

Undead 1211

Chapter 1211: The One Left Standing (25)

Skullius had recognised that tricks weren't going to work on Replicus anymore.

He had activated Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge to increase his chances of winning, but in all honesty, the Seed barely changed a thing.

Seramoro was a power that heightened the user's ability to manipulate [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] tremendously, almost as though enlightening them. It also granted them immense physical strength, but all its supplements to the user came with a caveat: madness.

Seramoro was a creature of destruction with barely any reason to it, but in that madness was the enlightenment and strength. Fulgardt had had trouble controlling it back in the day, but eventually figured out how to quell the monster's rage, and turn its primal unruliness into a controlled weapon.

Skullius, as an echo of Fulgardt, was doing the same. The WILLS guided him.

But of course, the Hybrid Luman had no intention of relying on this power for victory.

No.

Ever since he was dunked into this world of darkness, he had rejoiced.

All the benefits of [Benevolent Melanoid Prince] would thrive here!

The first thing he had done was to activate [Dipped in Black]. The skill collected natural darkness and converted it into physical strength for the user. While it had a limit, the darkness Skullius amassed raised his physical prowess by several leagues, though still, it wasn't anywhere close to what Jiggorrhax and Replicus were capable of. Each of the two outscaled the Melanoid Prince.

But triumph in a fistfight wasn't what Skullius was hoping for.

The boost to his physical properties was simply a means to ensure that he could use the expertise he had been gathering efficiently.

Indeed, expertise.

It might have escaped the notice of Replicus, and even Skullius himself at some point, that the Soul Spawn he had released to all the timelines were still drawing the memories and powers of millions of victims, feeding them all to the Hybrid Luman.

All this knowledge was useful to a sober, unfettered Skullius.

While Jiggorrhax attacked Replicus, instead of trying to cast his Territory again, Skullius decided to sharpen his skills with the overflow of knowledge he was receiving and figure out a way to kill the Warmoth without resorting to his final moves.

After all, GROWTH had been Skullius' motivation when he initially believed that he was controlling the pace of the battle. So far, he had earned much from fighting Replicus. Why stop now when he was offered the luxury of time and an ally?

Was this the right mindset?

Should he really take this path in this fight, where he attempted to win by merit in the end instead of frantically resorting to his last cards?

Could he maintain such a thought?

Hadn't he been shaken by the prospect of losing just moments ago? Hadn't he been panicking? Was it right to relax now?

'Shut it!' Skullius' scowled and told himself. His hand twitched. 'What does this matter? I have the better of him now. That's what matters!'

Around him, a fierce, cutting air hissed.

His field of disembodied slashes had been taken away by Replicus' Reversion earlier, but he didn't need it anymore.

Nitros and [Evil Darkness] roiled around him and both turned inconceivably sharp. The memories of thousands of skilled Swordsman from Families and Houses from four thousand years ago raced into him, spilling their secrets, their insights, their experience.

'I see...' Replicus thought as his mind opened. His confidence grew.

Yes, yes, just like this...

[You are HYPED!]

[You are HYPED!]

['Infinite Sword God' gains new insights!]

['Infinite Sword God' gains new insights!]

['Infinite Sword God' is evolving!]

...And then Skullius' senses spread through his two swords and interacted with the world differently than before.

Suddenly, he sensed things that had no business appealing to any kind of sensory trait possessed by living things below the Divine.

He sensed Replicus' movements before he made them.

He sensed Replicus' vision.

He sensed threads of existence connected to Null Life to Serenity.

A wide grin spread from his lips.

Yes, if things were like this, he could win.

If everything continued this way, he would kill the fake.

...

BOOOOOM!

The great rock reinforced by Divine energy struck Replicus point-blank. It wasn't nearly strong enough to hurt him, but as he had surmised, it was a conduit for a more lethal attack. It burst into a rune that engulfed him in white flame, and Replicus felt himself get... more vulnerable somehow.

Something about his durability had been compromised slightly.

'I knew it! Jiggorrhax is using Rules through the rocks! But I know from battling Jerthrax that he can't cast unusually powerful effects directly onto me through Rules unless I am leagues weaker than him,' he thought.

He once again tried to move, but his arms and legs remained planted on the ground. The very shadows of his next motions were sliced apart.

"Haha! You've long forgotten, right? Have a taste of it again," he heard behind him, and then the whistle of a sword rung in the darkness.

All of a sudden, Replicus' vision was cut. He was rendered blind!

...!!!

'He cut my vision?' Replicus thought, but he didn't turn frantic.

Skullius was grinning with glee, convinced that the Warmoth was merely donning a strong front. He must have been panicking like he had been before and trying to hide it!

'Show me that fear!'

Immediately afterward, light from the [Heart of Revelation] blasted against Replicus once more and the Stolen Angel descended from above and hammered its four fists into his body!

BOOOOM!

...

But this time, Replicus wasn't hit.

BZZZZZZT!

Skullius and the Stolen Angel were stunned.

What looked like a skinny, humanoid figure made entirely out of yellowish-red Ju`wtte had appeared and blocked the Stolen Angel's blow.

Of course, this entity, was a Strawler!

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth possessed the ability to create them, even outside the Empyrean Bosom and the Warmoth's Treasury, unlike his previous self!

The Strawler immediately grabbed the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow from the paralysed Replicus swung it against the Stolen Angel. The mobile Attegoth was pushed a great distance away.

"That thing won't save you," Skullius said from the darkness and almost immediately, the Strawler was diced into bits.

Replicus wasn't too surprised. The Strawlers he could create manifested with the inferior kind of Ju`wtte. With Skullius increasing his skill in swordsmanship now, it was only a matter of time before he could cut them down.

However...

Two more Strawlers emerged from Replicus' body, one grabbing the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and swiping at the darkness.

Skullius cut them down swiftly, but the instant he did, he realised that they were a distraction. Replicus wanted to buy himself time to recover from having his movements cut by having the Hybrid Luman turn his attention to the Strawlers.

'But what can you even do? I'll just cut you again,' the Hybrid Luman mocked as he raised Demion's Dance from the darkness. This time, he would cut apart Replicus' cores too!

He watched as Replicus, after having recovered his ability to move, planted his hand on the rocky ground.

What was he trying to do?

What could he hope to accomplish?

"[Unbound]!" Replicus declared.

...!!!

WHAT?!

Skullius couldn't have expected it.

[Unbound]... could be used on the entire world?

Even Jiggorrhax was surprised, but for different reasons.

The world suddenly became bright and he quickly felt his control over it getting wrestled away from him.

Though he couldn't perceive it, the world was saturated with Null Life Essence, and contrary to what Skullius was beginning to speculate, Replicus wasn't actually changing the properties of the entire world. He simply overloaded it with hundreds of millions of units of essence so that...

CRACK! BOOM!

The rocky world shattered around the four and Aigas' sunlight graced them all again. The four hadn't appeared in Agmold, strangely.

They were above a small clearing in Pelian, a few hundred kilometers away from the capital.

Skullius scowled.

He was just starting to get his momentum back, but now it was ruined!

He was exposed once again. One hit from Replicus could do him in, and now that the Warmoth was wary of his slashes, he would probably be able to avoid them more often than not!

Skullius turned to Jiggorrhax.

"Use it again! Create another world! He can't use that skill more than once in an hour!" he cried.

But Jiggorrhax merely growled unpleasantly, his eyes fixed upon Replicus who was flexing his fingers.

"UNUSUAL. ARE YOU AN ANOMALY?" Jiggorrhax asked with a terrible voice.

Replicus didn't reply. He knew from fighting Jerthrax that answering this question – Deities forbid with a yes – wouldn't grant him any favours. Maintaining the status quo was much better. But it was a double-edged sword. The longer this dragged out, the worse it became for him, but he had no choice.

Thankfully, Skullius was back to panicking again, and he was aware of his moves. Now all that was left was...

...

The sight of the massive dragon brought incredible unease.

Unlike before, when its appearance barely lasted a few seconds, this time, all had the chance to gaze upon it and marvel. Jiggorrhax was so large that he could be seen from afar after all.

Revia, who had slaughtered her nine hundredth Purity Knight in the sacred courtyard looked up, her bloodstained silver hair sticking to her face. Her enemies and allies alike were also momentarily distracted by the sight and the pressure of the Herald.

But the former Paladin Champion's roar forced the conflict to continue.

Whatever was becoming of Aigas was no business of hers. She charged to kill more of the Knights, the arrogant declaration she had heard from the High Priest earlier ringing in her head and fuelling her angry drive to enter the Inner Sanctum!

Elsewhere, a young man was standing on the roof to a great mansion, a heavy, familiar presence of Undeath around him. He was looking upward at the image of the dragon printed in the sky.

Yet his eyes saw more than just the dragon.

He saw the Hybrid Luman and the Soul-Burdened Warmoth.

...Then he saw the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and felt a twitch within him. Something about that spear resonated with him.

His eyes burned with fury at once.

What he might have done with this fury, however, no one would ever know, because it was quickly replaced by confusion.

The great dragon, the four-armed, furry entity, the red-masked demon and the glowing, winged angel vanished from sight.

Under the influence of Skullius' Creed, they appeared at the last location the random teleportation mechanism would ever take them: the Bryne Family Estate.

Immediately, a cold, nasty grin appeared on Skullius' face.

Chapter 1212: The One Left Standing (26)

Theurien kept his eyes on the Harmonic Ember.

Something deep within him, past his flesh and bones, was reflected on the face of the magical crystal which was hidden behind a clean, almost invisible glass panel a few paces in front of him.

Silrat, who walked into the room saw the mess within Theurien immediately. After peace started to settle within the estate, even with its growing number of people saved from various parts of the nation, the Bryne Family Head had had a lot more time to sink in despair. The unavailability of duties requiring his strict attention slowly made him more conscious of the weights in his heart.

He was more than a bit bitter.

While many others out there were saved – some even by him – his children had found no one to save them.

Setkh, Terese, Stylla...

Why couldn't they have been saved?

Why couldn't they be brought home?

This was their home before it was anyone else's.

"I don't recommend sitting alone in a dark room, brooding," Silrat said half-jokingly. Theurien didn't respond to his attempt at mirth. He looked pale, or rather paler than usual. It seemed he was even having a tough time grieving. After all, all he had was news. He didn't and couldn't see with his own eyes the fates of his children.

He simply been told that they had either perished or were missing.

Theurien leaned against the backrest of his chair.

"I need something to do. Distract my mind for a bit," he said to Silrat with a tired voice.

