

Undead 1381

Chapter 1381: Pressed For Resolve (1)

[Please wait...]

Skullius felt something significant churning in his Broader Existence - a great tremor. It was the Andori, [King of Severing Twilight: AfterDark]. Like skills in the body, Andori were also branded to the interior of the Broader Existence, and they circled the Amras well constantly.

The last time the Hybrid Warmoth had experienced such a reaction from his Broader Existence, was when the Doom Knight had blasted him with its green lightning Exotic Parlous Nature and carved through his soul using its great sword. The damage had reached his Broader Existence then, and it had pulsed violently. The sensation Skullius felt right now was similar, only it didn't hurt like hell.

But even then, the damage the Doom Knight had done to his Broader Existence might have killed him if it had been delivered right. The only reason that blow with the sword had not killed Skullius was because it reached his Broader Existence indirectly. (This was how most Divines and above bested each other, since attacks that targeted the Broader Existence directly were extremely rare.) If the blow had been aimed at his Broader Existence, it would have either collapsed in on itself or shattered like glass.

Thankfully though, the Broader Existence had the capacity to heal on its own especially when damage was received as a result of either the body or soul being left vulnerable.

'Ahh...' Skullius moaned, pleased. The feeling was reminiscent of an annoying itch deep in the flesh getting scratched mysteriously, satisfactorily by something unseen, ethereal and active. ['King of Severing Twilight: AfterDark' is being forcibly elevated!]

[.....]

[4.1% of the siphoned matter from using Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz has been used up in the process]

[...]

[...]

[...]

[You have acquired the Third Ascendant Tier Andori, 'Forbidden Monastery of Black's Scion!']

The Andori was swiftly established in Skullius' Broader Existence and he couldn't help but give a hefty sigh of both pleasure and relief. He felt it pulse and throb with impatience in his body. It was eager, almost exhibiting the traits of a strong-willed Treasure.

'Forbidden Monastery of Black's Scion? That's an odd name, but it just might be fitting...' Skullius thought.

But right then, Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather reacted viscerally. It coated Skullius with a sleek, dark armour that hissed black in smoky trails around him. The armour looked neither vicious nor saintly, but it gave the impression that it was formidable when it came to protecting its user.

It seemed the Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather only reacted this way - granting Skullius armour-when he was either in danger, or when it felt a strong connection to something within him.

The latter seemed especially true for this current circumstance, as indeed, Expanded Shadow Fiend's Leather was resonating with [Forbidden Monastery of Black's Scion]. Flashes of a kind of darkness only Skullius could distinguish from the rest ran across his armour, thrumming and throbbing.

'This is...' he had begun when a sharp call interrupted his thoughts.

"ELITA! ELITAAAAAA! HELP!!!"

Skullius recognised the voice at once, as did Elita, of course.

It was Revia, and she was crying for help from a great distance away.

Amidst all the chaos that followed what should have been a simple adventure to exact judgement on a corrupt organisation, Revia's own challenge against the Purity had almost been forgotten.

Elita especially felt ashamed that she had completely lost all thoughts concerning Revia until just now. She was racing towards what had been the Purity headquarters in the next second, followed by Uyuniya and Aurolio.

Skullius frowned, and he followed too. He would have loved to get acquainted with his new Andori, but the larger bit of him saw the look on Elita's face and was immediately reminded that he and her had yet to resolve their 'issues'. He wanted that done sooner rather than later; he wanted to find out if Elita was suitable to keep as an ally for now, or if she needed help. That thought would backfire on the Hybrid Warmoth quite soon, unfortunately.

Sila, Araeyn and Kenno followed after Skullius, curious as to what exactly was going on now.

The great fissures and craters made by the battle made travel on land rather difficult. Well, it would have been much worse if Kenno hadn't transmuted the ground into the sturdy steel beforehand.

As the group continued on, flying through the sky, they passed the cleaved, battered remains of the Second-ranked Paladin Champion, Mercella. Her skeleton looked rather pitiful. The nine had sent her corpse to fight against the Doom Knight, claiming that their new order, all 'sponsored' by Elita, would purge the evil thing, but it had been more than obvious that the corpse wouldn't so much as reach within two meters of the undead Deity, much less contend against it in battle.

Prompted by the look of Mercella, Skullius gave Elita a look.

The impression he had had at first, when Elita brought him here, claiming she wanted to end the Purity, still gnawed at him. Regardless of everything that had followed after, he still felt

betrayed.

The former Paladin Champion felt the sting from his gaze.

"Quit with that judgemental look, Skullius," she said to him, frowning.

"I wish I could. There really was no need for you to go this far," Skullius hissed. Elita scoffed. She seemed surer of herself now. Skullius imagined she felt justified in what she had done through just

how much Uyuniya had contributed to the battle against the Doom Knight. And fair enough, because of this Elita had played her part in delivering on the promise to Suzamete to save Aigas.

But Skullius wasn't convinced. He was moreso bothered by the fact that it was Elita who did such a thing, than by the deed itself.

"ELITA!"

The group had arrived at the source of the voice.

The Purity headquarters was no more, but there were a lot of remains - a truly staggering amount. It appeared that the reason much of these remains, stitched together by disease and rot persisted even amidst the shockwaves and fallout of absurd attacks, was a mix of Serenity's Null Life Essence dome and a World rank item that erected a barrier around them.

Skullius had sensed it before, when he and Elita were going down the levels of the Purity headquarters; more precisely, he had sensed the sword Uyuniya had come from - the Incubating Masterpiece - and the artefact which erected the barrier. It appeared the latter could be used more than once, though it couldn't possibly weather through the powers which

had been contending closeby.

However much the amalgamation of flesh had persisted, it were scorched, charred and disintegrated. The nine still thrived, but barely. They spoke in frail voices, like whispers, their eyes honing in on the group with looks of agony and terror.

"A... new order... A new order..." they kept saying.

Other than the masses of diseased flesh, a few torn corpses could be seen... and then there was Elita, bloody, broken, and missing a few limbs. She was hugging Alaris' body. His legs had been burned off by something powerful and the rest of him was charred steak. He was still breathing, however, miraculously.

Chapter 1382: Pressed For Resolve (2)

Skullius was astonished at the sight. He hadn't expected Alaris to be here. If the barrier hadn't messed with his ability to sense everything within the Purity headquarters concisely, he would have noticed him lurking within immediately.

Quite different from his own look of shock, however, Elita donned a face heavy with guilt at the sight of Revia. The weight of it grew tenfold when Revia exposed her relief at seeing her and smiled. The burden of tension was released from the former undead just from seeing the woman whom she had considered to be an older sister.

And yet, this older sister, Elita, had, at some point given up on everything she had left behind on Aigas. When Void had taken her, everything had become bigger, broader and less black and white. Suddenly, there were more evils around her, but some of them were necessary evils that she understood. Good characters she met turned out to be evil and evil characters she met turned to be good... and then evil, and then good.

There were selfish men and selfless men. There were frauds and people who led people towards horrific beliefs, channelling their faiths towards ominous causes. Elita had loathed them. However, broad-minded she became, she hated those who misused the faith of others and preached evil doctrines. And perhaps it was because Direction wished it, but she had met a lot of them on the many worlds Void delivered her to.

