

Undead 1241

Chapter 1241: Outlandish Powers!

Silence reigned as the group exited the Empyrean Hatcher. Kintar went forth to take the lead, Baddan and Savast following after her. Silrat, Theurien and Red Rage followed after them, then Soidon, Pherdanta, Elita, then Kenno and Grim in the back.

"Why don't we go to the Tipser Field first? It should be a great place to start the tour after that sappy moment," Kintar said while pointing at the upside-down field floating in the air a distance away. "And why don't we walk there for a change, hmm? It's good for the legs."

"You normally fly everywhere. What do you know about what's good for legs?" Baddan said to her.

"I'm not doing so right now, am I? Plus, since I'm the most in-tune with my centre of gravity, I think I am a notable choice for expositions on anything leg related," Kintar hissed.

"What good is a familiar centre of gravity when you're resisting gravity most of the time?" Savast attacked.

Kintar, likely recalling the earlier game of Kintar-ball, narrowed her eyes.

"You know, for someone with nine brains, you're severely mediocre when it comes to information retention. What did I just say?" she spat her venom.

Savast narrowed his three pupil-less eyes dangerously.

Elita was watching the Unlimited Stars closely. Their interactions were... odd. She would have said that these people had no sense of camaraderie if she hadn't seen their impressive gesture earlier when they formally greeted her and the others.

Also, she would have said they didn't get along, or that Kintar was an object of intense hostility for the other Stars, if she had felt some manner of bloodlust from any one of them, but there wasn't any.

These people were actually very, very close, it seemed.

'Well, that goes without saying. If Skullius' words are anything to go by, this fighting force of his must be somewhat perfect in every regard,' the former Paladin Champion thought.

She looked at Baddan and then Savast.

She was tempted.

She really wanted to know how strong these people were.

'Maybe just a peek,' she convinced herself. She would use the guidance field for a split-second to check how strong Savast was. If there was no reaction from him, she would check the others as well.

Elita proceeded with her plan immediately.

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[ Name : Savast QUEi ]

[ Tier : 97 ]

[ Level : 348 ]

[ EXP : --- ]

[ Core(s) : Purple ]

[ Class : Batty Mind Caster ]

[ Race : Warpsing Fleshimon ]

[ Inv. Status : Considering dismantling Kintar's brain nerve by nerve ]

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[ Stats ]

[ UNGENTLE APPULSE (II) : 122,900 ]

|Host can attack three targets with a single action|

[ WHIP STEP (II) : 400(231,900) ]

|Every movement with the intent to cross a large distance by the host may (if they desire) be amplified fourfold|

[ BEYOND SMART (II) : 134,094 ]

|Elevated intelligence; every unit of intelligence recorded is worth two extra units|

[ THREE-BLOW QUO (II) : 675,000 ]

|Host cannot be harmed unless they receive three consequent blows each above a certain threshold of strength (The threshold is 675,000 (II))|

[ LUCK : 165 ]

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[ I RESIST DEATH : 44/50 ]

|The host cannot be killed until all automatic reviving charges have been exhausted|

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[ MANA (II) (x4) : 50,210,000/50,210,000 ]

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[ NEURAL ENERGY STORE (x9) : 17,899,565/18,050,785 ]

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...!!!

Elita reeled.

What in the world...?

Even though she had only glimpsed Savast's stats, she had read everything clearly.

But had she? What did she just see?

The former Paladin Champion wore a dumbfounded expression.

Beyond Smart, Whip Step and... I Resist Death? These were stats from Aigas?!

Because she had managed to reach Patronage Rank 3 a while ago, her guidance field explained oddities that didn't match the general system established in a particular world, hence the small notes she saw below the strange stats.

Savast hadn't reacted to her appraisal, so she got bolder. She decided to check Kintar's stats next.

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[ Name : Kintar Aladaster]

[ Level : 55 ]

[ EXP : --- ; <Task Pending> ]

[ Core(s) : Purple ]

[ Class : True Myth Mage ]

[ Race : Human ]

[ Inv. Status : Wondering how to (ahem) Savast's brains ]

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[ Stats ]

[ EXPANDED VISION-BASED TORSION (II) : 112,908 ]

|Host can exercise all forms of physical interaction – especially physical impacts – with their sight|

[ COLLAPSING ALACRITY (II) : 155,934 ]

|When the host chooses, every movement collapses the integrity of their surroundings temporarily to bring them to their destination at once|

[ TRANSCENDENT SKIP (II) : x365,987]

|A second aspect of the host's transformed "Agility" where – should they desire it – if they backpedal a step, they traverse the entire span of the surrounding location up to 365,897 times in all directions within in an instant|

[ MEDITATIVE FOCAL INSTANCING (II) : 30,000]

|The host can isolate instances they have experienced, within their mind and then dissect, enhance, expand and speculate on them with extreme, Diviner-like quality, in a speck of time incalculable by most third parties. Up to 30,000 instances can be processed at a time|

[ FLUCTUATING THROTTLE ]

|The host's endurance is impossible to consistently trace and constantly fluctuates for better or for worse|

[ LUCK : 76 ]

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[ EXAGGERATED HEALTH : 1,223,003,899/1,123,003,899 ]

|Unusually inflated "Health"|

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[ ASCETIC MANA (II) (x15) : 127,466,980/127,466,980 ]

|The host's mana prefers to exist separately from them. It carves itself into the shape of the host's abilities and when needed, it can detonate with the effects of these abilities (taken after from the host's body). There is no need for conscious activation of an ability by the host themselves|

[ SUPER-CHARGED MANA (II) (x6) : 56,000,866/56,000,566 ]

|Mana entangled violently with different concepts and essences|

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Elita came to halt, her mouth slightly agape.

...What?

What was all this?

"Psst. You were appraising someone, weren't you?" someone suddenly whispered in Elita's ear.

She almost jumped and turned to her side.

Grim, with a sly smile had appeared close to her, inching his head to face inappropriately.

"How did you know?" she asked, frowning. A droplet of sweat was making its way down her brow.

"Well, I've seen that look of slack-jawed surprise many, many times on the Boss' face. He usually does it when he's checking out how we've grown. If you are like him – as he said – then you can probably see our powers in detail, right?" Grim said, grinning widely.

His fangs were showing, though he likely didn't intend for his grin to look as creepy as it did because of that.

"Yeah," Elita said. It was no use denying.

She was too disturbed to think of a good lie, not that she had ever been good at lying.

"You all have weird powers – weird physical attributes," she said.

"Weird? No, no. We have outlandish powers," Grim corrected. "But that's what makes us the perfect complements to the Boss, I think."

Elita's face churned. She hesitated to appraise Grim.

"How many of you are Incandescent Stagers?" she asked. She wasn't sure how she should phrase the question. Her intent came from her appraisal of Kintar just now, who was only five levels away from the Transcendent Stage.

If she was Replicus' Deputy, Elita wondered if she was the strongest among the Unlimited Stars.

Grim cheerfully answered.

"All of us, except Baddan and Savast, of course. It was really hard to complete some of the Tasks and Trials we had while being detained in the Timemould Mirror Box. Oh, you wouldn't know what that is, would you?" he said, much to Elita's surprise.

Incandescent Stagers had been dubbed as the optimal fighting force for a long time. A lot of combatants, especially in the modern day, peaked at this stage.

"Skullius wasn't bluffing about your strength then," Elita said with a faint, meaningless chuckle.

"Oh no, he wasn't," Grim said, "though he sometimes says ludicrous things like how our combined force could kill him even at his best, and easily, for that matter. Hahaha. Well, even if that were true, once he merges, I'm sure he will be a lot stronger than us."

And indeed, it was so. Very much so.

Chapter 1242: For The Merge! (1)

What connected the Layers of the Empyrean Hatcher was a large, bright pillar of light that transcended the boundaries between all three Layers. All one had to do was walk into it, and they would scale or descend as they pleased (if they had permission from Replicus, of course).

Replicus and the Strawlers he had assigned to carry his Hybrid Luman body appeared in a vast space with no apparent floor. They floated.

There seemed to be an invisible substance with a viscosity akin to that of tree sap all around, giving some resistance against all movement.

