

## Undead 1321

### Chapter 1321: Most Wanted (1)

"Be careful, Skullius," Serenity warned. "I didn't imagine either of these two were skilled enough to use such a technique."

Instantly, Skullius' instincts grew taut. He was suddenly reminded of when the Null Devil King Caxellac was about to use Serene Grace. The warning Serenity had given back then had been as cold as this one.

Skullius could only have drawn his full attention to the two women as they called upon the powers of this technique Serenity mentioned: Void Clot. It sounded ominous.

There wasn't an immediate assault, as Skullius had initially thought. In fact, both Uyuniya and Elita drew back from him and his clone, which continued to expend its Amras on [Elusive Meta Carvers] around itself. Skullius understood what purpose this served. He did the same. Hopefully, it would work.

Elita suddenly bulked up. Her armour creaked and adjusted to her sudden growth; she had grown to almost twice her previous size and her dark, curly hair grew wildly outward like a tangle of grasses, its colour morphing to a straw-like hue. It seemed to sing with sparks and heat.

'She's assuming her true form!' Skullius thought. He had seen Aurolio transform too, though the means he – and Elita – used to retain a human appearance seemed too different from Skullius' own. Aurolio had been human first, after all.

Uyuniya's transformation seemed to be the inverse of Elita's. She grew slimmer and smaller. She now matched the size of a typical common woman on Aigas. Her viral dress shrank to match her new stature, but she didn't appear any less dangerous (even with a leg made entirely out of Voided Death Essence). In fact, she appeared even more lethal when Voided Death Essence exploded from her and gathered into her hand. Still, Skullius wondered just why hers was stronger than Elita's and Aurolio's. The former Paladin Champion replicated her gesture. She gathered and condensed Voided Death Essence until it sent unnerving ripples through the fabric of Aigas.

'This is goi—' Skullius began in his thoughts when her felt

it

.

It

was clearer this time!

It was an uncanny power that sprang forth from Uyuniya seeking to strip him of his connection to his Broader Existence!

It didn't catch Skullius off guard this time. The [Elusive Meta Carvers] – invisible slashes meant to attack immaterial and conceptual targets – met the vague reverberations of this power, and began ripping at them without end. But it was only the real Skullius who was targeted. The clone was free, and it attacked the Voided duo.

Skullius felt his slashes chip away at the intangible application of Voided Death Essence. It worked only partially. The effect still reached him, and he was once again drowned in darkness, but only for a fraction of a microsecond. His senses returned to the image of Elita's bright form defending impeccably against his clone's slashes.

The Hybrid Warmoth narrowed his eyes.

'I see now,' Skullius thought as he gathered himself. 'It's just like Aurolio's powers. When Void users don their masks, they awaken unique abilities – I presume ones related to the void in some fashion. Elita's is pretty straightforward. Whenever she is doing something valiant, brave or something she considers fitting of a nature as a Paladin Champion, she gets access to power beyond what she's normally capable of – power to contend against Divines, in this case.'

'That's how she saved me from Boron, catching him off-guard with that freakish speed. That's how she reacted so quickly against Fulgardt, and how she's been defending Uyuniya so easily against me.'

And this was indeed the case.

Elita's interpretation of the void was selflessness. Whenever she discarded a sense of self in order to save others, she obtained power capable of contending against Divines for the instant she performed the selfless deed.

Skullius watched as his clone was guarded against nomatter what attack it used. Elita flashed about, defending Uyuniya with Broodweiler. Both Void users were still gathering Voided Death Essence, but Elita had to stall because of her response to Skullius' clone. She prioritized buying time for her companion.

Skullius frowned. The sight of it made him feel sick. He couldn't shake off the feeling of being betrayed.

He also couldn't shake off the gnawing thought that was something different about Uyuniya and Elita's Void abilities when compared to Aurolio's. Aurolio's seemed more versatile and expansive. But at the same time, Skullius couldn't say that necessarily made the pale man a better combatant than these two.

'As for Uyuniya's ability—' Skullius had begun when once again, a sense of wooziness reached him. Uyuniya had attacked him again!

Skullius cursed, but his words, even in his own head were drowned in the darkness of unfeeling. Because of his constant use of [Elusive Meta Carver] though, the effect of Uyuniya's Master Void Gate ability didn't last as long as it should have. He was back to his senses almost immediately after being hit by it.

But...

...!!!

Skullius suddenly recalled the potent thrumming of the attack his possessed self had used hours ago. That ray of destructive [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] had sounded like the end of the world, and had the power to back it up.

What he felt approach right now was no beam of malign power, but it was damn near close. Uyuniya moved faster than Skullius could have hoped to perceive. Aigas unravelled around her, shattering like hard clay to reveal darkness that could only have belonged to the great void. Uyuniya was moving within this darkness, and not in Aigas. She was upon the Hybrid Warmoth less than an instant later, her fist shattering Aigas, and meeting his chest while livid with the void!

And indeed, this was Void Clot!

Skullius' [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] couldn't respond. It didn't recognize the nature of the attack enough to stop it with Melding Stitches or its Parlous Natures.

Even Skullius' Immortal Physique and stats didn't help. The impact on his chest was unlike anything he had ever felt before. When he decided to guard with Null Life Essence, it was already too late. There was a vicious, unstoppable piercing charge against his chest and...

All Skullius remembered was a flash of pain and a loud, grating ringing in his head that blared so loud he almost lost his sanity. There was a loud crash on the outside as well. He only recognized what it was when he came to. The Purity headquarters was gone. Fragments of it flew far and high. Mountains were riding the sky and clouds on their way to plummeting somewhere outside the bounds of Pelian.

...And Skullius himself was brutally ripped in two. His torso was lost, leaving only his arms, head and legs, all of which were still flying away. The pain that assaulted the Hybrid Warmoth right then was ungodly, but it wasn't new. He had tasted worse when he fought against himself.

Skullius still had the time to gasp, gape and wonder what sort of attack that had been...until his consciousness was once again drowned, his senses stripped from him and his connection to his Broader Existence severed.

## Chapter 1322: Most Wanted (2)

The great void engulfed all of reality. It was an entity that was more of a hindrance to all ascended living matter rather than anything beneficial at all. The void was littered with many vexing phenomena that even Deities steered clear from. It was Void's body, after all, one too vast for her to control perfectly. It had its own imperfections.

When creating a world, Deities had to push against the sturdy foundation of darkness that was the great void to create their own spaces. But that didn't mean the great void was then detached from said spaces and worlds.

Unfortunately not.

Everything in reality was connected to the great void in some form. However, while Void herself could not impose her darkness on these worlds – lest she broke several 'rules' she had to abide by, like her sisters – her bearers could do so wantonly, provided they were skilled enough.

All Void users thrived in the void after acquiring enough mastery. Summoning the void to shatter the bounds of a world, and using the darkness like a corridor that devoured all incoming attacks and oncoming defenses was what bearers of Voided Death called the Void Clot!

As absurd of an idea as it was, it didn't take Skullius very long to grasp it. The instant before Uyuniya used her unique Mastered Void Gate ability to cut him off from his senses and Broader Existence, the Hybrid Warmoth had already analyzed why his nimbus and his physique failed to guard against the Void Clot.

It appeared that to use Void Clot effectively, a Void User had to be in their true form, first and foremost. As for the requirements for the activation of the technique, it appeared that a user had to condense Voided Death Essence until it bore a hole through a world – a hard feat to accomplish than it appeared.

However, this feat was easier to accomplish even while using basic Voided Death Essence since unlike Null Life Essence, Skullius had noted how rough and violent Voided Death Essence was inherently.

The sense soon came back to the Hybrid Warmoth. [Sagacious Antiphon of Dawnlight] immediately restored his body. A quick surveillance of the surroundings told Skullius that he had managed to recover only because his clone had defended him while he was out. It must have been a horrendous task. The clone had to protect itself against the odd void ability too, and in addition to that...

BAAAAM!

A cruel, screeching impact surrounded and Skullius' clone went flying in several, blasted pieces after receiving a punch from Uyuniya with her Void Clot. She was a cascading wall of darkness. Aigas unravelled, shattering wherever she traversed with the unique application of Voided Death Essence active. While riding the darkness, she was inconceivably fast and powerful.

Skullius cursed. He immediately coated himself with the [Elusive Meta Carvers] and activated the [Legion Eyes]. However, unlike the non-specific manner in which he had been using them until now, he attempted to pick up on Uyuniya's untraceable attack.

It didn't work.

The [Legion Eyes] could show Skullius 64 different kinds of existential states, but it appeared they couldn't perceive the application of the damned woman's ability.

