

Undead 1351

Chapter 1351: Joining Hands! (1)

<MASTER SOUMEI WILL BE EQUALLY DELIGHTED IN YOU AS A PRIZE, OR PERHAPS MORE THAN HE REGARDS THIS RICH WORLD.>

There was something about deific power that transcended even something like a language barrier. But of course, it was only natural. Becoming a Deity meant being greater than the sum of many worlds and their concepts.

Skullius' face hardened, but he wasn't too dismayed.

It was all but obvious, given what the Repented Lich Soidon had told him about the true power of Liches, that this Doom Knight was under the charge of one. And it was also obvious that it too would be attracted by his Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz.

But Aurolio, far from looking as shaken as Elita, Uyuniya and even the Doom Knight, laughed.

He had been watching Skullius closely, silently. He had gleaned much, including the funny fact – as his offhanded statement from before had suggested – that literally everything was revolving around the Hybrid Warmoth.

And that was the reason he had dived in to 'save' Skullius from Void.

Wherever Skullius was, there was ample opportunity for humility and growth.

But the Hybrid Warmoth hadn't been oblivious to the pale man's attention to his every move. In a way, they both shared a sense of cool calm. After all, even when a Deific Undead minion had resolved to take him on, Skullius was unconcerned.

It wasn't the first time someone much stronger than him had decided to kill him.

He instead focused on the threads of Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz swirling around his fingers. Aurolio paid them great attention too.

But then...

Without warning, Skullius' hand burst apart violently!

He cursed. Aurolio whistled. Kenno frowned.

"Yeah. It's dangerous alright," Skullius said. His hand had regenerated before he finished his sentence.

"Well, well, well. Now this is interesting! That was the critical detonation point! To think you're actually using Void's powers...in a way," Aurolio said, grinning.

Skullius turned to him. He meant to ask him what Aurolio meant right then, but instead, he gave a sharp look to the towering Doom Knight. It had raised its great sword and was pointing it at him. This was no more than a gesture – perhaps to also mark him as its own – but Skullius knew this was where the struggle for life and death would begin.

Thus...

"Kenno. I need you to make the environment as stable as possible. One serious exchange with this thing on Pelian will sink Feinheath in less than a second," he said.

Kenno acknowledged, though he did wonder why Skullius didn't just order Araeyn to swipe everyone into a Null Remnant if he was worried about Aigas.

Still, he got down on one knee and planted his hand on the ground. A staggering amount of mana surged through his body and as it met the skills branded within it, it was expelled as a peculiar effect.

The mountainous region plagued with very sparse, rich vegetation and a mix of different soils suddenly turned an iron-crusted scape spanning over thousands of kilometres from Kenno. The iron lacked any lustre and looked a little rusted. A bit of a nasty yellow hue ran along it, making it look unnatural; but of course, it was unnatural. Anyone with even the most modest appreciation of mana could tell that the iron was sucking up ambient mana at a furious rate.

Kenno had a Hidden Class called Matter Monster. He could freely change the state of existence – shape, composition, mass etc. – of any non-living object he came into contact with. The more non-magical the object, the more alterations he could make; at times, it would appear as though he had created something from nothing at all.

When it came to living things, Kenno didn't have as much freedom, but he could affect any phenomenon in their immediate surroundings like gravity, light, air, space and so on.

Skullius imagined that the reason Kenno had survived against the Doom Knight was because he had abused Araeyn's ability to drag opponents to Null Remnants to the extreme. Because the Null Remnants were unclaimed by any Deity and seemingly couldn't be claimed at all, he had manipulated the various, queer conditions around the Deity while Araeyn kept transporting them all to different Null Remnants – with different environments – so that the Doom Knight couldn't adapt. (He had still died several times though.)

At present, Kenno had changed the composition of every non-living thing in the surrounding area to a special type of iron that absorbed mana in order to make itself extremely resistant. He had encountered this type of iron in the Timemould Mirror Box. (One of the infinite armour sets that could take on any appearance.) Its natural durability was already slightly greater than the entirety of the land on Aigas, but with mana involved, it quickly grew much stronger.

Aurolio gave the iron a tap with his foot.

"Sturdy," he said to Kenno. "But I doubt it will hold for long."

The Unlimited Star turned to Skullius. He had similar doubts. Skullius knew this.

"What I'm aiming for won't take long. Hopefully," he said, and in a blink, he had teleported everyone – including Elita and Uyuniya – high into the air. (The still unconscious Sila was held up by Araeyn.)

Uyuniya seemed to have an opinion about the abrupt teleportation, but...

"Boss!" Kenno cried. Skullius had already perceived IT. In fact, he had hoped for the enemy to be prompted to make the first move because of his choice to move everyone into the sky.

Quite lackadaisically, the Doom Knight raised one of its hands and made a claw gesture at them from the ground.

<CAPTURE.>

There was a dreadful pulse of Undeath the likes of which Skullius had never felt before. He felt the Rules around them get eroded and corrupted, and like burning hairs, they coiled and broke. Space receded around the group and shattered, leaving the mix of Stagnant Space and the darkness of the void. But then even that was forced away.

Undeath energy condensed into a prison around the seven and while surrounded on all sides by darkness, they were trapped in crimson.

The prison was shaped like an irregular nonagonal prism from the outside, shiny and sturdy. It hardly had enough space for the seven, but it contained them all the same.

Skullius gave a chuckle. For an instant, he was tempted to transform into his War Body.

"This sockethole is really underestimating us," he said. He was sure the damn thing was all too pleased with itself. To be sure, this prison was likely to be extremely tough, Skullius new, but he was all too sure this wouldn't hold him if he really wanted to break out. Raw Null Life was superior to raw Undeath, after all.

He was happy to see that Uyuniya felt the same. The scowl on her face brought out the beauty in her furious, three-pupiled eyes. Well, he imagined it did. Her face was hidden.

Skullius turned to her and Elita, positioned oddly above him, Aurolio and Kenno in the prison.

"Now, surely, I think we can agree that our ideologies may not align, but when something as dreadful and arrogant as an Undead Deity makes the effort to trample its fellow anomalies, that might be cause enough to join hands, is it not?"

Chapter 1352: Joining Hands (2)

Eofel.

"Do you think it's a coincidence?" Rias asked. He paid keen attention to the fluctuations of the dreadful Undeath energy blasting from the far distance. To him, it was soothing and warm.

Fulgardt laughed.

"Not a chance. I didn't realise it before my encounter with that brat, but that thing is here because of me," he said, grinning and tinkering with what appeared to be the open air above Rias. "It was me who gutted Aigas and exposed its precious past. Boron served his role only after I opened the path. It's all delicate Direction."

"I like your optimism." Rias took a deep breath. Fulina and Cyne standing by his side looked awfully shaken. No doubt, they didn't find as much comfort in the great pressure of Undeath streaming down from beyond as they did his, which was much more familiar.

He wished he could have told them not to worry, that everything would be fine if they placed their trust in him. He couldn't. He was merely a ghost of the man they had loved.

Fulgardt chuckled.

"Perfection," he said. "Your brand of optimism proved to be sweeter than mine. If that Undead Deity had made known its presence before, I might have never doubted you to begin with."

"I had my doubts too. Previous errors don't mean much now," Rias said, and he looked at Fulgardt's hands. "Is that requirement met yet or do we still need to venture into your Labyrinth somehow?"

Fulgardt seemed terribly pleased by the question.

"Who knows? Perhaps this is the perfect chance for Direction to show who it favours more."

After trapping the seven enemies in the prison of condensed Undeath essence, the great Doom Knight planted its sword into the ground.

Its directive echoed through its mind every ten seconds. Soumei was a very impatient Lich. Even with the guarantee that his minions would, without a shadow of a doubt, do as he bid, he felt the need to invoke in them all a spell that constantly reminded them what he wanted done.

As most of them barely had any sense of individualism, they could hardly get annoyed, but this particular Doom Knight felt the slightest twitch deep within his altered soul.

<HMMM.>

He gazed north, where he had been driven away by that mortal and Null Lifeform. There was no need to go there anymore since he had decided to claim this whole world for his master.

His gaze shifted upwards. The blaze in his sockets condensed and his vision pierced through the many layers hiding the domain of one of the Deities here. He saw her and the many mortals bowing before her, barely moving.