The Warmoth's Progeny had grown to thoroughly enjoy the feeling of moving through this Layer because of it. He surged upward.

The Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher, unlike the first, was meant for learning and enlightenment. Its design didn't branch out into different resorts, but instead imposed a singular environment that Replicus could say with confidence worked best for the theme of this Layer.

As he rose, the Second Layer turned brighter, as though someone was turning a knob to increase the highlights. Replicus saw schools of fish and different, odd aquamarine creatures with traces of Ju`wtte swimming past him and into the distance.

This sight was always interesting to behold.

It always made him wonder about the Empyrean Bosom as a whole. Some of the things that existed in this place could not exist outside it. These fishes were probably the same, as Replicus understood that Ju`wtte was something only the Ju`wttta could produce. No other race of critters could wantonly generate it.

Speaking of Ju`wtte though...

'When I used the Implicit Evolution to evolve past the Warmoth's Progeny, the nature of my Ju`wtte changed...' he thought.

Indeed. His Ju`wtte had changed from its normal yellowish-red hue to a stark merigold.

It was stronger in that state, nigh unstoppable. It also had other functions that seemed beyond reason. They had baffled both Skullius and the dragon Jiggorrhax.

With that in mind...

'Why is it that the Warmoth didn't use this advanced Ju`wtte for this place? He probably had access to it as the progenitor of this power,' the Progeny thought.

He had been able to toggle between the weaker Ju`wtte and the advanced Ju`wtte as the Soul-Burdened Warmoth. Thus, he had no doubt that the Warmoth could do the same.

His mind turned to the large Strawler up in the Third Layer of the Hatcher, the only one to reject him as its master.

Hmmm.

Did the Warmoth perhaps fear that if he created the Strawlers with advanced Ju`wte they could gain powers beyond what they should have in his domain?

That was possible. The merigold Ju`wte was capable of rewriting concepts like Nitros and even Jiggorrhax's hard scales, turning them into natural light and rocks respectively.

But well, no one could answer Replicus' question for now.

He floated higher with the Strawlers, and soon scrolls began to appear. They unfurled into long sheets the higher the Progeny rose and soft voices began to call to him from them. There were many levels and tiers of these scrolls, some of the especially higher ones brimming with forces Replicus didn't and hadn't dared to touch.

These scrolls all held mysteries, powers and truths. On this Layer, if he desired, Replicus could gain enlightenment and inspiration about any skill or essence just by writing into the scrolls. The functionality of the scrolls probably went beyond that, but Replicus hadn't learned more about it all in detail.

He hadn't had the time.

He had spent most of it in the Timemould Mirror Box training himself and his subordinates. He had set the time dilation within it to equate one day on Aigas into a single month in the Mirror Box. He and his subordinates then spent two months enduring gruelling regimes.

After the settings to the Mirror Box were decided, no one in the Timemould Mirror Box could leave. Even after the time they wanted to spend within it was elapsed, they had to remain detained for a duration designated by the Mirror Box itself in order to stabilise their bodies.

The detainment requirement for the two months Replicus spent was 100 hours in Aigas' time, and after serving this sentence, he had had to immediately head out to battle Skullius.

"Alright. Let's do this," Replicus said to himself.

He had chosen the First Layer of the Hatcher as the location of his merge because he felt it was the most relaxing. Additionally, there wasn't much infrastructure here that he could destroy if things turned bad, and if things somehow turned awry, he was betting on the scrolls giving him solutions – if their powers extended to that.

There was one other reason though, perhaps most unusual of all.

If something were to go wrong, Replicus wanted to know how the massive Strawler upstairs would respond. It hadn't bothered with him ever since he visited the Third Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher back then.

Replicus chuckled.

A part of him hoped something nasty would happen just so he could see the Strawler's reaction.

"Now, why don't you guys show yourselves already. I know you're up to something!" Replicus yelled.

His words were meant for his phantoms and Serenity who had been oddly silent.

He wouldn't truly buy that something had happened to them perhaps because of his encounter with Boron.

That couldn't be.

"PRIIIIIIME!" one of the phantoms cried cheerfully. "How are you doing today? I'm feeling jolly."

"He's starting to get stuck up. Relax, bro. We are all here and at your service!" another said.

"We were listening in on everything happening outside, don't worry. You just become some shallow idiot without us, don't you?"

"Right? He completely forgot to tell the Unlimited Stars about what's happening on Aigas. But meh, those guys are witty enough to find out on their own."

Replicus felt soothing relief and blistering frustration.

"What were you fools doing all this time? And Serenity, where is she?" he barked.

"I am here as well. We were gone for the same cause," the Existential Parallel's voice came amidst the hums of the phantoms.

Replicus frowned.

"What cause? I thought Boron had suppressed you or something," he said.

"Initially, he did. I couldn't counter his presence in the short span of time it took him to appear and completely mount his pressure on you. After that woman Elita arrived, however, I was free," Serenity explained.

"Why didn't you say anything then?"

"Your phantoms exposed me to an interesting proposition. I would have spoken to you but you did not exactly need us for much of what happened after. You did not call for us with any urgency either."

Replicus supposed that was fair.

After Elita had shown up, he had indeed been safe. Relatively.

"What proposition did my phantoms give you?" he asked with grave suspicion.

All four of his phantoms guffawed like madmen.

"Prime, Prime, Prime..." one of them said while the others sang a horrible hymn in the background. "Where you are only seeing a merge with your original self, we are envisioning something far, far

more profound. We don't intend to leave the result of whatever is formed between you and the alter up to chance or the guidance field. No, no. We intend to take matters into our own hands."

Chapter 1243: For The Merge! (2)

Replicus was perplexed.

This wasn't what he had expected to hear.

Try as he might to deny it, he had actually put a lot of stock into the idea that his phantoms and Serenity had been suppressed or disrupted somehow by Boron. But to think that the reason for their absence was something like this.

"What exactly do you have in mind?" he asked the phantoms. "What do you intend to do?"

"Ah, Prime. It wouldn't benefit you to know any of it right now. We would rather explain afterwards. We've just had an extensive discussion and we'd prefer not to go through it again until the results have been actualised. Hope you understand. Besides, there are things we have to clear up and finalize during the merge," a phantom said.

Replicus frowned.

"During the merge?"

"Indeed!"

"I suppose we could feed him a bit about the overall plan. Perhaps that would get him excited too and stop being such a nag. We are way smarter than he is. He should be glad we are doing everything for him!" another phantom bellowed.

"Did you just call me stupid?" Replicus hissed.

"Glad you picked up on it! What are you going to do about it? If you intend to beat me up, do know that I can fight back!" the phantom said and made Replicus' bottom right hand twitch.

Replicus took a deep breath to calm himself.

What exactly had gotten these guys all excited to this degree? He had never known the phantoms to get violent like this, however unserious they may be.

The Progeny massaged the bridge of his nose.

"Tell me this smidgen of information you think I can handle," he said.

"Well," began one of the phantoms, "there are some very interesting secrets that your alter received through Fulgardt's WILLS. We intend to use those to our advantage."

"What secrets?"

"It's simple, you idiot! Fulgardt knew how to reach Divinity. Sause taught him how to do so – even though Sause himself doesn't seem capable of reaching that level yet. During the merge, we will get access to all these memories and we intend to use them to improve the quality of the result of the merge. If we are going to fight Somanda, we probably need to be on his level at least, right?"

"Oh!"

Replicus was surprised and delighted.

He hadn't thought about this, at least not in this instance.

The last time he had wondered about how exactly one reached Divinity, was when he was talking to Sause on Edagon. The Giant had revealed that he was the one to spell the secret to Fulgardt. At the time, Replicus didn't ask because of several reasons, the greatest one being that Sause immediately shadowed over the subject with ridiculous reveals about the Giants and the Drakkens.

Now, the Progeny found himself extremely intrigued.

What was this secret?

"That's about as much as we will divulge, Prime. Let's get the merging started," one of the phantoms said.

Replicus almost pouted. He felt like a mere assistant now, being told to do this and that. He had half a mind to shut out the phantoms, but that would be unwise – stupid, really, not to mention petty.

He had the Strawlers bring his Hybrid Luman body close.