'Her Void Clot or whatever quite literally uses the full force of the great void against me. She coats herself and travels through it at the same time, meaning my defensive abilities are useless against her and the power from her blows carries the might of the entire great void – as much as she can handle, I suppose. I imagine even Deities would have trouble contending against that,' Skullius thought just as he flashed towards Uyuniya. 'However, I have my Null Life Essence!'

Uyuniya noticed his approach and charged to meet him. The clash between the great void and millions of units of Null Life Essence was cataclysmic. Even Elita was blown away from the impact.

Uyuniya seemed quite surprised that Skullius held his own when they met. And indeed, the Hybrid Warmoth held his ground, but just barely. He had to elevate the output of his Null Life Essence to its limit and even then, that only helped him delay the inevitable.

Great tongues of white fire splashed out between his Null Life Essence and Uyuniya's void. She grunted and suddenly slashed at Skullius with her Deceptive Incubating Masterpiece, which was also coated in the Void Clot. But a great, thick, square plate of Null Life Essence appeared in a timely manner to block against the great sword successfully, and Skullius immediately countered with a fist livid with the blue energy.

Oddly enough, right then, Uyuniya's Void Clot flickered and vanished, restoring Aigas around her!

...!

Skullius didn't understand, but he didn't stop. His fist blasted into Uyuniya's mask. She screeched and tumbled back before a ruthless [Ruining Cutter] sawed off her arm, and six more of Skullius' fists dug into her torso in rapid succession. As she spun back, Skullius made to follow, but he was suddenly blasted in the face by an attack he couldn't see; it was Uyuniya's Broader Existence again!

But even worse, as he reeled from the blunt attack, he lost touch with his senses.

Since he had been countering its possible usage with the [Elusive Meta Carvers], the effect of the Uyuniya's Mastered Void Gate ability – rather, the duration of its effect – was reduced. Skullius woke up almost immediately afterward, but that little spot of time he had missed was enough for Uyuniya to forge herself a new arm with Voided Death Essence, just as she had done with her missing leg.

'It looks like Void Clot adds extreme stress to the user's body. She wouldn't have deactivated it right when I was attacking unless the burden had just been too great for her,' Skullius thought, delighted. An instant later, Uyuniya charged her Voided Death Essence, condensing it to activate Void Clot again.

However, a dazzling merigold brilliance interrupted her focus. It came with a gigantic bolt of Ju`wtte from the distance which smashed into her violently. It lit her up like fire and she screeched in agony. Skullius' clone was merciless. It expelled a gigantic hand – from the far distance – made using Null Life Essence and tore Uyuniya from the conflagration before she could rest and slammed her into the ground. Her figure was a mess, lit in flame, flesh darkened from the heat and hair singed terribly. The Ju`wtte, even while in this basic state, was fatal!

Then it was Skullius' turn to be cruel. He retrieved one of the Twin Usurpers of Misery – the red sabers he had taken from the Cavern he had killed earlier – and hurled it at Uyuniya's remaining genuine arm. As soon as it pierced her flesh, the blade imposed its uncanny property: It made the arm start to feast on itself, as though the point where the blade had stabbed had turned into a miniature black hole.

Then it was Skullius' clone to play a round. Its nimbus turned to a great blaze of purple-gold, but alas...

The clone was swiftly cleaved in half in less than a nanosecond, as Elita rushed in to Uyuniya's rescue. Aigas shattered from the entirety of her right arm and head, where she applied her Void Clot. It appeared she wasn't skilled enough to maintain it over the rest of her body like Uyuniya.

She had coated Broodweiler in it though, empowering it massively when it cut through Skullius' clone's waist. And where it cut... a stream of silvery blue energy poured from the clone and it cried out in agony.

Its Broader Existence had been cut and Exora Amras was leaking out!

Skullius cursed at the sight, and scowled when Uyuniya's body suddenly exploded with Void Clot as well.

The bitch was tough!

The red saber Skullius had flung into her arm was cast away, but it had already completed its task. Uyuniya's one remaining arm was gone, and she had to substitute it with one made entirely out of the purple essence of her benefactor.

She made Skullius know of her fury thoroughly. His senses dimmed for a moment, and when he came to, an angled slash had ripped through his torso and face like butter. Skullius' flesh blew apart, but that was far from the worst of it.

Disgusting boils began to grow where Uyuniya's great sword had cleaved him, infecting him with a vile virus he didn't understand. Again, Skullius was reminded that Uyuniya shared the Second-ranked Paladin Champion's abilities, and Void Clot had allowed a plague to find purchase enough in his defenses to affect him.

'Damn it!' Skullius thought.

...

...

...

However...

['Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus' has recognized the queer presence of an intangible assailant]

['Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus' has noted the use of a queer ability derived from overly complicated forces of reality. It intends to analyse, modify and create a Parlous Nature based on its findings with an input of 5,000,000,000 Null Life Essence. Will you allow it?']

Chapter 1323: Most Wanted (3)

['Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus' has recognized the queer presence of an intangible assailant]



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All of a sudden, Skullius' current predicament seemed like a trifle. Even though he and his clone had just been torn apart, leaving them incapable of covering for each other, the Hybrid Warmoth temporarily stopped caring about what would happen to him in the next few seconds.

They called it ecstasy. How could he have been worried about simply staying alive when something as absurd as this had just happened?

He scrolled through the guidance field notifications multiple times. Had he just read them correctly?

Skullius wished this was one of the instances where what was happening was all according to his or his phantoms' plan, but it wasn't.

He had not thought this was possible at all!

"Ha... haha!" he laughed hysterically.

Uyuniya was offended by this. She used her Mastered Void Gate ability on him and immediately raised her great sword to cleave Skullius in two. However, a great mercury maw exploded out of the Hybrid Warmoth's body and without delay sprayed out the outrageously powerful Clear Flame against Uyuniya!

While the fire didn't penetrate her Void Clot, it did propel Skullius and the Apostle away from the Voided Deathform with haste, clearing them of immediate danger.

Beyrmir had not been exempt from participating in this battle by his own choice. Skullius had told him not to risk showing himself unless it was absolutely necessary and beneficial to him. The Apostle could be obliterated easily by the nature of enemies Skullius was fighting right now, after all, and unlike before, he was down to one body and one 'life', just like everyone else.

As the Hybrid Warmoth and Mercurian Legend crashed into the rubble of what was left of the Purity Headquarters, Skullius' senses were restored, but Uyuniya was already upon him once again, seething and intent on killing him.

"Skullius!" Elita called to the Hybrid Warmoth right as Uyuniya's great sword descended. The Hybrid Warmoth barely managed to defend himself by erecting a dome of flaring Null Life Essence and immediately teleporting away right after. He spared Elita a glance once he had reached the new location. There was a sense of desperation in her voice.

Skullius scoffed.

Even though he couldn't see her face, he knew what she was crying for. She didn't fear for his life at all. On the contrary, she was worried that if Uyuniya cornered him, he would be forced to use his full strength and kill her.

Elita herself had only been fighting to prevent her fellow Voided Deathform from receiving lethal blows since she couldn't convince her to stop this needless battle; but then again, that was all she could do when applying her Mastered Void Gate ability.

'I would have considered using my War Body against this friend of yours, Elita, but not anymore,' Skullius thought, and joy bubbled within him furiously. It was as though he had bubbled underneath his coin grey skin. Right then, he lost touch with his senses and Broader Existence, but when he came to, he found his clone clashing with Uyuniya's blade using its Null Life Essence; it had defended him in time.

The clone had healed itself from the damaging blow from Elita, but...

"You got the notifications, right?" the clone asked him. Skullius immediately healed himself and nodded. "Yeah."

He and the clone immediately warped far away right then, appearing on top of one of the few snow-capped mountains spared from the conflict.

Skullius turned to the clone. He immediately donned a concerned look.

"That sword is way too powerful. You can't heal?" he said.

The clone sighed. Blue-ish silver essence was leaking from its body like vapour even though its flesh was intact. One slash from Broodweiler was enough to harm the Broader Existence and it

seemed that for most Divine beings, the wound wouldn't heal with the use of Andori like the ones Skullius had. The clone's Amras was leaking from its damaged Broader Existence.

"It appears so," the clone replied. "But never mind that. We're touching upon something revolutionary here. [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] might be a lot more powerful than we imagined and we just tipped it towards a greater height."

"Yeah." Skullius said. "Wait, what?"

Earlier, his nimbus had analysed one of the Cavern's Exotic Parlous Natures and made it into the coveted Second Divine Sinew, a Parlous Nature which allowed him to create clones with a Broader Existence of their own. Now, the cloud had picked up on two more things that it wanted to analyse and abuse.