"There's nothing to do. Nothing to fight. Ever since that 'glowing hero', as the people are starting to call him, returned stronger than ever, there's been hardly anything for us to do or worry about," Silrat said.

"Hmmm. Right," Theurien said. "I wonder if his master will come through with some kind of miracle."

Silrat's face hardened.

"Festos?"

Theurien nodded.

"I wouldn't blame him if he failed, but all my hopes lie with him now. I am sure he cared for Stylla. If he could somehow find her..." His voice broke.

Silrat had no words.

Indeed, Festos cared for Stylla and would indeed do everything he could to save her.

But could that be done?

Where even was Festos?

"Ah, to find you two in one spot," a voice was suddenly heard within the room, causing the two men to shoot up and raise their guard as they frantically searched for its source.

"It's an odd feeling, being so lucky."

Silrat and Theurien shuddered.

A terrifying presence assailed the room and paralysed them instantly. Both had managed to find the source of the voice before being stunned, however, and were looking at it with bulging eyes.

"F-Festos?" Silrat said feebly.

The Hybrid Luman grinned.

"In the flesh."

*

Replicus and Skullius had appeared above the Bryne Estate, just shy of its first Chieftain Screen – one of the two barriers that Skullius had erected long ago with the runes he learned from Hobbu Gogo to protect the Estate.

The two had had extremely different reactions to being warped here of all places. For Skullius, this was a fantastic turn of events and to Replicus, it was rather unfortunate. He knew exactly what this was going to entail.

And sure enough, not even a micro-second after they arrived, Skullius dismantled the Chieftain Screens he had created himself in a flash and warped down.

"Damn it!" Replicus cursed.

He had intended to follow after the Hybrid Luman, but a vast shadow suddenly smothered him, and great flaming runes encircled the two in shocking numbers.

Since Jiggorrhax was not bound by Skullius' Creed, he had followed after the two on his own a split micro-moment after they warped. Upon arriving, he used his powers to prevent Replicus from flashing away. The Rule Runes he made were locking down space, keeping the Warmoth trapped; teleportation was forbidden in this area.

The dragon's eye then locked onto the Soul-Burdened Warmoth who glared back at him with an equal amount of ferocity despite being blind.

But suddenly, Replicus felt strangely vulnerable again. It was the effect of that Rule he had been struck by earlier.

'I see. So that's how it works,' he thought. 'As long as he is looking at me, I will become more vulnerable to attacks in some fashion.'

But he didn't have time to deal with the dragon right now. Skullius had been liberated. He was likely to use the Bryne Estate as leverage!

Replicus flicked his finger and Ju`wtte gathered at its tip.

He then drew a vast square shape in the air with the lightning, one that was about twenty times his size. An instant later, a second square of the same proportions was formed behind the last and shone with vibrant merigold.

Jiggorrhax turned wary. He had sensed Replicus' use of this move earlier when he was tangling with Beyrmir.

One of the two shapes zoomed his way with incredible speed and before he knew it, it had struck his shoulder with a thunderous impact. The portion of the Noboboyama covering Jiggorrhax's shoulder... suddenly turned into black ink that spilled all over the Bryne Estate below!

...!!!

What?

While the dragon was still reeling from the strangeness of this, the second shape zoomed towards the same place the last had struck, where his scales were now exposed, and crashed into it!

ROOOOOOAAAAARRRR!

The dragon roared in pain.

Shockingly, great hills of green rock were falling from his shoulder, along with what might have been red wine!

A portion of Jiggorrhax's shoulder was missing, and the sky behind him could be seen through the square-ish hole. Apparently, the wine and rock falling from it... had been part of his body?

Jiggorrhax grasped his shoulder as he grunted.

Replicus used the chance to try and escape, but...

"STOP THERE. YOU STILL HAVE NOT ANSWERED ME. ARE YOU AN ANOMALY?"
Jiggorrhax asked.

Replicus turned. He had expected more malice and rage from the dragon, but the look in his eyes was strangely... tame. He seemed more curious now than blood lusted.

Even still, he didn't have time for this, however. And thankfully enough...

A great golden beam of light suddenly blasted up from below, penetrated the net of Rule Runes and shot into the Herald's gut.

...!!!

Quite comically, the vast dragon was sent flying upward, though with less staggering speed than when he had been blasted by the Warmoth's Peal. Owning the great golden beam pushing the dragon, was a certain Apostle with a heroic looking stature!

'Thanks, Red Rage,' Replicus thought, gathered Ju`wtte and escaped the enclosure of Runes, storming down to where thousands of souls were trembling, shrieking and screaming at what had suddenly visited them.

Though Replicus had been blinded by Skullius' sword, he didn't need eyes to sense the presence of the Hybrid Luman. It took no time at all for him to find it. In fact, he hadn't needed to expand his senses in search of the Luman.

The great mansion past the inviting line of trees in the estate suddenly exploded as fine, invisible slashes broke down its walls and roof!

People closest to the mansion bolted away, colliding with those who were running away from Replicus' figure.

Skullius appeared in the building which had erupted, his image a bit unclear because of the copious amounts of dust and falling rubble. Theurien and Silrat were standing before him, looking absolutely mortified. Skullius had his hands around both their necks.

Replicus scowled.

"What, you're resorting to tricks now? You're pitifully outmatched so you're going put my friends... our friends, between our conflict?" he hissed.

Skullius cackled.

"Tricks? No. This isn't a trick. You claimed the past, and all its sentiments, is the point; that fighting for it is what brings fulfilment. I loathe that idea – obviously. You were whimpering over the useless lives I took minutes ago.

But... it's only fair that we pit our ideals against more than just our strengths, don't you think? We should test them practically," he said.

Replicus felt the terror in Theurien and Silrat. They must have been incredibly confused and horrified.

"And I suppose you mean to test mine because there's really no way for me to challenge yours?" he said.

"Exactly!" Skullius said with a loud, jubilant voice and shook Silrat. His smile then dimmed. "It's only right. After all, you're the fake."

Replicus' scowl turned deeper.

To think he would become such a coward resorting to such foul tricks!

Skullius was deeply pleased by the look on Replicus' face.

"I know you're immensely fast. Perhaps you could disable me fast enough right now..."

And it was true. Replicus was already taking action. With a miraculous level of precision, he could stop whatever Skullius intended to do with Theurien and Silrat. However...

"...I made sure to craft ONE capable of allowing dear friends to watch and be part of the fireworks."

Huh?

One what?

Replicus felt uneasy.

Then, he heard it behind him.

"Majestic Territory Expulsion..."

Replicus sensed the Stolen Angel appear in the Bryne Estate, its hands forming a sacred gesture, and Skullius' voice leaving its lips!

At once, he attacked it, forcing it to stop what it intended, but...

"Majestic Territory Expulsion..."

Skullius himself chanted with a wide, nasty grin.

"...Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon!"

Chapter 1213: The One Left Standing (27)

Jiggorrhax swatted away the tiny, yet extraordinarily powerful creature that was pushing him high into the sky. His rising velocity immediately fell, and he spun while rearing his head back to look at the new enemy.

Red Rage was wrapped in a vibrant, intense brilliance that disallowed those without advanced sight from seeing his true likeness. Just this quirk alone was already enough to suggest that in terms of power, he was in a league most living things in this world wouldn't be able to reach.

Jiggorrhax recognised this, but his attention was quickly stolen by what was happening below.

A mass of darkness was spreading like a plague, eating a massive chunk of Pelian to create a proud, intimate world.

The sight brought no small amount of annoyance to the dragon.

Right then, the Noboboyama coating him like armour suddenly fizzled out and scattered, leaving his majestic, scaled figure on full display.

The Herald scoffed.

'IT SEEMS HE HAS NO NEED FOR ME ANYMORE. I SHOULD HAVE REALISED SOONER.'

Jiggorrhax had seen the madness of Fulgardt in full despite never once contending against it in person. The Deities had always insisted that he was unneeded against the Immoral despite their vessels falling against Fulgardt's forces during the Second Grand War.

The dragon hadn't known why he wasn't allowed to participate. This cultivated no small degree of frustration within him when he watched the atrocities of the mad man. However, his grievances with the Immoral had soon been washed away when the threat of outsiders had befallen Aigas. They had been much greater foes than the Immoral. They were greedier. They were creepier.

They were many.

It was only for this reason that Jiggorrhax, in the present time, had fallen for Skullius' claim that Replicus was an outsider, and that he would help defeat him. Against threats from outside worlds, Jiggorrhax was indeed willing to cooperate with anyone with the means to assist. Surely, that was reason enough for him to temporarily place his trust in Fulgardt as an ally, right?

But he had been wrong and he had slowly begun to piece things together.

'Fulgardt' had spoken to the 'outsider' as if they were well acquainted, however hostilely.

Above that, the 'outsider', while indeed having other odd powers, had quite a deep knowledge on the powers encrusted in Aigas. How he used some of his skills, how his mana cores churned, how they glowed, how he understood the threat of Territories enough to stop them from even being cast...

It was fishy.

The fact that Jiggorrhax could sense Skullius' mana signature all over in the form of the Soul Spawn corrupting innocent lives also made him stop and reevaluate his stance.

This was why he had begun to attempt to converse with Replicus, asking if he was an anomaly. This, to the dragon, would make the most amount of sense considering how unusual Replicus' powers were. In that case, perhaps, the anomaly wasn't the enemy, and the enemy was in fact...

"Scaled Elder..."

Jiggorrhax turned as he suddenly heard a voice call from above. Only he among those here could be called a 'Scaled Elder.'

The dragon's purple pupil saw the hazy figure of a familiar individual; a familiar Giant.

"SAUSIFILLIS?"

And indeed the ethereal projection was Sause.

The Giant wore a solemn look, one he had never worn in front of anyone but his Elders.

"Please... This is not your fight," he said.

The great pupil of Jiggorrhax quivered.

There was a pleading, sorrowful look in Sause's eyes.

"Please..."

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon!"

An all-encompassing darkness spread out, unfathomably deep and maddeningly silent like the great void. From within, other than its master, no one else would be able to tell how much of the outside world it devoured. And indeed, this darkness devoured and it did not eradicate. It swallowed the Bryne Family Estate, buildings, people and all, and hid them.

Within this darkness, a particularly darker, scarier construct of the black begun to emerge as though rising from the ocean. It was like a vast grotesque, abominable, crooked, bony arm from which countless, black skeletal limbs protruded, grasping a series of horrid objects tightly.

The construct was very, very tall. Where it was conjured from below couldn't be seen, but where it ended was anything except hidden. The arm ended with six, thin, long fingers, the tips of which held onto a massive, bright gem.

This gem was very beautiful, delectable to the eye.