He looked at it intently.

That handsome face with slightly glowing, slicked-back auburn hair, white, blind eyes and a perfect jawline... What would become of it after the merge.

Apparently, the skill [Brisk Storm Avatar] would generate the best results if Replicus and Skullius had massive differences between them. These differences – disparities, rather – compiled every kind of strength Skullius and Replicus had obtained and fused them to create a collection of unique, new strengths.

Replicus wasn't sure how exactly [Brisk Storm Avatar] would facilitate the merge. Would it work on his bodies separately; as in Hybrid Luman form to Hybrid Luman form or use some other metric?

'I guess I'll find out right now.'

Replicus used his affinity with Integral Time to accelerate the time around Skullius. An instant later, the timer for [Greatest Celestial Counterfeit] elapsed and Skullius assumed the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator form.

Replicus drew close and grabbed Skullius' hand. Using the Stark Constellation, he made the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator activate [Brisk Storm Avatar].

Right then, sparks of Levin exploded between the two Null Lifeforms' hands along with a massive surge of Null Life Essence!

[You have activated the skill 'Brisk Storm Avatar']

[Calculating disparities between individual known as 'Skullius']

[...]

There was a pause as the guidance field began to calculate.

It lasted longer than Replicus thought.

One minute.

Ten minutes.

Forty minutes!

'Bro, what the flesh is taking so long?' Replicus thought. He was getting frustrated.

Of course, he figured the delay was probably a good sign, but still.

The guidance field only responded after twenty-three more minutes had passed.

[An error has occurred!]

[The detected disparity transcends the ability of 'Brisk Storm Avatar' to process, analyse and multiply]

[A higher-level skill is required]

Replicus gaped, and then he facepalmed.

"You've got to be kidding me!" he cried.

Of course!

Why in the world did he not think about this?

It actually made sense!

[Brisk Storm Avatar] was only a Special Skill. How in the world was it supposed to comprehend and enhance Replicus and Skullius' abilities, especially the Supreme ones? Worse yet, what was it to do with his abilities and aspects which were bordering on Divinity?

There was no way!

Replicus clicked his tongue.

Now what?

"Relaaaaax, Prime. We considered this," one of the phantoms said.

"What?" Replicus was astounded. "You did?"

"Didn't I tell you that he was hopeless without us?" another phantom said and laughed quite annoyingly.

Replicus seethed, but he didn't address the comment. Instead...

"Please tell me you know how to solve this?" he said.

"Well, we have a theory. It might work. It will probably work. It will work."

The Warmoth's Progeny somehow didn't get any reassurance from this.

"What's the theory?" he asked with furrowed brows.

"For the first one we had, we need the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow," a phantom said. "By now, it should have generated some Divine energy for use. If it hasn't, we might have to wait a bit longer."

At once, Replicus understood what the phantoms intended to do.

Of course!

He could bypass the current problem very easily with the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow!

'Am I really dumb without them?' he asked himself.

"Well, we might not have to wait at all," another phantom suggested. "I believe this is the time to test if Maximum Catalyst's Progression can work perfectly with skills, don't you think? Fire it up!"

It was as if Replicus was smitten by a lightning bolt to the brain!

Dammit!

There was another pathway to try. Indeed, while in the Timemould Mirror Box, he had experimented with Maximum Catalyst's limits but he had fallen short of exploring some of its other strengths.

'It didn't work so well last time we tried, but I guess this really is as good a time as any to see if this works,' he thought.

At once, his body was flushed with purple-gold light, and he smote the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator with it!

While the Progeny was busy wrestling with the small error standing in the way of his progress, however, the world outside the Empyrean Bosom did not remain in stasis.

The threats Replicus, Elita and Suzamete dreaded were finally pouring into the present Aigas!

Chapter 1244: Ashema's Reward

<I am in need of a new vessel. I will not last for long in this current state.> Boron said. <As it stands, I might be forced to return below to be sustained by my body. I do not wish to leave the plans I have to you all alone. That will not do. One of you must carry my soul.>

A stretch of silence followed.

The giant, statue-like marble existence within which Boron inhabited was seated atop a great, magnificently carved boulder. Fifteen much smaller, dark, stone-like Cavern were on Boron's figure, tended to him. They held what looked like bright cloths, washing the great lateral wound on his chest from which a stream of energy textured like soapsuds attempted to leak out of him in copious volumes.

Before and around the great Deity, a host of Carven could be seen, gazing at him reverently. Their numbers were enormous, and they sat in segregated groups according to their ranks. The nearer they were to Boron, the stronger they were.

Behind them all was a vast gaping pit in the ground, which had formerly been the Extreme Formula – a brand on Aigas meant to seal anything to do with the Under from the surface.

After Skullius and Replicus had finished their battle, Boron had given the permission for the rest of his Carven to rise through from the Under and now they gathered around him.

The Deity had expected to immediately command them to assault Aigas, and carry forward with his intentions, but Elita had thrown a wrench in his plans.

Boron was critically injured and his vessel wouldn't last long.

This was particularly annoying because the plans he had in mind were not limited to simply dismantling Aigas as revenge for what Quintess, Listafelle and now Suzamete, had done to him. He couldn't trust his Cavern with some of the more delicate work that was required.

Boron cast his eyes heavily over his subjects.

The silence that followed after his words was not born from hesitation.

All the Cavern were burning with the desire to be his vessel, but they wouldn't voice it. Just because Boron asked, did not mean that he required an answer from them.

There was strict conduct that was to be observed before Boron, established in the Under, and this fact was engrained in all the Carven.

Most importantly, though, most of the Carven did not have the capabilities to contain Boron's power.

The Herald whom Boron had taken over had been especially bred to contain his power for a very long time. There could be no other better replacement that could be provided immediately.

However, among the Carven, there did exist possible temporary options: those that had reached Divinity.

Boron would choose from among them.

"Let me be your vessel, Lord Boron."

All the Carven were surprised.

They turned, some with eyes livid with bloodlust at the individual who had just spoken.

It was a Carven with large, twisted horns, charred-looking skin and one gleaming eye.

It was Ashema.

He stared at Boron boldly, disregarding all the condemning eyes burning at his outline.

"Please, let me become your vessel," he stated again.

Many would have protested and called him insolent for even speaking aloud.

Many would have risen and ripped him to shreds for his gall.

But they didn't.

Ashema had known they wouldn't, not in Lord Boron's presence.

A part of him was surprised by his own boldness. Before rising up to Aigas, Ashema would have never dared to stand against custom and tradition like this. He was not above it. He never considered himself enough to speak in front of Lord Boron if not given the permission to do so.

As playful, curious and eager as he might have been, Ashema wasn't ignorant or keen on disregarding anything from his homeland – values he had been bred to understand.

Yet bits of him had changed. Cracks in this solid foundation had formed.

The one to inflict these cracks was none other than Skullius, whom he had spent a few days following from Opungale to Feinheath.

There was a tantalising air of freedom around that man – how he travelled across the world, doing whatever he pleased, saying whatever he wished and ignoring even the most profound powers – that inspired Ashema for just this one moment.

Boron considered him.

<I have not forgotten you, little one. You were the one that stood between me and treachery earlier today. For such a valiant effort, I was prepared to give you a gracious reward.> he said.

Ashema bowed his head.

"Becoming your vessel is reward enough for me. It's enough for any of us, my Lord," he said.

The sharp glares of the Carven around him softened at these words.

<Hmm. Indeed.> Boron said. <But you are unsuitable. You cannot become my vessel.>

Ashema raised his head.

"You could make it so that I was suitable."

<Indeed. I could.>

Boron smiled.

Such commitment.

The process of becoming a vessel for most meant the extinguishment of their souls, especially with how Boron wholly settled a great portion of his soul within them.

Such would happen to Ashema as well.

<No.> Boron said.

Ashema was baffled.

<You deserve a greater reward for your service. I sense your devotion far exceeds your desire for wanton disaster. For that, I will reward that latter ambition of yours. I will give you the chance to swim in it.>

Ashema felt a pulse of joy.

Well, that hadn't been what he had expected.

To think that Lord Boron would choose to allow him to run rampant, as he desired, rather than to become his vessel.