Uyuniya had been attacking Skullius with her Broader Existence. It appeared the nimbus had gained some insight from this.

Even more surprising, however, was that since Uyuniya had also been attacking Skullius with her Mastered Void Gate ability, the nimbus had somehow picked up something from this too.

The terrestrial Void user's Mastered Void Gate ability allowed her to temporarily disconnect her opponent from everything they possessed – their mana, their senses and even their Broader Existence – just like how being stuck in a deep void would affect a sentient being.

The ability had a decent range, Skullius had noted, and it was very effective, even though it could only attack one target at a time. It had a very modest cooldown and could bypass the defences of his nimbus – his strongest Andori.

However, just like how Elita applied her Mastered Void Gate ability, Uyuniya's only lasted remained in effect for a short time. It seemed to be some trade-off in order to make the ability as strong as it was.

The fact that Skullius' nimbus had gleamed something from an ability derived from Void herself...

"How is this even possible? That void ability is powerful enough to skirt both our [Legion Eyes] and the nimbus itself – both of which are Sage Tier Andori. On top of that, it's an ability given by

Void. I don't think it should be possible to deconstruct it," Skullius said... and right after, he lost himself.

When he came to, he and his clone were flying away amid chunks of a mountain in pieces. His clone was a set of broken limbs and severed head, and he himself had a massive hole in his shoulder. Uyuniya was hot on them with her body applying Void Clot. She looked like a charred mess, but she was driven. She was shrieking something at them in that unknown language of hers.

Skullius barely managed to teleport himself and his clone away. They healed immediately after appearing in a forest several kilometers away from the demolished Purity Headquarters.

"That Void Clot whatever is fleshing annoying!" the clone hissed before turning to Skullius. He fanned away the Amras leaking from him with a hand. "You asked before how it's possible the nimbus analysed such a complex ability. Well, I think it has something to do with our Immortal Physique and our current state – you know, the fact that I'm a copy of you."

"What? How? This isn't like [Brisk Storm Avatar]."

"We are existing as two connected beings with the same abilities. I have all your Andori and your Physique. I have the Audacious Chassis of the Ninth Filament, and I also have the [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus]. I'm not exactly sure how exactly the Physique is helping, but I know for sure that our nimbus' abilities have been improved exponentially. We were both hit by Uyuniya's attacks and our nimbuses reacted the same way – they tried to analyse the nature of the attack. The effect—"

"Is compounded?!" Skullius finished the sentence for the clone, dumbfounded. Holy Somanda! If he hadn't shut off his phantoms in order to better concentrate on the battle, they might have told him the same thing. "How come you realised this before me?"

But the clone didn't get the chance to answer, Uyuniya befell them once again, but this time, they were better prepared. Even with her atrocious speed, she wasn't all that hard to figure out especially when her mind was set on attacking two targets at once. Skullius and the clone split up immediately.

Then the clone cried, "Let's pay the cost! We can manage five billion, right?"

Skullius chuckled.

Of course they could.

His nimbus' powers were enhanced by a currently unknown exponential because he and his clone were both using the Andori, and it was receiving the same attacks. As a simple Sage Tier Andori, it couldn't have possibly been able to analyse a power like Uyuniya's but now...

Skullius and his clone acted as one. They knew what they had to do to acquire the outrageous cost the nimbus was asking for in order to create a potentially monstrous Exotic Parlous Nature. It was a great cost indeed, yet it also wasn't all that difficult to pay. The resources for it were abundant.

"Null Extraction!"

Chapter 1324: Most Wanted (4)

It had come as a surprise to Skullius.

His basic Null Life abilities – Null Extraction, Static Limbo, Unbound – had completely been removed from his body as conventional skills.

The signs of this odd development had begun during his battle against his alter, the possessed Festos. While being bombarded by the Primary assault of Aphotic Catacomb of the Daemon, his access to all his skills had been cut off, leaving him defenseless, but he had been able to utilize basic Null Life abilities to protect himself with the help of his phantoms.

He had controlled Null Life Essence through sheer will rather than relying on the brand of the relevant skills engrained in his body. He had found it odd back then, but time had been tight to speculate.

When he transcended mortality, Skullius found that all his basic Null Life abilities had been removed from his body, but he could control their effects still – with even better results, in fact.

The explanation Serenity had given was that Divinity rewarded the long journey taken to reach it by allowing a fresh Divine complete access to abilities they acquired from their home world and the system created by its 'overseer' – the Deity or Deities – without cost and restriction. For instance, a combatant from Aigas, after reaching Divinity, would be able to use their Class skills with the same ease as breathing; there would be no costs at all.

In Skullius' case, however, it was different. His skills like [Infinite Sword God: Primordial Sword] had remained as skills branded to his body instead of evolving to this unique state because he was

never an original inhabitant of Aigas. He wasn't born here, and he wasn't human. With [Flesh It Like You Mean It] he had cheated his way into the power system on Aigas and hence couldn't retain the benefits.

When it came to Null Life Essence, however, this benefit was applied. His 'overseer', Serenity, claimed him. Skullius was hers, and as far as she was concerned, he was wholly and truly a Null Lifeform. And this was why Skullius had all the freedom in the world to use basic Null Life abilities like...

"Null Extraction!" The two Skulliuses called at the same time.

The effect of the ability was applied on the entirety of Aigas at once, excluding the two other timelines that existed within it as great drapes. The result of all the Null Life Essence in the world from dying humans, beasts and Cavern being drawn by two Divine entities was the significant increase in the speed of its surge towards the two.

Even if a majority of individuals in the world couldn't perceive Null Life Essence, its gushing from all directions cocked up a great gust that swept many away in swarms. Uyuniya and Elita sensed the wild rush of the energy quite clearly, but they could hardly do anything about it. They sensed the massive streams of it split in two and get absorbed by either of the Skulliuses.

There was 7,6 billion units of Null Life Essence collected in total, quite the staggering value and more than enough to satisfy the cost for [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus]' goal.

The clone poured his own reserve towards Skullius, and cost was paid immediately, but [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] actually absorbed all the excess Null Life Essence amassed even though it exceeded the amount it had asked for, leaving Skullius dry.

The cloud sparked with copious volumes of Ju`wte. It was pumped and charged, and for a moment, Skullius thought he sensed the connection of his nimbus to his clone's. If its powers were indeed raised by a vague exponential value, Skullius judged that unlike before, when it created the highly coveted Parlous Nature, Second Divine Sinew, its processing time would be much leaner this time around; it should take a shorter time to produce another Parlous Nature!

But Uyuniya wouldn't stand for it.

She couldn't react to the speed with which Null Life Essence flew into Skullius and his clone, but she was determined to stop the result of it.

...!!!

'Dammit!' Skullius thought, bewildered. Uyuniya had not moved to attack since he and his clone split up to grant themselves another reprieve from her assault. But that didn't matter, apparently.

In a rapid sequence, Skullius saw his clone drop to the ground mid-flight, a sure sign that Uyuniya had elected to use her Mastered Void Gate ability on it. But then her Void Clot, which had only coated several inches of her before, suddenly exploded out in a huge radius, crashing into Aigas' firm design and replacing it with dense black.

Skullius managed to get out of the range of the expanded Clot, but he watched as his clone was swallowed up by the darkness. He seemed to spin off to nowhere within the void, which, unlike Uyuniya, he couldn't control even if he regained consciousness.

The clone... was lost. The Hybrid Warmoth gritted his teeth.

Was his clone dead?

If he was simply transported into the wide great void, then his chances of survival were dreadfully low.

Elita, Suzamete and Serenity had emphasized how perilous a journey through Void's body was without a vehicle.

Skullius cursed.

'I didn't know she could do that. Isn't it already draining as it is?' Skullius thought as he flashed over to a newly-formed clearing in the area.

Uyuniya's immense Void Clot dwindled and then vanished around her. She suddenly slumped. Skullius could hear her panting from behind her magenta mask. She placed her Voided Death Essence arms on her knees, but Skullius could still feel her attention on him.

'Why are you so damn relentless?' he thought.

Right then, Elita appeared by Uyuniya's side. She hadn't been able to keep up with the events of the last six seconds prior to Skullius' clone vanishing. She placed a hand on Uyuniya's shoulder and said something to her in that language Skullius couldn't understand.

Skullius needed no translator. He was sure she was trying to convince Uyuniya to stop now that she was exhausted.

Uyuniya shrugged off Elita's hand and barked something that was probably insensitive given how Elita drew back, looking shaken. The alien woman's Void Clot returned, though slightly more constrained than before.