It shone resplendently, but its lustre was not reflected on the surroundings at all.

Far into the distance, three great Noboboyama PHANTASMIC RETAINERS grasping each other's many hands marked the circular boundary to the stage within which Skullius intended to use for his attacks, but they did not, by any means, mark the end of the Territory. They could be adjusted as per the Melanoid Prince's desire.

Speaking of the Prince, Skullius was standing, or perhaps floating right below the glowing gem held by the long arm.

His glee was formidable.

His eyes looked up beyond the shell of the Territory and he spotted the Herald, Jiggorrhax in the sky.

'I should have known you were quite smart, and as drunk on the idea of saving useless lives as my counterpart. You wouldn't join me here knowing how this Territory functions,' he thought, scoffed and then looked below him.

The heavily-furred, four- armed and long-haired figure of the Soul-Burdened Warmoth had reacted to his Territory's casting rather quickly. The proud, purple-gold light of [Neutral Maximum] was spraying vibrantly over him, protecting him from the basic effect of a Majestic Territory – to cease the flow of an opponent's mana, thereby crippling them.

Skullius chortled.

'I wonder how long that will last,' he thought.

He had every reason to be confident, after all...

[You have used your 'Majestic Territory'!]

[+5,500% to Strength within the Territory]

[+5,900% to Agility within the Territory]

[+5,000% to Endurance within the Territory]

[+10,500% to Mana Points and Mana Recovery within the Territory]

[+7,500% to Skill efficiency within the Territory]

The guidance field showered the Hybrid Luman with notifications. Indeed, he had massive calculated advantages within his Territory, but in truth, these were meaningless to the current battle.

The boons Skullius was most excited for came as a result of how he had constructed his Imaginary GeoScape; the three Primary functions he had forged were guaranteed to give him a phenomenal edge.

Replicus had been greatly disappointed by how Skullius managed to get one over him to cast his Territory. However, this feeling was quickly overwhelmed by how heavily unsettling this magical demesne was.

Upon entering, he had almost been caught lacking by one of its casual features; there was no ground to stand on here. It seemed targets would continue to fall in the darkness unless they had flight abilities or something similar.

For Replicus, what kept him steady was [Neutral Maximum]. It refused any kind of change from influencing his body other than that which Replicus allowed. This effect applied even to his position, though in most cases, he didn't really need to keep that constant.

'Catacomb of the Daemon, huh? Do you really think yourself a devil now?' Replicus thought.

"Neat, isn't it?" Skullius suddenly called.

In the unnerving silence, it almost seemed blasphemous to speak so loudly.

Replicus snorted and then he smirked.

"Sure. But you do realise that this Territory will soon be mine, right?" he said.

Skullius took a small bow.

"Ah, I'm not sure you mean that. After all, I haven't introduced you to its contents," he said, and suddenly, the darkness around them turned a little lighter, revealing the heavily-shaded mansions of

the Bryne Estate, the procession of darkened trees... and the thousands upon thousands of people who had been camping on the grounds.

They too were decked in black, golden-white halos hovering above their heads.

At once, Replicus' expression changed, wiped of all its mockery.

This...

"Still drooling for it? I picked up this neat idea from this Sif fellow, Benyn. He embossed his Territory on the surroundings, making sure any effect he cast was applied on them," Skullius explained.

Replicus was astonished.

In practice, it was probably harder than it looked to merge an Imaginary GeoScape with the outside world seamlessly, especially when living things were being included into the Territory from the outside, like how Skullius had done!

"Of course, my aim isn't anything ordinary. You see, it was rather difficult, making a smaller version of what I accomplished in the Labyrinth of the Yoke with a mere Territory, but I did it. My intellect made it through into this body – the bit of you I have doesn't contribute much, if anything," Skullius added on.

Right then, the shadowed bodies floated up into the air and each of them was immediately transformed into the CREATURE, two swords appearing in their hands!

"I have a lot of restrictions when using the Slow Ghost Divine Sword Art and CREATURE simultaneously. I can only make six ghosts blessed with that power of [Evil Darkness]. But here... I am free. The victims I bring into the Territory give me that freedom," the Hybrid Luman declared, and his thousands of CREATURES flexed their bodies, adjusting to themselves to their varying physiques.

Some of them didn't turn into the CREATURE. They transformed into the Stolen Angel, prompted by the same Divine Sword Art.

Replicus scowled.

This was... nasty.

"But this isn't all," Skullius said and he pointed up at the massive gem above him. "This catacomb may be aphotic, but that doesn't mean it refuses to bless those that need enlightening!"

The gem suddenly shone brighter than before, but its light didn't illuminate the Territory's aspects; not Skullius, not the CREATURES, not the twisted arm, or the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS.

No.

It only shone over Replicus and began to overwhelm all of his defenses!

Chapter 1214: The One Left Standing (28)

"[Maximum Constant]!"

Without a second thought, Replicus maxed out the output for [Neutral Maximum] with a skill he had been gifted from the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher: [Maximum Constant].

The purple-gold glow around him practically exploded, becoming roughly six meters thick in order to combat the glow of the massive gem, which had turned out to be an empowered [Heart of Revelation]!

'It's still getting fried through!' Replicus thought anxiously. White smoke was rising from around his [Neutral Maximum] as it collided with the aggressive light. Had he not increased the output of [Neutral Maximum] just now...

'Is that thing this effective without the need of that trick of his now?'

It seemed like it. Territories enabled many impossibilities, after all.

Replicus balled his hands into fists.

He felt his mana getting depleted extremely quickly.

[Maximum Constant] had a voracious cost, which was fitting given what it allowed. It was like a more specific version of [Neutral Maximum]. It allowed the user to keep one aspect of themselves working at maximum performance for as long as they had mana to spare.

'I'll have to keep Neutral working on overdrive until—'

"Scary," Skullius said, interrupting the Soul-Burdened Warmoth's thoughts. "Your adaptability with that skill is impressive. But it won't last for long."

The thousands of ghosts of the CREATURE and the Stolen Angels began sinking into the darkness, becoming completely imperceptible.

Replicus cursed.

"When that defence of yours inevitably falls, I'll continue from where I left off earlier. I will cut up your cores, your voice, your resolve, and then that sickening weakness you have. And then you'll die."

Right when Skullius finished speaking, tens of voices rang through the darkness.

"|GET CRUSHED|!"

"|GET FLESHED|!"

"|BURST|!"

"|GET WRUNG OUT|!"

"|EXPLODE|!"

"|SELF-DESTRUCT|!"

...

Replicus roared in intense agony.

The darkness within the Territory seemed to rush forth and attempt to smother him with a plethora of cruel effects!

His [Neutral Maximum] worked wonders, however. If it were not operating at extremes, it might have been overwhelmed instantly, but it wasn't. It merely dimmed and thinned, but kept up.

Replicus was lost for breath for a moment. The power of [Evil Veneration] was frightening, but it wasn't all that Skullius had. Far from it.

Silence once again filled the Territory.

Replicus' senses grew keen. He couldn't sense his enemies at all.

But then...

BAAM! BAAM! BAAAM! BAAAM!

Six Stolen Angels appear from nowhere and threw punches with all their might at the Soul-Burdened Warmoth!

The power behind these punches would have been enough to at least break a few of Jiggorrhax's scales. The weight, the Territory's enhancements and the power of several combat skills was empowering them after all.

Replicus held on, however. His [Neutral Maximum] thinned even more, but persisted.

The Stolen Angels sank back into the darkness.

Then... without notice, Replicus was suddenly buried in a flurry of empowered slashes!

He was alarmed.

How could there be so many?!

Couldn't Skullius only use his 'trick' once at a time?!

This was what Replicus knew, but what he experienced now was different.

The slashes didn't stop!

They sliced, hacked, butchered, whipped, slashed and carved at his [Neutral Maximum]. Amidst the onslaught, Replicus' figure vibrated so dramatically that he might have been experiencing a miniature, flesh-quake within himself!

[Neutral Maximum] couldn't handle it. It failed.

Replicus was left undefended for a split moment, and the light from the large gem overhead caught him, wiping away his flesh and bones like an eraser so that he appeared as a vague blue outline with brass bracers!

His copy of a soul, his cores, and everything else was revealed. Worse yet, his mana cores were now frozen. The basic effect of the Territory assaulted him at once!

...And then the thousands of CREATURES and Stolen Angels emerged from the darkness, already flinging themselves with shockingly well-coordinated attacks at the Warmoth!

Replicus roared in frustration. This was bad!

He couldn't hurt these enemies!

He couldn't fight to kill. All the ghosts fighting for Skullius were innocent people made into CREATURES. He couldn't simply slaughter them all. Wouldn't that be akin to wasting all the good Red Rage and Theurien had done? Wouldn't it be akin to wasting what Skullius had done – making the Chieftain Screens to better secure the Bryne Estate?!

But even if he disregarded all this and began killing wantonly, if he even could, what if Replicus mistakenly butchered Silrat or Theurien, those whom he truly cared for?!

Skullius had known he would hesitate.

But all these thoughts were too much of a luxury!

'Not here! Not now!'

Replicus' Warmoth's Spine and Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow remained equipped.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth wouldn't fall like this even if his access to mana was taken away, and by extension his Ju`wte, and most of his skills!

'I won't fall, especially to divine strength!'

Even though his bones and flesh had been dissolved by the light, that didn't stop him from filling his lacking, humanoid outline with so much Null Life Essence that he easily recreated a caricature of his four arms and started flailing his two weapons at the enemies, blocking and parrying tens of swords and sword slashes that hacked at him from countless angles!

Many swords aimed at his cores especially, seeking to turn them into nothingness!

Each slash was an empowered one with unlimited output, meaning that just one was enough to end Replicus' cores!

But the Warmoth persisted!

Since Null Life Essence was never a target for Territories, as mana couldn't recognise, much less counter it, he had an edge!

His movements were extremely fast. The Warmoth's Spine, being immune to concepts, was able to counter everything flung at him easily!

Yet still, even with this solution Replicus had crafted, he couldn't last long.

Since his flesh had been erased, the skills branded to his body were gone as well. He had no access to them. Furthermore, his Null Life Essence arms were not as quick as his original ones, and because using them was expending so many of his faculties at once, he couldn't do anything but defend. This wasn't sustainable.

If this continued, Replicus wouldn't last even a second and he was already halfway through it.

He needed his mana desperately.

'That should work!' he thought as his phantoms gave him many suggestions and acted.

At once, more Null Life Essence burst from his core and formed what looked like a vast mirror, or perhaps solid glass, near him. Five more of these were made in the next micro-instant, and to Replicus' relief, they worked as intended. The light from the [Heart of Revelation] gem was reflected seamlessly!