But curiously, not all of them were hunched in praise.

There were two other mortals there, standing before the Deity. Oddly enough, they were dressed in a similar manner to the mortal who had played a part in driving him away from his directive up north; they were dressed in stars.

It was curious indeed. The Deity before the two turned to stare deeply at the Doom Knight. They locked eyes.

The Doom Knight found it strange that this Deity was not hurrying to make a move against him. He vaguely remembered that that was the natural course for any Deity facing a threat to their world. The second Deity on this world behaved the same.

Why were they so nonchalant?

Did they not realise how great of a threat he was, how great of a threat his master was?

"HERESY! HERESY! THIS IS NOT YOUR DWELLING, FOUL UNDEAD DEMON! UNDER THE MIGHT OF THE NEW ORDER, WE WILL PURGE YOU FROM THIS BLESSED LAND! WE ARE ITS ORDAINED DEFENDERS!"

A cacophony of nine voices screeched from the distance. They belonged to nine men and women bonded together in an unsightly pillar of flesh. However far they were, they managed to see the Doom Knight, and it saw them.

It also spotted their emissary, a bloody skeleton decked in a silver armour. It was Divine... somewhat, and it was walking towards him.

How insulting.

Since when could the prowess of Liches be challenged by mere Divine husks?

The Doom Knight was enraged.

His wrath would have fallen on Mercella's walking corpse, obliterating it with zero difficulty, but something else stole his attention.

His prison up in the sky shattered and his enemies sprang out, zooming in different directions.

This was not unexpected. The Undead minion had hoped to capture the anomalies – and their pets – in the least harmful way. He had wished to preserve them, but perhaps anomalies couldn't understand goodwill.

...

Skullius had paired with Kenno and Araeyn for the strategy.

Again, he hoped this wouldn't take long, but it probably would.

He sensed Elita, Aurolio and Uyuniya move to their own positions around the Doom Knight.

'They are cooperating well. Thank goodness. It took a while, but we got there.'

"HERESY!!!" The cry drew Skullius' attention. He saw the nine shriek and Mercella hurtling towards the Doom Knight.

How tragic.

He gave Elita a knowing look. Even with her mask on, he knew she could feel his accusing gaze. But that was for another time.

Without a nano-moment more wasted, Skullius let loose twenty-five [Elusive Meta Carvers] and twenty-five [Ruining Cutters] charged to the greatest output at the Doom Knight. The former were invisible, but the latter whistled against the air while drawing thin, sharp lines towards their target.

They met the Doom Knights armour... and barely made sparks fly from its exterior.

Skullius scoffed.

'If his armour is this powerful, I can't imagine how strong his Immortal Physique is,' Skullius thought. The damned thing, unlike most of the Cavern and Uyuniya must have had one. 'Oh well.'

With that established...

Kenno appeared right in front of the Doom Knight – courtesy of Skullius' spatial prowess.

The Unlimited Star wore a bold grin.

'Thirty-third time's a charm,' he thought and then chanted:

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Bandit King's Boundless Collection!"

And the Territory splashed out rapidly.

Because of the properties of Kenno's Territory, he designed it to be extremely large, as it had appeared when he rushed here with Araeyn. However, for the current plan, he made it as small as possible.

It barely covered a fifty-meter radius from him and he only dragged within it, the Doom Knight, Skullius and Araeyn.

The Territory's Imaginary GeoScape formed for the 33rd time in front of the Undead creature, but it disregarded it. It instead focused on Skullius who immediately summoned all three of his Phantasmic Retainers.

The Noboboyama, Spirit of Blind Drowning.

The Ororoborou, Mantle of Smiting.

And the strongest one, Gajjkav, Baleful Remembrance.

With all three formed, he immediately applied all the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths he had never used; those that hadn't been seen on Aigas in over four millennia!

Chapter 1353: Micro-Dimensioning

As soon as the Territory's GeoScape was formed, it was instantly drowned in a vast pour of heavy darkness that issued from the three Phantasmic Retainers. For this occasion and strategy, Skullius had chosen to diminish their sizes, but their functionality remained unaffected.

The Noboboyama, a thin, dark humanoid with a staggering number of arms sprouting from its torso; the Ororoborou, like a ball made entirely of a bending, dark wires connecting to a golden-white hourglass in its hollow centre; and the Gajjkav, a golden-white, stocky humanoid with a giant, draconian head and six black wings, were all filled to the brim with Amras and Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths!

Kenno, Araeyn and Skullius were as ready as the Retainers, but...

<I TIRE OF THIS CONSTRUCT.>

And indeed, the Doom Knight had had enough of Kenno's Territory.

Its great sword was in its hand, but how and exactly when it used it, neither of its targets could have explained.

There was a sudden CRACK and Skullius' ears and eyes were bleeding, his insides churning from the great noise. Kenno's head had ruptured and Araeyn looked like he had been passed through a wringer. He was oozing an unknown substance from his broken, squeezed body.

But all this had only been the complementing audio of the Doom Knight slicing the Territory and Skullius into twelve, clean pieces!

The Hybrid Warmoth was overwhelmed by the damage. He felt a searing agony across all twelve of his slashed bits, and not just the flesh ones. The Doom Knight had cut through his soul as well!

'THAT FLESHING HURTS!!!!'

The was unimaginable for the Hybrid Warmoth, but he bore it. He was Divine. Damage to his body and soul couldn't kill him unless the two were separated. His opponent knew this, of course.

The Territory was gaping, revealing the dark night of Aigas painted red by the Doom Knight's marking.

...But then it wasn't.

In a blink, the Territory – lathered in [Evil Darkness] – pulled its pieces together and kept its integrity.

Skullius' blank eyes lit up with tenacity.

'This is far from over, sockethole!' he thought.

Several things happened in rapid succession right then.

Skullius healed, mending his body and soul together.

Kenno also healed. In his case, it wasn't as simple as it was for Skullius though. Before everyone had escaped the Doom Knight's prison, Skullius had told him to use Creeds to tether himself to his (Skullius') Andori, [Sagacious Antiphon of Dawnlight]. In the case that he was killed before

Skullius could heal him, the Creed he made would simply activate the Andori remotely, reviving him. (This was only possible with Skullius' consent though.)

Araeyn did not bother to heal himself. His role was more important than his health. For now.

He clapped his palms together and a deep voice escaped his lips.

"[Micro-Dimensioning]."

He parted his palms, and a ball of a greenish Null Life Essence had formed between them.

The visor of the Doom Knight blazed fiercely. It was excited. What could this be?

An odd suction drew on it aggressively right then, sucking it into the ball!

Skullius followed as well, and then Araeyn.

The Gajjkav, the Noboboyama, the Ororoborou and Kenno remained in Bandit King's Boundless Collection.

...

Deep within the condensed ball of Null Life Essence... was a massive realm.

It was greater than a world, but ultimately, it was a Null Remnant, a discarded dwelling that could not be claimed. Well, at least not by ordinary deific powers.

Skullius, Araeyn and the Doom Knight appeared within its excessively cloudy space, falling. Dark and light clouds alike littered everything all the way to be obscured ground below. They were livid, rich, with Null Life Essences, and sharp, silent flashes coursed through them infinitely.

This was a Null Remnant much different from the ones Skullius had traversed as the Amalgam during the grand battle against the masked necromancer.

And that was the point.

[You have been dragged into the Miscarried Levin Compound Islands]

[The dense Null Life Essence that makes up this environment greatly favours you]

[Your Null Life Essence reserves are forcefully amplified by 12,000%!]

[Your stats are augmented by 9,500%!]

[The performance of any and all Null Life abilities and relics will be increased by 1,000%!]

They were richer boons than Skullius and Araeyn enjoyed from that time ago indeed.

Skullius' nimbus seemed to explode in size, almost merging with the unending streams of clouds around him. It billowed, baleful and changing colours, crackling with all the Exotic Parlous Natures Skullius had access to.

Skullius could feel his reserves of Null Life Essence reserves raging and compounding. The Null Life Essences around him rushed up to fill his core, which had been drained because of the [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus]' creation of Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz. With the 12,000% boost to his reserves...