Skullius narrowed his eyes.

"Again, I will ask you, Elita," he suddenly said. "Is the trade-off as you imagined? Do you still think making this woman, your companion, Divine was still worth sacrificing hundreds and thousands? Because I still can't see it. Honestly, I might have believed your resolve if your goal was simply revenge against the Purity."

If Elita had an answer, she kept it to herself. She didn't even look at Skullius.

"Answer me, dammit!" Skullius roared, but it wasn't Elita who responded. Uyuniya sent her Broader Existence crashing down on him like an invisible world-sized boulder.

Uyuniya was rushing towards Skullius by the time the impact of the hit had settled. Her Void Clot was potent and difficult to deal with, especially now that Skullius had no Null Life Essence left to use with guarding.

But the Hybrid Warmoth was unconcerned. He didn't even attempt to move out of the way of Uyuniya's charge even though she was a little slower now.

Confidence surged within him suddenly, because the nimbus was pouring into him a glow unlike no other. The soft blue gleam, straight trails coursing over his skin and flesh, was different from the hue of Null Life Essence or the mysterious swirling beauty of Exora Amras. It looked a lot like an array that interconnected without end.



This was it!

The ingenuity of the [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] had birthed another gift for the Hybrid Warmoth and it filled him with confidence that bordered on arrogance.

The new Exotic Parlous Nature born would surely-

[LOOK OUT, SKULLIUS!!!]

"Don't you dare, sister!!!!!"

...!!!!

'Wha...'

Skullius was alarmed.

His high was disrupted by the Voice of Worlds and Serenity suddenly screaming of unseen peril!

And indeed, there was terrible danger, and it didn't come from Uyuniya's reckless assault.

Instead, it barreled out of her Void Clot, which abruptly widened. The assault was swift. It flashed faster than Skullius could comprehend while his guidance field expelled notification after notification.

Darkness covered his view, almost too great to be defined.

Void meant to kill him right there, right then!

Chapter 1325: Most Wanted (5)

It couldn't be allowed.

Many coveted Serenity's treasure because of the distorted, precious, abnormal powers and beings it held. The Null Lifeforms were creatures with their own standards and abilities that defied common

sense. Even Serenity had given up on trying to fully understand each of them. They evolved their universe rapidly and created their own rich histories and legends, some far more impressive than those of this wider reality.

But never had a Null Lifeform influenced the wider reality because they were locked up within the Null Verse. Only the Null Verse could handle the creatures on the Universe Purge Banner and the terrifying Authorities.

If some of these demented, overpowered beings ever revealed themselves to the wider reality, it would be chaos.

But chaos had already found another emissary.

It began with the first Null Lifeform to ever influence the wider reality, the Hybrid Warmoth – still in his default body.

No one had ever analysed Voided Death abilities to copy even a smidgen of their functionality before.

Many had used Void's body as a haven, some had harnessed the horrifying natural phenomenon born of her flesh for their own, but none had ever dissected the intricacies of the Mastered Void Gate powers and produced their own result.

None. Until today

And Void did not like that. Not one bit.

Emmae's answer to extinction was free to entice and entertain all others, but not her precious powers. Never.

Wyrrim couldn't be too biased. She couldn't afford tangible help to Skullius when Void struck, and that was why she only sent him a warning through the guidance field, just like she had done thrice before.

But Serenity was active and able. She had noted her sister's attack before she (Void) had even expanded Uyuniya's Void Clot to bring it through. Its size and power meant it took some semblance

of time to prepare, which gave Serenity a great advantage – one that only someone of her level could have exploited.

As the great, majestic dark spear exploded out, wreathed in great tongues of puce-coloured flame, the world shuddered. Though its whistle as it carved through the air and Aigas came whole seconds later, it was devastating; it was not at all dissimilar to the sound of great hollow steel pipe clanging against another.

With great determination, all the Deities of Aigas combined, might have been able to stop it, but Skullius couldn't even perceive it. It flashed towards him at 500 times the speed of light, after all!

But Serenity had already been rushing out to meet it before it was within a meter's distance of Skullius.

With godlike levels of speed, she had procured all that she needed to save Skullius' life, and that was only a single component – a vessel.

Deep within the same prison of darkness that the Hybrid Warmoth had stowed away the WILLS of Fulgardt, there was also a seed, ripe and soon to spring to life. Serenity had seized this seed and accelerated its growth to temporarily use it as a vessel.

Even if Sila had the right reflexes to notice how quickly Serenity was moving, he wouldn't have been able to take control of his new body from her.

The vessel appeared right in front of Skullius before an infinitesimally miniscule decimal of time could be realised. Its body was a neat, compact tangle of pale, luminous vines in humanoid form with a lanky physique, a gaunt face with a golden stubble and short hair of the same hue. Its eyes were a pretty shade of orange, but they turned dark when Serenity exerted her powers into it; as much as it could handle at least.

The simple tunic on the vessel rippled as Null Life Essence of a quality Skullius would soon gape at (when he acquainted himself with the rapid events) rushed out. It formed a great, solid dome over two dozen kilometers in all directions, highlighting everything in a strict royal blue hue.

At the same time, a great portion of Serenity's Null Life Essence coalesced into a massive, thick tower shield whose radiance threatened to eclipse that of all the stars in the sky.

And thus, spear and shield met.

The impact sent thrilling shockwaves about, but most of them were all drowned in the dome of Null Life Essence. They pulsed incessantly, trapped, but in the end, some of them escaped the dome to ravage the rest of the Aigas.

Each rippling wave was enough to kill all things below the Divine level. It didn't help that each also carried enough power to cross the width of Aigas seven times over!

All life on Aigas would have ended if Suzamete didn't act as quickly as she did.

The tip of Void's spear managed to pierce through Serenity's shield... but that was all it managed to do in the end before its momentum ceased altogether.

Serenity felt the flames from it attempt to burn away her shield, but that would be a lengthy affair. Voided Death Essence was not superior to Null Life Essence.

When the crisp sound of the impact rocked Aigas, Skullius finally became aware of what had happened. At first, he saw a body similar to the one the Stolen Angel had possessed and thought "Sila", but the pressure blazing from the body immediately told him the truth of it.

"Serenity...?" he said, dumbfounded. "What in the world is going o—"

But then the Hybrid Warmoth's senses were suddenly skewed. He heard a vicious hiss and his body seemed to melt. His bones suddenly desired to possess the properties of rubber and gum and would not allow him to stand aloof. Skullius dropped to his knees. The hiss came again, bombarding his head and he felt a malevolent force squeeze against his mind.

All while this occurred, guidance field notifications filled his vision.

[A Primeval Deity is interested in your newly forged Exotic Parlous Nature!]

[A LIMITED CONTRACT has arrived. Would you like to open the contract?]

[A Primeval Deity is interested in your newly forged Exotic Parlous Nature!]

[A LIMITED CONTRACT has arrived. Would you like to open the contract?]

[A Primeval Deity is deeply interested in your newly forged Exotic Parlous Nature!]

[An UNLIMITED CONTRACT has arrived. Would you like to open the contract?]

...

There were eight contract offers in total and they kept flashing in Skullius' vision.

But he couldn't have bothered with them right then. His head was throbbing, and the ominous hissing wouldn't stop tormenting him.

But wait.

Was it even hissing in the first place?

Skullius made the slightest attempt to see if he could comprehend it at all, and...

"I paid it no mind when Wyrrim started picking favourites. I ignored and indulged you when you loitered about, snooping, but this, I will not stand," a furious voice said. "I will not stand for the breach of our agreement. We were supposed to be equals. But now that you lied to me and raised your bearer achieve such a feat, how will we remain equals now? Was this your intent all along? Has Wyrrim been a part of it? Did she help you break your own vow and smuggle a Book of Alignment into the wider reality?"

Skullius was stunned. Almost as strange as the contents of the speech was the source of the voice itself. It was coming from the tip of the spear poking through Serenity's shield.

"He must die and then I will let this go," it said, and the Void Clot around the dumbfounded Uyuniya thrummed once again.

Skullius knew at once this wasn't good.

Serenity clicked her tongue and turned back to him. She seemed to be struggling with a decision about something.

Seven more spears exploded out of the darkness towards Skullius and Serenity. They moved just as fast as the last, but the flames around them were twice as potent!

It had been a while since Serenity had piloted a vessel. On top of this, she and Void were supposed to be formless entities as a consequence of their powers and thus, she didn't have much effectiveness in battle especially not with a vessel like Sila's.

She considered temporarily hijacking Skullius' body, but...