Right then, Replicus' flesh and bones were restored.

Pheew!

Even though he hadn't had access to the skill, Replicus, with the combined effort of his phantoms, had managed to manipulate his Null Life Essence with incredible precision to recreate the effect of the skill [Reflexive Null Cage]. He had learned this skill from the Null Terror, and then modified it with knowledge of how Caxellac used it.

It was essentially a powerful shield of Null Life Essence that could reflect damage. Caxellac had been able use it against Replicus' Crushing and Shocking Ju`wte in their battle, successfully reflecting damage.

It was miracle that Replicus had managed to do this without a skill, but also... odd.

But time didn't allow for philosophies and theories.

A moment later, Replicus' Null plates were shredded into tiny pieces by the slashes, much to his shock, but he made a herculean effort to formed them again.

BAAAM!

A Stolen Angel sneaked in between his Null plates, and hammered his head with a ridiculously powerful punch. Replicus felt his entire body quake and then...

CRAAACK!

One of his mana cores cracked... and then burst!

The pain was excruciating!

BAAAAM!

A pair of fists blasted into Replicus' sternum and he felt another core collapse!

The Warmoth lost focus, and two more cores were hacked to nothingness by a series of sword slashes that had quickly taken down two of his Null plates before aiming for him!

"RAAAAAAARRRR!"

A bundle of Null Life Essence exploded from Replicus and crashed into the myriad of enemies, pushing them back... but the attacks didn't stop.

Another core was lost!

Things were getting desperate.

If Replicus lost all his cores, then all was essentially lost!

He needed something.

He needed an out.

He needed inspiration!

What to do.

What to do...

What to do!

...

'RIGHT!' Replicus thought with a mix of joy and panic.

His phantoms brilliantly came through!

Under the masked faces of the ghosts and the orange eyes of the Stolen Angel, a purple-gold gleam, flickered around Replicus once, twice and then flared like the sun!

[Neutral Maximum] had returned in full force, and was supported by [Maximum Constant]!

'I-I did it!' Replicus thought, but he couldn't wallow in self-praise for long.

The enemies didn't relent, and he couldn't either!

The real Skullius, hidden somewhere in the darkness of the Territory, frowned.

'You're kidding me. That's cheating,' he thought as he caressed his red mask.

Replicus had overcome the quality of the Territory that paralysed all mana movements within an opponent's body, which restricted the use of skills that required it as a fuel.

Oddly enough, Replicus hadn't skimmed over this effect. It was still affecting him, but he had found a way to render it meaningless!

Skullius scoffed. 'No matter...'

Right then...

[Infinite Sword God' is evolving...]

[Congratulations, the Super Skill 'Infinite Sword God' has evolved into the Supreme tier!]

[Infinite Sword God: Primordial Sword' is now at your disposal]

[Greatest Mana Crafter' is evolving...]

[You have acquired the Super Skill, 'Mana All-Father']

Skullius grinned.

Yes.

His momentum was rising again.

The new developments quickly cascaded to his many CREATURES. They were enlightened, their version of [Infinite Sword God] rising up qualitatively.

Replicus felt the change immediately. After all, a slash came his way that tore his flesh, slicing him through... completely ignoring his Null plates... and his [Neutral Maximum]!

Chapter 1215: The One Left Standing (29)

To use his 'trick', Skullius had to sabotage the need for a skill in his arsenal to use mana for its activation, and then isolate it from a mana channel with two separate sword techniques.

These actions were the prerequisite required to initiate a complex mechanism he had created, where fifty Creeds were used up every ten seconds he was engaged in combat to keep the likelihood of his 'trick' working for him high.

At present, about a quarter of an hour had passed since Replicus and Skullius had begun fighting, and the latter had sacrificed about 4,500 Creeds so far. It was a truly costly technique.

Replicus seeing how this trick worked through the Rule he made to make aware his eyes to any of Skullius' tricks, had truly been a god-send fortune.

It was through seeing how Skullius made his cheat work, that he made his own against Skullius' Territory. It operated on a... very vaguely similar functionality though.

Instead of trying to remove the cost for all his skills, Replicus used the channels leading towards these skills to channel Null Life Essence towards said skills, instead of mana (as he couldn't move mana within the Territory).

Once the Null Life Essence reached the skill, filling the brand that represented it in his body, Replicus used one of the Blessings he had created when fighting Caxellac, to convert the Null Life Essence into mana!

Since Territories merely froze one's mana, making it so that it couldn't be mobilised towards skills, this worked like a charm! Once the Null Life Essence became mana within the brand for a skill, the skill's effect would be activated.

Naturally, all the skills within weapons that intruded upon a Territory were also forced to cease function, which meant that the skill [Divine Blessing Creation] within the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow was halted as well. However, this didn't extend to the Blessings that were made already and stored within the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow.

They could be activated with a thought, as they required no cost!

This was how Skullius had been able to use [Maximum Neutral] again, but unfortunately, it was quickly rendered useless.

He had been slashed apart cleanly... and the attacks didn't stop!

Before he knew it, Replicus had been slashed into six thousand pieces, but gritting his teeth, he forced himself to stay intact with [Maximum Neutral], and moved his arms to clash the Ju`wttta together to swiftly heal.

But...

"Oh no, you don't!" one of the many CREATURES around him mocked with glee and... Replicus found that his arms refused to move.

His movements had been cut!

'Not this again!' he thought in horror and his phantoms hurried to activate a skill that didn't require him to make any movements.

However...

"Not that either!"

And just when [Unrelenting Ju`wttte Viper] was about to activate... its activation was cut!

Replicus was shocked.

To think even such a thing could be cut!

This was cheating!

In addition to dramatically improving the quality of his sword skill, Skullius must have improved his ability to sense fine mana details as well! This was likely because of his Soul Spawn feeding him knowledge from many renowned sources through time!

Skullius was cutting off all of Replicus' channels to resisting a swift death! He was succeeding with flying colours!

The Warmoth was barely maintaining his slashed body with [Neutral Maximum], but then...

"|BEND|!"

"|BREAK FOR ME|!"

"|FOLD YOURSELF|!"

"|IMPLODE|!"

[Evil Veneration] was activated, and it strained him once again, his body quaking violently. As it did, another core was lost: the sixth one!

Replicus was so frustrated, and frankly, so frightened by the incoming loss that he screamed out of instinct:

"BRUNT DIVIDE!"

The darkness trembled and many, bare, confused human faces were suddenly made clear in the darkness.

WHAT?

The faces of many people who had been saved, nesting in the Bryne Estate were revealed, freed from the clutch of Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon through the Divine Blessing, Brunt Divide!

They were no longer CREATURES or Stolen Angels. The Blessing had torn the darkness from them.

For a single second, Replicus obtained some reprieve from the unrelenting attacks.

But only for a second.

The victims reverted to their victimised states. They bore Demion's Dances and Bashful Abominations and attacked the Warmoth again, even more aggressively, starting with Replicus' voice!

It was cut in the next instant!

But Replicus couldn't afford to care. The momentary reprieve he got allowed him to reacquire his bearings. He struck the Ju`wtta together and healed successfully. The loss of six of his mana cores had hit him hard though. Thankfully, he retained those connected to concepts he deemed very useful at the moment: Integral Time and Maximum Catalyst.

Replicus zoomed forth and used Ju`wtte as a foothold, leaping into the 'sky'. A moment later, his motions were cut and he froze, but he renounced defeat.

His phantoms were working so hard that he might have needed to pay them. As he couldn't activate skills without them getting cancelled, Replicus manifested an arm of Null Life Essence from which he forced Ju`wtte to trace through.

He pointed it at the crowd of enemies and drew a large, rectangular shape with the Ju`wtte which then hurtled towards the enemies at striking speed.

This... the CREATURES couldn't cut.

This was genuine Ju`wtte; merigold Ju`wtte.

The shape passed through all the CREATURES in sight and...

WHOOOOSHHH!

267 victims were suddenly returned to normal. The darkness coating them became a copious volume of dark ink that slipped off them like rain and fell into the abyss below!

The real Skullius hidden in the darkness scowled.

Again with that odd skill?

What even was it?!

He couldn't have known, but the properties of Ju`wtte were many and varied. With the right application, Replicus could apply genuine Ju`wtte to change the conceptual value of any object: be it from Nitros to simple light, or scales to rocks, or blood to wine!

This was what Replicus had done before.

It was a true phenomenal power, but unfortunately, it didn't work well with crowds. And to make matters worse, with his Null Life Essence arm, Replicus wasn't able to move quickly enough to rid the darkness from many other victims and perhaps dismantle the Territory entirely!

But even if he could, Skullius only had to restore the effects of CREATURE and Slow Ghost Divine Sword Art to the liberated victims; he could also possibly cast his Territory again if it was dismantled.

'Damn it! I'll just be going in circles with this!' Replicus lamented. Once again, he was ripped into thousands of pieces and he lost another mana core despite his attempts at shielding from the glowing gem and deflecting the incoming slashes with both of his Transcendent Grade weapons.

This in itself was a feat and a half. To match thousands of opponents somewhat and stall being hacked off to nothingness...

Skullius was a little impressed himself, but he had other thoughts beyond this.

'He's being pressed hard. And these are only the Primary functions of my Territory,' he thought.

And indeed they were.

Within Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon, there were three Primary functions.

The first was as Skullius had explained before. All living things impressed upon the Imaginary GeoScape of the Territory from the outside would be used as ghosts with the sub-skill CREATURE to empower them.

The second enabled Skullius to use his trick through all these CREATURES he created simultaneously, by increasing the cost of his Creeds tenfold: five hundred Creeds every ten seconds.

The third latched onto the second. It allowed him to use the [Heart of Revelation] at high output perpetually, but only up to the level of a Supreme Skill and not beyond, like Skullius was able to do with his slashing powers, for instance.

But as delightful as it was that Replicus was struggling with merely this much, Skullius was a little concerned about something.

'I have no doubt that he has a Territory. He has to have one. Why isn't he using it then? Is he simply not confident in it? No, even so, he would have saved himself much trouble by erecting his own when I did mine. My Territory wouldn't be able to contend with his in a simultaneous clash if his has a physical power-type Primary function.

Does this mean he doesn't have such an advantage?' Skullius agonised.

He just couldn't understand why Replicus was willing to suffer like this.

In any case, it was probably because he had some hidden card he was yet to use, perhaps one tied to his Territory.

'In that case, I won't delay. My Secondary attack function is already charged. I'll unleash it and end this before he uses whatever trick he is saving!'

