

"No!" Replicus barked, his eyes gleaming frightfully.

It couldn't be!

An ungodly amount of mana was gathering somewhere far, far, far away!

No. Nearly all the mana on Aigas was gathering there!

It was drawn to the truly immense maw of a creature that he had heard about a lot two months ago!

The mana, as it gathered so far away, flared and was transmuted into something far more potent, far more efficient and far more destructive; yet it carried blessed properties!

Even though there was an insurmountable distance between where Replicus was (Pelian) and where the certain doom was being produced, the visual was clear. A stark light brimmed far away, so intense it might have been coming from a nearby star.

The temperature rose around Aigas, then dipped terribly and rose again.

The sky darkened and then brightened.

Replicus gritted his teeth.

There was nothing for it. He had to escape!

He wasn't confident that he could face THAT!

What was Skullius even thinking by unleashing IT?!

Had he gone insane?!

Replicus had decided to reach for the ivory key – the key to the Empyrean Bosom – when...

"| GET CRUSHED! |"

Suddenly, Skullius' voice boomed from all around Replicus and a swath of darkness rushed to drown him and exacted the demand that came from its master's lips!

Replicus' body immediately began to twist and contort, his limbs turning at odd angles while his skin condensed, trying to fold itself into a neat, ceramic blanket!

"Not a chance!" Replicus growled.

His [Neutral Maximum] wasn't for show. It immediately lessened the effect of the [Evil Veneration]. It had the power to, after all, it was born from a Rule-Level concept!

But Skullius, who was watching from the distance, laughed.

He had known that even his fully powered [Evil Veneration] wouldn't be able to kill Replicus. It had a limit, after all.

His intent was already achieved.

By the time Replicus' body stopped contorting, his arms bringing the Ju`wtta together for [Ju`wtta Resounding Restoration], the blinding light in the distance was already set upon the world!

Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness had readied his all-defying breath and had cast it on the Aigas.

Chapter 1205: The One Left Standing (19)

Replicus, Skullius and the Stolen Angel were free from the current contusions of time. They could freely move from one drape of time to the next.

The normal people and even combatants up to a certain level of powers hadn't been able to feel the change in Aigas, how they were existing simultaneously with previous versions of the world long expired through time.

However, now that the breath of the infamous elder sibling of Jerthrax, and son of Seongssax, Jiggorrhax, was charging the same blast that had both saved and warped Aigas, the fact that Aigas was existing in three became clear even to commonfolk.

The three drapes of time were brightly illuminated by the glaring light of certain salvation.

Replicus' phantoms worked furiously.

Skullius had outsmarted the Progeny in the prior minuscule bits of time. He had made it so that his four-armed counterpart would have a delayed reaction to the imminent burst of power from the dragon because of the effect of his [Evil Veneration], and it had worked like a charm.

There was a little hitch, however, which Skullius immediately solved: positioning.

The drapes of time were hard to manipulate, even with Skullius' new (and still incoming) knowledge and power. He could twist time enough to create them, yes, but doing anything else required might the likes of which he had yet to achieve. He was even aware that what he had accomplished – splitting time and drawing forth the past – was only temporary.

With this limitation in mind, plus a few others, it would have been impossible for Skullius to position Replicus directly in front of Jiggorrhax's blast, especially when considering that said blast was to be aimed upward, where the shattered Rules and otherworldly enemies were coming from.

Thus, through the Stolen Angel...

A half a skull mark appeared on Replicus' [Neutral Maximum] coat, and nigh instantaneously, the beam of light he had been seeing from the distance was enlarged ten-thousand-fold in his vision!

He had been warped several hundreds of meters above the maw of a gargantuan creature – a Herald, and a dragon.

The first thing the Progeny noticed was how everything was melting around him. EVERYTHING.

It was so hot that the world was hard to define; it had become one massive collage of mirages.

It was so hot that he nearly lost control of the mana in his cores. Strangely, it had subscribed to a furious desire to simply evaporate like water.

But Replicus soldiered on with vivaciousness.

As space and stability itself was melting, there was no means of escape with which he could use.

'Damn it...' he thought, and then....

HWAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!

Jiggorrhax's breath came with an intensity so far removed from mortal conception that Replicus nearly lost his sense of self before it. Even his phantoms had stopped putting plans upon plans in play in order to survive the blast.

It had no colour.

It seemingly had no form.

And it seemed to spawn from everywhere.

This... this was true power!

Everything boiled and evaporated in the path of the blast, CLEANSED!

Such a stream of energy would have been expected to move slower, but it was the fastest thing to move through Aigas since the Deities created this world!

Replicus had only partially perceived it as he struggled with the rapidly dissolving [Maximum Neutral], his evaporating mana reserves and his disintegrating flesh.

Things were dire!

His only means to defend was Null Life Essence, which remained resilient against all this. Even Skullius' trick wasn't enough to cut it apart, which was why his Null Core had remained when all his mana cores had been destroyed earlier.

Before the blast came, Replicus had already cast [Null Extraction] without any gesture or word, and Null Life Essence was flying in from ALL three of Aigas' timelines and being channelled through [All Null Commander] to reinforce the Progeny's body.

Yet... the effectiveness of this manoeuvre didn't get to be tested immediately.

A massive mercurian entity had manifested in front of Replicus, its vast size shielding him from the incoming blast!

The Mercurian Long-Snout Legend, Beyrmir had arrived!

However, his massive body wasn't at all enough to protect Replicus; both the Apostle and his master understood this.

Thus, quickly after appearing, Beyrmir opened his long, crocodilian mouth and spat out the greatest stream of Clear Fire he could conjure with all his energy reserves!

The invisible flames shot out as a narrow, concentrated stream which rushed to meet the incoming, hard-to-comprehend breath from the Abiding Madness!

Yet it was no contest.

It was as though nothing at all had changed.

A meaningless split of a nanosecond later, both Beyrmir and his master would be reduced to nothing. In fact, Beyrmir had already begun to fragment, when...

Replicus, perked on the Apostle's back, raised one of his mangled limbs. He didn't have time to heal.

He extended the Warmoth's Spine forward while simultaneously channelling the billions of units of Null Life Essence flooding to him into Beyrmir. Then...

"[Honoured Lacerance]!"