At one point, Elita had even begun to detest herself and everyone who wore the silver armour of the Purity, whether they be a Purity Knight or Paladin Champion. She had felt sick. She had considered Deities in many ways, revering some, loathing others. Everything was a mess.

...And then there was Revia, the younger sister she never had, looking up at her with the same eyes she remembered. Elita couldn't meet them the same way.

She saw Revia as a child who didn't know any better. She didn't care that Revia had seemingly come to the Purity headquarters for her (Elita's) sake, even while plagued by a special brand of undeath.

The feeling of indifference haunted her infinitely in the short span of time it took for Skullius to use [Sagacious Antiphon of Dawnlight] on both Revia and Alaris, healing them immediately.

The latter drew in a deep breath as he spasmed to his feet. It must have been a reflex. He looked left, right, up and down and then he met the uncanny group standing before him and Revia. He shuddered at the sight of Skullius.

Revia rose, looking at her limbs with a smile. Admittedly, she had loathed being reverted to a living being again, but she was slowly starting to appreciate it. She looked up at Skullius. Her smile dimmed a little, but she kept it on.

"T-thank you," she said to Skullius. She owed him a double debt now, though, she was a little conflicted. His relationship with Elita seemed... inconsistent.

The Hybrid Warmoth merely nodded to her before turning to Alaris who kept gawking at him.

"Alaris... It's nice to see you again," he said.

Alaris couldn't even begin to compute what the sentence meant, of course. Where had he ever met such a creature?

Skullius realised this and made it easier for him. He created a mana link using the oh-so-powerful [Hegemon of Sorcerous Mana] and fed him a direct stream of information that gave Alaris a simple appreciation of what was happening.

Alaris drew back, shuddering.

"F-Festos? It's you?!" he cried.

Skullius gave him a small smile.

"In the flesh," he said, and then he pointed a finger to the side. Ju`wte sparked violently from it and opened a rift in space – a doorway into the Empyrean Bosom.

Everyone except Araeyn, Kenno and Elita gaped. A portion of the Bosom was revealed through the rift and two Strawlers appeared within.

"Theurien is waiting for you in there. He'll explain everything," Skullius said.

Alaris gave him several different looks. He was evidently having trouble digesting all this. In the end, he passed through the rift and the Strawlers guided him deep into the Empyrean Bosom. The

rift closed soon after, leaving behind a deep silence that was only filled in by a comment from Aurolio.

"Always something new with you, huh?" the pale man said with the shake of his head.

Everyone ignored him, especially Elita, Revia, Skullius and Uyuniya.

Revia had her eyes pinned on Elita, as did Skullius. Elita grew increasingly frustrated with their stares, and didn't know where to look; Uyuniya seemed to find it hilarious.

"Elita..." Revia was the one to break the ice while sounding like a thin, crackling sheet of ice herself. "What's going on here?"

Elita drew a shaky breath.

Aurolio, like Uyuniya seemed to find this interaction interesting. Thus, he created a connection of mana between Elita, Revia, Uyuniya and Skullius, all for the benefit of the terrestrial woman. He was lucky Skullius was too absorbed in what was happening to care to stop him.

Elita didn't know how to respond initially.

She opened her mouth, but no words came out. The sudden cry of the nine right then from the distance made it even harder for her to form words.

"I came here to destroy the Purity," she finally said and managed a small smile while looking at Revia. "I assume you came to do the same."

Revia, for a moment, was filled with joy, but then it all vanished. She struggled.

"You? You came to destroy the Purity?" she asked, and Elita saw the confusion in her eyes. It mirrored the look Skullius had just given her. She did her best to ignore it.

"Well, truth be told, I destroyed it before I even got here," she said.

Revia seemed to shrink by the second. There was a greater conflict within her, but she buried it to appear stronger than she was.

"I... I guess I wouldn't understand the how. You're so much stronger than I remember." She chuckled hollowly and blinked several dozen times. Indeed. She remembered the Elita who was weaker than her by several leagues. The one she had only looked up to in terms for morale and advice. "But, why? And where have you been?"

"It'd take a long time to explain," Elita said.

"Oh. Right."

An awkward, painful silence ensued. Skullius scoffed at it.

"Is it really all that hard to explain?" he said to Elita, who gave him a sharp, furious look.

"Back off," the former Paladin Champion told him.

"Why? I saw it before, you know. Somehow, when you're speaking to this woman, Revia, you can't quite defend yourself as readily as you do against me. Why is that?" Skullius hissed.

"Because IT'S SO DAMN COMPLICATED TO PUT IN WORDS SHE CAN UNDERSTAND!"

Elita flew into a rage.

Revia was so shocked she stumbled back and fell.

This was the first time she had ever seen this Elita angry, but she was yet to see the fullness of Voided Deathform's fury.

Chapter 1383: Pressed For Resolve (3)

Elita stabbed Skullius with a hot look. Her face might have been a kind of wrinkled, dark, thick sheet of paper. Voided Death Essence blazed from her body, sputtering and scorching. It was violent indeed. It fascinated Aurolio, unnerved Kenno, frightened Revia, but Skullius felt absolutely nothing when he felt the hostility from it directed towards him.

Elita's jaw danced as she ground her teeth.

"What do you want from me, really? The Elita you remember and the one standing before you are two different people, yes, but that's far from being a bad thing. I wasn't an innocent knight back then, plagued with righteous ideals, obedient and charismatic. I was just an idiot and a coward. That Elita couldn't possibly have even dreamed of becoming a Divine, not until she realised some dark truths about the world. Void didn't implant ideas in my head as you assume, I discovered how reality really is on my own," she hissed at him, spittle flying from her mouth.

Revia shuddered.

Elita pointed at herself.

"This is me, Skullius, the Elita primed for Divinity. Get used to it. What I did... I did because I believed it was for the greater good. A necessarily evil that both purges other evils and makes room for better courses for others – others who are still like the old me! I saw it with my own eyes. My first necessary evil was justified. The old order of the Purity died, but an ally was born in their place, an ally that both helped you fight a powerful enemy and played a vital role in increasing your strength. Yes, that's on me!"

Skullius scowled. He meant to say something, but Elita shut him down. She answered it before he could say.

"Yes. Many people who didn't need to die died in the end. That's on me too. I didn't mean for it to happen and I don't like the feel of their deaths on my hands, but it happened and there's nothing you or me can do about it, alright? Alright?" She might have been a hot kettle. Steam issued from her nostrils. "Dear Quintess! You see? This is why I didn't come out and say everything in the beginning, Skullius! For all the power you have, great power, divine potential and whatnot, your mind is still drowned in naivete. Just like mine was back then. It's a mystery how you've gotten this far."

"No, no, no, no," Skullius said, wagging a finger at Elita. "NO. You don't get to judge me like that. Sure, I don't know what you saw out there that changed you to this degree, but I've had my fair share of opportunities to learn, and not just about the world. I know where I draw the line, and WHY. I'm just trying to figure out if you do."