And right then, Replicus activated his Secondary attack function.

The Noboboyama PHANTASMIC RETAINERS bordering the Territory were suddenly engulfed with fierce lights around their outlines.

Replicus noticed the rising power from them right when a chunk of his face fell off, sliced through perfectly.

'This is bad! I will lose at this rate!' he thought and one of his arms went flying. 'Where are you dammit?! How long are you going to keep me waiting?!'

It was a desperate call. Desperate indeed.

...But perhaps it wasn't just Skullius who was a little lucky.

For right then, the darkness overhead was breached!

A great, long mercurian snout bombed the ceiling of the Territory and pushed itself in!

Beyrmir had invaded!

Replicus' expression brightened and he wore a most relieved grin.

'FINALLY!' he cried inwardly.

Skullius looked up in surprise and frowned.

'What's this? This thing is still alive? I thought I killed it,' he thought dismissively. 'Well, I'll just kill it more thoroughly this ti—'

But his thoughts lagged.

His dismissive, relaxed temperament withered as cold fear slithered into him. After all, it finally hit the Hybrid Luman that the draconic Apostle didn't invade the Territory in a simple show of brutish loyalty to its master.

The Mercurian Legend was making a delivery.

Between its jaws, between its sharp teeth was a great chain of darkness, the end of which was tethered to a cage of darkness and light.

Within this cage, was a broken soul attached to many seals and arrays...

Chapter 1216: The One Left Standing (30)

Compared to the sight of his soul suddenly being in the enemy's possession, the fact that Beyrmir was still alive was barely vexing at all.

Skullius couldn't believe it. How was this possible?!

In addition to being wary of the idea that Replicus could have dropped in on him while he was at his most vulnerable over the last few days – in his Penetrator form, that is – he had accounted for the fact that he might have acquired abilities related to the soul, after all, his (Replicus') winning condition lied in making Skullius willingly use [Brisk Storm Avatar] to merge them back together.

He couldn't do that effectively without manipulating his soul.

Thus, Skullius, while applying his own advanced knowledge in souls, carried forth from Fulgardt's WILLS, had removed his soul from his body, tethered it to many seals and arrays that made it so he had a 'wireless' connection to it, and cast it outside Aigas.

Factoring in that Replicus had access to Stagnant Space, which was a dark, stable space that covered large bits of Aigas and even bordered it with the great void, Skullius had ensured the soul would be hidden beyond that, drifting in the great void.

Unlike with outsiders, natives of a world had a lot of leeway against Rules that prohibited entry and exit, which was how Skullius had been able to accomplish this feat. Fulgardt's influence and Sila's soul essence qualified him as a native of Aigas.

The Insurgent Magnus had even gone through the trouble of using anti-Divination measures in order to ensure that this action of his couldn't be traced by Diviners. In his mind, without a little tip, there was no way Replicus would guess – at least in a short time upon seeing that his soul was missing – that his soul was in the great void.

...But he had been mistaken.

Replicus' enhanced vision, formed through a Rule, had been catered towards seeing through Skullius' tricks. He had even been able to see the real Skullius among the ghosts. Thus, when he couldn't find any hint of where Skullius' soul was anywhere on Aigas, he had assumed that it could only be somewhere his vision and senses couldn't reach.

Replicus cackled as Beyrmir's great head burst through the Territory.

Finally, his loyal Apostle had delivered!

A broad grin spread on his face. He could only imagine how frustrated Skullius was right now. He was probably questioning how this was possible. He was probably agonising over how it was that the Soul-Burdened Warmoth had seen through his 'well-executed' plan.

And out of burning, brutish glee, Replicus had Null Life Essence gather in his throat and project the vibrations from his vocal cords as vivid words to all:

"YOU MADE IT ALL POSSIBLE, YOU ARROGANT SOCKETHOLE! YOU SHOWED ME THE WAY!"

Skullius was alarmed.

But Replicus didn't elaborate. The CREATURES around him were turning their attention to Beyrmir.

Thus...

Replicus used Maximum Catalyst's Progression on his mana and Nitros flooded out of him expanding just as he called in his mind...

'Majestic Territory Expulsion, Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity!'

The guidance field sprang forth in his vision.

[You have used your 'Majestic Territory!']

[+16,220% to DUAL-CONCEPT TRACING IMPACT within the Territory]

[+11,900% to JU`WTTE BLIZZARD MOTION within the Territory]

[+10,000% to EMPOWERED DEVIANT TRIGGER BUILD within the Territory]

[+22,300% to Mana Points and Mana Recovery within the Territory]

[+30,000% to Maximum Catalyst efficiency and power]

[+17,900% to General Skill efficiency within the Territory]

As Replicus qualified as a beast by Aigas' terms, he didn't have any cruel demands for executing his Majestic Territory like the human, Sif and Giant experts. Thus, his Territory sprang forth freely and quickly.

...!!!

But it wasn't only Nitros that exploded from the Warmoth. Maximum Catalyst's [Neutral Maximum] expanded as a vast purple-gold crystal layer mixed in with Null Life Essence, creating a glowing, ovular palette that rushed out, dismantling the darkness of Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon around it!

The sheer ease with which the dark Territory was broken apart, making room for its superior, was staggering.

The CREATURES close-by as it expanded were suddenly assaulted by tiny, merigold explosions that looked no different and no stronger than little fireworks... and liberated of the darkness completely!

Skullius scowled so deeply that his face nearly twisted.

No!

Unlike the previous time, his slaves were being freed permanently! His Territory was also failing to combat Replicus'!

He couldn't allow this! He was losing ground!

Beside him, the real Stolen Angel appeared from the darkness, and it brought its hands together and yelled in a voice similar to his own:

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon!"

...!!!

As many Creeds were used with the call, Skullius' dark Territory stopped getting overwhelmed. In fact, it started to emit a more formidable pressure than before; a pressure more than twice as powerful!

Where the two Territories met, tiny explosion of Ju`wte constantly crackled, very slowly eating away at Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon.

Replicus scoffed.

'Damn. I didn't know you could do that. He's superimposing one Territory on top of another, making it twice as powerful,' he thought.

But this didn't concern him.

His Territory quickly established itself and Beyrmir flew down to take refuge within its atmosphere. He then handed Replicus the cage with the soul within it.

Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity was an extremely powerful Territory with a gorgeous, Imaginary GeoScape. It looked like the opposite of Skullius'.

Having been made with a combination of Nitros, the essence of [Neutral Maximum], and Null Life Essence, every aspect of it was purple-gold and white. Tall blades of grass in a pretty purple-gold made its solid platform and among them, many great, tall white trees could be seen with numerous long, spindly arms replacing their branches.

Large, smooth boulders of purple-gold with smiling faces carved onto them could also be spotted, littered about.

The hundreds of victims who had been saved from Skullius' Territory just now might have been frightened by these things, but somehow, they felt at ease. The picture ahead of them also gave them piece of mind.

The purple-gold field with statues and trees almost appeared to be some kind of prelude to the real thing. Beyond it was an odd gap with a dark greyish tone above the purple-gold palette. It looked out of place. The only thing within it was a large stone portrait of a young girl huddled around herself, thrumming with great powers.

Replicus was standing on it, looking ahead.

His grin never waned.

He had known that his Territory was superior to Skullius'. It was, after all, also a double Territory of sorts. The problem was, he had yet to nip a single problem with using it in the bud: Its outrageous cost.

At present, Replicus could only keep active for no more than three minutes, and that was without using any of its effects, and with all thirteen his cores – twelve for mana, one for Null Life Essence – to power it.

The great, expertly carved stone portrait he was standing on was another Territory within the purple-gold expanse, one that expelled effects outside the boundary of his first's GeoScape rather than in. And of course, the purple-gold expanse was the ordinary Territory.

'Let's do this!'

At once, the stone Replicus was standing on surged with immense power.

He activated one of its Primary effects right as he cocked back one of his arms.

'[Neutral Impact]!' Replicus called and he threw a fist into the greyish void around the stone portrait.

...!!!

Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon trembled, and within its dark interior, hundreds of figures were suddenly engulfed in a purple-gold, crystal-like entrapment!

The many CREATURES Skullius had at his disposal suddenly turned limp and floated upward with the coloured crystal around them!

"Bastard!" Skullius growled.

Replicus was intent on stealing one of the advantages he had!

He had incapacitated his CREATURES, and he (Skullius) felt his connection to them get severed. Reestablishing it wasn't going to be easy, it seemed.

And indeed, it wasn't.

Replicus called the effects of the great stone Territory as External functions.

One of his External Primary functions allowed him to project his powers outside Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity with greater efficiency and on multiple targets. Depending on the skill he was using, the range could be expanded to over a hundred thousand targets!

Right now, Replicus had used a skill known as [Neutral Impact]. It, quite like [Maximum Constant], was a skill he had learned from the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher, and it allowed him to halt the bodily functions of his target and keep them in that state after a successful hit.

On powerful opponents, it was unlikely to work for long, but with the empowerment of his Territory, it was on magical steroids!

Replicus spammed this skill several times in an instant, and many of Skullius' CREATURES were incapacitated one after the other!

'[Maximum Reach]!'

Replicus called and hundreds of arms forged out of Maximum Catalyst's essence sprang forth at fifty times the speed of light to grab the incapacitated victims and drag them into the purple-gold Territory. Once they were inside, miniature explosions of Ju`wte bombarded them, freeing them from Skullius' grip!

This feature – the miniature explosions – was a Primary function of Replicus' more standard, purple-gold Territory. Everyone dragged within it would be assaulted by the Ju`wte, but depending on whether they were friend or foe, its reaction to them was different. It would cut off any malign influences over them or endless drown them in Shock and Crush damage!

"Enough!" Skullius cried and he grabbed Demion's Dance.

He then bolted forth through the darkness and reached as close to Replicus' Territory as possible. On the way, he unleashed a torrent of slashes that ripped the [Maximum Reach] hands to bits and hid the CREATURES that had been struck by [Neutral Impact] further within the darkness of his own Territory.

He came to a stop when he was only a few meters from the boundary between his and Replicus' Territories and...

SHIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!

The Hybrid Luman applied [Infinite Sword God: Primordial Sword], mixed the Absolute Severance, Unmotivated Bender and Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Arts and slashed with every fibre of his being!

...!!!

Replicus shook.

A small yet terrifying sword slash was coming for him... no, not for him, but the cage he had in his possession!

The slash refused to be limited by Replicus' Territories, and in less than a blink, it had reached the Warmoth!