He grinned.

<I cannot grant you Divinity. You know that.> Boron said to him. <But I can allow you a package that will help you reach it sooner rather than later. Perhaps you will not achieve that strength on this world, but the next or the next after that.>

Indeed, even Deities could not grant Divinity. Divinity was a lonesome mission.

Ashema was trembling with excitement.

What exactly was Lord Boron planning to give him?

The Deity's body shone with immense power. However immense it was, however, it was far from what Boron could muster at his peak. He was slowly losing control of his body and he had exhausted much of his strength by bypassing the Rules of Aigas to make the drapes of time Skullius had made fix onto the present Aigas.

His Divine energy surged.

<From this campaign and onward, you shall lead my armies. You will be my seventh General. You will grow into that title and the power it commands.> he said and raised his hand to point at Ashema. <And to accomplish that...>

The Carven around Ashema drew away him.

Their peer was about to be blessed.

Chapter 1245: Breaking Boundaries

Across the drape of time carrying Aigas during the Second Grand War, when Fulgardt's forces inspired terror and caused unsavoury cults and ideas to form; the other drape projecting the time following the departure of Quintess and Listafelle, when obscure horrors invaded Aigas from the great void, and the present Aigas, millions of beings kissed by the powers of [Just Light] could be seen.

Millions of them, possessed by the Soul Spawn, creatures released through Skullius' [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] to attach to targets, turning them into Masterpieces, stood on standby.

Because it was the Stolen Angel that held all of Skullius' Insurgent Magnus skills, Replicus hadn't been able to release all these millions of people the Hybrid Luman had taken control of during their fight from the grasp of the skill.

Well, he would be glad he didn't soon.

These Masterpieces, some taken from common families, some from the Capital Service, or from the Sif, looked into the distance collectively; in same direction. They were gazing at the location where Skullius' energy signature was greatest: the great toxic pit in the present Aigas.

But they weren't the only ones who could see the great pit, or least the heavy pillar toxic fumes rising from it.

Just like how people from the present Aigas could see through the drapes of past times, the opposite was true as well.

There was fascination brimming in the eyes of many curious, ambitious combatants.

They could discern that something was wrong with the world, that it had been split.

Time had been messed with.

Some had a mind to fix it.

Some had a mind to explore.

Those that attempted to cross from their time into the next found it quite difficult.

Crossing into another time, even if you could see it beyond your eyes wasn't a simple affair.

The more skilled among the beings eyeing the other times soon discovered a way to cross, however.

Their Nitros brimmed from their bodies and exploded violently to coat them, creating Imaginary GeoScapes that lathered over their skins like lotion. They donned their Majestic Territories; their own, smaller scale worlds with smaller scale Rules.

With their especially fierce powers cladding them with the kind of Divine energy which mimicked how the Deities created Aigas in the first place, they managed to enter different times unhindered and unharmed.

"Why is the mana so thin here? Even the atmosphere is feeble. Are we still in Aigas or are we in some abominable Cluster that managed to spread itself over it?" a slender yet tall woman said, her body crackling with Nitros so potent that it warped the space around her.

"This is Aigas for sure. Though, I'm tempted to doubt that Feinheath could ever feel so... boring. Why does the ground feel so lifeless?" another woman said. She was built like a brick, stocky and even. She too had on a layer of Nitros that would have crippled an entire city with the reverberations of its concentrated might alone.

Behind the two, and the eight other women looking around with expressions of boredom and disgust, space and time were mending themselves from how they had been ripped open to allow these individuals passage.

Two more people seemed to be passing through though.

Space and time bulged and burst as a muscular yet curvy woman adorned in a scaly plate armour with nine overlapping tassets at the waist came through. She had great shaggy locks of dirty blonde hair that formed a mane around her head and a terrifying look to her large, inhumane eyes.

"Did you say this was some kind of manipulation of time, Marileen? Oh, yes! This could be the future or the past, right?" the beast of a woman said greedily. She towered over her mates by at least two full heads. Her eyes eagerly drank in the sights and sounds. She took a great whiff of the air and a fierce, bestial look appeared on her face.

She grinned and her face looked no different to that of a furious lion. "Where are all the damn men?! I can't wait to get a hold of some new flesh and bone!"

"I don't suppose this is the past. It's probably the future. Mana density in the atmosphere could have only declined as the years gone," another one of the women said, ignoring the bestial fiend's remarks. "If that is the case, I'm afraid there might not be anything worthwhile here."

"Who cares? I'm fine as long as we don't have to be hunted down. It doesn't seem like anyone will follow us here," another said.

The space and time behind them burst again and another woman crossed over.

Unlike the others, she had a grace to her that completely hid away her true nature, masking it with soft, feminine quality of the highest order. One might have thought she was some kind of Priest.

"Yes, I don't suppose we will have any tails here. If it indeed is the future, I wonder if what we've only just begun to work on in our time has already been claimed in this one," she said, and the other eleven women snapped in her direction, intrigue in their eyes.

"I didn't think of that. You think someone already inherited our legacy if this is the future?" one of them asked the graceful woman.

"Perhaps. They would persist over time, immortal. They could be here," she replied, looking at the skies with a calm smile. The pupils in her eyes had a rather strange shape. They looked a lot like arrows. "But that is a thought for a little later.

For now, I do wonder how much the male population has recovered. Shall we have a tour, ladies?"

The question was met with eagerness and bloodlust. The twelve women walked forth, their bodies burning with a storm of powers foreign to the current Aigas. Well, somewhat foreign.

But they weren't the only ones.

From another corner...

From another timeline just beyond theirs, a figure quite literally burning with vicious crimson energy burst through the boundary between times.

It didn't employ a Territory to achieve this feat.

It did not need to.

As a being that had transcended Divinity, it had that luxury.

The flames burning its sockets flared furiously and it stabbed its great sword into the ground. A burst of air shuttled from its mouth.

"Master Soumei will be pleased," it said.

Another enemy had arrived: a Doom Knight fresh from the ranks of an Arch-Lich.

Chapter 1246: Forging The Strongest... (1)

Third Layer of the Emypyrean Hatcher.

A great Strawler with a wide face upon which ten white eyes were embossed, sat in the endless, nebulous space that his master had created a very long time. His hair, which was quite literally made of bolts of Ju`wte flying wantonly in every direction seemed to mirror the state of his thoughts right now.

The Strawler's name was Susu`k.

He was the greatest among all the Strawlers his master had made and he had a lot of authority. However, his master had restricted this authority to the Emypyrean Hatcher alone. Susu`k could manipulate things to do with the egg-shaped building, but for anything else, he was only able to observe.

Susu`k had no desire to leave the Third Layer of the Hatcher. There was nothing else in the Emypyrean Bosom, Warmoth's Treasury or Pestilent Vault that intrigued him. The Emypyrean Hatcher among all the demesnes his master made, had the most personality; it held the most intimate gestures of his master.

But all the personality left within the Hatcher was now being muddled, he thought.

The newcomer, the individual who was supposed to be the second coming of his Jan`ind was defacing the Hatcher.

The Strawler had been startled when the Progeny of the Warmoth messed with the sacred murals branded to the ceiling of the First Layer of the Emypyrean Hatcher. He had nearly climbed down from the Third Layer when the successor made a shelter for berserk, strange creatures in the Bosom; how uncalled for it was!

Susu`k would have accepted any changes this successor desired to make if he at least possessed strength comparable to that of his master, but no. The Progeny was leagues weaker and vastly underwhelming in his eyes.

He had seen the whole arsenal of this individual. Susu`k could peer into any of his master's demesnes, after all. He had analysed how the Progeny wielded his powers and improved upon them

in the Timemould Mirror Box. Yes, there was a lot of ingenuity in the way the successor crafted his abilities and refined every aspect of his body, not to mention those of his allies, but it was all so... mortal.

It was inadequate.

More than a few times, Susu`k had almost dived down to Mirror Box to counsel the Progeny but he stopped himself. That wasn't his job. He was there to serve the successor of the Jan`ind, not nurture him. If the Jan`ind needed nurturing, then he wasn't worthy of being the Jan`ind in the first place.