"The line?" Elita expelled a laugh that wasn't a laugh. "You would really say that when you live in a reality where powers infinitely higher than you make territories in the great void, living as they

please? Skullius, how have you touched upon all three Existential Parallels and still managed to miss that there are barely any lines to cross?"

Skullius looked appalled.

"You're kidding me. Do you mean to tell me that to you, there are no limits to what you will do for benefit?"

"For certain things, and for certain people, YES, Skullius!" There was no doubt to be found in Elita's eyes. "You're privileged enough to have rallied an entire group of people who will live and die for you. That's good, but I'm beginning to wonder if you've considered just how far you will you go to keep them alive."

Right then, the image of Allora spun into Skullius' head.

He regretted her death more than anyone knew.

She had been keen to prove herself when she asked him if she could try to become an Unlimited back then. She had acquired a Hidden Class that gave her unlimited mana as long as certain conditions were met, and she had been instrumental in the battle across the Central Boundary. She had proven her resolve and her worth to the end, when Actuass had stabbed and obliterated her soul.

She had died in Skullius' arms.

The memory was horrific. Skullius had made a mural for her in the Empyrean Hatcher to honour Allora... and to try and offset the burden she had left in him.

He couldn't understand it in full, truthfully, but he was trying to.

It was for this reason that Elita's words really bit Skullius where it hurts. She assumed so much about him falsely. To be fair, he did the same to her, but he was neither willing to admit it nor back down. Discover stories at empire

Other than perhaps reacting violently, physically, Skullius couldn't find a way to respond to the former Paladin Champion.

Thankfully for him, Revia stepped in.

She was shaking. Her bloodshot eyes and suddenly shrunken face expressed all there was to express regarding how she felt.

"What is it that you did to the Purity, Elita?" she said, half-whispering. She might have been a mouse. "I...I have never known you as the vengeful or violent type Elita. You taught me to keep myself in check... even... even when I had the power to do something about the status quo. Even when the Purity judged you unfairly, you seemed content and—"

Elita didn't soften her words.

"I was a coward and a fool," she cut Revia off. "As for the Purity... I did what I failed to do back then. I exposed the Purity for it really was. The Deities never needed the Purity. They had their Heralds. The Purity was a hub for cruel, false beliefs. I gave them ideas that they presumed to be sent to them by higher powers and they took the bait. They revealed what they really were inside. They revealed all their plans for a new order, plans that didn't have the sanctity of Quintess, Listafelle and Suzamete. They didn't hesitate to devolve into monsters. The worst kind."

Elita shot a glance towards the nine, attached together in the form of a disgusting pillar.

Revia shuddered. She was close to bursting with tears.

Skullius, on the other hand, was nodding, not because he agreed with Elita, but because he was finally starting to piece together how exactly Elita had 'exposed' the Purity and the nine.

"So it all started with a LIMITED CONTRACT, huh?" he said.

Chapter 1384: How She Did It

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Elita turned to the Hybrid Warmoth. Her fury turned flaccid.

"Yes. I used a LIMITED CONTRACT. Even without returning to Aigas – which I didn't want to at the time – I could interact with the Purity. Contracts are a way to bypass a world's Rules. Knowing

the greedy nature of the nine, I knew they would take my words as gospel. I offered them a contract with two Treasures within it and they were ecstatic," she explained, a look of scorn on her face.

The two Treasures which she had offered through the contract, had been the Treasure which produced the barrier, and Uyuniya's Realm rank sword, Deceptive Incubating Masterpiece. The former was actually a communication tool that erected a powerful barrier around a large space and then projected information to everyone within that enclosed space.

"I knew Mercella's Divine Blessing could harness plagues. Theoretically, it could produce a Divine, if used right. Void confirmed it for me," Elita continued. "I explained it to the nine. I proposed the idea and told them that if they did it all correctly, they would have a combat unit that could dominate the world. They could use it for their whims. And oh, they were incredibly pleased to hear it."

Skullius scoffed, disgusted.

"I see. I was wondering how YOU managed to offer the Purity a contract. So it was Void who offered them the contract," he said, neglecting everything else Elita explained.

He recalled it then. How Fulgardt had said making a contract with Void was more beneficial than making one with Primeval Deities. Serenity had also confirmed it. She couldn't make contracts because of her restrictions, but Void and Emmae could, and probably with lesser restrictions than that which Primeval Deities had to go through.

"Naturally," Elita said. She didn't like the way Skullius looked at him, but she ignored it. "By harnessing plagues and infusing them into Cursed Bloods like me, Mercella could complete the Mortal Binding requirement for Divinity. Ember Tasting wouldn't be a problem. She already had access to a Divine Blessing, and with the help of the Higher Order Priests who wield artefacts imbued with Blessings and Divine energy, she wouldn't need long to complete the Ember Tasting requirement. All that remained was Limit Breaking. There was no conceivable way for Mercella to reach the Beyond the Veil Stage from the Incandescent Stage, but that wasn't a problem. I wasn't working to make her a Divine. Uyuniya would fulfil that last requirement herself."

And indeed, that was the case.

Contracts could be offered even to individuals without the guidance field. It was a lot harder to interact without one, but not impossible. Thus, with Void's help, Elita offered the nine a contract with the Deceptive Incubating Masterpiece. The Treasure had already been housing Uyuniya at that time, as was one of its various properties.

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[Deceptive Incubating Masterpiece]

+Realm (Wicked)+

A unique sword whose blade will ensnare anyone reflected on its surface in a snug, incubating cushion that responds with 100x efficiency to all forms of beneficial stimulus from the outside.

...

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The nine had given the Deceptive Incubating Masterpiece to Mercella, just as Elita had instructed with the other Treasure: the communication tool. As it was attached to her the whole time, everything beneficial Mercella experienced, happened a 100 times greater to Uyuniya.

Thus, the Voided Deathform had completed Ember Tasting and Mortal Binding.

As for Limit Breaking, Uyuniya had already been at the peak of the power system in her world.

All this didn't need to be spelled out to Skullius. As soon as he realised Elita had used a LIMITED CONTRACT, most of his questions were answered. He didn't even bother asking how Elita made a contract with the nine when they didn't have an Exotic Parlous Nature to offer – as was the mechanic for how LIMITED CONTRACTS were attracted.

Judging again by what Fulgardt had said, contracts offered by the Existential Parallels did not conform to the norms of the Common Reality Leagues - a standard for anomalous powers like theirs. If Serenity didn't have many restrictions, she would have been able to do the same.

"You really did orchestrate it all," Skullius said. How he began to pace around showed just how stunned he was.

Revia too was stunned. She didn't understand half of what Elita said, but the rest was easy to piece together. She had been at the Purity headquarters before Elita and Skullius had shown up. She had heard all the cryptic, horrifying things the nine had said, and slain a large number of Purity Knights and even Paladin Champions who seemed diseased both literally and figuratively.

To think all of that... was Elita's doing.

"I...It was you?" Revia said. Her face looked as though it would fall off her skull. Her eyes were miniature seas, dank with conflict. "But... how could you?"