Chapter 1217: The One Left Standing (31)

Upon identifying the target of the attack, Replicus, bolstered by his Territory physically, successfully whipped it out of the way of the attack, however much surprise he got from the fact that he was being pushed on the defensive while in his own Territory!

'Is he trying to get the cage away from me or is he...?' Replicus thought, but then he had to dodge another slash then and another and another.

What was this madman trying to do?!

Replicus leaped off the great stone portrait.

Skullius gave the smooth stone a disgusted look, having recognised who it was sculpted after, and he continued his relentless assault.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth made a gesture with his hands, and the great portrait bellowed with power; its second Primary assault function was unleashed.

A great ball of blackish-grey energy spawned right next to Skullius.

...!

The Hybrid Luman didn't need to look at it to recognise what it was.

He immediately slipped into the darkness just before it detonated with enough oomph to level Pelian, turning it to ash!

The two Territories shook at the ensuing explosion, but they held.

Skullius had been successfully repelled.

He looked at the Warmoth with boiling hatred from a distance.

There was a short pause.

Replicus found himself dumbfounded.

Skullius' series of sword slashes just now...

The real target of those slashes...

Was Replicus perhaps mistaken?

The Hybrid Luman had clearly put in a lot of work to keep his soul safe from Replicus' clutches.

The Warmoth had also put in a lot of work to find it. Well, Beyrmir did.

As Replicus had said before, it was, in the end, Skullius who helped him get to the soul and simultaneously revealed how he had hidden it outside Aigas in the first place.

Earlier, Skullius had used the Noboboyama wrapped around Jiggorrhax, and Limitless Paradox to slash apart the world in an effort to kill both Replicus and Beyrmir. Replicus had escaped but one of Beyrmir's bodies had been completely destroyed. A black patch where the Rules of the world had been disintegrated remained as evidence of the power of the attack.

This... was the key. This black patch was a mix of Stagnant Space and the great void outside Aigas. If navigated through correctly, it could lead outside Aigas!

Right after his body was destroyed, Replicus had given Beyrmir a telepathic order to take the chance and use his second body to travel outside Aigas and search for Skullius' soul. As Jiggorrhax and Skullius were convinced he was gone, it was the perfect strategy.

It had taken a while for Beyrmir to find the soul and return. The great void was... an odd, dangerous place. He had to be careful. However, in the end, he had done it.

No doubt, it took a lot of work.

So then... why?

Replicus scowled.

Null Life Essence ran through his throat and he projected his words.

"Why are you trying to destroy your own soul?!" he barked at the Hybrid Luman.

Skullius narrowed his eyes as he floated through the darkness back towards the giant, crooked hand in the middle of his Territory.

He didn't answer immediately.

Indeed, his aim had been to destroy his soul with an empowered slash just now. However, it wasn't as suicidal of an act as it had appeared. In fact, it was the opposite, at least according to Skullius' hypothesis.

His nostrils flared.

"I had my misgivings, but I cast them away moments ago. This is the best way to end this once and for all. If your ideals are a pestilence that corrodes a living being, then the soul is its carrier! Perhaps man need not have a soul at all, just a body!" Skullius spat.

Huh...

Replicus shook his head with a look of incredulity.

Was he hearing this right?

"Just how much more madness do you intend to ingest and process? How can a—"

"I don't need to be understood by the likes of you!" Skullius cut him off and his mask burst apart from his face, revealing a ferocious, hateful visage.

Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon trembled. A surge of power permeated through it from the outside.

Replicus didn't miss it.

What was it now?!

The white ring on Skullius' middle finger began to shine with greater luminance than before.

"How I'm enlightened and exalted above folk as small-minded as you will continue to be a mystery YOU will struggle with!" he roared, and Replicus could have sworn he felt the darkness within the Territory rush towards Skullius.

The Luman continued, his voice soaring.

"I AM A DIVINE! I UNDERSTAND HOW MY BODY AND SOUL WORK BETTER THAN ANYONE!"

"IF I SAY A SOUL IS WORTHLESS, YOU BEST BELIEVE IT IS, AND THAT I CAN LIVE WITHOUT IT!"

"THE SOUL LEARNS FROM THE BODY, AND THE BODY LEARNS FROM THE SOUL! MY BODY HAS LEARNED ENOUGH ABOUT MY SOUL TO QUALIFY AS AN ENTITY CAPABLE OF BEARING THE QUALITIES OF BOTH!"

"I OWE YOU FOR THAT REALISATION, FAKE! I WAS INTIMIDATED BY THE IDEA THAT I COULD BE WRONG, THAT IT COULD ALL GO SOUTH, BUT FUCK IT! WHEN HAVE I EVER BEEN WRONG?!"

Replicus was astonished.

This bastard was serious.

The energy he was mobilising now, was all for one last attack to destroy both him and the soul, most likely!

'Just when I thought I had the upper hand!' Replicus thought, a bit of fear creeping into his bones.

Skullius exhaled a cloud of steam, as though expelling the last bits of his rageful rant just now.

"This is it, fake! Either way, your route towards victory ends here. ALL OR FUCKING NOTHING! Either I destroy you and the soul and continue living, or I destroy you and the soul and I die! THIS IS MY LAST GAMBIT!" he declared.

Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon shook vehemently and incessantly. Skullius was being truthful. He was going all out.

If there was one bit he lied about, however, it was the fact that this was a gamble where he really didn't have much confidence in what would happen if he destroyed his soul.

In truth, he had a lot more confidence in this than he wanted Replicus to believe.

It was true. The body learned from the soul and the soul learned from the body. After some time in a being's life, the soul and the body became equals. This was the first trait imposed by Divinity. This was why, even though Fulgardt died, he hadn't ceased to exist. His body still existed in the Labyrinth, active, and his consciousness resided in the legacy he had created.

But Skullius wasn't Fulgardt and he wasn't Divine... yet.

While indeed his body was already very strong, destroying his soul now was a risk. To mitigate this risk, he had added something else to stabilise his existence if he should destroy his soul.

The Stolen Angel.

At first, its sole purpose was to be a firm counter against Territories, but later on, the Hybrid Luman gave it greater, glorious purpose.

The Stolen Angel was Skullius. There was no difference between the two except in physical features. The Hybrid Luman hoped it could serve as his soul's replacement!

Thus, he boldly set to attack.

He wasn't going for unleashing his Secondary attack function anymore. He was going beyond, pulling all the stops!

Replicus clicked his tongue.

He turned to the hundreds of people he had saved so far. Some of them were getting nervous.

Among them, he couldn't sense Theurien or Silrat.

This fact made him even more hesitant to ditch the enticing thought of not giving an undead's ass about everyone else and simply doing what he had to do.

Thus, using one of his External Primary functions, he began teleporting the many, saved victims outside the Territories, and far, far away from their vicinity!

'I'll have to save them all now. No way I'm letting Theurien die before he sees his daughter again. And Silrat... well, I can't betray a friend to death. There won't be another Allora if I can help it. And definitely not by own hands!' he thought determinedly.

With two of his hands, Replicus once again held the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and drew the string on it.

Skullius, on the opposite end, exhaled another steaming breath and called:

"Daemon's Stygian Mimic."

Right then, the great, twisted arm reaching from the abyssal darkness below, rose, making way for the rest of the body which it was connected to.

Replicus shuddered.

What emerged was a truly hideous being.

Like its arm, it was plagued by small, bony limbs that protruded from every inch of it, warping its overall appearance. But despite that, it being a humongous skeletal figure with an unnaturally wide ribcage, was more than evident. Its skull had nine horns growing off the top, each plagued by nine, smaller, golden-white figures that seemed to be hanging onto them for dear life.

Whenever these figures moved, there was a clang no different to that of a bell.

Nine sockets also assailed the face of the skull, but an even deeper darkness was vividly brimming within them. The skeleton crouched on the blank darkness as though it were a firm platform, and gazed upon Replicus' Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity.

Skullius extended his right hand forward, and his middle finger, where the white ring was slung, pointed ahead.

"The one left standing..." he said into the darkness, "...will be me."

Chapter 1218: The One Left Standing (32)

The Tertiary function of a Majestic Territory was not simple to forge.

Its power could only be accessed when a Territory acquired traits similar to those of a world – forming living things within its boundaries.

The power to launch a Tertiary tier attack could only be siphoned from the energy of these living things.

Beasts made it seem easy, but it was far from so. The key laid in having the Territory progress naturally, which meant that the Territory would need to remain open for a long period of time.

As most humans, Sif and Giants didn't have the means or knowledge to casual leave their Territories open in their Dormant states, as guardian beasts from forests often did, the Tertiary attack power was out of reach for most experts unless they fought strong opponents very often and over a long period, ensuring that their Territories were open as many times as possible.

...

Skullius' white ring burst into countless, orb-shaped particles of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light].

The great skeleton behind him mimicked his motion, also pointing ahead with its right middle finger.

The particles released from the white ring surged and began dancing around the Stygian Mimic's middle finger. They multiplied at an alarming rate, and started violently bouncing against each other with each passing second, creating tiny sparks that grew intense, burning hot and hotter!

Skullius had only created his Territory less than a week ago.

He couldn't possibly have acquired the Tertiary power already.

...But he did.

With Fulgardt's knowledge, he crafted a work-around that was extremely conditional.

One could say he had been preparing it as a backup of a backup since earlier, when he started to use the Soul Spawn. And of course, the Soul Spawn were the key.

Skullius had made many Soul Spawn and in turn many Masterpieces as well. There was a limit to how many Soul Spawn could be made using [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance], but Replicus had made that restriction meaningless by using his 'trick' on the Super Skill.

This was why he had managed to create so many Masterpieces between the three timelines he had created by slicing time!

Now, he had hundreds of thousands of Masterpieces over the present Aigas and both versions of its past.

Using 10,000 Creeds earned from this grand feat, Skullius made a declaration. The Masterpieces he created over the varying versions of Aigas would serve as the fuel required to power his Tertiary assault function for a maximum time limit of twenty seconds!

But of course, Skullius didn't have a defined Tertiary assault function yet. He didn't have a well thought out ability. The best he had made so far, was the skeleton, the Daemon's Stygian Mimic.

Thus, what was being fuelled here by the energy from the Masterpieces, was an ability he brought in from the outside; an ability that was in the ring he had been given by Vali.

The Stygian Mimic behind Skullius trembled as many energies sifted through it.

The energy drawn from other living things was far more profound in powering higher forms of might than mana. This was, after all, why Deities created living things on the worlds they created.

The Mimic's finger shone bright as the sparks from the clashing particles around it grew brighter and brighter!