A blaze of flaring, scattering purple had reached her side before the seven spears fully emerged from the Void Clot. Someone adorned in a large, white fuzzy jacket, with long white hair to match and a golden mask on their face was expelling waves upon waves of energy.

Indeed, it was an ally; one no one had expected.

Chapter 1326: Most Wanted (6)

Aurolio had been watching.

The spasming, pulsing, rippling torrents of Voided Death Essence from this location had long attracted his attention. They coursed all throughout Pelian.

He had hurried to this location as soon as he could. The pale man could never have imagined that he would feel another signature of Voided Death Essence on Aigas. He had thought he was the only Voided Deathform here, but apparently, that wasn't the case.

He had been taken aback when he found that there was not one, but two Voided Deathforms on site, and worse yet, they were fighting a familiar face. Even with a different form to him, Skullius' identity was obvious to Aurolio. He was the first Null Lifeform the pale man had ever seen.

The image of the three engaged in a brutal yet complex battle was poetic. It seemed to spell suggestions to Aurolio, especially without context.

Was this how it was supposed to be?

Was the path he had chosen – allying with Skullius, who was supposed to be an enemy, in order to harvest Exp back then – the wrong path?

Was Null Life and Voided Death fated to be parallel for all time?

Aurolio didn't know the answer.

He had almost convinced himself to join the battle as soon as Elita and Uyuniya begun using Void Clot – a technique he had never seen before – but ultimately, he decided against it.

Yes, these two women were better users of Voided Death than he was.

Yes, it was better to wait and watch. To learn.

For the second time in a while, Aurolio found himself presented with a precious learning opportunity. However, it didn't last long.

The furious sensation had caught him off guard. It was so close, and so vibrant.

Aurolio had felt Void's fury from his very bones when it first barreled out, dripping with killing intent. She was livid. The feeling that anger poured into him as a result of his connection to Void had actually scared him, as did the display of Void's power which came right after.

But that fear didn't stop Aurolio from jumping in to help Skullius.

He, quite like Serenity, could feel the build-up to Void's attacks. He had launched himself forward and reached Serenity before the attack came, expelling all the Voided Death Essence he could master.

But why? Well...

In truth, Aurolio didn't know how he was supposed to help against Void's cruel spears. That was why he expelled Voided Death Essence into the already firm dome of Null Life Essence Serenity had erected about; he hoped for some result. He didn't know what happened next, since the events far exceeded his ability to keep up.

Serenity, on the other hand, could.

She recognized the Voided Death Essence mixing into her own energy and was intrigued.

She had long known how the two energies interacted when pulled together. They weren't opposites. In a way, they behaved like water and oil. They wouldn't mix, but the latter, if placed correctly, could support the other.

And that was what Serenity did.

She used her Null Life Essence to direct Aurolio's Voided Death Essence towards their front, where the spears were coming from. She wasn't confident her dome alone could handle the charge of a spear, unlike her shield; all of the spears weren't aiming for her shield, after all.

And true enough, when three of the seven spears swerved to avoid the shield and strike at Skullius directly, Aurolio's efforts showed merit. The speed of their movement was reduced dramatically. The spears were especially affected by the bits of the dome with both Null Life and Voided Death Essence sloshing about in an odd tangle.

However, they were still moving at crazy speeds of at least a hundred and fifty times the speed of light. They would reach Skullius behind Serenity's shield in less than a fraction of a fraction of a nanosecond. But that was all Serenity needed. While dealing with the three other spears that smashed into her shield, their tips boring through, she manipulated her Null Life Essence in the dome to ward away the ones aiming for Skullius.

Two were forcibly redirected into the air, but the third...

'DAMMIT!' Serenity cried. She missed.

The last one aimed true.



It reached the Hybrid Warmoth, who wouldn't even know how he died when it hit and...

...

...

Nothing.

The spear suddenly came to a halt.

Serenity was shocked.

Why did it stop?

Beyond her curiosity, however, urgency drove her to use the chance to change the course of the spear and drive it away. It was only when that was done that she focused back on her question and found an answer.

She sighed.

'I see,' she thought, reading Void's intent. 'You knew that the impact from your attack this close, would not only destroy Skullius, but also this young bearer of yours.'

And indeed, this was why.

As furious as Void was, she reined in her sense.

She cared for her bearers deeply, Void knew. At the very least, she would never sacrifice them for any machination of hers, unlike Emmae.

The world-ending shockwaves caused by the spears once again rocked Aigas, and when their accompanying noises erupted, Skullius, Aurolio, Elita and Uyuniya finally caught up.

All but the pale man were shocked by what they saw.

Skullius looked up at Aurolio, gaping. The pale man first paid his attention to Elita and Uyuniya before turning to the Hybrid Warmoth. Skullius couldn't see it, but a grin stretched over the man's face.

"Everything just has to revolve around you, doesn't it?" Aurolio said with a chuckle. "What did you fucking do to get Void all riled up, man?"

Skullius was still reeling from the fact that Aurolio was here. This was a great surprise. It even seemed like he was alive because of this man. He was lost for words.

He might have conjured a word or two to say right then, if the guidance field hadn't spilled more notifications.

A ninth contract arrived and then...

[You have acquired the Pseudo-Void Rank, Exotic Parlous Nature—

But even the interruption was interrupted by an interruption.

Everything was already spiraling into messy chaos – Skullius' new Parlous Nature, the contracts from Primeval Deities, Void's rage, but something else suddenly took center stage, and it was by no means insignificant.

The dark sky above warped, and broke apart for what might have been the millionth time today.

A gigantic Majestic Territory appeared amidst the fragments of the shattered world, orb-like and vivacious. Extraordinary volumes of Nitros were blazing from it, lightly highlighting everything below in a solid white glow. The Territory was so large that it didn't appear so at first. Only when it shattered in turn did Elita, Uyuniya and Aurolio realise what it was.

Its Imaginary GeoScape vanished as quickly as smoke in a gust of wind, but the three figures who had been trapped within it remained suspended in mid-air.

On one side was the Apostle Araeyn and the Unlimited Star Kenno.

And on the other, was an immense creature decked in foul armour emitting a similarly foul pressure of Undeath. It was a Doom Knight.

For the first time in history, the Existential Parallels had met in one place, matched against each other in a convoluted, unpredictable design.

#### Chapter 1327: Exemplary Knights

Before Skullius and Elita reached the Purity Headquarters...

The woman had never felt this kind of relief before. No one had cared for the commonfolk since the Great Trembling. When the creatures of darkness had begun their evil campaign, rising from the Under and slaughtering endlessly without mercy, she had watched as her oldest son, who, while exhibiting bravery too great for a common man, had attempted to protect them all. He had shielded his younger sister, and her while stomaching the sight of his beheaded father only a few inches away.

If bravery was a dragon, he might have saved the whole of Aigas on his own, but alas, the woman had watched him get gutted like a fish. She and her daughter couldn't have looked away. Closing their eyes was no comfort and looking elsewhere only gave them a different picture of death.

The horrendous image was burned into her eyes even now. It would never fade, but her heart was starting to rest and accept the new future.

Her daughter, small, skinny and particularly large-headed, had fallen asleep in the arms of one of their saviours.

The dimpled young man decked in a white, silver and blue armour, made sure to walk close to her so that she didn't get anxious about her daughter. The little girl was even sucking her thumb as she rested her head on his shoulder.

Oddly, many of the children in the vast group were walking close to the men and women in the same suit of armour as the dimpled young man. There were only about two dozen of them, moving in a perfectly circular formation around the forty thousand and some civilians, but their presence was extremely reassuring.

The common men who knew anything about mana and combat prowess in Aigas had been whispering among themselves, awed at how these armoured people all had purple cores and strikingly controlled mana. They were disciplined and they were gentle.

They had been moving around dispatching the dark creatures, healing wounds – even fatal wounds casually – and feeding them all delicious, stamina-granting foods that even brightened everyone's moods. Some even told stories to keep everyone entertained and they smiled a lot. The odd brands on their foreheads, constantly sparkling with lightning, always shone bright when they interacted with them.

It was bizarre.

The woman with the skinny daughter wondered where this fighting force had been all these years. The Capital Service, the Purity Knights, the Contract Knights. She had seen them all. Most were strong but cold, or kind but weak. Either way, they wouldn't be suited for the current Aigas, but these people...

"Ah, I wish I could be like them," someone from the large group said as he drank a curious, peach-coloured juice from a flask. "I can't say I'm not a little jealous that my little boy feels safer walking with one of them than with me, but jealousy be damned!"

A few around him laughed heartily.

A woman walking with her head on her husband's shoulder smiled shyly and looked up ahead, at the front of the formation of armoured figures.