"I just said ho—"

"HOW COULD YOU?!" Revia screamed.

And it was Elita's turn to reel, surprised.

Revia might have been drawing in all the air in the world.

"Have you any idea what it took for me to do what I did? To kill people I once called peers? I agonised over it for months! I...I joined hands with that necromancer... I...I did so many... things I knew I would have to pay for someday! I did it all for you. To find you. To rescue you. To make the nine answer for what they had done with you! But... but..." As her speech broke, it began clearer and clearer why Revia was upset when her goal had aligned with Elita's.

"You did the exact same thing I did, Revia," Elita said patiently.

"NO, I DIDN'T!" she screamed. "I didn't come here to kill anyone but the nine – if there proved to be need for it. I didn't come here to brandish my sword against Purity Knights who didn't know any better! I only did so because they kept raving on about some new order! They were diseased, they were brainwashed, and I HAD to kill them to get to the nine! To find you, dammit!" The breath caught in her throat and she could have choked on it. "But... but now it appears YOU turned them into those monsters?!"

Elita cursed.

"Then you did them a favour by cutting them down. That is all there is to it."

The words horrified Revia. She couldn't believe it was Elita speaking.

"How can you say that so casually?" she squeaked.

"How can I not? There's nothing I can do about the dead."

Revia seemed to turn mad. Again, all the things she had done just to find Elita bore down on her like an avalanche. Had it all been for nothing? Was she also... naïve?

"So that's it, then? There's no limit for you? You are willing to cross any line and weather through the consequences, head held high? Detached?" she said. The mocking tone in her words was unmistakable.

Elita didn't reply. Her face seemed to turn colder than before. Revia could hardly recognise it.

"I...I was ready to die for my sins after I had found and saved you... I knew what I was doing was wrong.... but I had faith in the result. I... I...just had to find you..." Her tongue failed her.

Elita pitied her, but it didn't show.

"You found me. But you don't have to die," she said.

Her words no longer meant anything to Revia. The ferocious look on the silver-haired woman's face, like that of a wounded panther, showed it.

Skullius felt sorry for her. He found that he could relate to Revia more than he could to Elita. He understood it all because of—

...!

Fifty-nine green lights surging up into the sky, accompanied by fierce pressures cut apart the tense, sombre atmosphere right then. They were located in varying areas within Aigas, and they all pulsed, whipping against the darkness of the night perhaps to draw attention to themselves.

But this was swiftly proven incorrect. The lights suddenly converged towards the edge of Pelian... towards Skullius.

Chapter 1385: You Didn't Defeat Him

The beams of light were no source of an attack.

Skullius had read that before they even touched him, and that was why he allowed them to strike him as they did. They did him no harm, merely engulfing him in a mucus green hue. Stay updated through empire

...And then a voice spoke to him just as a ton of information lanced through his mind. It was loud so that everyone could hear.

"You'll thank me later for this, master. Or... you'll rush over here, seething. Well, whatever you choose, you needed to know all this at once."

Skullius didn't react to the message from the voice because of all the bits of information funnelling into him. He saw odd, crystals positioned in several points around Aigas as well as several other things with frighteningly high resolution. But Elita and Kenno recognised the voice and reeled.

"Is that...Kintar?" the latter said.

Elita only donned a curious frown before sighing and looking back to Revia who couldn't have given a thousand shits about the light show.

Unfortunately, nothing could be done about the two's torn relationship. For indeed, it was torn.

Aurolio could hardly have cared for the intriguing drama anymore. He, quite like Sila, Kenno and Araeyn was concerned about what was going on with Skullius.

As he was fed the information, his face increasingly grew grim, and as though the night was gathering on his face, Skullius' face turned so dark that it became impossible to decipher any of its details.

Kenno saw it coming from a mile away.

'Oh no. What did that little freak do?' he thought, filled with dread.

...And then Skullius exploded.

The look on his face stunned everyone present. It might have been a collection of ellipses doing their best to form a visage.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, YOU STUPID BRAT?!" Skullius growled with a voice many decibels different from his own, and then he vanished.

Kenno was the first one to react.

'Shit. Kintar's mission was to go to Emeradis. That's probably where the boss is going,' he thought, his heart racing. He turned to Araeyn, intending to tell him to warp them to Emeradis, but the Apostle was already on it. He could sense where his master was. He drew in Sila and Kenno... and after a little hesitation, he beckoned Uyuniya, Aurolio, Elita and Revia as well. The latter refused to move. She might not have even heard Araeyn's calm and succinct, "Come here." Thus, she was left behind. Elita gave her a pitying glance as she and the rest disappeared.

As they began warping using Araeyn's abilities, Kenno couldn't have imagined his heart would ever settle.

'I always did wonder why the boss gave Kintar a higher position than Pherdanta or Yuyui. Those two deserve to be closest to him. But no... he chose that freak of nature,' he thought.

Kenno had thought Skullius had made a mistake, and honestly, so did the rest of the Unlimited Stars. There was something unnerving about Kintar.

Her eyes.

Her demeanour.

Her freakish record in the Impossible Task.

But Kenno believed with all his heart that Skullius didn't choose Kintar to be his Deputy solely because she was the strongest of all the Stark Troops.

But then... what else had Skullius seen in Kintar?

And would he still see it after whatever was happening right now?

Kintar was still sitting (floating) on the Monarch's throne, surrounded by her loyal Arch-Mages, headed by Stern-Mage Weyven Irlis.

These Mages were watching.

Those who hadn't believed in Kintar before were watching.

The Monarch was watching.

Red Rage also stood, watching... watching as the thousands of souls were sacrificed.

A giant array had been branded onto the floor of the Royal Dwelling and laid on top of it was a mound of a little less than 100,000 Mages of different calibres, from Apprentice to Grand-Mages. They were all dead. Soft lights, pristine and powerful, rich with all their potential rose from their corpses, feeding into a large, impressive golden wheel of Runes.

The wheel emitted a WHAARP! noise whenever a soul reached it and was burned up as fuel.

Kintar watched from the throne, both fascinated and frightened. Death did not frighten Kintar, but death without cause did. She feared ceasing to exist without a grand purpose after all she had accomplished. But also, death fascinated her. If her soul wasn't used up, burned like the ones she was looking at, what would be the next step for her? What would become of Kintar Aladaster? Would her fate, her Direction be any different?

Right as this thought assaulted her, something warped into the Royal Dwelling, swift and noiseless, landing right in front of the mound of corpses.

But in stark contrast to the nature of its travel, its presence was suffocating. Everyone in the Royal Dwelling immediately sensed the danger.

The many Arch-Mages who had been watching the sacrifice of souls readied for battle instinctively, but Kintar stopped them all. The rise of her pinky finger was enough to dispel all their mobilising mana.

"Kintar..." Skullius said. His voice was low, but it was loud. His blank white eyes had turned dark... black. "What do you think you're doing?"

Kintar looked at her master. Her ovular eyes turned into crescents.

"Did you perhaps not receive the information I gathered, master? I could have sworn I sent it to you just n—"

"You know exactly what I'm asking," Skullius cut her off.