It was Susu'k's pride that his master had left him a great degree of free will. He could decide if he wished to serve the Progeny or not. While Susu'k had chosen the latter option, he felt that it was a shame he didn't have the power to interfere with the higher authority the Progeny had over his master's possessions. He would have kicked the Progeny out of the Hatcher by now.

"It might be centuries before I even consider this creature worthy of even having his name spoken in the same sentence as the majestic name of the Jan`ind," he said, and a smile crept up on his face. He was fine with that.

BOOOM!

...!!!

The Emphyrean Hatcher suddenly trembled violently. It was as though Jiggorrhax had slammed into it!

Susu'k was alarmed.

What in the world...?!

The entire mass – all the Layers of the Emphyrean Hatcher – kept on shaking, and the intensity of whatever was causing this kept increasing. Pulse after pulse of force shuddered through them!

"What's the meaning of this?!" Susu`k cried and immediately searched for the source of the disturbance.

At once, he found that the turbulence was coming from the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher, where the successor had gone a few minutes ago.

Susu`k hadn't bothered keeping track of his or his subordinates' movements after sensing the Progeny travel to the Second Layer. He hardly had any interest in what the successor was trying to do.

Now, he did.

Suddenly, Susu`k's arrogance faded.

The moment he gleaned what was happening with the Progeny, he shuddered.

"What is he doing to himself?!" he wondered.

*

"It worked!" Replicus cried joyfully. "It really worked!"

Maximum Catalyst had answered his desperate call, and the guidance field echoed the victory.

[The Special Skill 'Brisk Storm Avatar' has evolved into the Supreme Skill 'Restless Storm Companion'!]

Replicus grinned.

During his two months in the Timemould Mirror Box, he had discovered that Maximum Catalyst's basic effects, Progression and Reversion did not work on skills as well as they did for anything else.

Well, in truth, the same was true for most complexly structured entities and objects.

Maximum Catalyst's Progression and Reversion couldn't simply cause any living species – as a whole – to evolve or devolve on a dime, for instance. An individual was composed of too many

volatile components for that to be done successfully. There was no way for Maximum Catalyst – as godly as it was – to reasonably Progress or Reverse a complex body.

It was also difficult for Replicus to effect any change outside his own body. This was why he always manifested the porous orb of purple-gold particles in his hand when he wanted to cause Reversion or Progression on an external target.

Additionally, most of the changes Replicus effected were not permanent.

Eventually, depending on the complexity of the target and the effect, they would wear off. When applied on himself, however, any changes Replicus effected would last much longer.

That said, Replicus had found that skills were similarly difficult for Maximum Catalyst to handle, but not because they were as complex as a living thing, but because of how fragile their physical representations were.

Skills were branded onto the body as complicated symbols that would be charged with mana. Basic Progression and Reversion wouldn't work on something so delicate. Skills were more intricate than most cores.

Thus, under the guidance of his phantoms, Replicus had tried borrowing the properties of an application of Maximum Catalyst he had learned from the scrolls in the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher to handle skills: [Maximum Constant].

Replicus had used [Maximum Constant] against Skullius in their battle. It worked like an ultra-specific version of [Neutral Maximum]. It kept one aspect of the user – be it a limb or skill – working at peak performance as long as a large amount of mana was introduced.

Activating [Maximum Constant], Replicus had applied its effect on the skill [Brisk Storm Avatar] in Skullius' body – which proved to be extremely taxing. The purple-gold particles of [Maximum Constant] traced the skill perfectly, and Replicus, with immense effort, had quickly applied Progression to the skill, causing it to evolve into a Supreme Skill!

At once, the error the guidance field had noted vanished.

Everything was on a straight course now.

Levin exploded from around Replicus and Skullius' body and started creeping into their finest recesses!

"Here we go!" Replicus cried.

And in the next moment, he felt his body get broken apart!

A pulse immense energy rushed forth from him when this occurred. An ungodly amount of Ju`wte sprang forth angrily as well, shooting in every direction.

The same happened to Skullius.

While Replicus' consciousness remained intact, he felt a sense of existential dread for a few moments. What he witnessed around him was bizarre.

His memories.

His souls – the copy and the original.

His skills.

His cells.

His mana.

His Hybrid Luman bodies.

His Eternal Storm Veil body.

His Warmoth's Progeny body.

His weapons: Warmoth's Spine and Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow.

His phantoms.

Fulgardt's WILLS.

The Stolen Angel – it was forcefully pulled over from the dark enclosure it had retreated to earlier.

His Territories: Purified Cadaver's Impartial Felicity and Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon.

Everything was spread out individually throughout the entire space of the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher while tethered to interconnecting webs of Levin and Ju`wtte.

It looked surreal.

"Wow," Replicus said, and his phantoms voiced their wonder as well.

[The merging process will now begin, starting with the least significant and modifiable component...]

As the guidance field announced this, Replicus felt himself get bombarded by a series of memories that he did not recall.

There were flashes of images, voices, sounds, smells, tastes.

There was useless information... and then there were especially mind-boggling details!

If Replicus' consciousness had physical eyes, they would have popped out.

No way...!

Suddenly, as memories of the Immoral Fulgardt, Skullius, and the Angel were swiftly processed between him and his phantoms...

"Oh... oh...my sockets..."

Replicus, no, Skullius... had no words.

As seconds ticked by, he and his phantoms reached a dark yet splendid conclusion.

No.

No, no.

No, no, no.

With all this information, it was impossible NOT to be overcome by arrogance!

With all this in their grasp, it would be an insult to any kind of power and authority out there NOT to walk away from this merging as gods!

Chapter 1247: Forging The Strongest... (2)

Skullius was becoming whole.

There was no Replicus, no damned fake, anymore.

Skullius recalled everything that happened since the day he split.

He recalled his trip to the Reacher Academy, where he learned to use Aura to combine skills.

He remembered the incident at the Bryne Estate, when Em-Sul's agents had stolen the Harmonic Ember.

He recalled the meeting with Darwel, the Sif Princess. How she explained bits about his powers, which had forecasted the path to his glorious skill, [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance].

He recalled how he trained with Alaris to become very proficient with the sword, how he hunted Clusters like a madman with Red Rage and eventually acquired god-like sword qualities after battling the giant goblin, Hobbu Gobbu.

He practically tasted the experience. How tantalising it had been to wield such power and how it had become the foundation for his infamous Supreme Skill, [Infinite Sword God: Primal Sword].

Skullius recalled the arrival of the BoneTender; his conversation with Aurolio on the Existential Parallels; the Premium Age Royale; his battle with Rayn; the encounter with Fulgardt in his Reflection of the Soul; his appearance on Opungale; his ultimatum with the Deity Luserus, creator of the Luminants, who had granted him three measly wishes; his meeting with Ashema; his battle against the Ode; the trip to Maqi; the preparations to fight against the fake; and his whole thought process up to the end of battle.

Ah...

This was enlightening. Terrifyingly so.

...But these memories were enhanced a millionfold by a stream of bits of knowledge that had been extracted from the WILLS of Fulgardt!

The WILLS carried pieces of Fulgardt's memories and ideals. They were essentially parts of his consciousness. Each one, depending on what it was called, drew Skullius towards certain memories – certain ideas – making him recollect things that he hadn't personally done or achieved, but felt bound to.

This was why his personality had started to change from the first time he had received the WILLS and gotten worse as time progressed.

But now, it was all just a blessing for the real Skullius, the one who had fully realised himself amidst trials, battles, death and companions beyond the Central Boundary of Aigas!

Now Skullius looked into Fulgardt's mind, and many, many secrets were revealed to him, beginning with something he had just wondered about: How Divinity was reached!

"So, that's why..." Skullius was dumbfounded.

Now, his possessed self's actions made sense. Too much sense!

During the battle, he had assumed that his alter was creating Masterpieces – people brought under his control through [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance] – across the timelines just so he could acquire an abundant number of Creeds, but there had been another meaning behind this action.

In fact...

...!!!

"So, that's why...in the Labyrinth of the Yoke...!" Skullius felt like he could detonate like a bomb.

He couldn't believe it!

What he saw back then, in the Hall of Fulgardt was no simple arrangement without purpose.