The Warmoth's Progeny slashed down with the blades of the spine just as he charged it with 500,000 units of Null Life Essence!

At once, there was a difference.

First of all, there was second of silence.

Then, it was as though someone had transported a waterfall to the scene.

The shocking, glaring brightness of Jiggorrhax's blast lessened in intensity and its effectiveness on Replicus and Beyrmir was cut down significantly!

Before the two, it seemed the beam of light reluctantly thinned, but it was never fully thwarted!

Replicus' arm trembled violently.

[Honoured Lacerance] had worked!

It was a skill of the Warmoth's Spine that could only be activated by expending 500,000 units of Null Life Essence. According to its description, it could cut through anything, a trait which Replicus attributed to the fact that the Spine itself was resistant to concepts.

As powerful as this skill was, however...

'It's not going to hold for long. As I recall... Jiggorrhax kept up his breath for thirty days back when he used it to mend the Rules of the world!' Replicus thought with gritted teeth.

His hand wielding the Spine could hardly stay firm.

He was trapped in the torrent with a skill that was going to fail him sooner rather than later.

And if he managed to somehow get out of this, he could only imagine that Skullius was waiting to finish him off.

Or even before that, if Jiggorrhax discovered him, perhaps he would mistake him for a...

...!!!

No, wait!

What if it was a combination of these two things?!

Replicus nearly turned pale.

If Skullius somehow managed to acquire Jiggorrhax's strength, perhaps by using Masterpiece empowered by his 'trick'...!

...

No way!

That would be disastrous!

'I really was taking him too lightly!' Replicus thought and his face hardened.

Immediately, he brought up the guidance field in his vision and gazed intently at his status.

'Of all the places and times... I didn't think it would be here...'

It greatly surprised him that he would be utilising even greater trump cards just to best... himself.

But what else could he do now?

With a click of his tongue, Replicus set to use the 43 billion units of Null EXP he had acquired from Caxellac!

Chapter 1206: The One Left Standing (20)

A month ago.

Timemould Mirror Box...

"...but as I said, it's just a theory," Serenity concluded.

Replicus didn't give any kind of response for a while. The sounds of thunderous and violent clashing in the background were the only thing to prevent an awkward silence from persisting between the humanoid, blue flame and the four-armed Progeny of the Colossus Warmoth.

"Only a theory, huh?" Replicus finally said, disentangling his two upper arms which had been folded in front of his chest. "Implicit evolution? Well, that could be possible, given that Caxellac really looked down on anything mana-based.

His grasp over Null Life Essence in general also suggests to me that it has a hand to play in evolution, at least where the top races of the Null Verse are concerned."

Replicus' eyes were fixed on the guidance field as he spoke. He looked so intently at his massive value for Null EXP that the numbers might have been compelled to flee.

He then turned to Serenity.

"It's still really strange to hear the uncertainty in your voice. I mean, the Null Verse is your creation. How do you not know many of the things involved in its more ultimate species?" he said.

Serenity shrugged.

"I created it, established its mechanics and set its boundaries. In the millions of years it has had to mature, I haven't been an active participant in how its expanded and evolved. I have my own agendas outside it, you know.

Besides, through the Voice of Worlds, I can get knowledge about the overall progression of things in the Null Verse – pressing matters mostly – so I didn't bother sticking around a lot," she said.

Replicus nodded.

"I see..."

He, his phantoms, and Serenity had been pondering on what Null EXP could be. Given the super-inflated value, they had all assumed that the purpose behind it would be quite... delectable.

Serenity had tried to reach VOW to ask directly what this variant of EXP was, but she found – to her immense surprise – that the Timemould Mirror Box, where Replicus and the Unlimited were all trapped until their selected training time passed (plus the repercussions), cut off all communication to outside planes. Serenity wasn't able to reach VOW from here.

Thus, all Serenity and Replicus had was speculation.

"There's considerable risk, but what the flesh, I don't mind trying it out," the Progeny said.

"Are you sure?" Serenity said with concern. "We don't even know if this is safe for someone that isn't a Divine. For all we know, trying to surpass what you are now, when even the denizens of this place – that Strawler and the armour – seem to deem you too weak, might be extremely detrimental."

"I know," Replicus said with a small smile and he looked at one of his palms.

It was still funny to him that he no longer embodied skeletal traits. That had been the hallmark of his existence for a long time.

Interestingly enough, as the Vehement Bone Nullmancer, his Apostles had embodied mostly skeletal properties as well, derived from the evolutionary options they were offered. But now Replicus was simply the 'Nullmancer'. Not everything had to be bone.

Replicus chuckled.

"I reject that same fate."

"What?" Serenity said, surprised.

"I walked down this path before, you know? I once entered a Labyrinth that handed everything to me – EVERYTHING – on a silver platter. All I had to do was strive to survive and follow the guidelines and the footpaths laid forth before me. I, being as weak and as simple as I was, dived at the opportunity, desperate. I was blind," Replicus said, and his yellow eyes gleamed. "You were right.

That me from back then couldn't have comprehended your reasons and your existence."

Serenity was lost for words.

Where was all this coming from?

"Skullius is the embodiment of my past weakness; not just in terms of strength, but in mental terms as well. Oddly enough – ironically enough, actually – the Warmoth's Progeny is similar to Fulgardt. 'Become HIS echo'. That's what that blasted armour told me. It wants me to become the Warmoth. That Strawler wants the same.

And if I do end up meeting this vague requirement to be seen as worthy in their eyes, what exactly is the end goal, hmm? Will I be possessed by the Warmoth too?"

Replicus clicked his tongue.

It pissed him off a bit how everything really was working to push him in a direction that would probably make him regret ever choosing the Colossus Warmoth's Progeny as his evolutionary path.

The fact that his Flaw, where he couldn't allow the source of his Ju`wtte (the Ju`wtta) to be destroyed or lose possession of the Warmoth's Spine, were decided by the Warmoth himself was already ominous enough, now that he considered it.

"Perhaps my battle against Skullius will be more than just an excursion to thwart a parasite. I fully intend to win, swiftly in fact, but in the process, perhaps whether or not I was ever just a normal organism without the guts and WILL to surpass the powers I acquire will be tested," Replicus said and then he sighed.

Serenity was immensely impressed.

She had a lot of things she wanted to say in that moment, but Replicus was not done talking.