'This is it! It's working perfectly!' Skullius thought and soon, the sparks pouring from the Stygian Mimic's middle finger grew so bright that they hid the two's figures.

Skullius wore a terribly nasty grin.

This was it!

He had made Vali create for him a ring that could bind [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness] together and calibrate them into an extremely powerful, offensive product using her Imagining Technique.

This had been a tall ask, however. [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] weren't just any element or concept. They were mysterious powers created by the Fruit of World Myths and simply combining them wasn't something any odd treasure on Aigas could do. This was especially true for anything created by Vali's inferior copy of the Imaginary Technique.

Thus, the ring Vali made created an alternate route to making what Skullius wanted a reality.

Once equipped, the ring began greedily absorbing any nearby essences, which was why Maxim told Skullius to only unleash the ring when he needed it. But Skullius had known what he was doing. As soon as he unsealed the ring from Maxim's storing technique, he had begun feeding it large amount of darkness and light all throughout the fight.

After it was full and was ready for the next step, the ring expelled [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness] in solid forms (the orbs) and forced them to bounce against each other, creating what might be aptly called 'Assimilating Friction'.

A third element, a bizarre type of flame, silver in colour, was created because of this friction, imbued with properties similar to those of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light]. This flame would be the bonding agent for the two elements.

This was the way the ring used to merge the intended elements.

Because [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] were too outlandish, the binding would not be 100% complete, or even 60%, by that was fine by Skullius.

The resultant offensive power was what was going to be considered as the Tertiary attack of Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon, fuelled by the energy of hundreds of thousands of people!

VWOOOOOSH!!!

Replicus couldn't see, but he felt the immensity of the attack that was incoming.

Beyrmir's eyes narrowed at the great blaze flourishing ahead, licking the darkness in Skullius' Territory!

In the heart of the blaze, Skullius and Stygian Mimic barely showed as distorted, grinning figures with their middle fingers pointed at the Apostle and his master.

The silver flame lurched and barrelled forth.

"MY LIEGE!" Beyrmir cried.

But Replicus was aware.

It was coming!

The silver fire was just a kind warning!

'Just a little more!' he thought.

While he was drawing the string to the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow, causing a glowing, soul arrow to be nocked on it, his other arm was using [Maximum Reach] to grab as many of the CREATURES as it could, bringing them into his Territory and then teleporting them away!

But he was too slow.

Wielding the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow required two arms and since Replicus always needed to be wielding the Warmoth's Spine with one hand, he had only one arm available for everything else.

But no. He didn't.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth manifested multiple arms of Null Life Essence and channelled [Maximum Reach] through them. The effect of his External Primary function multiplied even further, grabbing multiple victims at once!

But alas!

VWOOOOOOOSH!!!

The silver flame smothered the rest of Skullius' Territory before Replicus could save everyone else! The remaining CREATURES were burned to something more pathetic than ash!

'Damn it!' Replicus thought.

He hadn't managed to confirm if he saved Theurien and Silrat or not!

His heart sank, but that was too great of a luxury!

BOOOOOOM!

The silver flame bashed against Replicus' Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity.

The Warmoth gritted his teeth.

He opened the cage within which Skullius' soul was trapped.

He drew the soul out, luminous and incomplete as it looked, despite being functional.

With the proficiency with souls that the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow granted him, he carefully brought the soul into the soul arrow he had nocked. The soul was seamlessly absorbed by the arrow and it turned several shades brighter!

'All or nothing...' Replicus thought and pulled the string to his bow spear even further.

...But he wasn't done.

He layered the arrow with a massive amount of Ju`wte which was then inverted, losing its merigold hue for a black-ish quality!

The arrow changed hue, drastically shifting its grace from what it had been earlier; from something divine to some fell, dreadful chaos imbibed in a mortal, pointed vessel.

'Come, Beyrmir!' Replicus commanded and the Apostle's mercurian body forged a great armour around him with thick, hot, silver scales. The Warmoth then activated [Neutral Maximum] and [Maximum Constant], and a purple-gold covering belched over him at full force, empowered by his Territory.

It was over fifty meters thick in radius around him, working in overdrive!

The silver flame beyond surged and lurched attempting to break into Replicus' Territory.

He wished he could see it.

Perhaps it would be the last thing he ever saw.

But alas...

The silver flame was suddenly parted viciously, cast left and right with haste!

In the path it left behind, Skullius, donning the same ugly grin Replicus had seen in Riba's Divination, cackled, middle finger propped forth, and...

"ALL OR FUCKING NOTHING!!!" he shrieked and something quicker than Replicus' [Neutral Acumen] burst forth.

It was more than fifty times the speed of light.

It was so thin it was barely visible to the naked eye.

It had no colour... but it had every colour.

It was so violent it ripped everything apart, blasting even at its master when it was fired.

It was... an abominable, straight ray with the power to destroy Aigas completely.

Replicus' blind eyes widened.

His attack didn't have that much power. It didn't need it.

The ray came before he loosened his arrow, but that was no issue at all.

The task to loosen the arrow... was left to his Territory.

Another one of its Primary functions enabled him to carry out any action through the Territory itself with a few instructions. This extended even to actions involving weapons that belonged to Replicus. Thus, he had trusted this Primary function to loosen his soul arrow as soon Skullius' precise position was in view.

As such, the soul arrow dipped with Inverted Ju`wte was released, but that was not all.

Another arrow was formed and released in a blink, sent the same way as its twin.

Yet these arrows hadn't even left Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity by the time the world-rending ray reached Replicus, who had propped before him the Warmoth's Spine with one of his hands.

And then there was only destruction.

Chapter 1219: ...Is Me

<Ah. How fascinating indeed. Your prediction held true.> Boron said as his great figure slowly began to descend.

Suzamete flew out of his palm and floated still in the sky, gazing at him intently.

<I never would have expected that two mortals could entice me so much with their battle. This perhaps was the greatest battle to take place on this world, as you said. Though its ending... I wouldn't say it was as spectacular as you claimed.>

Suzamete gave a weak, suspicious smile, but Boron missed it.

<Forgive me, then...> she said.

<There's nothing to forgive, my love. Nothing at all.>

Boron stormed downward, piercing through the veil of clouds in the sky, leaving Suzamete behind. The Deitess wore a dark visage.

<Forgive me...> she whispered.

*

Jiggorrhax was heaving great, laboured breaths.

He himself couldn't believe he was alive after THAT.

His vast body was standing on its hind legs, and his other pair of limbs were stretched out wide, quite like his great wings.

Very little remained of the great Herald.

He almost looked like a carbon copy of the Daemon's Stygian Mimic.

His scales had been eradicated – every single one of them – and his flesh was mostly gone, blasted off, or charred to the point of shrivelling and attaching to his great bones. Most of Jiggorrhax's torso was spine and ribcage, and it couldn't support his erect stance anymore. Thus, he collapsed.

The dragon heaved and hissed.

Despite his sorry state, he was proud.

Because of him, Aigas was safe.

Even though half of Pelian was obliterated, this was a small price to pay.

The illusory figure of Sause, floating in the sky like a cloud, wore a dark grimace.

He had begged Jiggorrhax to return to his time earlier, fearing that he would perish in a battle he had been dragged into. While the dragon was merely a relic of the past temporarily thriving in the present, Sause hadn't wished to see two of his Elders die mere days apart.

Now, however... he was compelled to believe that this was ordained.

When a catastrophic explosion had ripped open the darkness which had spread over Pelian several moments ago, rolling out with staggering, galloping might, Jiggorrhax had unleashed an unending series of Rule Runes in an attempt to contain it.

He created nine worlds around the vile detonation, and they were all blasted to high hell in less than instant, but they significantly tore down its power to a degree that Jiggorrhax could contain... somewhat.

But this came at a cost.

The Herald's body wasn't able to handle the power, however shrunk down it was, hence his current state.

Furthermore, one of the human nations had paid part of the price.

At the moment, a great crater approximately six hundred kilometers in diameter had replaced anything the civilization under the reign of King Royan had established in that range.

Jiggorrhax was also in this crater which spewed lava and toxic fumes in dangerous volumes, warping the state of the sky.

The dragon's purple pupil turned hazy, but he refused to lose consciousness before seeing what became of the two who triggered the madness he had been left to contain.

His vision travelled past the heat and choking fumes; it scoured a great distance around him until...

'AH...'

Two figures appeared in his sight.

One was standing with his head held high, and the other was kneeling with his head hung low.

Only a few dozen paces worth of distance split the two.

The smaller one between them, was the one standing proud, heaving and coughing terribly. His body was a mess. His flesh was molten, cracking like a mud pot, and black. His face was hardly recognisable. Its features were distorted like stirred wax; they were lumpy, swollen and charred, except for the eyes.

He was missing most of his limbs – much of his legs and left arm – but he substituted them with darkness to be able to stand stably. He was making a generous effort to heal, but it wasn't working all that well, but he could hardly be annoyed.

As he had declared, he was the one left standing.

Skullius, was the one left standing!

He gazed at his counterpart with what might have been a grin; broken pieces of dry flesh chipped and fell as he moved his lips.

The Soul-Burdened Warmoth looked horrible. He looked worse than Jiggorrhax!

The only thing that looked decent about him was the pair of brass bracers around his topmost arms; but they hardly looked like arms – they were simply cracked bones layered with blackened flesh and furs.

The Ju`wta had sustained heavy damage, but because they had grown even tougher with Replicus' Implicit Evolution, they had survived the formidable ray's might. They were swiftly approaching the durability of the Warmoth's Spine, which was tight in Replicus' grasp.

Everything of Replicus' was smoking profusely. None of his flesh remained and his head held the worst of the damage he had received.

There was barely one.

Only a jaw remained, and even that was half gone.

Skullius greedily took in the look of the Warmoth.

"Ha... hahaha... HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA!!!" he began laughing like a madman, bits of his burnt hair falling off as he rocked his head back and forth. He seemed truly insane.

"As I predicted! It's me, it's fucking ME AND MY IDEALS that stand proud in the end!"

He laughed some more, his face facing the sky, and staggered. Then he sighed and looked back at Skullius with Crude Vision. His smile dimmed.

As much as he wanted to celebrate a complete victory though, Skullius couldn't.

After all, there was the thrum of a soul deep within him.

During that final attack, he hadn't quite managed to see and dodge the dark arrow that had been hurtling towards him. The arrow had struck him point blank and bashed him with a volley of Inverted Mana which was now preventing him from healing properly.

While Skullius had been wrestling with the agony, his soul had been swiftly pushed through him and reconnected with his body perfectly.

"Tsk!"