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[Null Core: 5,460,105,600/45,500,800]

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It appeared that the same benefit Skullius had reaped last time, of a greater amount of essence than his core capacity applied even now, which was more than delightful. Even after escaping this Null Remnant, he would keep it all.

Araeyn, on the other hand, was like a star shining among the clouds. They converged towards him and whispered, as though paying their respects. Null Life Essences swam around him too, like twisting swirls of watery winds.

The Doom Knight was almost enthralled.

It seemed to recognise the play awaiting it immediately. This was a terrible ambush.

Araeyn's body healed and was reinforced.

...Then the whole realm turned eerily silent.

Skullius grinned.

Even a Deity would have to take his Apostle seriously here!

He was no mere summon. He was descended of a very special race of Null Lifeforms that had a great claim to the Null Verse and many of its eccentricities. It just so happened that after Skullius' reached Tier 4 back then and had an upgrade to his Nullmancer Class, which forced his Apostles to evolve... Araeyn obtained something rather critical.

The Apostle obtained an AUTHORITY.

Araeyn had the power to control a whole realm like this one down to the most minute details with great ease!

And that was why...

Skullius unleashed it right then; it was the Treasure he had taken from the Warmoth's Treasury earlier: the Realm rank Prime Charged Mantle, Dance of the Thousand Levin-Born!

Chapter 1354: Dance of the Thousand Levin-Born!

Araeyn's abilities had always been geared towards transposing Null dimensions over pieces of the wider reality before Skullius had reached Tier 4, as his name – the Astute Duke of Traversal – suggested. After he evolved along with his master, however, he acquired the ability to create mini

gateways towards these Null Remnants, and with an AUTHORITY, he was allowed to govern them all as he pleased with only a limit of time being the caveat.

He was only allowed full control of a single Null Remnant for thirty minutes by Aigas standard, and this ability cost an outrageous amount of Null Life Essence to use.

Araeyn, now changed into the race, Authority of Dimensions, also had the passive ability to scroll all the known Null Remnants and their characteristics.

It was not random coincidence that this place, the Miscarried Levin Compound Islands were his choice. It was a decision that was made with Skullius' arsenal of Treasures in mind.

...

When the Hybrid Warmoth unleashed the Charged Mantle, Dance of the Thousand Levin-Born, the first stage of the plan began.

The Charged Mantle was something like a large scroll. As it was unfurled, the Runes drawn on its face sparked and spilled an army of Penetrators!

They numbered a thousand, and were of a great variety; Skullius would have never known some of the Penetrator types if not for this!

Some had dark clouds billowing around them like the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, and others only had flashes of Levin silently sparking within their sockets with nothing of note to their other humanoid, or animalistic parts. Some were large, some were small. Some were mere bones, and some were creatures with flesh, decked in archaic armour. Some were roaring, eager to be fed to battle, and some were silent, their eyes honing in on the enemy.

There were the Crazy Expenditure Penetrators, the Garbed Penetrators, the Golden Order Penetrators, the Measured Ascension Penetrators, the Archfiend Warlords and so many more!

Every single one of them was fearless, and every single one of them was powerful, extremely powerful.

Skullius saw that the least among them was Tier 38 while the strongest was Tier 129.

As frightening as these numbers were, though, they didn't mean all that much. The quality of a race was what determined their strength, rather than their tier. Yet still, a fair number of these creatures were Divine and Skullius saw that a majority of those kind were a peculiar bunch of Penetrators layered with Runes all over their half-meaty bodies.

They were Runes different from what he had used before.

'I have no time to waste.'

"ATTACK!" he commanded the Penetrators.

"UUUUUOOOOOOOOOH!" they cried and streaked towards the Doom Knight. Some turned into bolts of Levin and rode the clouds while others simply charged, using the air as footing.

And then Araeyn worked his magic.

The monstrous Null Life Essences in the atmosphere rushed towards the Penetrators, coating them like armour and enriching their cores!

Suddenly, the army looked invincible!

<THIS IS HOW YOU HONOUR MY MASTER – WITH A WORTHY CHALLENGE! COME, PESTS OF SERENITY!>

The Doom Knight was excited, so excited that his massive reserves of Undeath energy splashed out like a thousand oceans, and contended for space within the realm. Red and blue battled against each other in the skies.

The force of the Undeath caught Skullius off guard. His mind spun, and he was sinking again.

But...

"MY LIEGE! DON'T FALL FOR IT NOW OF ALL TIMES!" Beyrmir rescued him again just in time.

Skullius was pleased, but he didn't get the chance to express it.

The same intense CRACK he had heard before boomed in the thousands and the realm shuddered like a great leaf. Its finest qualities shook, cracking, and twisting. The Doom Knight had brandished his sword and was slashing at everything with ferocious intensity!

The sky broke into many flying shards, revealing hidden layers underneath, and the clouds burned whenever the great sword swiped. Penetrators were hewn into fragments and ash before the sword even touched them, obscure features of the realm hundreds of thousands of kilometres away wailing from the force of the creature's blows!

It was chaos... but not unexpected.

Almost eight hundred of the Penetrators were killed in the Doom Knight's attacks. Yet...

Boundless Null Life Essences caught their remains and rejuvenated them instantly.

All of a sudden, the fallen Null Lifeforms were back again, and they charged at the armoured monster in the skies.

The Doom Knight was taken aback.

What the hell had just happened?

Skullius could sense its confusion and he was terribly pleased.

'Go crazy, Araeyn,' he sent the mental command.

The Apostle, hidden in the folds of the space in the Miscarried Levin Compound Islands acknowledged.

He had full control over the realm from the ground, to the skies and whatever was beyond even that. He exercised that control to the point of abuse. Even a Deity trapped in the Null Remnants could be toyed with.

The Doom Knight was suddenly hooked by an unseen force and dragged upwards at a speed far surpassing what even Skullius could perceive.

What received it was the great, odd, misshapen sun that had been giving light to the cloudy environment below – a blue sun with a fierce heat more than five times greater than the sun blessing Aigas!

As soon as the Doom Knight was devoured, Araeyn closed his palm in a harsh gesture... and the sun collapsed in on itself.

The explosion came down with the force of hundreds of worlds dropping from the sky. It was fire, scorch, death and torment, melting everything it touched... even time and space. It came in heaps and flares spreading far and wide.

Many great, glowing chasms of no less than forty thousand kilometres were carved into the ground, their ends unseen. The realm shuddered. It was the end of all.

Yet neither Skullius, Araeyn nor the Penetrators were concerned with this at all.

They were concerned with the state of the Deity. It was still far from dead, of course. It hadn't fallen with the blazing wreckage. Its armour, white hot – but completely unharmed – and stained with molten lava and charred concepts, issued terrible plumes of smoke as it floated high up, behind it the glaring light of the continuing chaos it had just escaped.

It looked thrilled. The flames in its sockets were lit like bonfires.

'Yes, yes. Keep underestimating us.' Skullius thought from the ground.

Yes, it was imperative that the Doom Knight keep toying with them. After all, a large-scale ability like Araeyn's was sure to make it feel like it could discern all they had planned.

The Hybrid Warmoth grinned.

His nimbus was eagerly analysing the Doom Knight's prowess, but its part to play in this bout had not yet come.

For now, it was the turn of the Elder Sages of Penetration to strut their stuff and add value to the distraction.

Chapter 1355: Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune

The Doom Knight suddenly found itself planted on the ground, lying face-up. Indeed, it was Araeyn's doing.

Levin lit up in a bold, complex Rune around it, so brilliant it could be seen from beyond the sky, where the misshapen blue sun had been.

Seventy Divine Elder Sages of Penetration rode the burning clouds in the sky, surrounding the Doom Knight and began chanting something Skullius couldn't quite understand.

The Hybrid Warmoth knew about languages between Null Lifeforms, and had even been able to converse with rogue creatures of the Null Verse before, but this...

The Sages chanted in unison what might have been a song and between them, in the sky, a replica of the same Rune around the Doom Knight began to form.

When it appeared, Skullius felt the incredible amount of Null Life Essence packed into it. There must have been close to ten billion units!

And beyond just the fuel used to bring the complex Rune to life...

'BRO!' Skullius thought, horrified and drew far away from the gathered maniacs as quickly as he could.