"And as for the Warmoth's powers..."

[You have expended 15,100,000,000 Null EXP!]

As the guidance field chimed at his action, Replicus' body exploded with great bolts of Ju`wtte while trapped in Jiggorrhax's blast of incomprehensibly powerful might!

The Progeny had two powerful tools in his arsenal that he had speculated would help him become the Colossus Warmoth's 'echo', as the great suit of armour had put it: the Supreme skill [Bloodline Awakening: Warmoth's Return] and the Full Release of his Warmoth's Spine.

However, Replicus had decided to abandon the usage of these two options. To him, this was no different from receiving Fulgardt's legacy and his WILLS.

Thus, Replicus opted for an alternate path.

Serenity had hypothesised that the Null EXP he received following his defeat of the Null Devil King, Caxellac was for 'implicit evolution'. She had been right. This was different from the predetermined paths Replicus had been shown thus far each time he evolved. In a way, implicit evolution was akin to the Personal Configuration he had experienced as a reward for reaching the Fourth Tier.

By expending the Null EXP, an individual could forcefully evolve once or several times beyond the capabilities of their racial qualities. However, the risk was as Serenity had feared. This was indeed a means used by Divine beings and it worked especially for Divine beings.

Replicus had powers comparable to the Divine, but he was not there yet. His body couldn't handle it.

That didn't mean the EXP was useless to Replicus though.

No.

Perhaps permanently evolving his race was still out of reach, but through trial and error – using millions of Null EXP each time – he had discovered that he could accomplish temporary evolutionary gains depending on the amount of Null EXP he used.

This was exactly what Replicus was doing right now.

The method to use the Null EXP was simple, but excruciatingly painful.

'Channel it. Use as much finesse as possible,' Replicus told himself.

Null EXP was similar to regular EXP – cumulative mana experience.

In essence, it was Null Life Essence, but it was incredibly rich with the information of the organism it had been taken from. It could be manipulated precisely within the body, and after declaring that he wanted to use it, Replicus felt it flood his body from the guidance field!

"NGHHHHHRRRRR!!!" the Progeny screamed in agony.

He had expended 15 billion units at once, but it wasn't out of careless judgement. He had estimated in the last month, that this was about as much as he could handle, but still, his body was barely able to contain the power.

Yet giving in to pain was a luxury Replicus couldn't condone.

Using [All Null Commander], his Null Life Essence manipulation skill, he guided the Null Life Essence towards the very cells that composed his form!

With the help of the thought phantoms – whom he had practised this with many times – it was a lot easier than it otherwise would have been.

Each of Replicus' cells (and indeed even a creature like him had those, just not in the shape one would expect) were saturated with so much energy that their composition changed dramatically, rapidly!

However, this change didn't happen in the typical fashion; that is, towards a logical progression in the same line of species that the Colossus Warmoth followed.

No.

Many factors were taken into account.

Replicus had four arms.

Replicus had a human form – the Hybrid Luman form.

Replicus had an oddly deformed soul.

Replicus was not a native of the Null Verse.

Replicus had a Transcendent grade tool that had nothing to do with the Warmoth, bound to him.

Replicus was simply... his own individual.

As such...

[You are evolving...]

[You have become the...]

Chapter 1207: The One Left Standing (21)

Quite a distance away from Edagon, Skullius was watching the torrent of brilliant power coming from Jiggorrhax's maw with a massive grin, a hand placed before his eyes to reduce the glare.

He was currently using Crude Vision – where he took on the black, white and grey visual properties of his Crude World Projection form without actually leaving his body – to witness the spectacular scene.

The sea was boiling and evaporating at a furious rate, but Skullius was unbothered. If anything, the searing steam wafting upward all around and the shuddering, endless shockwaves coming from Edagon only served to make him all the more excited.

"Magnificent!" Skullius exclaimed and cackled maniacally.

His right index fingertip subconsciously caressed the beautiful white ring with a zigzag pattern nestled around his right middle finger.

The blast from Jiggorrhax's maw... how would it compare to the power that this ring was capable of expelling, Skullius wondered vaguely.

Right then, his right hand twitched violently, but he ignored it. He was too entranced by the view ahead and his compartmentalised thoughts.

'I have a feeling you'll survive even this – the greatest tragedy or perhaps greatest blessing Aigas has ever known, fake,' he thought, amused.

And then his vision scaled down from the blast and landed on its source: Jiggorrhax.

The word behemoth didn't do the dragon justice. It could perhaps sit on Pelian and engulf half of it completely it.

The dragon had unnaturally green scales that looked like rough horns sprouting from every inch of its body. Each one of them would look like a bare mountain to the average common man. The scales couldn't hide how thick the dragon's build was, though.

The broadness of its shoulders and toughness of its thick muscles could almost be seen even now, when it was angling its massive head into the sky while the rest of its body was firmly planted on the ground.

Jiggorrhax had a massive, heavy-looking jaw from which what looked like liquid-Nitros was pouring onto Edagon in large volumes. It seemed he was trying to prevent any permanent damage to the interior of his mouth from his breath, by flooding it in Nitros. But whatever amount was effectively shielding his mouth, a lot seemed to be wasted by the overspill or simply by evaporation.

The sight of his might was magnificent all the same, however.

"Oh..." Skullius voiced as his eyes followed the flow of Nitros to a shape gathered below Jiggorrhax.

There was another dragon here.

It was only about half of Jerthrax's size, with foggy grey scales over its body.

It had unfurled its impressive wings out, and from their ends, an odd replica of them in a lustreless golden hue covered everything else that its own wings couldn't on Edagon, shielding the continent from damage.

This dragon was, of course, Jerthrax.

Skullius was immensely intrigued.

Many thoughts and ideas sprung up in his head – evil, treacherous ideas – but...

...!!!!!!!

The Hybrid Luman was suddenly compelled to look upward.

Right as he did, the stream of unimaginable power blasting from Jiggorrhax was ruptured from a point somewhere hundreds of meters up in the sky, turning into glowing, frail lumps that flew off in different directions.

...!!!

The raging noise following the interruption of the dragon's breath caused Skullius' ears to explode, along with a third of his face. A moment before that, the Hybrid Luman could have sworn he heard countless creatures far behind him in the seas shriek in agony as well!