Kintar smiled and then she rose from the throne, floating before the lines of puzzled Arch-Mages failing to summon their mana. They felt as though they had been caught in a Majestic Territory.

Kintar's smile faded.

"I guess you're here because you don't approve of the method I used," she said and she floated a little higher from the ground. "I expected as much."

"You have five seconds to explain yourself," Skullius hissed, his face a mess of dark wrinkles. Red Rage gave a sigh. He was anxious. Unlike Kintar, he wasn't quite so sure of himself.

Kintar turned thoughtful for a second and then she fixed Skullius with a stern gaze.

"Do you know why I bet against you, master? When you went off to fight against your evil self?" she asked him.

Earlier, Grim had referenced - jokingly - how Kintar had forced the Stark Troops to make bets on who would win between Replicus and Festos. (This was when when Skullius, Theurien, Silrat, and Soidon had been relaxing on the giant butterfly in the Empyrean Hatcher earlier.)

Skullius' eye twitched.

Why would Kintar bring that up now?

"Admittedly, I did it half in jest," Kintar continued. "But the other half of me thought you would actually lose. Do you know why?"

Right then, Araeyn warped with everyone else behind the mound of corpses below the wheel of Runes just in time... just in time to hear Kintar say it.

"Why?" Skullius asked acidly.

Kintar sighed and she suddenly looked a little tired.

"Because you didn't defeat him. You didn't defeat the masked man. You couldn't. And to me, it was highly probable that you'd fail to beat a nastier version of him when you didn't have much help."

Chapter 1386: Beneath You

"Because you didn't defeat him. You didn't defeat the masked man. You couldn't. And to me, it was highly probable that you'd fail to beat a nastier version of him when you didn't have much help."

The words staggered Kenno, Elita and Sila.

Kenno in particular was utterly shocked to hear Kintar say it, regardless of the missing context.

Master had failed to defeat the masked man?

And because of that, it was only natural that he would lose against his alter?

What kind of stupid logic was that?

Every single one of the Stark Troops knew how much Skullius prepared for that battle. He found time for it while also helping the troops with their individual training and monitoring how they handled the Impossible Task.

He put everything on the line. He had felt the tension. Everyone had.

So what gave Kintar the right to talk down to Skullius like that?

Spurred by the heat of the moment, Kenno meant to rush up to Kintar and knock some sense into her? Her astounding power be damned! If it was Pherdanta in his place, she would have gone for the kill, as would every other Unlimited Star.

...But Skullius was faster.

The walls of the Royal Dwelling shuddered and then turned to dust when Skullius knocked Kintar into them. The bits Amras he had recovered exploded out and stole the light from the world, dying it in dimness. His fury was palpable.

Skullius had Kintar by the throat, squeezing hard.

But the Unlimited Star's face didn't show any signs of strain. To be sure, she would die just like any other mortal if Skullius desired it, yet she didn't look like someone waltzing with death.

"Say that again..." Skullius said to her, his face dangerously close.

Kintar looked straight into his dark eyes, calm and composed.

"I said... you never defeated the masked necromancer. You lost to him. You couldn't stop him from getting what he wanted," she said. "You can't hide it, you know? I know it eats you up. You and several others that time were at the necromancer's mercy. That battle wasn't just a test of strength, was it? Just like it wasn't only a test of strength when you confronted your other self."

Skullius squeezed harder and Kintar wheezed. Then she gave a soft, crooked goosebump-inducing laugh.

"You would kill me for saying it? Fair. I wouldn't mind. A death like that... I would still have accomplished much. I was meant to die for you in any case," she said.

Right then... Kintar's dark hair fluttered and changed colours. Her face was no longer ovular and she looked younger. Suddenly, she was naked, and a background of snow whipped outward behind her.

'Why now?!' Skullius thought, burning from the inside.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!" Somanda's laugh rang out, sending shivers down his soul.

Beyrmir came to the rescue, but this time... this time Skullius couldn't feel relieved. He was back in the Monarch's Royal Dwelling, but his emotions were awry. They were still in that snow scape, his soul facing a naked girl he called an adopted sister, Camilla.

It was Camilla, and then it was Kintar and then Camilla and Kintar.

Skullius had let go of her throat. She took a moment to heal and massage it before she looked at him. There was no hostility or animosity in those eyes. It didn't matter if it was his adopted sister or his Deputy. They bore him no ill.

When she spoke, two voices came to Skullius as he drew back, staggering.

"I love you as much as Pherdanta, Yuyui, Grim, Kenno, Savast, Baddan and your Apostles, master, but I don't have the grace to sing your praises where I feel you're undeserving," Camilla and Kintar said. "I'm not sure what you were like as an undead. I'm sure you hated living beings and didn't hesitate to kill eyesores. But then, you got a curse that prevented you from building relationships and for a long time you were alone, right? But then you got rid of that curse and you started to value relationships immensely. The freedom to ally with people unconditionally must have been pure bliss, right? You valued your Faction, and you valued your Unlimited. But then Allora died... and now you can't bear to see people die needlessly."

Skullius dark eyes flickered.

That was all Kintar and Camilla needed to see. In his vision, they smiled.

"That's why the masked man won and you lost. That's why I saw your other self prevailing against you. Since the masked man killed Allora, you've been carrying a bit of him in your soul. 'I won't become like the man who killed my Allora,' you must tell yourself as you fight it. 'I won't be the person who takes away loved ones from others, like the masked man,' you think to yourself. Am I right?"

Skullius fumed. The [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] crackled dangerously.

"That's enough, Kintar!" Kenno roared, but she didn't listen.

"You must have sensed the rapid loss of life just now, right?" Kintar and Camilla said to Skullius. "You must have been reminded of the... what was it called again, the Premium Age Royale? The fifteen million souls lost for the masked necromancer's cause. Yes, master, I learned from the masked man. He knew what it takes to get what he wanted. But you don't. At least you refuse to come to terms with it."

...And Skullius began laughing. He was gripping his own face so tight, he might have meant to rip it off.

"What it takes, you say?" he said, his voice lethal. "What makes you think you understand what that even means? You think just because you completed the Impossible Task with the highest score of kills you know better than me what it takes to survive in this world? You don't have the qualification to lecture me about what it takes, Kintar!"

Kintar and Camilla smiled softly.

"Yes I do and no I don't. I recall you saying anyone who completed the Impossible Task would be dubbed your equal, and last I checked, you named me your Deputy, didn't you?" she said. "But also, no. I don't have the right to lecture you. You are far beyond what I am. I and everyone else in this world... we are beneath you."

Chapter 1387: Either, Or

Again, again, again...

Skullius had only heard Kintar say it once before, but he was already growing sick of it.

How was everyone else beneath him? Just because he had transcended mortality? Did his bonds with mortals no longer matter now? Could he freely sacrifice them on a whim or for a greater good?

The idea to Skullius was sick.

Indeed, it was the idea that made him hate the masked man so much.

He hated Somanda for the same reason. The bastard found pleasure in the sorrows of his Moronic undead as they strove to find love and companionship in fellow undead skeletons.