Runecraft, quite like souls and mana, was a universal concept. Runes were marks used to make tedious and long processes more streamlined and efficient. They were a means of absolute control, and the greatest forms of them were not easily mastered.

The Elder Sages of Penetration were a race that completely abandoned the concept of building skills or other forms of techniques in favour of Runes.

In order of complexity and power, there were three levels to Runes according to the Sages: GRAND, MYTH and ETERNAL.

An example of a GRAND Rune was the Rune of the FIRST, which Skullius had learned how to use from Caxellac. It was powerful, but not too much so.

What the Sages were using now... was an ETERNAL Rune, called the Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune.

To be sure, Skullius wasn't too familiar with any of these details. He had fled because he sensed the sheer power bounding within the Rune.

It was baffling how the Sages skirted using Andori and Amras like everyone else in the wider reality (it didn't make any sense according to the Common Reality Leagues) but he knew for sure that the Rune they were using was equivalent to an Ascendant Andori!

That was one tier above his strongest Andori, the [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus]!

The Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune was ignited... and Skullius was glad he had been nowhere near its vicinity.

It first torched the world in a glaring white light too deep to see through.

The realm and its clouds, and the fiery matter falling from the collapsed sun suddenly didn't exist anymore. Only the bright light.

And then... ZZZZT.

ZZZZT!

ZZZZT!

ZZZZT!

Something flickered within that brightness. It was a gargantuan, spherical shape in a deep crimson hue.

It flickered in and out of existence, first vague with little detail and then bold and bolder.

Soon, the great well of a silvery-blue substance swirling in its centre and the hundreds of unique, complicated and mesmerising symbols revolving around it could be seen. Patches of different shapes and colours could be spotted near the outer boundary of the spherical shape, drifting like islands. They held things too small to see, but as the sphere flickered, they became clearer and clearer.

But even without figuring out what was within the queer shapes, Skullius had grown pale. He was frozen in shock. For a moment, he almost forgot that this was the perfect moment for him to strike as he had planned.

'I thought... I thought this was supposed to be extremely difficult!' he thought, gaping.

What he was looking at, was the projected Broader Existence of the Doom Knight!

Somehow, the Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune had revealed it in its entirety, almost producing a perfect, vivid depiction of everything stored within it!

It was supposed to be incredibly difficult to find another Divine's Broader Existence, but Skullius was looking at a group of severely underpowered creatures casually doing it to a Deity.

'No wonder everyone wants the Null Verse...' Skullius said. He meant these words for Serenity. 'No wonder Void tried to kill me. This is insane!'

Only Serenity could have understood the depths of his meaning, but she also understood something else.

Skullius couldn't have known, but he was only half right.

The Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune was not just limited to projecting the likeness and boundary of the Broader Existence of anyone struck by it.

No.

It was designed to strip away the Broader Existence and return the target to mortality!

The Doom Knight, unlike Skullius, sensed what was happening and immediately switched gears.

The brilliant light scape conjured by the Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune was killed at once by a blaze of red Undeath that poured upwards in a pillar from the Doom Knight. The world returned to normal – hell-like – afterwards.

<ENOUGH.>

The Sages of Penetration and all the other Penetrators were squashed into nothingness by something unseen – an attack using the Broader Existence. Yet, they were restored almost immediately after.

Levin sprayed all over the Doom Knight and bounced off its still-sizzling armour. Different kinds of Runes raced through the air to smash against it, but the Doom Knight quickly cut them down.

<YOU ENJOY THE BENEFIT OF SUPERIORITY WHEN IT COMES TO THAT LITTLE TREASURE YOU HAIL FROM.> the creature said. <BUT THAT ALONE CANNOT MAKE UP THE DIFFERENCE IN MIGHT.>

Something terrible was coming, but the Penetrators attacked all the same, even as their attacks did nothing.

The Doon Knight raised its sword... and the spark of an Andori lit up from the tip.

Something dreadful was coming.

...But then the realm dissolved into darkness and silence.

Light, gravity, heat, time, sensation... everything seemed to just STOP.

The Doom Knight was unaffected by all this, but he was again confused.

That little pest which was capable of commanding everything in this world had restricted damn near every concept to be found here.

But... was the point of that?

Well, the point, quite literally, pinched the Doom Knight in the next nano-instance.

A blade of gold and pink pierced seamlessly through its terrifying armour, and then a fraction of obscure time later, thin cuts ran along the armour, intersecting and connecting until it was ruined!

...!!!

For the first time, the Doom Knight was absolutely shocked.

Its armour creaked and shattered under the Absolute Prime Property of Broodweiler, revealing the true form of the subdued Deity underneath.

Skullius was feeling the rush and also the ungodly apprehension. The first level of defense had been taken down, and now, everything either went extremely well or horribly wrong.

Chapter 1356: Lying In Wait

Indeed, Skullius had taken Elita's Realm rank Prime sword for his own after convincing her it was necessary for the plan he had. It had not been easy convincing her to part with it, especially since they had been embroiled in a conflict before the great Doom Knight came. But in the end, the former Paladin Champion had surrendered her weapon.

The Doom Knight was furious, Skullius knew.

Even in the dark, timeless void Araeyn had created, it saw him as its armour fell apart, revealing its true form beneath.

There was no escaping the creature's wrath, Skullius knew. He could only prepare for a dreadful counter.

The first thing he did, was to stow away Broodweiler. He wouldn't get a chance to use it again. Its part to play in his hands was already done.

Because the guidance field would not show any information about the Doom Knight to Skullius, he had had to improvise.

Fighting a Deity-level opponent who was wearing a nigh-invincible armour (at least to Divines like him) and was possibly in possession of a dreadfully powerful Immortal Physique was a sure sign that the battle was unwinnable. Thus, Skullius' plan had been to chip away at the Deity's layers of defences while it was still toying with them.

Broodweiler had been one of the bets Skullius had thought of, but there was a caveat.

Treasure weren't all about which one was higher in rank. Prime Treasures opposed Wicked ones with their Absolute Properties and the opposite was true. In such circumstances, the Treasure which struck first with its Absolute Property, won. But unfortunately, since Skullius didn't know what kind of Treasure the armour the Doom Knight was wearing was, he had to rely on trial and error.

While the Doom Knight was preoccupied with the Penetrators (and before the Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune was used), Skullius had attacked the creature with his Tainted Lycan's Siphoning Claw, a Realm rank Wicked Treasure that caused large, poisoned claws to sprout violently from inside the target.

When the claw didn't work, Skullius immediately knew that the Doom Knight's armour was also a Wicked Treasure, but of a higher rank.

And that was why, with Araeyn's help and with the Penetrator's distraction, he had struck the armour with Broodweiler's Absolute Prime Property.

The blade was lethal to Divine phenomena, but no different to a Legendary grade weapon when matched against any mortal material, living or otherwise.

Keeping it hidden was essential until its next use, lest it be destroyed by the Doom Knight. But while this was achieved, Skullius felt there was a great chance he would get destroyed.

The Doom Knight... no, the Deity's eyes were two red, flaring suns. Untold fury and streams of what might have been blood slid down from them to its fair face – large, but indeed fair. A modest stubble of golden-brown hairs that glowed made the bottom end while voluminous curly, messy variants made the top.

The Deity was rather lean. Its torso was bare, advertising the grim scars, scabs and singes to its divine body while its waist was covered by a layer of kilt made of some kind of animal hide.

The contrast with and without armour was staggering for Deity, but even more vexing than that...

<HOW DARE YOU BREAK MASTER SOUMEI'S GIFT TO ME?!> the Deity screamed, and its voice shook the realm. Blood sprayed more fiercely from its flame-lit eyes, hot and way too voluminous to have all fit in its body.

Skullius was alarmed.

He was in the Deity's grasp before he even realised it, being squeezed into oblivion. He almost popped like a balloon. He was consistently at the point of bursting even with [Sagacious Antiphon of Dawnlight] constantly trying to heal him.

Worse yet, Doom Factor 2 chose this exact moment to strike, triggered once again by the overwhelming pressure of Undeath, but Beyrmir came to his master's rescue again.

"Gah!" Skullius felt like he had woken up from a nightmare. Things were teetering on success and grim failure.

'I should surrender it,' he thought and a large key he had hardly used appeared in his hand only to disappear in a flash.