But of course, Skullius couldn't feel pain from this.

His expression turned nasty with agitation and shock... and then it shifted into something somewhere between fear and defeat.

From where Jiggorrhax's breath was expunged... a certain creature was revealed.

The mere sight of him caused Aigas to calm the flesh down.

Despite Jiggorrhax's breath, the sea stopped evaporating, the air returned to being weightless and free, and the mana cooled, retaining its normal properties. The skies turned clear and the immense strain upon the canvas of Aigas was reduced considerably.

Jiggorrhax's purple pupils dilated.

Jerthrax looked up, alarmed.

Skullius shouted an expletive.

The being responsible for causing the dead calm was the one to turn things chaotic again in the next instant. Chaos could only be brought about on his terms.

In one of his hands, what looked like a giant arrowhead of striking merigold (colour) was gripped tightly between his thumb and the rest of his fingers. It was easily six times his size, yet from the distance, it looked like an agitated, hungry pet awaiting his command rather than a formidable force greater than he was.

And indeed, it seemed like an angry pet. Bolts of merigold lightning as thick as Jiggorrhax's fingers were shooting from the arrow head recklessly, and behind it, one long tail of this same kind of lightning trailed all the way towards the sky, its end unseen!

The tamer of this merigold lightning... released it.

It was unclear whether he threw it down or if it simply raced forth as soon as he let it go, but it did not matter.

No one saw it travel, but everyone (Jerthrax, Jiggorrhax and Skullius) did see it flash blackish-grey at the last moment.

And then...

There was a blinding flash, a roar of agony and Skullius found himself flying at an unreasonable speed towards Aigas' Central Boundary!

No one could have known, of course, but the arrow was the skill [Wanton Royal's Void Biting Serpent], which had previously been the [Nullmancer's Unforgiving Lancet]!

The skill hadn't changed since Replicus evolved. It was his Ju`wtte that had changed.

It now possessed a merigold hue because it was in its complete form, where all of its effects wouldn't be half-assed, as when it was in the hands of a mere Progeny of the Colossus Warmoth!

As for why it had flashed blackish-grey at the end, well...

Skullius resisted the shockwave that had nearly thrown him halfway across the world by teleporting back to where he had been a moment ago. The Stolen Angel appeared before him, shielding him from the crazy effects of the impact of the arrow.

A great, dark mushroom was rising in the distance, on Edagon, but...

ROOOOOOOOAAAAARRRRRRRRRR!

The figure of Jiggorrhax could be seen flailing, shaking, thrashing and roiling in agony within it!

The great dragon's face... along with most of his torso, was spilling frightening volumes of pungent, scorching, ashy smoke.

Jiggorrhax's scales and flesh had been blasted off by the Biting Serpent and even his bones had been shattered, charred. They hissed as the bone marrow was fried from them!

Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness couldn't have looked more like an undead minion.

The agony he felt made him furious.

To think he, the most excellent Herald of the Deities...

"WHO DARES?!!!" he roared, and his voice, almost tangible, coursed through space to challenge whoever had the guts to aim an attack at him. "WHO DAAAREEEES?!!"

The dragon rose, his limbs pushing through the thick lava that was now half of Edagon. His eyes turned into furnaces and his mouth, with only half of its teeth left, a whole chunk of the snout above it blown off, raged with staggering white flames!

Jiggorrhax looked up at the creature hanging in the air. His bloodlust was unmistakable. Even Jerthrax, who had been spared only because he wasn't the target of the [Wanton Royal's Void-Biting Serpent], cowered at Jiggorrhax's rage.

"YOU! OUTSIDER...!" the Herald growled and genuine Divine energy burst from him like a tide!

Yet, before he could act on his rage, the dragon felt the presence of a tiny human warp to his eye.

His great purple pupil locked onto the individual... and it dilated.

The darkness and light this human was giving off made him think...

'Fulgardt?'

But Skullius didn't say a word. With a look of great concentration, he summoned great volumes of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] which he quickly forged into what looked like a magnificent suit of armour around Jiggorrhax!

But of course, this was no suit of armour. Not really.

It had many dark arms of various sizes sprouting from every inch of it, and long seams where golden-white light seeped through.

What clad the Abiding Madness, was the PHANTASMIC RETAINER, Noboboyama.

Jiggorrhax would have questioned or even resisted this gracious armour, but at that moment...

"For now, we have a common enemy, don't we? Just this once, consider me an ally," Skullius said, and his nasty grin reemerged on his face.

He knew at once that Jiggorrhax wouldn't attack him right away. There was a pressing enemy now.

Skullius looked up into the sky daringly.

The creature hanging there, looking down at him seemed to scoff.

'So that's your play? Cunning bastard,' the creature said and the two weapons in his hands were suddenly lit up with merigold Ju`wtte!

Jiggorrhax growled, flame spilling from his mouth.

Beyrmir, who became visible right then, suspended under Replicus, did the same.

A collision between tamers of dragons had begun, but it wouldn't last for long. For the victor would be decided in the following 279 seconds!

Chapter 1208: The One Left Standing (22)

Skullius had weighed his options and found that using [Soul Spawn] and [Masterpiece] on Jiggorrhax with his 'trick' to amplify their power was likely NOT to work in the very worst scenario, and at best, it would probably only work temporarily. He didn't know how long 'temporarily' would be and thus, he had decided to use the odd circumstances to his advantage.

Jiggorrhax was using his breath to plaster Aigas' Rules and kill the outside enemies peering and invading Aigas. If he were to see Replicus (as he did) he would assume that he was also an outsider, especially given that in the current time, there had never been something as powerful as Replicus. If there were, Jiggorrhax would have known about it.

On the other hand, sensing the darkness and light from Skullius, Jiggorrhax would be convinced that Skullius was indeed Fulgardt, even if his appearance was different. After all, the Immoral had been known for some rather atrocious acts.

And thus...

'You won't be living through this gambit, fake. And even if you do...' Skullius thought as he looked upward and activated CREATURE once more.

His enemy didn't look at all fazed by the insurmountable challenge below him.

Even though both combatants had dragons for allies, Beyrmir was no match for Jiggorrhax. Yet this didn't matter to Replicus.