The individuals who were gathered in that hall, forced to celebrate the end of Fulgardt while condemned by [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness] to immortality, were perfected versions of what Skullius had attempted to do with the Masterpieces earlier!

"To reach Divinity," Skullius said to himself, "the first requirement is to spread your essence across a large number of blessed living beings."

And indeed, Skullius remembered it as clearly as though it had been him who had been sitting across from the Giant Sause more than four millennia ago, tasting the secrets to power beyond that of mortals.

To reach Divinity, three conditions had to be met.

One of them was, an individual had to share a piece of themselves that was truly precious, with beings that were had received a blessing.

Fulgardt had chosen to do this with what was most precious to him: the power he claimed he received from the Wanderer Who Seeds: [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light]!

And...

...!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Skullius' mind, which had been burning ecstatically under the prospect of many, wonderful possibilities shook.

Suddenly, cold fear rushed through him like Absolute Frost.

The Wanderer Who Seeds... was no figment of Fulgardt's imagination!

He – whatever he was – was real!

Skullius had no clear image of this entity, but from Fulgardt's powerful belief stowed within one particular WILL of his, he confirmed it.

The Fruit of World Myths was indeed not something from Aigas, and neither was it a relic taken from the great void.

Skullius wanted so badly to gulp hard, but he couldn't.

The only thing to crash through his crippling train of thought was the guidance field's chimes.

[A comparison of all relevant and related skills has begun]

[Mana-related skills compiled]

[Basic Null Life skills compiled]

[Racial skills – Hybrid Luman series – compiled]

[Racial skills – Null specie series – compiled]

[Class skills – Hybrid Luman series – compiled]

...

...

As the guidance field continued to churn out notification after notification, Skullius gathered his wits.

'Let's not worry about the Wanderer just yet. I have no more information about him. If Fulgardt's WILLS kept proliferating, I probably would have gotten more substantial evidence that he is, and with every description Fulgardt ever gave, real. But that's not important right now,' he thought.

Indeed.

For now, he had to focus on the task at hand.

He should have been celebrating the fact that the first condition to reaching Divinity was already met with his alter's actions – with Fulgardt's actions.

As for the rest of the conditions, well...

[A mutation has been triggered between the compiled, mana-related skills: Super Skill 'Mana All-Father' and Special Skill 'Sorcery of Essence']

Two complex brands representing the two skills in question were suddenly attracted to each other. The Ju`wte and Levin connecting them to everything else inched forward to make them touch.

[The mutation process seeks to fuse and compound the skills into an optimal alternativ—]

"Prime! Stop the process now! Use Maximum Catalyst to freeze everything in place!" a phantom suddenly cried out to Skullius.

Skullius was a little startled.

"What?!"

"Just do it!"

Skullius didn't know if he could use his skills in his state – as a mere consciousness – but he tried anyway.

He commanded the essence of Maximum Catalyst to explode outward and freeze everything with [Neutral Maximum]!

Thankfully, it worked like a charm.

Even though his individual pieces were split, they responded to him just as quickly and effectively as they did when he was whole.

Before Skullius knew it, every aspect of the fusion process triggered by [Restless Storm Companion] was halted. The skills the guidance field had specified no longer moved to meet in the middle.

Skullius heard the phantoms cheer.

"Are you going to tell me why you just made me do that?" he asked.

"Ah, Prime. We told you. It's not really necessary for you to sweat the small stuff. Let us work our magic," one answered.

"Yeah. We told you, didn't we? We don't want the result [Restless Storm Companion] is going to create. We want something better."

"Right on! And with the knowledge we just got, you bet your sweet sockets we're looking at something even grander than we imagined previously. Isn't that right, Serenity?"

"Indeed. I am looking forward to this as well."

Skullius was surprised to hear Serenity answer.

Of course, after everything that was revealed through his memories, he too believed that something phenomenal was going to emerge from within the Emyrean Hatcher today, but what broader vision did his phantoms and Serenity have?

"To ensure the best result, we need to add things to the merging process. I'm especially interested in incorporating the Blessing that Luserus gave us – the one that we used to create the Stolen Angel – [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent]!"

"Let's get started already! Prime, expel everything in your personal storage now!" another phantom said.

Skullius grumbled and did as he was told.

He had a special storage item he kept on his person at all times. A lot of special artefacts were stowed within it, but as he emptied out everything inside, he immediately got an inkling about what his crazy phantoms were trying to do.

...!!!

"YOU CRAZY SONS OF SOCKETHOLES!" he shrieked, baffled.

"Look gentlemen. He's catching on," a phantom laughed.

But Skullius had every reason to call his phantoms crazy.

There were three items of interest in his storage that could reasonably be of interest to the phantoms when paired with the context of the situation.

Caxellac's body.

Caxellac's soul.

...And the Legendary grade artefact, SoSei!

Chapter 1248: Forging The Strongest...(3)

Caxellac's body, Caxellac's soul and SoSei.

Skullius could hardly believe it. His crazy phantoms intended to add these components into the merging process, hence why they had told him to use Maximum Catalyst to pause it!

Caxellac's body had been heavily damaged after being struck point blank by Replicus' final, all or nothing move in an attempt to survive the Mors Serene Grace.

The corpse still looked graceful, however limp and lifeless it was.

The long creamy hair that hardly looked like individual strands connected to form one mass, the pale, pasty skin, and deep, dark sockets on the face that had seen with shocking depth before...

It was magnificent to behold. If not for large hole dug into his body, the sanctity of the King's body might have remained intact. Even his dark armour had not been spared. Skullius remembered how incredibly resilient it had been. He wondered if the phantoms had a plan for its shards as well.

Caxellac's soul was bold and vibrant. If not for its bright, ghostly colour, anyone would mistake it for a tangible body. It too was borne through, however, damaged so badly that Serenity had claimed it was practically useless. It seemed she had changed her mind.

Where Skullius was most baffled, was with the Legendary grade artefact SoSei. It was a green skeleton with cracks and chinks all over its body.

This thing had been in Actuass' possession. He had used it to fight and overwhelm Revia back in Evic, and when he (Actuass) and Skullius met for the first time, the artefact had come out of his storage of its own accord, Somanda piloting it.

It was then that the Arch-Lich had sought to kill Skullius with it and bring his soul back to Deadmanland. Of course, Skullius prevailed against it in the end, but only after damaging SoSei very badly.

"What do you intend to do with SoSei?" Skullius asked his phantoms. "Don't tell me you want to add that thing to the merge."

"Psssh! Flesh no!"

"What do you take us for Prime? Socketholes?"

"No. The skeleton is for later."

The phantoms gave Skullius much needed reassurance that they didn't have any weird plans.

"What about Caxellac's body and soul? Serenity, didn't you say we couldn't use it back then?" he asked.

"I did," Serenity replied, "but I was referring to using it to forge a weapon, as we did with the masked necromancer's soul. That was the only use I could think of back then, but your phantoms presented me with other possibilities."

"Like what?" Skullius said expectantly. "Do you have a way to fix my soul with this one?"

His intent in asking wasn't to disregard the other portion of his soul he had vowed to claim from Somanda, but if there was a way to prevent the portion of his soul on this end from going mad or to delay the effect of Doom Factor 2 – perhaps by adding extra parts – would be great!

Skullius felt like buying himself additional time would be immensely helpful. He hoped that his phantoms had been thinking of the same idea.

"No, unfortunately," one phantom said a bit sullenly. "Apparently, there's no way to stop Doom Factor 2, even if we acquire a Deity's soul to try and mend ours as you are thinking."

"What?" Skullius was dumbfounded. "How come? Is it because Somanda became a High Lich a while ago, reaching Divinity?"

"Surprisingly, no," another phantom voiced. "We seriously underestimated Arch-Liches, Prime."

Serenity chipped in. She was the one to have given the phantoms the enlightenment about undead Liches.

"You see, Liches are masters of the soul. That is their inherent, defining trait, even before they acquire great ranks. Perhaps you have thought to yourself before, wondering how exactly Arch-Liches like Somanda conquered worlds that are guarded by not only Rules, but the Deity or Deities who created said Rules?" she said.

Skullius reeled.