The Penetrators made a valiant effort to strike with all they had and Araeyn even attempted to force the Deity to release Skullius, but it didn't work.

The enemy, however emotional, was still lucid, as it turned out.

<DO YOU THINK I MARKED THAT WORLD FOR NAUGHT BUT MY MASTER'S GLORY?!

> the Deity growled, and glared in Araeyn's direction, even though he was packed behind many layers of space, hidden. The question was aimed at him. The Apostle received a large key and streaked away from the glare.

...!!!

At almost the exact same moment, realisation dawned on Skullius too late, not that he could have done anything about it.

The Deity wasn't stupid.

He had marked Aigas for more than a simple duty of servitude to his master, it seemed!

...

Skullius' ears had heard enough loud crashes and CRACKS too much for the average living being. He had even begun to think no noise could ever surprise him anymore, but the contorting of a Null Remnant as a Deity suddenly forced itself through while rushing to a place it had marked... was something beyond the word 'noise.'

The sound twisted Skullius' skin and curled his limbs. The Miscarried Levin Compound Islands vanished as the Deity charged, as though cast into some dark waste bin behind them.

The grating noise temporarily took away Skullius' ability to think.

When he did regain it, he found himself and the Deity in a boundless wad of thick darkness littered with an assortment of giant objects glowing in different colours.

There were anchors, there were shields, there were anvils, there were swords, there were ships, there were cards and many, many other things. They all hummed, their hues intensifying by the second.

Skullius, bleeding and battered but mending, found hope.

Even though he didn't need to, he shrieked anyway.

"NOW!!!!"

But, of course, Kenno had already been prepared.

Indeed, Skullius and the Deity were back in the latter's marked territory, Aigas, but Kenno's Territory was also in Aigas. They had returned to exactly the point they left from.

Kenno had sacrificed a large number of Creeds, just as Skullius had told him, for what came next.

The Retainers his master had left in his Territory, reinforced with Amras and not mana, had a purpose.

When Skullius had filled Kenno's Territory with darkness earlier, it was all to amplify the effect of a Seed he had imbued in the Noboboyama called the Womb.

The Womb kept any non-living construct of modest size from falling apart as long as it wasn't split into more than a hundred pieces. The Seed, of course, responded best to constructs made of [Evil Darkness] or [Just Light]. This was why Kenno's Territory had not fallen apart when it was slashed by the Deity. It had been melded with [Evil Darkness]. This, along with the use of a massive number of Creeds, allowed Kenno full control of every element in the Territory temporarily, even his master's Phantasmic Retainers.

The Gajjkav, its draconian maw open, bulked and devoured the Doom Knight and Skullius almost immediately after they appeared.

Kenno's vomited blood. The speed required to pull everything off seamlessly was only achieved because of his sacrifice of Creeds and a little bit of luck. A normal mortal wouldn't have managed it.

But as strained as his body was, he didn't allow himself the luxury of collapsing.

The next step needed doing.

His Territory unravelled right then, leaving only him and the Phantasmic Retainers.

The rest – for now – was left for the three individuals bolting towards the Gajjkav with near desperate intensity.

Chapter 1357: The Wrong In It

Before breaking out of the Undeath energy prison...

"LISTEN TO ME, YOU STUBBORN SOCKETHOLE!" Skullius boomed, his blank eyes glaring at Uyuniya. "This isn't the time to strut your damn pride! In case you haven't noticed, our opponent is a fleshing Deity! The only way to beat it is with a well-constructed plan! If you have a better one, why don't you tell us? We're all ears."

Uyuniya stared daggers at Skullius, and then her eyes narrowed to slits. One would have thought she didn't have anything to retort. Well, in that case, one would be wrong.

"Despite how strong you are, you really are a product of an inferior world aren't you? I thought Void's sister was supposed to be more cunning, a genius, given how she's managed to rope in the interest of all the greater entities in reality," she said with a scoff. "How can you fear Deities, much less Undead ones? In any case, I do have a plan. Unlike you, I can continuously replenish my Voided Death Essence and with my Void Clot, I can injure a Deity if given the right opening. Chances of that shoot up tremendously with Elita's Broodweiler. And as such, no. She will not be surrendering it to you."

Aurolio was silently listening to the back and forth with great interest. It was a miracle that he could hold back his intense desire to butt into the conversation and give his own insights. The battle across the Central Boundary of Aigas had taught him there was value in being quiet sometimes – waiting.

It was also a miracle that anything intelligible could come from Uyuniya's mouth. Honestly, because they hadn't been able to communicate, and Uyuniya would rather fight than listen to reason, Skullius had begun to think she was a bit of an idiot.

Overcoming the language barrier between them had been a simple thing. Connecting to her mind with mana allowed them to communicate, but before, when Uyuniya was dead set on killing him, this wouldn't have worked. She would have prevented Skullius' mana from reaching her.

Everyone was connected to the network of mana now, even though it was only Skullius and Uyuniya who were arguing.

Skullius was seething. He turned to Elita.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked him.

"Don't you have a damn opinion of your own? Does she" – Skullius pointed at Uyuniya – "speak for you even on this?"

"What do you mean, even on this? Are you still assuming I don't understand the path I've chosen? That it was chosen for me by Uyuniya and Void? I'm proud of the fact that I'm not so naïve anymore, Skullius. What I did, I did for both my new belief and to elevate the strength of my ally. And as it turns out right now, having her at the same level as you – something I achieved by sacrificing poisoned men and women hiding behind the Deities – might just save Aigas! Tell me where the wrong is in that!"

Uyuniya seemed proud, but she masked her emotions with her glare against Skullius.

The Hybrid Warmoth was beat. He sighed and his expression softened.

"Tell me where the wrong is in trusting me just for a little while. If I wanted you dead, I would have done so as soon as you confessed how you lied to me. Both of you." Skullius shot Uyuniya a look. "But right now, I don't care for arguing or murdering. Everything living, Void-living and Null-living in reality feels the unnerving creep of Undeath. It's an enemy to us all, and in this case, it is pretty personal."

Elita sighed.

"We owe Suzamete, remember?" Skullius continued. "We said we'd help with the chaos on Aigas right now, and I seem to recall that you were all giddy about meeting her. If you thought Uyuniya could help with achieving that, fine. All I need is a bit of trust for this current problem."

"You keep speaking of trust. Funny," Uyuniya said, chuckling. "I just saw Void try to kill you in the name of injustice, an injustice by your benefactor, it seems. So, noble objectives aside, how is my trust well-invested in you... Skullius?" She seemed to hiss his name.

Aurolio would have loved to have had some popcorn. Kenno too. They didn't know it, but they might have been birds of a feather.

Skullius sighed. Perhaps it was better to change his approach. Uyuniya was very good at frying his patient nerves. He tried to cool himself off. The very look of her made him mad.

"Trust, huh? Well, you seem to be very invested in the idea kin. Fellow Voided Deathforms. That's all that matters to you, right? Who says I am NOT your kin?" Skullius said.

Uyuniya recoiled and scowled.

"What?"

In one of Skullius' hands, strings of his latest Exotic Parlous Nature wound between his fingers.

Elita and Uyuniya tensed.

"I don't have any particularly strong feelings towards Emmae, Void or even Serenity. Yet, I've harnessed Undeath, Null Life and at the moment, it looks like I'm partaking of Voided Death, in a way," Skullius said solemnly. He watched as his fingers twiddled. "For me, things aren't so black and white, not because I'm special, but because of circumstances. I don't know how thorough you are about the term 'kin', but for now, whether you like it or not, it seems I'm part of the family. Far from the main branch, but family all the same."

Elita was darting as fast as she could towards the Gajjkav. Her Void Clot sprouted from her head to her torso, and thus she couldn't use it to speed up like Uyuniya, who was already upon the Phantasmic Retainer, her body swallowed in darkness – in void.

Skullius had told Elita, Uyuniya and Aurolio that after Kenno's Territory vanished, they were to hit the Gajjkav with their strongest attacks as quickly as possible.

And thus...

"RAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Uyuniya roared and with her Voided Death Essence hand, she smashed into the Gajjkav with everything she had.

A blow from her with mild effort while using Void Clot had been enough to completely obliterate Skullius' body. This time she put everything she had in the punch and the tremor which spawned from the impact was atrocious!