It wasn't as if Skullius believed Replicus would be leaning on the Mercurian Long-Snout Legend anyway. The physical appearance of the Nullmancer boldly declared that fact. His individual strength was what would be tested against the fangs of the Abiding Madness and the humanoid calamity of the current age!

Replicus now looked quite different from before.

Instead of looking rather thin and lank, his figure had gained a bit of bulk and lost a little of its height. His ebony ceramic skin was now hidden under tufts of incredibly soft, short silver fur that thinned when they reached his chest, revealing a kite-shaped hole on his skin.

His brass Ju`wtta were glowing fiercely, attracting all attention to themselves while blazing with merigold Ju`wtte.

His hair, also in a pristine silver, was much longer and extended five meters behind him, billowing in a non-existent gust of wind. The baggy pants of thick fur he had worn as the Warmoth's Progeny were still cladding his legs, making him look a bit primal and ancient, and with his robes dismissed, Replicus truly looked like a savage.

The Warmoth's Spine and the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow were flushed with torrents of angry merigold Ju`wtte and their appearance seemed to be... changing.

Indeed, changing.

For they were being blessed by the grace of the Soul-Burdened Warmoth!

This was the result of the implicit evolution; a transformation that had taken Replicus two evolutions beyond his previous one, and would last for only a few minutes!

But of course, a few minutes was all Replicus needed, though, he needed to maximise them, as afterwards, he would be stricken with fatigue so immense that he would lose consciousness, his body taking its time to reconfigure itself.

'This should be done in a few minutes anyway – not that deadlines even matter now,' Replicus thought and he opened one of his hands.

Skullius' eyes under the mask of CREATURE bulged the instant he saw a ball of purple-gold particles appear in Replicus' third hand.

"NOW!" he cried at Jiggorrhax, and immediately manifested the [Heart of Revelation] above the dragon's head.

And then it began.

The Herald of lost times shot into the sky with such speed that one would have thought his size was simply for show.

Space bent with his ascent, the clouds in the sky fleeing, the winds diving out of the way, mana burning as it collided with the darkness-clad figure of the dragon!

Replicus responded to the threat in kind.

He added an ungodly amount of Null Life Essence around Beyrmir and condensed it as best as he could.

It seemed Jiggorrhax, his maw livid with aggressive white flames seemed intent on ramming through Beyrmir, completely destroying him.

But unfortunately for him, that was not what ended up happening.

BOOOOOOOOOM!

The Mercurian Long-Snout Legend, who was about two-thirds Jiggorrhax's size, had shot towards the ascending Herald fearlessly.

The impact when they met was so outrageous that it coursed through all the timelines Skullius had created, and every living thing within them felt it. The great drapes of time rippled and the creatures branded on them screamed and tumbled as their very state of existence was challenged.

The sea below the two dragons was pushed back, leaving only dry ground and plumes of dust.

It was chaos!

A seemingly unending shockwave rolled out, but before it could even begin to wane, the combatants who had caused it were already fighting furiously.

A quarter of Beyrmir's mercurian body had been blown off despite his thick coat of Null Life Essence, but that didn't stop him from brandishing his fangs and claws, clutching at Jiggorrhax and ripping away at him with all his might.

"A MERE IMITATION LIKE YOU SULLIES THE NAME OF MY KIND. BEGONE!" Jiggorrhax roared and his eyes (one of which had already regenerated from earlier), spat out beams of scorching white fire that blasted Beyrmir's head off easily.

But the Apostle couldn't be killed that way. His mercurian body manifested three more heads and more limbs that grabbed the body of the Herald and tussled with it.

Jiggorrhax growled in fury. He was forced to give the Apostle a bit of recognition.

While the two dragons tangoed, Skullius and Replicus were using their bodies as a battlefield.

A split-moment where the two simply glared at each other passed before Skullius summoned his six ghosts and charged barehanded. The Stolen Angel appeared behind the Soul-Burdened Warmoth and savagely swung Demion's Dance at his head!

But the Angel's blade never touched the Warmoth.

Faster than Skullius could see, a strange crude flute had been passed in Replicus' fourth hand and was immediately injected with merigold Ju`wte. It rapidly changed. It became stronger; much, much stronger.

The instant Replicus placed the flute to his lips and played a tune, the CREATURE, his ghosts and the Stolen Angel were cast backward at speeds that flirted intimately with light!

The heat that the flute expelled rapidly expanded space, forcing the enemies backward!

This was of course, one of the tools made by Beyrmir. The Legend could create weapons imbued with phenomena related to fire and heat.

After the single use, Replicus' threw the crude flute up, and it was dragged by an unseen force towards one of Beyrmir's scales which opened up to receive it. At the same time, another one of the Apostle's scales opened and a giant pair of scorching scissors rushed into Replicus' hand.

Skullius quickly recovered by grabbing one of the many hands of the Noboboyama over Jiggorrhax to stop his momentum.

'What was that?' he questioned himself before looking forward and seeing, no, barely seeing a chilling scene.

All he managed to salvage with his sight was a giant pair of sizzling scissors, lit up with violent bolts of Ju`tte, murdering his six ghosts in less than an infinitesimally miniscule moment!

...And then suddenly, despite his increased durability because of CREATURE, despite his enhanced senses, he was carved through by the sweltering edge of the same scissors... before Replicus' fist, burning with Inverted Mana blasted into his face!

"AAAARRRRRGHHHHH!"

Once again, harrowing pain coursed through Skullius, but a moment later, he didn't feel it. Everything in his body – his mana core, his muscles, his nerves – exploded into nothingness, and only a deflated, crushed head remained.

One clean hit was all it had taken.

Replicus himself was quite surprised, but he didn't linger on the feeling of triumph.

The Stolen Angel returned, and it wasn't alone.

Ten thousand of its ghosts flashed all around Replicus, and took the opportunity to hide Skullius' head from view. Replicus didn't miss which of the Angels took it.

In the next instance, an army of Tier 1,000 monstrosities were rushing him, some utilising their fists, some sending slashes from their swords, and some, with the aid of the hidden Mages attempting to confuse him by employing space to hide their blows for sneak attacks!

It was quite the scene, especially when considering where it was taking place. The battlefield – the two dragons – was constantly whirling, rising and descending – but it didn't matter to the combatants.

But likewise, being outnumbered ten thousand to one didn't matter to the current Replicus.