The thought had slipped into his mind before, but not for very long.

"How do they do it?" he asked.

"You've seen for yourself what I told you before, about Luserus, the Deity your original body met in Opungale. He was a weak Deity. Far weaker than the Deities of Aigas. The world he made was felled by the efforts of Fulgardt alone," she explained. "He couldn't defend it as well as he could have because, like Quintess, Listafelle and Suzamete, he also gave up much of his strength to create it.

But in his case, where he was already very weak to begin with..."

"I see," Skullius said severely.

There were weaker Deities that couldn't create Rules as powerful as those in Aigas. By creating a world, these Deities left themselves weaker, unable to fight against opponents that normally wouldn't be able to threaten them.

"Beings like Somanda have been thriving for a long time. They have been able to enslave the souls of weaker Deities after conquering their worlds. These souls are forged into fearsome warriors reserved only for great campaigns. I believe they are called Doom Knights," Serenity said.

"Ah, I see."

Skullius would have liked to massage his temple.

"Yes. It would seem I underestimated Somanda's prowess. If he was able to mess with the souls of Deities even as an Arch-Lich..."

No wonder Sause had reacted the way he did all the way back then, in the Labyrinth of the Yoke, when Skullius told him he would be helping him to get his soul back from an Arch-Lich.

"Enough with the sombreness!" a phantom cried. "Let's get to business. Our aim is to create a stronger body than before. For that, we will use [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent] to combine the Hybrid Luman body, Caxellac's body and the Warmoth body."

"Isn't that dangerous? That's too much information in a single body. How would the racial skills from all these bodies even mesh well together?" Skullius asked, concerned. "And where does Caxellac's soul come in, in all this?"

The phantoms emitted a collective, fake sigh.

They really didn't want to talk about the process they had planned.

"We are going to remove all the skills from Caxellac's body and our own bodies. We want to create the base bodies first. We fully intend to keep the Warmoth's Progeny's characteristics as the most dominant," one of them explained.

"Caxellac's soul will be used to enhanced the new bodies. There's a lot of information to be salvaged in that soul about Caxellac's himself. We intend to extract it."

Skullius nodded, but in all honesty, he wasn't sure he understood everything the phantoms had explained. Also...

"Did you say bodies? Aren't we creating one body?" he asked meekly.

"Alright, Prime. Let's continue with the process! Deactivate [Neutral Maximum]."

Skullius grumbled once again and did as he was told.

At once, the guidance field resumed the process, but the phantoms gave him several commands.

"Quick! Activate [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent]!"

"Quick! Isolate the skills from Caxellac's body!"

"Quick! Use [Neutral Maximum]! Don't let the Stolen Angel be merged with Caxellac's body and your own bodies!"

"Quick! Make sure the merging of bodies starts first. Halt the mutation of the skills!"

Skullius grew irritated.

In this state, the phantoms weren't able to carry their own weight. He had to do everything himself.

The loathsome geniuses said it casually, but removing skills was no easy task. Skullius had never attempted to do this before.

Thankfully, using both [Sorcery of Essence] and [Mana All-Father] after holding the skills in place with [Maximum Constant] made it a simpler affair than he had imagined, even though it took a bit of time.

Skullius isolated all the skills from Caxellac's body. (The ones from his bodies had already been isolated by the merging process.) As soon as he finished, Skullius used [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent].

The Blessing combined aspects of himself with other targets of his choosing. Thus, Skullius, for convenience, had the Blessing devour Caxellac's body. He then had his Hybrid Luman body and Warmoth body merge through [Restless Storm Companion], and the instant the two bodies were engulfed with blinding bolts of Levin and Ju`wtte, he devoured them with [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent] as well!

Slowly but surely, the turbulent storm that had been erupting simmered down and was replaced by a large, golden seed that shone bright.

Skullius made sure the seed remained open to more components to be fused with.

After all, the seed had been planted after all the necessary inputs had been finalised.

But now wasn't yet the time.

Skullius was just getting started.

Chapter 1249: Forging The Strongest...(4)

The giant glowing seed was connected to the throngs of Ju`wte and Levin. It was now added to the fusion process.

"Now what?" Skullius asked the phantoms. He felt exhausted, even though he was just a consciousness.

"It's time for the skills," a phantom said. "And for this part, we'll need the genuine Divine energy within the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and the Creeds stowed within our original soul."

Skullius had questions, but he drew towards him the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and his souls.

Skullius first checked the bow spear.

He had used up its 50 million units of genuine Divine energy all at once during his battle with his alter by creating a Rule that allowed him to see through his possessed self's antics. Some of the energy had regenerated: there were currently 456,990 units of Divine energy.

The phantoms deemed it good enough for what they hoped to do.

Skullius then checked in with his original soul.

Since his alter had reached the Incandescent Stage, he had been able to generate Creeds with his soul. They appeared as beautiful crystal gems swimming within it. Because of his Masterpieces, which gave him roughly one creed per individual, depending on whether they were an expert or a common person, the number of Creeds amassed was absurd!

Skullius clicked his tongue.

He already knew roughly how many Creeds he had after acquiring his alter's memories.

3,320,003 Creeds!

Common folk made into Masterpieces didn't count for much. Roughly three or four of them equated to one Creed earned. If this hadn't been the case, Skullius would have gotten a lot more Creeds.

"What are we going to use these Creeds for?" he asked the phantoms.

"There are skills we need to modify and automatic systems we need to create. For now, though, add half of the genuine Divine energy into the seed."

Skullius had the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow transfer half of its energy into the seed, as he was told. The potent golden energy gave the seed a brighter radiance.

"Good! Now, let's take those two mana skills the guidance field wanted to fuse and mutate before. It will be better to get them out of the way," a phantom said.

Skullius dragged [Mana All-Father] and [Sorcery of Essence] close to him. They were connected by strokes of Levin and Ju`wtte that were eager to mix the two abilities together.

"Add a hundred units of Divine energy and then allow them to merge."

Skullius did so. The potent golden energy coated the two skills and then he allowed them to meet in the middle. Ju`wtte and Levin sparked violently where the skills met.

['Sorcery of Essence' and 'Mana All-Father' have begun the process of fusion. Processing...]

"Good. Now, follow this blueprint we made. Attach together the strings of Ju`wtte and Levin exactly the way it's shown," a phantom said.

The blueprint it was referring to was not physical. It was rather a mental image it passed to Skullius.

"Huh?" Skullius was confused. "What is this? What are you trying to do with [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance], [Benevolent Melanoid Prince], [Infinite Sword God: Primordial Sword] and [Greatest Celestial Counterfeit]? Are you trying to merge them? Is that a good idea? And why are you adding the essence of Grand Fire, Integral Time and all these other... WHAT IS THIS?!"

You want me to add all the remaining Null EXP too?!"

"Your pea brain wouldn't understand. Just do it!"

Skullius mumbled irritably.

He was very anxious at this point.

He was losing some faith in his phantoms.

Weren't they getting a bit too creative?

In the end, Skullius did everything as the phantoms said – reluctantly. He connected the skills depicted on the mental image along with certain essences he had high affinities with. He then added the last of the billions of the Null Exp he had left, though after several moments of hesitation.

The blueprint the phantoms had made reminded him of the great masterpiece of mana and Null Life Essence instructions he had crafted in order to give Baddan a new technique before leaving on the voyage to Edagon.

But what was this? Was this something similar?

It was especially curious that the phantoms had added [Greatest Celestial Counterfeit] – the skill responsible for giving him a flesh form – to this mix. What was that all about?

It took Skullius twenty minutes to fully map out the blueprint with Levin, Ju`wtte, mana and Null Life Essence – as was described.

"Good. Now connect Caxellac's soul to the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow and Warmoth's Spine, and add them to the mix as well. Make sure they are part of the fusion process."

"What?!" Skullius cried. "What the... That doesn't make any—"

"Skullius, my dear. After we are done, after this is all complete, you will be kowtowing to us several times a day. I promise. But for now, just listen to us, will you?"

"Get your vague ass on it!"

The phantoms once again pushed Skullius without giving him much of an explanation.

He sighed.