Skullius hated Fulgardt for the same reason as well. When his (Fulgardt's) WILLS were in his other body, they taunted and mocked him by slaughtering commonfolk Skullius didn't have ties to, and people he cared about alike. Explore new worlds at empire

Even now, the fact that his alter had almost killed Theurien and Silrat in that battle from hours ago, still haunted Skullius.

He didn't believe for a second that he had somehow become so valuable that he could play god, toying with lives as he pleased!

'AAAAARGHHH!' Skullius groaned inwardly. He hated that he saw Camilla in Kintar and vice versa; he hated even more than he didn't know exactly why that was.

He cursed.

A piercing glow illuminating the darkness which had swallowed the Royal Dwelling ever since Skullius began releasing Amras, attracted his attention. It was Red Rage. The Apostle had been watching silently the whole time.

Skullius pulled him close using his Amras. The Apostle couldn't resist and he didn't try.

There was no need for words, but Skullius said them anyway.

"You were supposed to keep her in check!" Skullius hissed at Red Rage. That had been the Apostle's mission.

"I was," the Apostle said.

Skullius reeled.

The tone from the Apostle told him everything.

"So... you too? You think she's right?" Skullius barked, and then he pointed at the mound of corpses behind him. "Aren't you supposed to be some knight of justice, you sockethole?! How do you look at that and support it?!"

Red Rage hung his head.

"Because, master, we are up against a Deity who has been setting up a nasty scheme while we were all distracted with the drapes of time, and the Cavern," he said. "And besides, none of the Mages you see were forced to give their lives. They did so willi—"

"Shut up!"

Red Rage acquiesced. He said no more.

Skullius cursed.

It had been a very, very long time since Red Rage had disobeyed him. He hadn't believed the Apostle would skirt his orders at a time like this. He clutched his face hard until it tore.

Camilla and Kintar saw his struggle.

"Master, you recruited us for the ultimate mission of charging headfirst into Deadmanland to fight a Divine Lich and retrieve your soul. All of the Stark Troops. Do you know that many of us will not survive such an ordeal? I believe you are the one who stated that this mission you have been preparing us for will be worse than everything happening on Aigas right now?" they said. "How is leading us into certain death for your sake any different from what I have chosen to do for the greater good – for your good right now?"

Skullius would have squeezed her neck until her head popped, but he held himself back. The tiniest bit of him shuddered and realised...It was true.

Necessary evils.

Indeed, Skullius hoped to grow a lot more before ever reaching Deadmanland and he was sure that this dangerous mission on Aigas would sharpen his troops a hundred or even a thousand fold. But it was true that going into Deadmanland was extremely dangerous. Nomatter what, people were going to die – to die for his sake.

For his sake.

"So it wasn't that difficult for you to understand after all," Elita suddenly said, issuing more tension into the taut atmosphere. Skullius fixed her with a glare, but that didn't stop her from walking forward and staring at the mound of corpses. "You just preferred to pretend to be the only one who saw a solution that everyone didn't."

Kenno meant to stop Elita for saying any more, but Uyuniya raised a hand to stop him. She had been listening keenly using the mana link Aurolio had re-established as soon as they arrived here.

Elita met Skullius' glare.

"Too bad, Skullius. This is how reality works, as I've been trying to tell you," she said, but not harshly. She finally saw something in him that she had seen in countless men and women in her days as a Paladin Champion. "You must have had your first real experience at seeing someone you care about die and you've yet to break out of the hideous illusion such a thing can do to you."

Was that it?

Was that it really?

Skullius couldn't believe it.

Did Allora's death, which seemed to have happened ages ago, still weigh on him that much?

Had it meant so much to him?

Yes, it had. It had reshaped how a fundamental part of him worked.

But...

"So? What am I supposed to do? Start believing that everything is beneath me? That what I do doesn't matter as long as it bears some result?" Skullius asked Elita.

The former Paladin Champion looked at Kintar. There was a little distaste in her eyes.

"I never said that. I carry the weight of what I've done, however successful and plausible it turns out to be. I wasn't lying when I said I don't have a line when it comes to people I care about. I DON'T. Divinity is a nasty game, Skullius. There's no room for half measures. Everyone out there is killing for the sake of their own people or for their own lives. No one who has reached Divinity holds back, whether they are an anomaly or just a regular Divine. To beat them... we have to play the same game. Only... we can't get lost in it, and the weight of the necessary evils is supposed to keep haunting us till the end."

Skullius barely managed to find a decent chunk of the collapsed ceiling to sit on. He took the time to digest all that he had just heard.

As he did so, Kintar gave Elita a less than savoury look. It was all but clear that they agreed with the other's notion, but to different extremes.

And as it turned out, they were both eager to show Skullius that they were the ones in the right.

Chapter 1388: Violent To Enemies, Wise To Friends

The stare down between Elita and Kintar continued. Neither was willing to back down, and as time went on, it almost seemed as though their invisible confrontation had little to do with their clashing ideals, and more to do with whose view Skullius would deem correct. Both women criticised the current Skullius' mindset, but they both had great resolve to change it for the better.

But Skullius could hardly focus on their whims and wills. Their words had stabbed him, leaving great wounds, but even greater than these words, was the throbbing pain in his soul. He still felt Camilla's presence and it was driving him crazy.

The yearning to know who she really was, and why exactly her appearance was superimposing on Kintar longer than it had on anyone else Skullius had hallucinated to be her before, was like a swarm of living ants crawling through him, chittering and biting his being mercilessly.

He gritted his teeth. He was sweating.

The fact that Allora's death, one of Skullius' greatest scars was opened fresh right then didn't make him feel any better. He recalled that mural he made for her and suddenly, it all felt too real. Elita was right. Skullius had never experienced the death of someone he really cared for, at least not on Aigas or in Deadmanland.

He was incredibly attached to friends and subordinates alike.

He had even done his best to protect Silrat when the Premium Age Royale was reaching its conclusion. He had used an artefact that temporarily deleted the man's existence until it was safe for him to return.

Yes. That was the kind of person Skullius was now. He held incredible attachments and would not suffer seeing death falling upon those who didn't deserve it, those who had nothing to do with him. He had failed with Allora where he had succeeded with Silrat... and that gave him a heart.

But according to Kintar, Skullius didn't really need one.

And according to Elita, he did need it, but was supposed to keep it hidden in a vault, away from the darkness in the wider reality.

What exactly did it take for a Divine to survive in this dreadful world?

Skullius couldn't imagine himself reverting back to the skeleton of old who burned an entire library of men and women in Inhone just to keep his identity secret. That Skullius had no regard for life whatsoever, and perhaps for that time, it was best. But now... if Skullius didn't regard life with importance, what was the point of having subordinates?

What was the point of going to Deadmanland to claim his soul if Camilla - who must have been a human far weaker than any in Aigas - had no worth?

Wasn't this at the core of why he butted heads with his possessed self?

Surprisingly, there came an answer.

"Neither of you are wrong."

Uyuniya had begun taking steps towards Skullius. She gave a passing glance to the Arch-Mages and the Monarch watching in awe and shock at the drama which had sprouted from nowhere within the Royal Dwelling.