When the first line of Angels reached him, he gripped his giant pair of scissors and swiped across.

A length mark of red heat was left on space, and then six hundred Angels were sliced apart with thick fumes coming from their torn torsos. It hadn't mattered that they all shared Replicus' physique!

But the army of enemies didn't stop.

Replicus raised a finger and Ju`wtte splashed at its tip vigorously.

"[Unrelenting Ju`wtte Viper]" he said... and a thin, merigold Ju`wtte serpent bolted from his hand and connected to the ten thousand Angels in less than a breath.

They all erupted into showers of merigold lightning and a blink later, nothing remaining of them.

Behind where they had been, Skullius had been restored by the real Stolen Angel.

He had been hoping that he had some time to weigh his options, but now...

He looked on with gaping shock at the empty distance between himself and the Warmoth.

The current Replicus...couldn't be bested by mere tricks.

And having learned his lesson last time, Replicus wasn't going to let his guard down even a little after incapacitating Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman understood all this.

Beads of sweat dropped from his temple.

But it wasn't over yet.

As quickly as he could, Skullius formed an ominous gesture with both his hands.

"Majestic Territory Expulsion..." he chanted.

...But Replicus didn't allow it.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth did something truly... godlike.

With a finger, he traced a large, triangular, merigold shape in the air... and this shape, once it was connected on all three corners, sped towards Skullius as Nitros flooded out of him to create the canvas for his Territory.

The hollow shape... passed through Skullius and his Nitros seamlessly, and all of a sudden, the Hybrid Luman's Nitros became no more than simple white light which dissolved in the air.

Chapter 1209: The One Left Standing (23)

Nitros was not light. It was an imitation of the Divine energy that made the world. Its solid, lustreless white colour was meant to mirror a blank canvas upon which a powerful combatant could paint their own ideal environment.

But now, the vibrant white of Skullius' Nitros was turned into nothing more than ordinary white light; it was a truly bizarre phenomenon.

Skullius was bewildered, but he didn't let shock and fright stop him from diving into the darkness of the Noboboyama and hiding away from Replicus to recover his mettle!

'What the hell was that?!' he thought the instant he was swimming in the black.

But there was no answer.

And it didn't seem like he could hide in here forever.

Thus...

The Hybrid Luman wore a ferocious look that portrayed his immense desire to level everything into nothingness. He wouldn't be humiliated by a damned fake like this!

No, he wouldn't!

At once, Replicus charged the Noboboyama with the Seed, Limitless Paradox!

He hadn't used this move just now because it took a little time to charge, when compared to his Territory, but now...

Replicus, who was on the surface, sensed a slight tremor in the great Spirit of Drowning he was standing on.

At once, he knew what was coming and sadly, he couldn't save Beyrmir in time, as the Apostle was tangled around Jiggorrhax sending jets of Clear Fire over his vast body!

Replicus flashed a distance away before the attack came, but as soon as he appeared elsewhere, he saw Jiggorrhax roar furiously, grab Beyrmir's shoulders with flaming, clawed hands, and rip him into two melting swaths of chunky mercury!

...And then Aigas trembled, a wide void of approximately ten kilometers in radius appearing where Jiggorrhax and Skullius were!

'Damn it. I still don't know if I can survive that attack. Best not try if I can just avoid it,' Replicus thought with a frown.

Skullius was using Limitless Paradox, which could repeat a simple action infinitely within a second. He would employ his 'trick' on one of his slashes, and then use the Noboboyama to repeatedly spam the enhanced slash around it over a wide range, which would effectively dice everything in said range, including Rules. Only Skullius and the Noboboyama were immune to the effects, it seemed.

Replicus was sure that Beyrmir hadn't been able to withstand that attack.

Thankfully though, the Apostle existed in three parts. He could not truly die until all three of his bodies were destroyed.

From the gaping void in Aigas, which had eaten a small part of Edagon as well, the gargantuan form of Jiggorrhax, armoured in an odd shape of darkness and light flew out, its great eyes locked on Replicus. White flame was still bellowing from its mouth, clearly asserting its fury.

The Herald was extremely intimidating.

Replicus was glad Jiggorrhax wasn't the enemy he had had to face months ago.

In fact, unless Actuass made a different plan, there was no way he was going to be able to hunt a dragon of this calibre. It would have been suicide. What's more, even though Replicus hadn't yet seen what Jiggorrhax had in his arsenal other than his immense physical strength and potent flames, he was sure that the dragon could put up a hard fight against even Caxellac, the true Null Devil King.

Skullius gave Replicus a wary look from over Jiggorrhax's head.

'He's rattled. I think I've exhausted his well of tricks now. All that remains that I need to worry about, is his Territory and that ring he's wearing,' Replicus thought. He had noticed that odd ring when he landed that clean punch on Skullius before. It had vanished from Skullius' body, however, probably to be stored in a safe place until he recovered.

A moment passed... and then Skullius and Replicus felt themselves get warped away.

The Creed Skullius had made, which dictated the 'ideal battleground', had finally kicked in after losing track of its targets over the three timelines.

The two suddenly appeared in the well-furnished streets of a great city.

If it weren't for the whipping winds rocking it (because of Jiggorrhax and Beyrmir's clash a moment ago), one would have thought it didn't exist in the same Aigas that was experiencing a battle of a calibre never before seen.

This city was Agmold, the capital of Pelian.

The instant Replicus and Skullius arrived, the latter cursed and activated [Null Life Aura] to combat the sluggishness inspired by Replicus' still-active [Static Limbo].

It seemed his Creed would only teleport him to populated places in the current version of Aigas.

The Stolen Angel warped itself to Skullius a micro-moment later.

Skullius whipped his hands up faster than before, and formed a gesture with his hands again, and Nitros exploded from him to wash over Agmold, but...

CRACK!

His hands and his torso were obliterated by what looked like a whip of Ju`wtte that had crossed the distance between him and Replicus in a fraction of a modest moment!

The Nitros Skullius had expelled instantly vanished as he roared, "GAAH!"

The Hybrid Luman was panicking.

The Angel set to attack Replicus, but he ignored it and simply headed for Skullius who couldn't even perceive his movements anymore.

The Warmoth had grabbed Skullius successfully for the third time when...

...!!!

Something vast sped towards Agmold and forced Replicus to back away.

BOOOOM!