"I-I wish I could more like her," she said, staring admiringly at a figure that stood out. "She's the most graceful person I've ever seen." Everyone followed her gaze.

Ah, indeed.

Heading the formation of the Stark Troops, was a woman with long, black hair tied into a ponytail. It turned green at the ends, dancing and brushing against her back. Only she among these armoured figures wore a beautiful black armour littered with moving, shining stars. It became a poufy, pleated skirt at her waist before continuing to her legs as tall black greaves that had an uncanny, glossy sheen.

Two swords were sheathed on the side of her waist and she always had a hand on them, tracing their scabbards with her long fingers.

While the woman just now had called Pherdanta the most graceful person she had ever seen, most of the men here could only say she was the strongest person they had ever seen. Unlike the others, she didn't expel a subtle, controlled pressure. You wouldn't feel anything from her when she was close, as if she didn't exist.

In fact, the only reason anyone could see her now was because she was having a partly audible discussion with someone by her side. It was an old man who was shrouded in a strange, illusory image of a dense forest of pale silver trees all over his skin, and clothing. A mighty pressure pushed forth from him, casting a dull light flare around him.

Those who were knowledgeable would know at once that he was a Transcendent Stager, and that he had superimposed his Majestic Territory over his body.

"I grow more and more curious about this master of yours," the old man was saying with a wide smile that transcended his rough beard. "He's all you've referenced in your answers to my questions."

"I am all I am because of him. I'm marching out to protect Aigas only because he asked me to. It's all for him and no one else," Pherdanta said as she fixed a cool gaze on the old man. "So, you better get used to hearing of him in each one of my sentences."

The old man laughed.

"Is he as cold as you are? For you to have reached this unreasonable sort of strength, he must have pulled you apart and reassembled you countless times. In my time, I have never known an Incandescent Stager with the ability to take my life in the blink of an eye," he said, his eyes narrowing.

Pherdanta read the man's intent quite easily.

"It's no secret, you don't need to be witty in getting the answer. My fellow Unlimited Stars would have bragged about it already," she said. "The secret to our strength is as simple as it is tedious. My master called it the Impossible Task."

The old man's eyes sparkled with intrigue.

The Impossible Task?

What Task could that have been?

'Wait! Could this woman's master be a Deity?' he found himself wondering against all common sense.

But Pherdanta didn't elaborate. Instead, she stopped and fixed her narrow eyes at something no else could see. The group stopped.

"What's this?" Pherdanta said.

"What's what?" the old man asked, alternating his gaze between the nothing ahead and Pherdanta. What could she see that he couldn't?

Pherdanta grabbed the hilt of Demion's Dance, but she did not draw the sword.

But even though she didn't, everyone, even the commonfolk behind her, heard the crisp whistle of a blade's edge cutting something. The sound was loud, and a little frightening, but even more harrowing was the effect it accompanied.

A neat, thin but humongous 'X' was drawn right beyond the formation of Stark Troops and a sound akin to a thunderclap followed. Something unseen screeched in pain. It was writhing, and soon it revealed itself. It was a huge bed of yellow snakes forming an ugly ball on the ground. About a third of them fell away, slashed to death, but those that remained hissed at Pherdanta and began repairing the odd shape they made.

The old man beside Pherdanta recoiled.

"By Quintess!" he cried. "What are these ungodly creatures?"

Pherdanta remained composed, as did the Stark Troops. Their collective calm diffused to the commonfolk, so much so that even though they had seen the atrocity ahead, they didn't panic.

The serpents were hiding something, Pherdanta discovered. She had seen a glimpse of what it was before the snakes restored their form.

Strangely, both the snakes and the object had a note of a presence vaguely similar to the new pressure her master exuded. On top of that, they were not alone.

Carven walked out from pools of darkness around the bed of snakes and brandished their weapons against her and the Stark Troops.

Chapter 1328: Prove It!

After Stern-Mage Weyven Irlis had finished explaining and bowed before Kintar, a few of the other Stern-Mages followed suit, but four remained stubborn.

A Realm Source Mage?

The theoretical peak of all Magecraft that even the progenitor of the art failed to achieve?

It was a lie!

And she was too young, too short!

How could she have possibly reached such a level? What would she possibly know about the Realm Source? Did she know what it took to become a Mage with such a title?

As Kintar took in all the mix of suspicion and praise, she gave an odd, creepy little smile. Somehow, her diminutive stature paired with it made her look even more untrustworthy and uncanny. But she didn't care what these other Mages thought of her. It was, after all, Stern-Mage Weyven Irlis, who had rushed her to the capital of Emeradis, made an urgent call to the other Stern-Mages and presented her before the Monarch as a Realm Source Mage.

What she had done in Bane – killing off millions of Cavern in an instant – had left a deep impression on the female Stern-Mage.

The Monarch believed half-heartedly, Kintar knew. She saw through the look in his eyes.

"Unbelievable. Truly magnificent!" he said, beaming, his arms spread wide. He was walking towards her. "I can feel the immense power you are hiding even now. Magnificent!"

'Liar. My armour hides the presence of any energy I emit,' Kintar thought, but no one knew. All they saw was her little smile. She floated forward to meet the Monarch. A few Arch-Mages, the Monarch's guards – part of the sceptical bunch, it appeared – made to restrict her, but the Monarch shooed them away.

He was a chiselled man – notable through his thick, muscular neck – under the gorgeous, turquoise and scarlet robes. He wasn't bald, but he might as well have been. His heart-shaped face was clean-shaven and childish-looking. His eyes were so bright they hid many lies.

Kintar allowed herself to be embraced by him. She could tell he was trying to discern all he could about her – if she truly was a stage beyond Arch-Mage. She allowed it. He wouldn't find out anything about her unless he had a guidance field.

The Monarch drew back.

"You are welcome. Very welcome. You have our many thanks for saving Bane and our treasured Stern-Mage Weyven," he said to Kintar before looking behind her.

Red Rage's glow had dimmed somewhat. He wouldn't have wanted to blind everyone in the massive hall. But even then, the details of his figure remained obscured. He continued to look like a sun with a humanoid shape... and a cape. All who looked at him found themselves bearing a slightly favourable opinion of him already, even without speaking to him.

"And you as well... err..." the Monarch faltered, unsure how to address the Apostle.

"Don't mind him," Kintar said. "He's more of an accessory." Red Rage was offended, but he kept to himself.

In a way, Kintar was right. He was an accessory. Skullius could have sent Kintar alone on her mission in Emeradis. She was the strongest Unlimited Star, and would have deserved to lead a group of Stark Troops of her own like Pherdanta. However, because Kintar could be mischievous and unpredictable, the Hybrid Warmoth had judged that Red Rage would be a good companion, one capable of reminding her of her objective. The Apostle was good with handling people with his current powers.



The Monarch took Kintar's word and merely nodded at Red Rage.

He then walked over to his throne, a great golem decorated with bands of an odd sort of gold that was branded with runes. It adjusted when he took a seat and conjured a separate chair for Kintar to sit opposite the Monarch. She sat over it, hovering an inch from its surface. Her standards were prime. She only sat or stood in her master's abode, and not in Aigas.

Many Arch-Mages sat around the two in a wide arc within the large hall. Weyven and the Stern-Mages who had decided to believe that Kintar was indeed a Realm Source Mage sat on the floor around her and Red Rage who stood beside her seat.

The rest of the Stern-Mages snorted at this, as did the other Arch-Mages, but they would never speak before the Monarch over this matter.

"Why have you come? We appreciate your presence, but you must understand, this is a most unusual visitation. Where do you come from, Mage Kintar?" the Monarch said. Weyven had presented Kintar's name before, and he had taken it to heart. Whatever he believed, Kintar was on definitely on par with the Stern-Mages at least.

"Rather than answer something so tedious, I would rather explain the purpose of my visit," the short, wide-faced Unlimited Star said, her eyes narrowing. "My master sends his regrets for the damages to your country as a result of the anomalous battle hours ago. Aigas bore it, and was wounded. Too many precious lives were lost. My master wishes to create a mutually beneficial alliance to keep Aigas safe, especially with the new threat about."

'No need to tell them it was all your fault, master. That's being waaaaaay too humble,' she thought inwardly.

The Monarch's brows rose. He seemed to extract a different notion from her words.

"Master?" Mirth leaked into his voice. "How could someone of your calibre, a Realm Source Mage, have a master? Who could possibly be above you? I'd imagine every creature under the sun would call YOU master."

The sceptical Stern-Mages sniggered and chortled. The intent of the Monarch was clear after all.

However, Kintar laughed along with them all, much to their surprise.