After an astounding crash, the ground sank inwards inconsistently for a thousand kilometres. However, if it hadn't been transmuted by Kenno into a powerful iron capable of increasing its density and integrity by absorbing mana, the damage would have been five times greater and it would have carried over to rest of Feinheath.

The Gajjkav reacted rather... oddly.

It swelled, becoming misshapen and let out a peculiar, high-pitched shriek.

Then Elita was upon it. She couldn't hope to do as much damage as Uyuniya barehanded, but...

A golden-white flash splashed before her, manifesting Broodweiler right into her hand.

...And Elita went crazy.

The Gajjkav might not have been innately Divine, but the Amras charged into it gave it a level of reinforcement that qualified it as one.

Thus, when Elita slashed at it seven thousand times in a blink, it swelled again while shrieking horribly, growing in height to more than 50 meters!

...And then it burst.

Aurolio had yet to do anything. He, along with everyone else was flung away a great distance by the explosion.

'Was that supposed to happen?' he thought just as he steadied his body.

Uyuniya, Kenno, and Elita wondered the same.

Well, it was indeed supposed to happen like that.

The Gajjkav had been imbued with a Seed of the Fruit of World Myths that allowed the Gajjkav to trap a target within its body, and focus any attacks it received from the outside on said target. The damage received was then amplified by an exponential of 20 on the victim.

Indeed, 20!

This was the power of the Seed of the Fruit of World Myths known as Exorbitance!

It was quite a handy Seed. Skullius had discovered quite recently that Fulgardt had been right. The powers of the Insurgent Magnus had every potential to reach the Common Reality Leagues. The Seeds and the Phantasmic Retainers resonated with the strength of their user, even to the Divine. They, in a way, broke the Common Reality Leagues, but perhaps that was the point; they were supposedly a power given by someone who existed outside the Common Reality Leagues.

Skullius came flying out of the aftermath of the explosion.

He was unharmed. He was immune to the effects of his own Seeds, after all.

At the centre of the mess he had left, the Doom Knight was standing, hunched, with smoke rising from its body.

It too was unharmed. Mostly. A very thin, new set of scratches had appeared on its chest.

While Uyuniya, Elita, Aurolio and Kenno looked dismayed at this sight, however, Skullius was grinning.

He had identified the threshold, if only barely and he couldn't help but laugh.

'As I expected, its Immortal Physique is something else too. But it isn't invincible. Shockingly, this guy might just be a lackey,' he thought.

And then his [Legion Eyes] opened.

Instead of the green-gold glow they had exhibited until now, however, they expelled a mix of puce and turquoise. The shade was more vibrant than before, and the eyes started bleeding almost immediately. Great, throbbing veins popped up on Skullius' temples, seeming ready to burst. They could hardly endure it.

But Skullius was determined.

[You are funnelling the Pseudo-Void Exotic Parlous Nature, 'Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz' into the First Sage Tier Andori, 'Legion Eyes']

[...]

[A temporary mutation has been achieved]

[You have created the First Ascendant Tier Andori, Vision of Calamity'!]

Chapter 1358: ALL Hands (1)

When it came to all things ranked using the World to Reality measuring system, there was a noticeable chasm of power at the bridge from Realm to Void.

The Void notation expressed a shift in the league of strength a Treasure or an Exotic Parlous Nature held.

Treasures of this rank were even rare in the Warmoth's Treasure; there were only 11 of them, and they all had vicious egos.

When it came to Exotic Parlous Natures, meeting an enemy wielding one almost certainly spelled demise, but on the flip side...

[You are funnelling the Pseudo-Void Exotic Parlous Nature, 'Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz' into the First Sage Tier Andori, 'Legion Eyes']

[...]

[A temporary mutation has been achieved]

[You have created the First Ascendant Tier Andori, 'Vision of Calamity'!]

Skullius felt his second pair of eyes pulse with furious calamitous intent. The eyes seemed to bear an emotion of their own, and great throbbing veins bobbed on his skin leading into them. The puce and turquoise blasting from them intensified with each passing moment. Indeed, these eyes were powerful.

They were powered by a Pseudo-Void rank Exotic Parlous Nature that gave them its properties while enhancing their own powers a tier higher than before!

The Doom Knight noticed Skullius' activation of this power and hummed in what might have been interest. It slowly raised its sword and gazed upon him. The streams of blood gushing from its eyes gave away less of its amusement and more of its fury though. It remembered how it had been dealt in that odd realm.

Skullius noticed the attention, but...

'BY SOMANDA'S FALSE BEARD!' he cried inwardly. But he wasn't exclaiming because of the power he felt from the Andori. 'THE COST!'

The cost for each second this Andori was active was blasphemous!

10,000 units of Amras were devoured just to activate it, and 5,000 were required for its perpetual use!

'This is—' Skullius had begun when his eyes sparked so bright, they might have eclipsed the glow of the Mortal Sourcing Destiny Rune.

...And then the top of his head exploded.

...!!!

Elita, Kenno, Uyuniya and Aurolio gaped. This was not the sight they had expected from someone in whom their hopes for defeating the Doom Knight lied.

Skullius' body staggered back. His head was quickly reformed, the [Vision of Calamity] once again active.

A power like this, in exchange for its might, was very difficult to handle!

Skullius breathed out, shaking.

'Well, the dangers of using this are well advertised,' he thought. 'These...mutated eyes don't automatically expel their effects, it seems. Well, makes sense given how the very nature of their powers has changed.'

Right then, as Skullius was about to use them on the Doom Knight...

"BOSS! Did you pick a damn contract?! My guidance field is insisting that you do... again!" Kenno cried.

Skullius groaned. Right now? What was the big deal with this? Just what kind of consequence would there be for waiting a little while?

This matter was burning at the Hybrid Warmoth's ends. He cursed.

"Well, boss?!" Kenno cried. But before Skullius could tell him to shut it, a pasty, wrinkly handy whipped through the fabric of space and snatched the Unlimited Star somewhere unseen. The same happened to Elita and then to Aurolio.

And then only Skullius and Uyuniya remained.

Skullius clicked his tongue.

Right. It was as he had designed.

But the Doom Knight was prompted by the re-emergence of Araeyn's features on the battlefield. This time, he would not let the little thing get the better of him. Thus, he raised his sword, and a spark lit at its tip.

...!!!

It was the spark of an Andori, Skullius realised. He braced, as did Uyuniya who expanded the range of her Void Clot.

But it wasn't anything to do with the sword that fell on them first.

Quicker than either of the Divines could see, an odd sort of lightning, mucus green and accompanied by a cold mist blasted them. It came in a charge of millions of branches, smiting, zapping, ripping, cracking!

It was a Parlous Nature, Skullius would gather later, when his flesh was all but gone, vaporised to nothing, leaving only his distorted, misshapen, incomplete soul on display!

...!!!

It must have been a high tier Realm rank Parlous Nature or higher. It whittled his Immortal World Physique, Audacious Chassis of the Ninth Filament, and Andoris' defenses with almost no effort.

'Damn i—' Skullius was horrified, but then a great sword was cutting into his soul before the experience of the prior attack could settle. It was seamless. Skullius didn't see it coming, and...

"ARRRRRRRRRRRGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!"

His well of Amras trembled and destabilised.

His Andori spiralled out of control.

Indeed, the damage from the Doom Knight's sword had reached his Broader Existence!

It was taking no chances. It had reached him to cleave his soul before he could even see its shadow.

Skullius felt his Broader Existence keel and attempt to collapse in on itself. A few more raw blows and it would shatter, and he would die. And if the enemy used another potent attack like that green lightning, only half an attack would do.

But Skullius had not been a fool to not prepare for this.

Yes, he wasn't a match for the Deity in physical power or in Andori or anything else.

But he still had options.

One of them was to be activated not by him, who couldn't possibly do it midway through being butchered, but by Serenity.

"Hold on!" she cried and in Skullius' place...

[You have equipped the Immortal Realm Physique of the Third Stratum, 'Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather'!]

[+30% resistance to attacks a single league above the user's defences]

[+25% resistance to malevolent Deific forces]

[+25% to total Exora Amras Well reserves]

[+15% to Exora Amras regeneration speed]

[+42% to Broader Existence Defence]

[x2 to the effects of all physical properties under the Physique]

[...]

['Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather' resonates with 'King of Severing Twilight, AfterDark'!]

And right then, the next raw blow to complete the massacre on Skullius came and carved through his soul. Yet, instead of cutting through it like butter, it only made it a third of the way before pure black blobs poured out in excess from Skullius' soul!

Darkness cloaked Skullius and created a horrific armour that might have suited the Doom Knight better than the Hybrid Warmoth. It was slick, but bold, with a texture like granite on the outside. It refused a majority of the impact from the Doom Knight's sword.

...!

The creature was taken aback.

But something else forced it back.

On the horrifying armour's helm, two malevolent eyes shining in puce and turquoise appeared.

Their fury shot outward and smote the Doom Knight in a wave of colour and shockwave. Space was distorted into a screw around the Deity as it was forced back ten meters. It wasn't harmed, but there was a strangeness to the blow that made it grunt, wary.

Its opponent didn't wait for the result of the eyes, however.

He had already propped up his hand and...

[You are funnelling the Pseudo-Void Exotic Parlous Nature, 'Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz' into the Second Grand Tier Andori, 'Elusive Meta Carver'!]

[...]

[A temporary mutation has been achieved]

[You have created the First Sage Tier Andori, 'Nonstandard Splicer!]

[...]

[You are funnelling the Pseudo-Void Exotic Parlous Nature, 'Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz' into the Second Grand Tier Andori, 'Ruining Cutter'!]

[...]

[A temporary mutation has been achieved]

[You have created the First Sage Tier Andori, 'False Tickler!]

Chapter 1359: ALL Hands (2)

The Immortal Realm Physique, Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather was one of the gifts Skullius had been given by the Primeval Deity JOISEN ANTERRAS in exchange of one usage of his Exotic Parlous Nature, Second Divine Sinew.

He hadn't yet chosen to use it because he was unfamiliar with the nuances of having more than one Immortal Physique, but now, he had no choice but to use it. It was one whole rank above his current one, and its benefits proved to be much greater than Skullius could have ever imagined.

Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather resonated with his [King of Severing Twilight], further bolstering Skullius' defences, but of course, that was not the entirety of the product of the resonance. Skullius did not explore that immediately. Instead, he put all his focus on...

"[False Tickler]," he declared, and 100 units of Amras were depleted at once to fuel this variant of the [Ruining Cutter]. A single visible slash, coated in puce and turquoise moving at a hundred times the speed of light reached the Doom Knight while cutting space like a silken cloth.

SHIK!

A cut the length of an average human's arm appeared on its chest... and began to bleed.

...!!!

And there it was, the limit of the threshold of the Doom Knight's Immortal Physique.

Skullius grinned from behind the armour of darkness, though, his smile was ugly; as his distorted soul was ugly.

'Good.'

But a hundred [False Ticklers] were already rapid firing from him towards the Doom Knight.

The enslaved Deity grumbled. To think the pests now had attacks that could harm it.

<INSOLENT.>

It was gone from the trajectory of the slashes in the next nano-second. Branches of its greenish lightning stormed towards Skullius and Uyuniya as a counterattack again, bold and dangerous.

The latter barely seemed affected because of her Void Clot. The elemental tendrils didn't reach her before and they didn't start now!

'A cheat,' Skullius would have thought.

But he too wasn't affected by the odd Exotic Parlous Nature either!

"[Nonstandard Splicers]," Skullius had declared, only for show. The new invisible slashes – twenty-five in total – had been launched almost at the same time as the [False Ticklers]!

...!!!

With meticulous control, the slashes cut things that couldn't be cut with a normal sword strike.

Some of the branches of lightning reached the Hybrid Warmoth and clashed against his armour, but the rest were severed at the very thing that gave them motion. Their ability to travel... was cut. Their user suffered the same fate.

The Deity suddenly found itself paralysed.

It had taken fifteen slashes – aimed at the Doom Knight specifically – but Skullius had managed to cut its movements all the same, and thus it couldn't move, even if it was just for half a microsecond.

But that slim time frame was enough for the Gajjkav to appear behind the Doom Knight and devour it again.

...And then the 100 [False Ticklers] Skullius had let loose before, curved and hurtled towards the Gajjkav, striking it eagerly!

And but of course, the Seed of the Fruit of World Myths, Exorbitance, which facilitated the 20 exponential damage to the target within the Gajjkav, was active!

...!!!

Four of the [False Ticklers] had struck the Gajjkav when Skullius looked up.

He cursed.

The Doom Knight had escaped at the last second, flashing through some kind of warping ability into the sky from the Phantasmic Retainer!

But it hadn't escaped unscathed. Four gaping gashes from which blood poured out marked its torso severely. They were incredibly deep, but they were also healing quickly.

'He must have reinforced himself with Amras too, otherwise, he should have suffered more damage than that!' Skullius thought.

And indeed. The 20 exponential was a deadly ability. Unfortunately, the vessel for Exorbitance was not inescapable.

<WHAT MANNER OF HUMILIATION...!> the Doom Knight roared, cocking up a storm. Indeed, it was furious. Strands of Undeath energy stitched together its flesh, but that alone could not assuage its rage.

Uyuniya's Void Clot range expanded and drew in Skullius into the darkness. He slowly drifted within the void towards the woman. A part of him thought:

'My clone travelled through this void. Could he find his way back through it too? If he's still alive?'

Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Uyuniya seemed to give him an appraisal. His armour, prompted by the Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather might have left an impression on her.

Skullius used this chance to fully recover his flesh under the armour and while he was at it, he used [Sagacious Antiphon of Dawnlight] on Uyuniya, restoring all her limbs, all of which he was responsible for severing.

She flexed them and scoffed. She was satisfied, but she hid it. Skullius extended a network of mana to her head.

"The least you can do is say 'thank you'," he said to her.

"Kiss my royal ass," was her unprincess-like reply. Skullius knew a princess who would have said the opposite in this scenario.

'Worth a try.'

It was an odd feeling, being in the Void Clot. Odd, but not unpleasant. In fact, Skullius felt both [King of Severing Twilight: AfterDark] and [Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather] brimming with some kind of excitement because of being in the deep dark.

'Right. I did surmise before that Fulgardt had some connection to the great void because of [Evil Darkness]. I wonder if I was actually right,' Skullius thought.

Unfortunately, he was neither as excited as his Andori and Immortal Physique nor as experienced as Fulgardt. Being in the Void Clot actually unnerved him. He was sure it irked Void.

If not for Serenity's assurance that he was safe from another of Void's attacks, he might have fled from the Void Clot.

All while thinking and saying all these things, Skullius' senses had not left the Doom Knight. It healed quickly while also stabbing them with a hateful glare. It seemed to be analysing this defense of theirs.

"How safe are we from all his attacks?" he asked Uyuniya.

"If it gets serious with its output of Amras, any of its Realm rank Exotic Parlous Natures and Ascendant tier Andori will reach us without fail," she replied and looked at him. "You better have a way to whittle at it faster than it can shred us to pieces."

"Oh, I do," Skullius said. "Are you a dual-wielder?"

"Yes. Why?"

Right then, Skullius' nimbus billowed, and a Treasure crept out of it. It was a golden gauntlet that looked as though it was made of countless little parts. It was the Malefic Gold Hand – one of the gifts Skullius had gotten from his contract with JOISEN ANTERRAS.

Skullius let out six streams of [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness] and began to touch them one by one using the gauntlet.

One by one, they began to change into Realm rank swords, pretty, dotted with stars and with halos for cross guards!

He wielded four on his own and gave the rest to Uyuniya who looked at them with intrigue. Skullius would have asked her why she wasn't using her own sword anymore – the Incubating Masterpiece – but gave up on that. She must have had her reasons, and she was unlikely to tell.

A skin of Exora Mead peeked from Skullius' nimbus and he took it and began to drink, replenishing his rapidly depleting Amras.

Only the Deities knew how much he needed to restore his energy reserves.

However, before he was done replenishing, the enemy had charged and done the exact same thing Uyuniya said would render her Void Clot useless.

Chapter 1360: ALL Hands (3)

"How do you do it?" Aurolio asked as they looked through the small crevice in space Araeyn had created so that they could have a look at the battle raging on in Aigas.