It landed with an intense shockwave where he had been, and cast a vast shadow on the city!

Replicus scowled.

What stood between him and Skullius was a giant green dragon scale!

ROOOOOOAAAAAARRRRRR!

Agmold was suddenly assailed by a devilish heat and a deep-cutting gale.

Above, the insurmountable figure of the dragon Jiggorrhax suddenly appeared. Its head reared and its purple pupil locked onto none other than Replicus!

'Seriously? He's here?! I thought he wouldn't bother with me as soon as I was in a different time! Isn't he supposed to be repairing the broken Rules?' the Soul-Burdened Warmoth thought.

Was Jiggorrhax perhaps, petty? Was he still mad about being slammed by that earlier attack? Replicus was beginning to think so.

Agmold was immediately cast in huge flames and the wails of its citizens, who had hidden themselves in their homes since tragedy struck across the world, could be heard. The Knights within the city had been in the middle of mobilizing against Skullius and Replicus, but at the sight of the dragon, they simply turned limp.

Sixteen Incandescent Stagers and seven Arch-Mages sworn to the Capital Service lost the will to fight as soon as they were dyed in the shadow of the Herald.

Yet, in the centre of the city, where the royal mansion could be seen, a small bird flew out from the window of the fifth floor and wrestled against the raging winds to get a clear view of what was happening.

Asthon had been sneakily spectating the battle between Replicus and Skullius, but a few minutes ago, he had lost all visual.

Now, the battle had come to his doorstep.

Unbelievable!

Asthon was pleased.

He heard King Royan calling him back from within the mansion, crying in fright, but he didn't care.

A dragon.

An echo of Fulgardt.

An anomaly.

Goodness...

'Thank the Deities I'm alive to see it!' Asthon cried inwardly, joyful.

...

Jerthrax's eyes shifted momentarily to look at the burning city, and his rage was quelled temporarily.

Replicus was surprised. The intensity he felt from the dragon lessened somewhat.

The dragon then expelled what looked like a giant rune of fire from his open mouth and it fell on the city, encrusting itself on the buildings and the ground!

Agmold was encased in a brilliant light, and then...

...!!!

The dying people, demolished houses and raging winds were gone. The dead were resurrected and everything was restored to its normal state!

What?!

Replicus was dumbfounded, as was Skullius.

The latter quickly tore himself out of his stupor, however, and barked at the Stolen Angel:

"Give me those!"

The Angel surrendered the two swords to its master.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth would have worried about this, but in the next micro-moment, Jiggorrhax's fury returned, and he glared at Replicus again.

The Nullmancer immediately clapped his bottom hands together and arched his back such that his upper torso was facing upward. The essence of Maximum Catalyst then flooded into his hands, and less than a moment later, [Neutral Acumen] surged forth, hurtling towards Jiggorrhax's underbelly at fifty times the speed of light!

The attack was too fast.

It bashed against the Noboboyama, pierced through it and crashed into Jiggorrhax's body!

The dragon groaned and he was pushed several meters up into the sky!

...But he was unharmed.

Since taking the [Wanton Royal's Void-Biting Serpent] to the face, he had resolved to keep his entire body reinforced by a potent layer of genuine Divine energy.

Replicus cursed.

But his attention was stolen a split-moment later.

The Stolen Angel made a complex gesture with its hands and Nitros was expelled from its body.

'It can use a Territory too?!' Replicus thought, but then he noticed something else.

Skullius had disappeared.

It didn't take Replicus long for him to find the bastard though, because of his enhanced vision tailored towards picking off Skullius' tricks.

The Hybrid Luman had retreated to somewhere a few hundred meters away.

He was transforming.

His hair grew long, his robes of darkness were cast away, and what looked like a second face emerged over the one Replicus knew.

'Right. He has that card too,' Replicus thought as his hands rapidly moved to react to each of his predicaments.

But...

"NOT HERE, YOU FOOLS..." Jiggorrhax spoke. "NOT AMONG THE INNOCENTS."

What?

What could the dragon have meant?

But there was no need to speculate.

Sixty giant runes of flame burst from Jiggorrhax's mouth and were branded over the city once again, though they did it no harm.

The runes flashed white and Skullius, the Stolen Angel and Replicus found themselves in a different, unfamiliar space with Jiggorrhax above them!

It was... a world.

A rocky world.

There were only rocks and nothing else.

Rocks floated in the air like clouds.

Rocks made the land below, where Replicus and Skullius were standing.

Yet, it was indeed a world.

Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness... had created a full-blown world using the secret art of RULE RUNES!

Chapter 1210: The One Left Standing (24)

Rule Runes were more complex in practise than they were in theory.

One could simply define them as enablers; they removed the need to declare Rules verbally, as Jerthrax had done when he used them against Actuass, Replicus and the rest. This significantly reduced the time required to cast them, and even better, disallowed enemies from knowing the properties of the Rule being cast.

That said, Rule Runes were still in a tier of power higher than what Jerthrax had been able to attain. After all, they made it easier to conjure dramatically powerful influences that were unreachable for ordinary, high-tiered combatants.

This was how Jiggorrhax was able to conjure a world.

'Incredible!' Replicus thought.

To think such a feat was possible.

This rocky world was incredibly vast. In size, it was probably above half the size of Aigas, but, given how Jiggorrhax had reacted to people in Agmold dying because of the battle, he was sure the dragon hadn't superimposed this world onto Aigas. It was likely existing in a separate space, like a Cluster, to avoid instantly killing millions.

How ironic. Replicus shared the same hesitancy to kill needlessly, yet he and the dragon were pitted against each other.

There were many different kinds of rocks in this world, all with different textures, densities and colours, some forming hills and some forming mountains. There was no sunlight to highlight all these differences, however. This world was completely dark, yet this was not a detriment to any of the four combatants.

'It's a world, but it can't be anything too impressive. He simply used Rules to create a blank, wide realm, but it doesn't have the properties of a real world. I suppose it's something like a mix between a Cluster and a Dormant Territory,' Replicus thought.

Quickly reeling in his wits, he focused his attention on the Stolen Angel which had been expelling Nitros for a Territory!

Ju`wte whipped out of his body and smote all four arms of the mobile Attegoth before the creature even registered what had happened. The same lash of Ju`wte then obliterated the tall humanoid entirely.