Skullius turned his head to her. She looked straight at him, and then at Elita.

"You're not wrong, sister," she said, "but your beliefs are strongly based on your previous life as a religious knight. That part of you mustn't be something you try to inflict on others as an answer to their queries. You're naturally a selfless person who would avoid conflict if need be and you're always willing to help those in need."

Elita's face softened.

Uyuniya then looked at Kintar.

The ovular eyes of the short woman stared deep into hers. Discover hidden stories at empire

Uyuniya turned to Skullius again.

"I'm sure you've started to doubt this woman as an ally, but I'll tell you this. The fact that you chose someone like her as an aide marks you as someone with the makings of a great leader. Often, leaders need a contradicting voice that challenges their views, even in the extremes. Happy, peaceful times don't bring to light the truth about leading and all the horrible decisions it forces upon you. Believe me, I know," she said to him, her face looking incredibly grave. "Your... Deputy has confronted your ideals with nothing less than the truth. Or rather a set of truths. Now, it's up to you to decide if you are going to accept those truths and bear them as your own, or if you'll form your own truths, and make her accept it. Currently, you have none."

Skullius considered Uyuniya for a while. A deafening silence persisted as he did.

He saw in her eyes something he hadn't seen before. She had been abrasive and irrational earlier, opting to fight and mock him rather than to try and talk. But ever since Skullius acquired Maximum Jaqqezjaqqz, she treated him very differently. She considered him as something more than just an ally.

And as for what she had said just now...

'Ah. I see it now. She really is some kind of princess like Elita said. Violent to enemies and wise to friends,' Skullius thought.

And her words were true enough.

Kintar meant him no harm. She wasn't doing anything maliciously. She was simply presenting him with an interpretation of how she thought he should be, how he should do things. The fact that she was willing to die by his hand just for expressing her opinion was a clear sign that she was also willing to accept it if he chose a different path. It was Skullius' duty as her leader to stipulate an alternative path and hammer it home.

So far, Skullius had not convinced Kintar how exactly she was wrong and why.

He took a breath.

'Maybe I'm just too on edge because of the sheer number of enemies I've met in the last few hours. All of them have been branding me names, deciding what I am. I might have thought Kintar was doing the same,' he thought, and he looked at her.

She stared back at him, the look in her eyes unwavering.

"Prove me wrong, master, and I'll gladly follow the path you think is the best. But until then..." Kintar began.

Skullius waved her off.

"I get it, I get it." She still infuriated the hell out of him. He wanted so badly to rip her head off.

He stood up and gave Uyuniya a nod.

"You're right," he said, and then he looked at Elita. "So are you. But I can't create an entire philosophy from scratch right now. As much as I hate how Kintar acquired the information she gave him, it really is crucial. Boron must be stopped." He took another deep breath and felt his soul calm down. "He outsmarted us all and we're behind by several steps."

Chapter 1389: Return of Glorious Purpose

Everyone's hair stood on end. Stay connected via empire

Even Ferex was caught off guard by the unbelievably sharp force which cut the enemy he had been aiming to fight. Granted, unlike the weak enemies from before, the Sif warrior standing before him, cloaked in a passive Territory, was definitely a force to be reckoned with, and would not have gone down with just one blow from the Apostle Ferex... but just a single blow from Pherdanta was overkill.

Everyone behind her, from the Stark Troops, to the civilians they were surrounding protectively, gaped when Pherdanta drew one of her swords, Demion's Dance, and swung it in a brutish flash. The Transcendent Stager from the past, barely having gotten the time to shine, was violently ripped in two, body, soul, mana and armour.

And as if this wasn't enough of a frightening display, several hundred Cavern off on their own business hundreds of kilometres away in different directions, were chopped down from Pherdanta's one slash. It hardly made any sense at all. Their shrill cries could almost be heard from all directions.

"Goodness!" the old Priest beside Pherdanta exclaimed. He should not have been surprised, given that he had already judged Pherdanta to be way beyond him in both skill and strength, but seeing her actually try for once, solidified his guesses tenfold. He swallowed a lump of saliva. Thank goodness he had made his non-hostile nature known when he had crossed into the present Aigas from the past.

Even more astounding than the show of violence by Pherdanta though, was the fact that there was zero collateral. She only struck the enemy. Not so much as a single blade of grass had been harmed when she drew Demion's Dance to attack.

After the Sif warrior fell, staining the ground with his blood and guts, Pherdanta gave a sigh and looked at Demion's Dance.

'This sword is still rejecting me somewhat. It must still have a profound attachment to master. Or... maybe I'm just not using it right,' she thought. The latter might have held more truth given that Pherdanta was still trying to figure out all she could do using her latest skill, [Infinite Sword God: Primordial Sword].

She slotted back the green-bladed sword into its hilt and looked ahead at the unnerved, pale and gaping faces of the group they had been about to run into. Silrat's face was the only familiar one, if she only counted the humans. Ferex was more of a peer, given that he had been part of Skullius' training in the Timemould Mirror Box.

Pherdanta's group converged with Silrat's, and it was only when she was right in front of him that he snapped out of his dazed state.

"Ah... I didn't think I'd run into you," Silrat said with a sheepish laugh at the end. The fact that he couldn't sense an ounce of Pherdanta's strength even though she had just displayed such a horrifying feat with her sword killed common sense. He remembered her though, and the way Skullius had introduced her as the Commander of his troops.

"It was bound to happen. I assume master sent you on a similar mission to ours? Saving civilians?" Pherdanta asked him.

"Uh...yes. Well, I am... was to help mobilise Pelian's forces against the enemy with their help. Festos directed me to them," he replied and turned gesture at Vali, Maxim and the experts behind them. "So far, we have been making much progress, but we hoped to find the Six Houses of Pelian and rope them in as well. Unfortunately, it's not that simple. They have hidden domains, and I'm sure it would take a lot of convincing for them to join us. They prefer to work alone, as far as I know."

Pherdanta gave a nod, and then she finally entertained the burning looks Maxim and Vali had been giving her.

After the initially horror at the kind of attack power Pherdanta could expel at once, Maxim had gathered the substance to give this woman – who was apparently acquainted with Festos – an appraising stare. It was rather odd to see another prominent feminine figure in Festos' service. Maxim had grown to feel somewhat... special after being trusted by Festos not once, not twice, but thrice now.

She and Festos had become allies during the Premium Age Royale, when they were fighting against Baddan, who had still been a Sky Watcher then, tasked by Rias to kill the Contenders in the game. It had been Maxim, Festos and Tallo, the Mage. A bond had grown between the three after brushing with death that time. Maxim especially took to Festos when he sacrificed his Units to save her life near the end of the event.

As for Vali, she gave Pherdanta an amused look. Unlike Maxim, she was somewhat thrilled to discover the real Festos' company, and how she compared to them. Or perhaps, how she would compare. She had faith in her value to Festos, especially with the portion of Rias' Imagining Technique which she had absorbed during the Premium Age Royale. Like Maxim, she had also gotten close with Skullius during the Royale, and when Skullius had saved her using the one Supreme Potion he had purchased from the Guilds Association, her interest in the Hybrid Luman had grown tremendously.