If it was any other Unlimited Star, the Monarch's head would have rolled for jabbing at Skullius, but Kintar had different priorities.

"Well, I'd rather you meet him yourself and judge if he is worthy. That would be fun," she said, her oval-shaped eyes turning creepier. "In any case, would you consider this request by my master?"

The Monarch grinned.

"Of course. In fact. I would like to meet him as soon as possible to discuss his terms," he said, waving a hand dismissively. "I am more concerned about your identity, however. You have won over a great share of my nation's most powerful forces with one display of power which I regrettably missed. Do you know what a Realm Source Mage is?"

Arch-Mages were practitioners of Magecraft who had mastered at least two forms of Ascended Magic – Magic that used natural essences to cast instead of mana. The most accomplished Arch-Mage of all time, Arch-Mage Remos, had mastered eleven forms of Ascended Magic. However, even he who created Magecraft itself, deemed himself to have not touched upon the Realm Source Mage title.

The highest form of Magecraft, was Absolute Magic. It involved combining runes (stronger, more efficient forms of brands which contain specific magical effects, like skills in a living body) and essences to touch upon the power of Rules. Indeed, it was a terrifying art. Absolute was absolute. There was no revision for anything that was manipulated to completion with Absolute Magic.

In the labyrinth of the Yoke, Skullius had tasted such magic. Even his Supreme Skill [Flesh It Like You Mean It] had been powerless against it.

Arch-Mage Remos had mastered one form of Absolute Magic, however, he deemed it unimpressive solely because of one thing: output.

His output with Absolute Magic was pathetic. He could only affect a limited number of targets with it, and even then, his mana reserves and skill in efficiently converting mana to essence in order to keep the Absolute Magic erect couldn't keep up. He had documented all these regrets and deemed that a Realm Source Mage was someone who could perform Absolute Magic as easily as spells from a common Patch of Magic.

It was godly mastery.

Many of the Arch-Mages in the hall, fixing Kintar with arrogant, suspicious eyes wondered if she knew any of this. She didn't appear to be from Emeradis, after all.

And they were right. Kintar knew none of it. She knew all the ranks of magic, but had never known what a Realm Source Mage was really supposed to be. In truth, she didn't care. This was why the next words she said nearly caused the Mages around her to attack.

"Whatever it is and its requirements, I'm pretty sure it's got nothing on the Impossible Task. And I'm probably a Realm whatever Mage at this point," she said waving a hand airily.

At once, one of Stern-Mages rose, mana blistering around him.

"Then prove it, you arrogant little mouse! Let us be the judge of it!" he cried.

#### Chapter 1329: True Myth Mage

Kintar was not someone who particularly cared how she ranked amongst others. She also didn't enjoy revealing how she really felt about certain subjects. She had a mouth, but she usually used it to deceive or taunt, keeping her true nature under wraps.

'Is it because of that skill master gave me?' she thought to herself while ignoring the tense and blood-lusted Arch-Mages around her. 'Well, I have been feeling pretty good after analysing how to best use it. Pfft! Did I just become a Realm Source Mage in the last hour since getting that skill?'

After Skullius had addressed everyone on the directive – what he wanted done in Aigas and how – he had duplicated [Greatest Hegemon of Sorcerous Mana] and given it to Kintar. Skullius knew how terribly powerful he had just made her with that skill, and he truly was hoping she'd use it as terribly as possibly... on enemies.

Kintar heard a spark of lightning as she was drowning in her thoughts. One of the Stern-Mages was getting ready to attack. She grinned menacingly and her eyes turned into wicked crescents.

The Monarch had been just as surprised and displeased by her response just now as the Arch-Mages around him, it seemed. Though he said nothing, it appeared he was well in favour of humbling her.

However...

"Please, good practitioners of a supreme art," Red Rage suddenly flashed before Kintar and appealed with his hands outstretched, "forgive my... ward, in her manner of speech. She means no harm. I beseech each one of you to understand that as much as she is ignorant about certain things pertaining to Magecraft as a foreign practitioner, you too are also ignorant about the trials she has faced in order to reach her current strength."

The Apostle's words did not erase the tension, but they massaged it enough to where it became malleable. The faces of the opposing Arch-Mages softened somewhat. Those around Kintar did not care what she said or did, especially Weyven Irlis. She was already aware that Kintar had strength beyond what any of the others could imagine. She silently urged Kintar to demonstrate it.

"I see," the Monarch said. Somehow, he felt additional reason slip into his mind. It was as though he had willingly allowed himself to be put under a spell. "Perhaps you are right. We both are ignorant, but dark, ugly words have been spoken here. Surely, they must be answered for, or at least given credence. The legacy of Arch-Mage Remos is extremely important to all of us Energy Formers."

The Arch-Mages around the Monarch nodded aggressively.

"Exactly!" one said.

"This insolence must be punished!" shouted another.

Red Rage rose into the air and his glow became brighter.

"Indeed. It is as you say, great Mages," he said and turned to the Stern-Mage who had risen up to chastise Kintar first. "Why don't we take his suggestion? Have the lovely lady Kintar demonstrate her prowess and see for yourselves if it matches the standard you know to belong to the pinnacle of Magecraft."

There were whispers, snorts and grunts. But before a collective response could come, Red Rage added on:

"If Kintar Aladaster falls short, I will personally execute her in the name of my master. It is well within my power and capacity. To ensure that I will do as such if she fails, you may use any binding contract you wish. Even a Tie of Exchange."

The Apostle broad his hands together, as though expecting to be cuffed.

It became so silent in the throne room that you could have heard a pin drop. No one had expected such a severe proposal. Even Kintar was taken aback. She gave Red Rage a piercing look.

She didn't know (fully) the nature of Red Rage's powers. She knew for sure that he was weaker than Araeyn though, and that Apostle WAS capable of killing her. She silently snorted.

'I know what you're doing,' she thought. The Apostle was forcing her to do as their master had bid in the most straightforward way possible – something Kintar had obviously been skirting. If she proved her strength to the Monarch, the deal would be sealed. Her master's intent would be done as he intended. If she failed...

'Master would probably punish him for killing me – if he can – but the damage will already be done,' Kintar thought. She relented. 'Fine, dammit.'

The Arch-Mages wasted no time creating a binding contract with Red Rage. They had feared he might have been bluffing, but he agreed to it with no qualms, even when breaching it guaranteed death.

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"It is Arch-Mage Remos' legacy," the Monarch said as they walked through a massive corridor within which a seemingly endless series of great doors rose, revealing another stretch of it the group had to cover. "Our nation was always built upon a desire for Energy Forming rather than Arma Using or Form Using. My family lead the nation into the deeper mysteries of Summoning – as well as its nuance. But then Remos came with other ideas, intricacies of a lesser known art – Magecraft."

"Before his disappearance, he had publicly announced how much he was looking forward to the next generations of Mages exposing the secret to transcending the Arch-Mage. He left behind a method that would test and confirm the acquisition of such power. Many have come to test their strengths before it. I decided that placing it in my Royal Dwelling would give each aspirant a sense of honour when they came to challenge it."

The ninety-eighth gate rose and it flashed with arrays that dimmed before it disappeared into the ceiling.

Kintar gave the door a strange look. She wasn't pondering over the door, however. She was just imagining if the reason why this place – the Royal Dwelling – was so vast, was because the Monarch, as she had heard, was a Summoner, and not a Mage.

'How practical.'

Soon, she, the Monarch and all the Arch-Mages who had been in the throne room had reached the final gate – the one hundredth. As soon as it took its leave, a great, dark room was revealed. There was no light source, but everyone could see what was inside it.

It was a thick, massive, square stone frame leaning against the wall opposite the entrance. It was no less than seven hundred and twelve meters tall, and indented in the centre where rings of circles fed into each other. Around the outermost circle, were a thousand triangular spokes with a very, very faint glow. Around them in turn was a series of runes and arrays grooved into the frame in a complex, nigh incomprehensible fashion.

The frame looked a little old and worn, but that was misleading. It had thrived for thousands of years while receiving the practised determination and spells of countless Mages. Traces of char and chinks evidenced this.

"This is it," the Monarch said proudly. "Many a Mage has aimed their most powerful attacks while exercising their greatest efficiency with energy. Remos claimed with his rough judgements and calculations that a Realm Source Mage would have enough output to light up all thousand spokes on this frame with a SINGLE attack. The duration of the attack's effect is a non-factor, but unless that attack has the potency equal to Absolute Magic, not even a third of the spokes will be lit." The Monarch gave Red Rage a look.

The Arch-Mages opposed to Kintar snorted and scoffed and jeered. Many of them grinned, anticipating Kintar's loss.