After this, Replicus turned to the massive dragon above him.

The two locked sights for a moment, and then Replicus sensed the Herald's body churn, preparing for sharp movement. Again, he had to applaud the dragon's physical prowess. Somehow, despite his size, he moved so fast that Replicus had trouble tracking his initial burst of speed.

Such a large mass moving at such high speed caused an apocalyptic turbulence within the rocky world!

Jiggorrhax readied a fist as his wings strangely arched back and expelled a vicious burst of gale that doubled his speed!

Replicus had every intention to dodge, but...

Great stitches appeared all around his outline, sewing him to the fabric of space firmly!

This was Melding Stitches!

Skullius had got him!

He had activated this Seed through the Noboboyama, which was right in front Replicus!

Now, the Soul-Burdened Warmoth couldn't move, even if it was only for a fraction of a nanosecond!

"YOU DIE HERE!" Jiggorrhax roared and then...

BOOOOOM!

Replicus felt every inch of his body ache. Tears and torsions reigned supreme all over him from the raw force of the punch. He almost broke apart.

This was easily the fiercest physical blow Replicus had ever been struck by.

For a moment, it seemed as though this world Jiggorrhax had created would burst like a watermelon. Replicus was carried by the fist's weight deep into the ground, rupturing rocks of every kind as he went. A moment later, he felt simmering heat fry his back, and it became clear to him that he was approaching the very core of this world, and yet Jiggorrhax's fist was still connected to him!

The giant Herald frowned with suspicion.

His arm had sunken into the ground up to his shoulder; he had used every bit of physical strength he could muster for this attack. Yet...

'HE IS STILL ALIVE?'

When the momentum of his punch ended, he was flabbergasted to realise that indeed, Replicus was still in one piece, however badly injured he appeared.

Just how freakishly durable was this outsider?

Wait... was he even an outsider at all?!

Just as he agonised, something swift blasted into Jiggorrhax with the fury of retaliation!

...!!!

It came with a merigold flash of light and then an exceptionally loud, elephantine roar that speared the great dragon into the air with half the alacrity with which he had come crashing down a moment ago!

Where the dragon had plunged his fist, Replicus could be seen, pushing against the broken chunks and silt-like remains of rocks.

After eating Jiggorrhax's punch just now, he had coated his whole body with Inverted Mana, which snipped the Melding Stitches from his body. (This was how he had escaped them when Skullius last used them against him before.) From there, he hadn't wasted time, instantly going on the offensive despite his reluctant, battered body's protests.

The Warmoth's Spine, crackling madly with Ju`wtte, was placed on his shoulder, its handle behind him and its top, blunt end pointing at the sky, where Jiggorrhax had been blasted to. A dwindling merigold glow could be seen on this blunt end. It was, of course, where the sonic attack just now had come from, an attack by the name Warmoth's Peal.

By expending 100,000 units of Null Life Essence, Replicus could launch this sonic attack at an enemy. However, the variant of the attack he had just unleashed wasn't normal. The normal Warmoth's Peal wouldn't have been to do much against Jiggorrhax.

The Ju`wtte livid around the Warmoth's Spine wasn't just for show. One of the lightning's many uses was to passively empower any artefacts its user was equipping. Even the inferior version of Ju`wtte had this quality.

This was how Replicus, against the Null Devil King, Caxellac, had been able to create more than two Blessings at once, despite the description of the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow forbidding it.

Now, however, with the more potent merigold Ju`wtte, Replicus was capable of raising high tier artefacts to higher grades and empower ALL their individual abilities accordingly. At the moment, the Warmoth's Spine could be considered a genuine Transcendent grade artefact despite not being fully released!

Replicus flashed to the surface with haste.

Right as he did, however, he sensed a staggering pool of Divine energy storming down.

No.

It wasn't a pool.

A belt of massive, heavy rocks was streaking down towards him, each coated with copious amount of Divine energy!

'Jiggorrhax intends to use these rocks as conduits for tricky attacks, most likely,' he thought, while one of his phantoms reminded him how Sause had said unlike Jerthrax, the greater dragon had been a master of six Advanced Classes and two Hidden ones. He had to keep that in mind.

In doing so, however, Replicus completely dismissed the presence of his other enemy.

This bit at him almost immediately.

For a second time, Replicus found himself unable to move the moment he set out to take action against the incoming rocks.

...!!!

'What?'

A quick glance to the darkness on his far left showed him the vague, masked, long-haired image of Skullius, melded seamlessly with the black, his Bashful Abomination pointed at the Warmoth.

Before the four had been trapped in this world, Skullius had been transforming.

Replicus had already figured out then, that he (Skullius) was shifting his form into Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge, one of the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths!

He hadn't been particularly concerned about this. This form alone couldn't change the course of the battle, but when combined with certain other factors...

A realisation scratched at Replicus at once.

He had overlooked one thing; the fact that in this total darkness, the Benevolent Melanoid Prince thrived!

He could hide and was invulnerable to attacks!

'Damn it! Did Jiggorrhax know about this?' Replicus thought while trying to raise his arms. 'Why can't I move?!'

SHAAAA!

Right then, the light of the [Heart of Revelation] bathed Replicus and his skin, flesh and bones were stripped away, revealing his vulnerable insides!

The Stolen Angel streaked from his right and landed a cruel kick on his sensitives, all its staggering strength and weight stacked on!

But that was only superficial. Because the mobile Attegoth had copied Replicus' physique, each of its hits targeted more than just flesh.

Replicus felt his mana cores and consciousness waver and crack!

His vision spun, and his control over his mana withered.

...Then he streaked away like a bolt of lightning, traversing a thousand kilometers in a few seconds.

'How the hell did he paralyse me?' Replicus thought as he rolled, and attempted to get a feel for his body again. He was starting to get the feeling in his limbs back.

One of the rocks flying from the sky reached him, but as he attempted to stop it...

...!!!

Replicus found himself paralysed again, and he felt the presence of the Hybrid Luman in the darkness, his zhanmadao once again pointed at him.

'Wait...Is he...?' Replicus thought in disbelief.

No way!

Was the bastard actually... was he cutting his movements, slicing each of his intended actions with a sword?!

As he shuddered at the thought, Replicus was thrashed by a colossal rock and died in white fire!