"What?" Elita asked, not taking her eyes away from the action. "The Void Clot?"

"Nah. I've mostly figured out how you do that, remember? No. I'm more interested in your Mastered Void Gate aspect. You're able to output much more power with it than I can with my own aspect. We're both only Masters, even though..." Aurolio sized her up. Elita was a little buffed up. "Even though I recognise that you've earned strengths outside just your Stage."

Elita sighed.

She had been quite interested in Aurolio when she first heard about him from Skullius. He was the Hybrid Warmoth's only point of reference for Voided Deathforms until Elita and Uyuniya showed up.

To Elita's displeasure, however, Aurolio had turned out to be rather average, though she had half-expected it given that the pale man had had trouble dealing with Skullius before he ascended to Divinity.

"You mind sharing what your aspect does? I could help you from there," she said. Kenno, who was next to Elita, waiting for her to tell him when it was his turn to jump into the fray on Aigas, folded his arms, listening in.

"Sure," Aurolio said. "My aspect interprets the void as boundless strength that can be manifested in different ways. I can conjure clones, I can define defense as strength, I can define speed as strength and so on and so forth."

Aurolio nearly laughed at himself.

The him before fighting Skullius across the Central Boundary wouldn't have shared this information. If he'd met Elita then, he'd have been beaten to oblivion. He preferred the method he

had been humbled with in this timeline. Being bested by a dragon, a super necromancer, a King of the Null Verse and a four-armed anomaly amongst anomalies made for a much better tale.

"I see," Elita said, but her brow rose as she turned to him. "You use these aspects interchangeably and whenever you need them, right?"

"Yeah. Doesn't anyone with any unique powers?"

"Not at the Divine-level and not with one-of-a-kind abilities like these," Elita said. "I don't blame you. When I crafted my aspect – which interprets void as strength I can only wield when exercising selflessness – I almost fell into the trap of trying to produce power beyond what I actually had, without any costs. We anomalies don't exist outside every rule."

"I see. So, there was some kind of trade-off. I noticed it especially with that Sif or rather, Sif-like woman," Aurolio said. "The effect of her aspect only applied for a very small window of time. What is it, some kind of Rule or Creed?"

"Sort of," Elita said, and a flash of green light illuminated her face from the hole they were looking through from within the dimension Araeyn had created. "Rules and Creeds are caricature of something that applies in the wider reality to all – Divines and Deities alike: the Fundamental Barter.

"What's that?" Aurolio asked, frowning.

"It's a concept not really considered part of the general cache of Divine qualities and their ranks – the Common Reality Leagues, as they are called – but it was created by one of the Primeval Deities, the strongest Deities in this reality. It's a long story, but there's a queer desire among these super powerful Deities to make interactions between stronger and weaker Divines fair – to some extent. So, one of them created the Fundamental Barter."

"It pretty much applies to anyone with Divine power or near-Divine power. For anomalies like us, we are guaranteed access to the Fundamental Barter automatically since our powers bear potential for the Divine from the start. Some powerful experts tend to even use the Fundamental Barter while mistaking it for Creeds or Rules. As long as you meet the conditions, it applies no matter where you are. The Primeval Deity who created the concept isn't particularly interested in recognition, like AKHASHA. No contracts and all. Oh, you wouldn't know who AKHASHA is."

Aurolio rolled his eyes.

"Get to the point. Great, I have access to this Fundamental Barter, but what does it do?" he groused.

Elita didn't mind his tone.

"The Fundamental Barter allows an expert to bolster the power of their abilities by an exponential of 10 if they limit the practical efficiency of an attack in two ways. One, is time. Limiting the duration an opponent is exposed to an ability or the duration you can use said ability. Two, limiting the number of targets who can be attacked with an ability at a time. These two conditions automatically raise the power And efficiency of an ability by the exponential of 5, but adding more restrictions after these two, boosts it even further. Of course, sometimes, this could be detrimental."

Aurolio was immediately swallowed by his thoughts.

The Fundamental Barter. He could see how it was the principle for which Creeds and Rules were based, but those paled in comparison to it. An exponential increase in attack power and efficiency of an ability was insane. If Incandescent Stagers and beyond were capable of that, they would be monstrosities.

Elita must have mistaken Aurolio's silence for confusion.

"If it's too hard to grasp, just think of time. In the wider reality, the flow of events are measured in Consternals and Consterns which—"

"I get it, damn it. I'm not fucking stupid," Aurolio snapped. "How do you invoke this Fundamental Barter?"

The Doom Knight attacked before Skullius replenished an amount of Amras worth noting. The tip of its great sword sparked and it swiped across, its hand a blur that neither Skullius nor Uyuniya saw quite as well.

Even if they did see it, they would have expected a dreadful, generic slash that cut across the Void Clot, but instead, what assaulted them was a rather complex sword technique.

Pale blue, ethereal boxes appeared around both Uyuniya and Skullius, and at once, their ability to move was revoked.

...!!!

Within the boxes, tiny, sword-shaped needles, shining in white could be seen. They drilled into the two's bodies immediately after the boxes appeared, affecting neither flesh nor armour, but the soul.

Skullius immediately felt a slightly ticklish sensations on many points around his soul, and they grew less pleasant by the instant, but Uyuniya screeched in agony. He sensed her soul getting borne through by the needles, but...

They didn't simply cut into her soul. Once they pinched in, they were set ablaze, bathed in Undeath energy, and Skullius noted the activation of a second Andori with that energy source!

'Damn it! There's nothing stopping this thing from corrupting our souls with Undeath, is there?' Skullius noted in a panic, recalling how he had been agonizing over why Uyuniya's Voided Death Essence was stronger than Elita's. If the Doom Knight's Undeath energy had that much more intensity than either his or Uyuniya's energies...

But Skullius' Immortal Physical shielded him from the full force of the needles, at least for now. Quickly, Skullius focused his [Vision of Calamity] on the Doom Knight. A dreadful pulse of energy zoomed and slammed into it, but the Doom Knight only staggered back, and kept its Andori active.

'Damn it! Why aren't these eyes doing anything?' Skullius thought, frustrated.

But right then... what he expected his mutant eyes to do was done. Just not by him.

The boxes around him and Uyuniya flickered and vanished. The Doom Knight suddenly groaned. Its leg quivered ever so slightly and then its eyes burned fiercer in red. Whatever had happened to it passed in less than a blink.

Skullius was confused.

He turned to Uyuniya. She was wheezing and her Void Clot suddenly dissipated. Had she done something?

"Wait. Did you use your—"

"Don't let him use that Andori again!" she cried.

'Right!' thought Skullius, but the Doom Knight had already raised its sword again, sparks brimming from its tip.

An Andori of this calibre was likely higher than even Skullius' [Vision of Calamity] eyes at the Ascendant Tier. If it was used again, especially by an enemy with so much Amras while his and Uyuniya's reserves were depleting...

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Bandit King's Boundless Collection!" came Kenno's sudden call, and his Territory erupted, wide and quick. A nervous grin was on his face. Quite honestly, neither he nor Elita could have predicted when exactly to jump in since the battle in Aigas was moving at a pace hard for either of them to comprehend. It had been sheer luck.

Skullius was pleased all the same. The Doom Knight, on the other hand, seemed to switch from the sword-type Andori it had been about to use, to another. It meant to dismantle the Territory... and it succeeded.

What appeared to be tentacles of ugly, red, rough flesh whipped from the joints of its arms and smacked the Territory's edges with extraordinary force right as its GeoScape was finishing its formation.

The Territory might as well have been sack cloth.

Yet... it held.

Skullius' Noboboyama imbued with the Womb held the Territory together while Skullius filled the Territory with [Evil Darkness]. And then the Territory forged back into one.

Kenno was already sacrificing more of his dwindling Creeds by then.

"Majestic Territory Expulsion, Bandit King's Boundless Collection... Bandit King's Boundless Collection... Bandit King's Boundless Collection... Bandit King's Boundless Collection!"

The Territory thrummed, empowered by one of the tricks the possessed Skullius had left behind.

"Thirty-fourth time's charm!" roared Kenno with a grin and he made way for Uyuniya and Skullius streaking towards the Doom Knight with swords of darkness and light.