Skullius scowled, rushed forth, and kicked the Warmoth's charred body. It remained fixed in its kneeling position.

"That was all you managed. Nothing more. I'll purge this weakness sooner rather than later anyways," he said and then he tore his eyes away from Replicus.

The Stolen Angel was a few meters behind him... frozen in Cold Time.

Right when Skullius was stricken by the dark arrow, the Angel had been smitten by one charged with Replicus' skill [Cold Time], freezing it in place.

"This must mean you're still alive somehow, right? Get lost already," Skullius said, turned back to Replicus, and extended his remaining right hand which was immediately drowned in a cold cutting energy to erase Replicus' remains.

...But Skullius' hand never reached Replicus.

It suddenly turned stiff.

'What?'

Before the Hybrid Luman could even process what was happening, his hand turned against him, and gripped his throat so tight that it shrunk and squelched!

Skullius' eyes bulged and immeasurable fury burned from him.

"SILAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!" he cried, barely managing to squeeze out the words.

But then...

The pitiful, miserable, defeated body of the Soul-Burdened Warmoth suddenly rose, faceless as it was, and lunged, grabbing Skullius' head!

...!!!

What...

How...

When...

Cold fear sprang through Skullius. The lone eye on his face that wasn't blocked by Replicus' large hand trembled.

"NOOOOOO—" the Luman shrieked in panic, but his voice failed midway through, and he slowly stopped struggling.

Replicus slowly removed his hand – which quickly fragmented, having been sliced a bunch just now – from Skullius' head, and on the Hybrid Luman's forehead, a glowing brand appeared. It looked like a tiny tree made from Ju`wtte, with branches that had stars on each end.

Both the Luman and the Warmoth slumped to the ground, kneeling with barely an inch between them.

Replicus' lost head started to form rapidly, as did his flesh. Oddly, it didn't seem as though he was healing. As his limbs were restored, they were covered in a kind of goo, as though they had been incubating in some egg. The same was true for all his other bits that sprang out like inflating balloons.

The fur from his body was gone and his stature now resembled that of the Warmoth's Progeny once again, fully recovered. Yet Replicus felt an ungodly level of exhaustion. He could barely stand. This was a side-effect of the Implicit Evolution, no doubt.

Replicus gently grabbed the back of Skullius' head and sighed as he looked at his slack face with the Ju`wtte tree crackling on it. His vision was back now, and his voice was restored.

"Thanks, Sila. I really owe you one," Replicus said with a small smile.

He had won.

Chapter 1220: Just Like That

Replicus had noted the disastrous power of Skullius Tertiary assault function – the merged power of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] given raw, explosive offensive properties.

This was why he had clad himself in Beyrmir and shielded himself with [Maximum Neutral] despite being in his Territory. He had lost all faith in it in the face of the upcoming attack.

But all his other defences weren't much better. The only thing Replicus had truly been counting on, was the Warmoth's Spine, which was immune to all concepts; this was why he propped it forward. It had played a great role in ensuring that he wasn't eviscerated instantly, but so did a number of other factors.

[Ju`wtta Resounding Restoration] had also been extremely helpful, but even at the end of it all, whatever damage Replicus sustained or evaded, his greatest hopes laid in one thing: the third adjustment to his body which had been awarded to him as a result of Personal Configuration!

Replicus had added two more arms to his form. He had also added a nervous system which his phantoms could use. But the third adjustment had been more intricate and complex. It had required a few hours to completely establish as a part of him.

It was called Embryotic Stuffing.

Its purpose was simple. It was essentially a spare body for Replicus, fresh and new, hidden within the recesses of his present one. When the need arose for it, it would replace the lost or badly damaged bits of him, as it had done just now.

Replicus had hoped that since it was a new body, it wouldn't be affected by the side effects of Implicit Evolution, but he was wrong. Even though his new body was in perfect condition, his cells were drained still.

'I suppose that's fair,' Replicus thought. He was being too greedy. Right now, he had to be thankful for what he had managed to accomplish.

His ambush on Skullius had worked much better than he had imagined.

Even though his head was blown off, he had managed to lunge and grab Replicus because his phantoms had their own circuit of nerves to facilitate their own coordinated moves. They had spearheaded the attack, using the opening Sila created to the fullest, and marking Skullius with the Stark Constellation – the brand that was on Skullius' forehead.

Replicus had created this brand while in the Timemould Mirror Box.

With what had happened to Skullius in mind, Replicus was determined to ensure that his subordinates, especially the stronger combatants, wouldn't fall prey to the whims of those who made the Hidden Classes they wielded or would wield in the future.

The primary purpose of the Stark Constellation was to reject any foreign influence from an individual's body and soul. It negated all adverse soul effects and body manipulations spawning for most kinds of attacks – skills, Blessings, Spells, Veneration arts and more.

Additionally, it helped to strengthen the resolve of the individual it was branded to, responding and resonating to their personal ideals. It reacted rather violently when they did or saw anything that supported a stance they subscribed to.

Above all else, however, the Stark Constellation allowed Replicus complete control of anyone it was branded to.

The Warmoth's Progeny added this function just in case all the other properties of the Stark Constellation couldn't stop an enemy's attack on his people, and they successfully hijacked their bodies or subjected them to a vile influence.

Indeed, the Stark Constellation was the ultimate mark of loyalty to Replicus.

He didn't impose it on everyone, however, and didn't hide all its traits. Yet still, to Replicus' surprise and delight, not one among his subordinates refused to be branded. They were all even enthusiastic about it. Well, all except that one...

Replicus smiled as he thought about the beaked bastard. He sighed.

'This is awkward,' he thought, and he looked down at Skullius whose head was now planted against his broad chest. 'I wonder how long it will take for me to be able to move well again. Ah, and there's a bunch of time left until Skullius' cooldown elapses and he naturally reverts to the Penetrator. But... oh, right! I can just use Integral Time to change him right away!'

Replicus remembered that he could just cheat and use the Rule-Level concept Integral Time to rewind time on Skullius' body, or better yet, use Maximum Catalyst's Reversion! The fact that he had almost forgotten these tools at his disposal when he had literally used them to do what he intended to do right now during the battle, was a mark of how exhausted he was.

Speaking of time, Replicus looked up into the distance.

The drapes of time remained.

He had no idea how long they would last and if he could even fix them. His affinity with Integral Time wasn't all that great, after all.

'Maybe if I initiate [Brisk Storm Avatar], I'll get enough power to—'

<You're a fascinating creature up close. Definitely more conniving and powerful than you should be.>

...!!!!!!

Replicus visibly quaked at the voice that had come out of nowhere!

...But then came a horrendous, absolutely atrocious pressure that stole the wits out of his mind!

The Progeny's mouth fell open.

The mere shadow of the thing that had spoken was like a furnace to his flesh, frying his faculties of composure and strength!

Replicus only managed to turn his eyes up to get a look at the thing that had somehow approached him without him noticing.

It was a giant marble stone being sculpted as a half-naked, extremely handsome man with short hair and curly beard. It was crouching over Replicus, the sharp, obsidian eyes brimming with might the likes of which Replicus was sure was Deific, but on a scale he couldn't fathom.

Suzamete was a Deitess, but she didn't carry power like this even in her domain!

Replicus' [Sorcery of Essence] picked up various kinds of energy blasting from the great Deity in mind-boggling volumes.

Primus!

Nitros!

Genuine Divine energy!

It all seemed intent on crushing him!

Replicus called desperately for Serenity. She was his only hope for getting out of here alive!

But Serenity didn't spring forth to help.

She couldn't.

<I don't want anomalies meddling in my affairs. You've proven to be a potential thorn in my side already.>

And then Boron scooped up Replicus and Skullius with one hand, raised them to his eyes, and squeezed.

<Tell the one who cursed you with these powers that I look forward to their next vessel which will – and I have no doubt – come for revenge as many others have.>

And a blaze Replicus couldn't fathom engulfed himself and Skullius!

The former realised at once that this was game over. His instincts told him that in his current, exhausted state, he couldn't offer any kind of resistance, even if he caused Skullius to do something against Boron!

Was this it?

'Just like that...?' Replicus thought while looking at Boron's colossal, dark eye.

Just like that?

He was going to perish just like that?

...

...

...

...

BOOOOM!

Replicus' senses seemed to reset.

He was on the ground, Skullius lying down beside him.

He was unharmed.

'W... what?' the Progeny thought, lost for words, confused and terrified.

What the flesh was going on?

He turned his head to his left.

A massive white arm was lying in the lava, severed cleanly at the elbow.

...Wasn't this the same arm that had been crushing him just now?

Replicus reeled. This didn't make sense.

He looked up.

Boron was donning a fearsome expression, the hand on his remaining arm grasping a deep, lengthy gash running across his chest. From this gash, a fiercely bright radiance, textured like soap suds, was leaking upwards.

What the...?

<Another one?> Boron said hatefully.

...And then something fell right in front of Skullius.

It was humanoid and much shorter than him.

It held a very long sword whose blade was half pink, half gold.

This sword... Replicus shivered at the sight of it.

The figure wielding it had on a bland, shiny, sapphire mask.

<WHO ARE YOU?> Boron asked as he staggered and fell on one knee, straining.

But the figure didn't answer.

Instead, it turned to Replicus, who flinched.

It grabbed the mask on its face and pulled it off with some difficulty, revealing the pretty visage of a familiar, dark-skinned woman.

The woman flashed Replicus a kind smile.

"It's probably not ladylike – or Knight-like for that matter – for me to say this, but my word, you got uglier!" she said.

Replicus, torn between the view of a massive, literal god a few meters away, and the familiar face of someone who had just brought said god to his knees, fumbled. But then he managed to spill out a word – a name.

"Elita...?"

[Author's Note]

End of Volume 4: Chaos Across Boundaries!

Phew!

I cannot express how happy I am to have finally written all of this. It's been spinning in my head for many months and I'm glad I can share it with all of you sockethole- ahem, friends!

I know this Volume is flawed just like any other, but I really enjoyed writing it, especially the final battle.

I know it got very long, perhaps too long. Forgive me for that, but I felt 'Possessed' Skullius deserved more time to shine especially in the fight, revealing all his abilities and his trickery and the likes.

In any case, please tell me what you thought about the Volume and the final fight! I would REALLY love to hear your detailed thoughts, criticisms and all! Leave comments if you wish socketho-, dear readers!

And IF, and I mean IF, you were so intrigued and enthused that you feel like you could orgasm, do feel free to leave a DONATION for the book as that helps me quite a bit!

If you haven't done so, please leave a REVIEW as that would help with exposure, and with those few words, I thank you!

Volume 5 will begin shortly!