She would soon learn why they all revered Remos, they thought.

They would soon have her head, they thought, and mount it on a wall.

Everyone drew back and Kintar alone entered the massive room. The reason why it was dark was to perfectly accentuate the lighting of the spokes.

Kintar went and stood at the centre of the room.

Weyven Irlis stood next to Red Rage. There was no doubt in her mind about the outcome, but she did wonder what kind of magic Kintar would use. The kind she had used in Bane was unsuitable for the frame – something Remos had documented as a flaw of the frame's design. The frame required attacks that weren't too abstract in nature.

When Kintar spent a whole minute without showing any signs of preparing an attack for the frame, one of the Arch-Mages cried:

"Go on then! You won't prove us wrong if you stand like a fro—" But he didn't get to finish.

Kintar shushed him while raising a finger. And then, suddenly, it was as though her voice belonged to another entity, something colossal in both stature and power. She spoke.

"My master has always fussed over how my creativity when matched against my Advanced Class is a little...poor. 'A True Myth Mage must have the ability to perfectly envision myths and bring them to life, or perhaps... prove myths to be true by demonstrating what they look like,' he said to me," she said. "He's always had a way with words. To remedy my lack of inspiration, he allowed me to peer into his mind and see different kinds of 'myths'."

...And then a staggering volume of mana blasted out of Kintar. It was so powerful and so bountiful that it filled the entire Royal Dwelling in an instant.

When it had poured from her with such dangerous ferocity, a few Arch-Mages who had failed to respond in time were blown away, and three were killed instantly, burned raw!

Everyone except Red Rage turned ashen. The Monarch might have died too if one of the Stern-Mages hadn't defended him from the freakish mana. He and all the Arch-Mages gawked at the darkness beyond, wondering, pondering...

'That mana... How could she have so much...' and 'Where is it coming from?'

But this was only the prelude.

For in the time it took everyone to respond to Kintar's mana gushing out, she had shed her appearance as a human.

In a blink, she had filled the great room, and was growing bigger, better, stronger. The ceiling broke and the walls shattered.

The Monarch and the Arch-Mages were pushed back, all while they continued to look like corpses.

A great dragon had appeared in the Royal Dwelling.

It continued to grow.

It had eight eyes and eight limbs and eight wings.

It continued to grow.

Its body was thick darkness littered with moving, bright stars.

It continued to grow.

Its maw opened, and three wheels of stacked runes materialised before it all the way to the magical frame – which the dragon had made sure to avoid disturbing, lest they call her a cheat.

A berserk conflagration surged within the maw of the dragon. It was so hot and so bright, a genuine star might have been birthed within it.

Everyone was blinded.

Everything was melting.

Everything was warping.



The spokes on Remos' frame were lighting up one after the other, its integrity dwindling. Cracks formed on its edges and in its centre.

...

...

...And then the dragon released its scorching breath.

#### Chapter 1330: A New Party

In desperate times, humans tended to slacken their sense of morality and their reason. However, it was also a common fact that they tended to inflate their suspension of disbelief in such times. Their minds opened up to many new possibilities that might have seemed absurd before.

Nothing encapsulated this idea better than the reception of the giant snowman waving its large wooden fingers forlornly at the twelve thousand men and women within the ruined city. Some waved back while some only watched as their children smiled and giggled at the guardian beast's emotional gesture.

The great snowman then harnessed a great portion of its mana and conjured mounds of cold snow and great, solid blocks of ice which circled the decrepit, broken city and covered it in a protective, domed shape. The humans inhabiting the city would now be safe and well-cared for with the supplies they had been given.

"Look at him. The great, stupid idiot is indulging," a beast that looked a lot like a pale goblin with an ice blue beard said to Azila. It spat on the ground, and a chunk of it turned to ice. "I wouldn't celebrate humans tolerating us just because there's been a crisis too dangerous for them to handle while taking care of their weaker folk."

The Great Mane Mountain Ape chuckled.

"Perhaps after this – if Aigas does survive – we can go back to the times when a visit from a guardian beast was met with celebration and reverence. Youths like him" – Azila pointed at the snowman adding some finishing touches to the dome around the city – "have never known what a cordial relationship with humans feels like until now."

"I'll bet," a young man with spiky white hair and striking red eyes chimed in. "I saw him giving heartfelt goodbye to his snowlings before we left. He must have a soft spot for any sort of 'weaker folk'."

The pale goblin regarded Grim with narrow, suspicious eyes. It regarded Yuyui, who was standing next to him, looking to be lost in her thoughts with even more suspicion.

It had taken a lot to convince the goblin to join the cause. He was the one who ruled over the Urja Sacred Forest which the party of Unlimited Stars and guardian beasts had visited earlier. Karima had made a good case for why this goblin was supposed to join them to save Aigas from the Cavern, but his misgivings had mostly been about Yuyui, Grim and the Stark Troops. He felt the humans were too weak to join the ranks of beasts of their calibre.

A timely attack by a group of Cavern had tipped the goblin's decision in favour of allying with the group, though. He was joined by some of his more powerful companions, one of which was the giant snowman.

The party had decisively split up from then. Karima took some of the goblin's other companions in another direction in order to cover more ground. The guardian beast was confident that Azila could handle negotiations with other guardian beasts on his own, with the goblin and the humans' help.

So far, Grim, Yuyui, the Stark Troops, Azila, the snowman and Hauza the ice goblin had not managed to persuade other groups of guardian beasts to join them because they had met many groups of humans in need on the way. Azila and the snowman were more inclined to help, which was why the party had stopped to create a safe space for the thousands they had rescued up until now. They couldn't continue on with their objective with such a mass of potential victims around. The dome the snowman had built could weather many high-powered attacks, but its greatest feature was stealth. Anyone who had not watched as it was created wouldn't be able to see or sense it.

"Looks like he's done. Shall we move on?" Grim said as the snowman floated towards them while clapping away snow from its fingers.

"Yes. I imagine Karima has already recruited a few more guardian beasts by now. We need to pick up our pace," Azila said. "I think there's another Sacred forest north-east of here, not too far. I'd say about seven hundred kilometres give or take. Is that enough detail?"

Grim scratched his chin thoughtfully.

"I think so," he said and started turning on the spot, trying to identify which way was north-east.  
"That should be it, right?"

Hauza scoffed and spat. Grim turned to him, frowning.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing," the ice goblin said scathingly. "I'm just reminded that the... quality of this trip wouldn't change if you human folk weren't here. You can't even read basic cardinal directions. How can I take you seriously?"

Grim rolled his eyes.

"I got the right direction, alright?" he said sharply. "Now let's go. Yuyui?"

The lime-haired girl looked as though she had been torn out of a nap.

"Hmm?" she said before shaking her head. "Right. Everyone gather around me."

Grim gave her a suspicious look before telling the snowman, Hauza and Azila to do the same.

As soon as everyone pooled together – the twenty and some Stark Troops around Yuyui and the beasts close to Grim – the male Unlimited Star's Granted Star Armament was suddenly suffused with a soft glow from the stars running across its dark surface. Then, with a thought, he expanded his senses and activated one of his armour's Starmations, the Granted Warp.

Granted Warp was an ability afforded by the special armour the Stark-Soul Order members wore. It allowed its user to instantly teleport wherever their senses could reach – whatever sense was used, magical or otherwise, did not matter.

The party vanished and appeared somewhere several kilometres away, and then vanished again and again and again until Grim judged that they were close to where Azila had said this Sacred Forest he knew would be.

The area that made their last stop was rather rocky but beautiful. The treacherous chaos of what was happening on Aigas had yet to sully its beauty. The Sacred Forest Azila had mentioned was less than a kilometre away. It began in a crescent from three bald hills up ahead, avoiding their erect masses.

The party wasted no time in traversing over to the Sacred Forest. During their march, Grim walked over to Yuyui who once again looked distant. There were wrinkles of worry over her face.

"You still thinking about that bad feeling you had earlier?" Grim asked her.

Her face contorted into something like a croissant.

"I can't help it," she said.

"Do you really think it's got something to do with those twelve women?"

"Nothing is impossible with the current state of Aigas," Yuyui said and she looked at the drapes of time made permanent by Boron's powers. "The connection I felt is almost certainly related to the powers of my Class."

Grim nodded.

"You scared?"

Yuyui didn't answer immediately. This concerned him a little.

"I've always wondered what the people who made my eyes are actually like – what made them turn into monsters in the end, and if they can be redeemed," she said. "The only thing I'd fear about them – since they started as a band trying to save women from unjust treatment – is if they had been lying to themselves about their righteous intentions from the very beginning."