Why was he adding his two best weapons? He couldn't see the vision. How would this help?

He did it anyway, however. Soon both his Transcendent weapons (the Spine had been elevated to this grade through the merigold Ju`wte during his battle with his alter) to the fusion process.

"Now, for the last piece. Create these three Creeds," a phantom said and sent a mental image of the Creeds Skullius was to actualise. They were rather lengthy and had extreme detail to them. They might have been chapters from a book.

Reading through them, Skullius' nearly fainted.

He didn't even know how he would go about asking his phantoms what had possessed them to think of these ideas.

However, by reading the Creeds, Skullius got a clearer idea of the end goal; not the entire goal, but at least a third of it.

"You guys really thought ahead. Way ahead," he said, and his phantoms laughed.

The first Creed Skullius had to make was the simplest.

It essentially duplicated all of Skullius' skills and abilities. Once Skullius made the Creed, copies of the original skills were made away from the fusion process.

The other Creeds were hard to describe succinctly and were rather broad.

Each cost Skullius more than 200,000 Creeds to actualise.

Immediately after he spoke them into existence, the magical structure he had been forced to create with the skills, essences, Null experience and weapons became one small blot of radiant light that was fed into the seed.

The seed turned from its golden shade to an ashen one at once.

Skullius felt uneasy.

What they were creating here... was it safe?

"Good, good!" a phantom said eerily and sent Skullius a mental image of skills that were to be modified before the fusion. "We are going to do something else with the new affinities we acquired, as well as the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths: Limitless Paradox, Seramoro, Melding Stitches and Delight's Pursuit.

It's hard to use them without the Phantasmic Retainers, but that's only for a mortal body. Our body won't be so mortal. We will have all the leeway to use the Seeds as we please!"

Skullius shuddered at this.

He quickly began modifying the skills he was shown as he had been told.

That's right.

From here on out, he really wasn't going to be mortal anymore.

Chapter 1250: Forging The Strongest...(5)

The thought phantoms were on a generational roll. After reading the Creeds they had commanded him to create, Skullius' misgivings had been soothed somewhat. He had to admit that the phantoms had a very well-planned ambitious idea. However, he didn't allow himself to relax completely.

Even if Serenity was involved in the creative process, she didn't know everything, even when it came to matters concerning her treasure: the Null Verse.

Skullius' greatest concern remained that he wasn't sure a physical form forged using the Hybrid Luman body, Caxellac's body and the Warmoth Progeny body could evolve properly using the metrics of races from the Null Verse. Of course, the phantoms had said they somehow made it so that the Warmoth body's traits would be the dominant ones, but...

And what about the skills he was now adding to this body.

Some of the combinations the phantoms had him create were genius, but would they mesh well with the body?

['Melding Stitches' and... and... and... and... and... are now bound to the 'Ascended Nullmancer's Unbridled Wisdom'. Fusion process begins...]

There was another combination that Skullius permitted. He had used a little more than 90,000 Creeds with a large net of links to make it all work, just like that other one he had been apprehensive about before.

['Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge' and... and... and... and... and... will now be conjoined to the... and.... Fusion process begins...]

And there was another.

The conjoinment of the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths to high level skills – especially when considering the purpose the phantoms assigned – was truly astonishing. If not for Skullius' apprehension about the result, he would have been giddily jumping up and down. Well, he would have been attempting to.

Skullius worked on four other skills, including – to his own shock – [Apostle's Liege], which had formerly been [Apostle Summon]. He expected more than 700,000 Creeds in total for these.

"Now we need the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS. Well, I suppose we can only create one at the moment," a phantom said.

And indeed, Skullius only had access to one, the weakest Retainer of the three he knew were possible to create.

The Retainers were created by constructing massive, eerie figures with precise volumes and contours of darkness and light. The potency of the darkness and light had to be high and the movements flexible, which meant that a high affinity with these elements was required as well.

In Opungale, Skullius had managed to reach an S rank affinity with [Just Light] because of the convenience that this element meshed extremely well with the racial properties of the Luminants, which were abundant in his Hybrid Luman form.

Unfortunately, the same couldn't said about [Evil Darkness]. Even the possessed Skullius hadn't managed to fast track the process to acquiring a high affinity with the element. As of yet, the affinity was stuck at the B rank, but using the Bashful Abomination's affix, Skullius could bump it up to A as long as he was wielding the chipped zhanmadao.

An A rank affinity with [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] was the bare minimum required for using the Noboboyama, Spirit of Blind Drowning. But this was insufficient for the other Retainers.

Of course, there was brighter news to be had.

The original plan for Skullius' split all those months ago, had been for Replicus to be the one focusing on raising the affinities of darkness and light so that Skullius could gain access to the Retainers when they met and fused back.

Replicus had done just that, despite the rest of the original plan falling through.

While his affinity for [Just Light] was low, his affinity for [Evil Darkness] was at the A rank.

"If we can use the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths on our own, what use do we have for the Phantasmic Retainers?" Skullius asked his phantoms.

"Fulgardt used these to contain and activate the nine Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths, but he must have kept them busy even after he reached Divinity," one of the phantoms answered. "We are going to do so too. We are going to make the Retainers useful still. But first, we need to be able to use all of them.

This might be dangerous, but I think we finally need to tinker with the Fruit of World Myths."

Hearing uncertainty for the first time in the phantoms made Skullius nervous.

Tinker?

It seemed the phantoms were planning to do more than that.

He drew the Fruit of World Myths, which had also been isolated from his body, towards him.

It was an odd, little thing. It looked like a flower, or perhaps a flower-shaped mark, dark in colour and with a bright golden cross in its middle.

"Let's see if appraising it will yield any more information this time," Skullius said.

He had tried to pry its secrets with the guidance field before but had only managed to get a generic description and nothing else. Would it be different this time?

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[Fruit of World Myths]

The masterpiece of an item made by Fulgardt which can neither be called a physical object or a spiritual one. It is the perfect culmination between Evil Darkness and Just Light.

-Imitation%\$@!-

~~~

"What the...?"

Skullius frowned.

Even his phantoms were a bit surprised.

That last tag that read 'Imitation' was new.

"Fascinating," one of the phantoms said. Its tone made it seem as though it might have been stroking a non-existent chin. "An imitation? Is this fake then?"

"Wait. Now that I think about it," another one cut in, "The more we learned about Fulgardt the more I was convinced that he probably got this thing from somewhere far from here. It even feels foreign. Did he really make it himself? I suppose he himself might not have needed the Fruit of World Myths in the beginning, right?"

It might have been created to allow others to use his powers effectively, outside the Labyrinth."

"Well, he claimed his powers came fr—" Skullius began, but stopped suddenly.

A sudden CRACK had resounded so crisply through the Second Layer of the Empyrean Hatcher that it shocked him.

The ashen seed had cracked.

"Dammit!" a phantom cried.

The seed cracked again.

"I think we've overloaded it!" another phantom yelled, panicking.

"No, that's not it! It's the Blessing! The Blessing can't handle what we are trying to create, I think!" another corrected.

Skullius would have frowned.

So, an unexpected chink in the plan ended up happening after all!

At once, he used [Neutral Maximum] at full throttle on the seed, hoping to stop its imminent destruction.

The purple-gold light of Maximum Catalyst... failed.

...!!!

"Use [Static Limbo]!" Serenity advised.

Skullius did so. He was amazed once again that a simple thought allowed him to use skills floating outside any of his bodies.

The seed was suddenly engulfed in a sickly, blue hue.

It stopped cracking.

Skullius and the phantoms breathed a huge sigh of relief.

That was close.

Skullius would have shaken his head.

He had been hoping the phantoms would immediately jump to reevaluating their scheme, but...

"I can't believe it!"

"Even a Divine Blessing can't contain it, and it hasn't even budded yet!"

"This is too sweet! We may need to make a few adjustments, but otherwise, we were successful! This is it!"

"Indeed. We've managed to create something that will definitely rival the peak of this reality!"

And indeed, it was so.

Skullius could hardly believe there was cause for celebration in this.

Why were these socketholes so happy?

But well...

He did wonder.

What peak of reality were these phantoms jabbering about?

What manner of abomination did they really have in mind?