The long stare game between Maxim and Vali, and Pherdanta lasted for a few minutes. It felt a tad hostile right before it was broken.

"You must be important allies of my master then," Pherdanta said to the two ladies.

"You're damn right," Maxim said and she folded her arms in front of her modest chest. "And I hope for his sake that he plans to see us. It wouldn't hurt that skeleton to apologise to us for almost making us blow up Aigas. I could have had the blood of billions on my hands, including on my own."

Pherdanta was slightly surprised.

"You know...?" she began.

"That your dear master is a terrestrial, freaky, anomalous skeleton? Yes, we know, dear," Vali said with a smile. "As you guessed, we are important allies to Festos."

Pherdanta wore a duck face.

"I see..." she said. She imagined these women had been allied with her master's alter, perhaps before and after he turned rogue due to the Fulgardt's WILLS. "When this is all over, I don't suppose my master will have a problem sparing some of his time. He has a lot on his plate at the moment."

"We are aware," Vali said. "And don't mind her" – she pointed at Maxim who frowned – "she's just... irrationally emotional when it comes to Festos."

As Maxim began arguing with Vali over why her assertion was untrue, Ferex approached Pherdanta.

"I did not appreciate that," he said, towering over her.

Pherdanta raised a brow.

"What? Me stealing your kill?" she said, almost mockingly. "Please. Killing one measly Transcendent Stager will not count for your redemption in master's eyes. There are many other ways you could reclaim your... honour, or whatever it is you think you need to prove to make up for losing yourself and becoming that thing."

Ferex's sockets blazed with intense light.

"What are these ways?" he asked eagerly.

But before Pherdanta could answer...

"Oh, I have the perfect way. An extravagant way," someone chimed in.

Chapter 1390 Distant Magnets

1390 Distant Magnets

Boron finally had a lavish new vessel.

As of a few seconds ago, he now inhabited the body of a Cavern with midnight-blue skin, four striking pairs of glowing, white eyes, a stack of three mouths, and six, hideous arms.

But his bellowing Amras quickly shattered this ugly appearance, and imposed one of Boron's liking. His skin turned white, rough and scaly. He shed four of his hideous, monstrous arms and retained two with human-like contours of muscle – firm and thick. He rid his torso of the bulbous potbelly his vessel had spotted, and replaced it with an attractive, fit one; there was no flab, only perfection.

His face was like carved marble. He spotted a stiff great beard, small dark eyes issuing streams of ominous power, and curled hair that looked as though it was hewn from stone. Boron looked a lot like his previous vessel after he had transformed, only, he was smaller.

He stood at fifteen meters tall, but his presence was no less striking.

He had healed the wound carved onto his Broader Existence by Broodweiler, and had made a full recovery.

It had taken a little while, but it was finally done.

Boron had chosen one of his Divine Cavern to inhabit as a vessel. Because this particular Cavern was a major downgrade in quality from the last - his Herald - it had taken longer to fully impress his essence into it.

Boron had been concerned about how much longer it was going to take for his new body to be ready when a Fated Reef had suddenly sprang forth from the distance, threatening to conquer Aigas in a desperate rush. He had only been two-thirds of the way to completely taking over his new vessel when it had happened.

The Doom Knight he had sensed before was battling a team of anomalies and predictably, it was pressed to the point of attempting to unleash a Fated Reef on Aigas, claiming it as its territory. If that happened, Boron would have been in trouble without his vessel complete, but thankfully, the Doom Knight was weaker than he was, and after he pushed back its Fated Reef, it hadn't attempted to fight back.

Boron had accelerated the completion of his vessel as best as he could then, and now...

<Ah... Perfection.> Boron said as he looked up into the sky.

The majority of his Cavern children had left to attack every inch of Aigas. They flew over the lands and seas, killing human and beast alike.

They had slaughtered indeed, having fun as they poured chaos everywhere, recklessly going in on powerful and weaker opponents with a complete disregard for their lives.

But the Cavern had also been on the receiving end of terrible blows.

Millions died in Maqi.

Millions died in Pelian.

The dark creatures suffered terrifying losses.

...But that was the point.

Boron sat back down after his body transformed to a variant he was pleased with. His previous vessel was lying some distance away, looking eerily like his current one, only dead, with giant cut across its chest.

The few Cavern to remain around Boron drew close after he completed his transformation.

They were six giant, Divine Cavern with an assortment of hideous looks and features. Their appearances went beyond just variations in racial properties. Some of these Cavern looked as though they were moulded by crooked, uninspired hands.

They were Boron's six Generals, the only Cavern he truly cared for. Well, there was one other who had earned consideration from the Deity, but he was far off.

"We congratulate you on the completion of your vessel, lord," one of the Generals said, bowing. He spoke for the rest. Boron did not like it when too many of them told him the same thing.

The Deity nodded. His dark gaze lanced into the distance and his thoughts were also elsewhere.

<I think it's about time some of our enemies realised what is going on with the Distant Magnets. I did not think it would be a mortal who would catch on first though. Aigas truly has an interesting collection of things.>

Another one of the Generals raised his head to speak right then.

"Lord, concerning the Magnets..." he began, Boron had read his mind.

<Don't worry. They are already beyond interference. Even if our enemies stop killing your fellow Cavern now, it will make no difference. The Distant Magnets have already reached the threshold. I have my many brave children to thank for giving themselves so willingly to the cause.>

And it had been so indeed.

From the beginning, the death of the millions of Cavern had been part of the plan. To be sure, the Cavern weren't a match for some of the experts on Aigas, but they had been fighting with the thought they were supposed to die. They were supposed to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the fifty-nine Distant Magnets that Boron had set up all over Aigas - large purple crystals guarded by some of the stronger mortal Cavern.

They had a sinister purpose, but admittedly, as they were, it was impossible for them to achieve this purpose. They weren't Treasures, after all.

Thus, Boron had established a Fundamental Barter to boost their abilities.

Their purpose was limited to only one target and they could only be used once before breaking to pieces. These conditions had of course secured the five points of exponential increase in the powers of the Magnets, but Boron went further with his Fundamental Barter. It was possible to enhance the qualities of a non-Andori and non-Treasure beyond the basic exponential augment by adding further restrictions. Of course, this could only be done once, before a non-Andori, and non-Treasure couldn't be enhanced using Fundamental Barter again.

Thus, Boron made it so the Distant Magnets could only be used after at least half of his Cavern were killed; and suicide didn't count.

This further condition gave an additional exponential increase to the Magnets; an exponential of ten!

Their durability was enhanced.

Their powers were augmented.

Their range was furthered.

It was perfect.

Boron wished for something else other than the destruction of Aigas, which had been established right over his head. He had been its foundation for so long, and he wanted nothing more than to see it go up in a merciless conflagration.

But before that...

<It will be done soon.> he said to nobody in particular. He looked up at Suzamete's body. Oh, his former beloved who betrayed him so. <You will rue the day your soul stopped yearning for mine, Kaella. Struggle however much you like. You will rue along with the rest of them.>