

Undead 1391

Chapter 1391 Present Concerns

1391 Present Concerns

"The masked man sacrificed a lot of unwilling souls to achieve a feat that encroached upon the Divine. At least I imagine so, given that he obtained the power to resurrect a soul that had been sent to the Yormuness thousands of years ago. I imagine nothing less than the atrocity he performed was required to facilitate such a feat, right? Even with your Maximum Catalyst, you couldn't have drawn back a soul that old, master," Kintar explained right as Araeyn warped back into the Monarch's Royal Dwelling. He sent a mental message to his master confirming that the favour Elita had asked for was done.

Skullius nodded, but his attention remained on Kintar. He hated how blunt Kintar was being. Even though she wasn't referencing that exact situation, he was reminded of how he had been unable to restore Allora with his Maximum Catalyst. Her soul had been completely destroyed, and Maximum Reversion couldn't recreate it to place it back in her body. It wasn't a Divine ability. Besides that, Skullius didn't have the appreciation of souls then that he had now.

What the masked man had done using 15 million souls was the equivalent of Skullius being able to reverse Allora's shattered soul and placing it back into her body.

"I noticed that these crystals I located all over Aigas couldn't be penetrated no matter what kind of appraising and analysing spell I used. Supreme Skills couldn't do anything to them either. Pherdanta tried cutting them down. So, I concluded that they must be something Divine or close. I engineered an array with Runes, powered by the willing and powerful souls of those Mages to extract information about the crystals. And that is all."

Kintar's nonchalance as she explained baffled the Arch-Mages and the Monarch especially. They hadn't known what exactly she was doing when she gathered all the Mages earlier, but since she had hinted that it had to do with the world's security, they didn't pose any qualms. Furthermore, she hadn't forced anyone into the ritual. The participants had been happy to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a Realm Source Mage's grand purpose even after she stipulated their deaths and how... cruel, they could be.

None of the stronger experts here were too perplexed by Kintar's nonchalance though. Elita, for instance, was more concerned with how she was going to repair things with Revia than Kintar's glacial attitude towards the loss of life. She had asked Skullius to send Revia somewhere safe just

now, and Araeyn had gone to do just that with the ivory key to the Empyrean Bosom, given to him by Kintar.

"So, these crystals have been growing increasingly more powerful as the Cavern die, huh? That's a damn shame. I killed a few ten thousand of them before I had Araeyn take us to Edagon," Kenno said while shaking his head.

"Did you manage to extract any information about what exactly they are supposed to do?" Elita asked Kintar.

"No. There's only so much this contraption of mine can extract. It is still a mortal's workmanship. I couldn't even begin to wonder what Boron wants to do. Do you have any ideas, master?" the short, wide-faced Unlimited Star asked.

Skullius shook his head.

"All I know is that Boron is at odds with the three governing Deities. He wants Aigas destroyed, but that seems like a goal he is saving for later. Suzamete is incapable of protecting Aigas, at least with raw power. She's had to be sneaky, and quick-witted to avoid it being destroyed by external forces during the Ashing of Time; at the hands of Caxellac; and when my alter fused the Insurgent Magnus elements. Foresight has been her greatest strength, not raw might. I'm not even sure she would have been able to defend against on her own against the Doom Knight. So it stands to reason that Boron could have easily destroyed this world if he really wanted to, but I don't know why that isn't his first priority," he said.

"Then he's trying to settle a score with the governing Deities somehow – in a way that hurts them more than just destroying Aigas," Elita speculated.

"Apparently." Skullius massaged his temples. He still felt the uncomfortable presence of Camilla deep within him. "The whole situation with those four is strange. According to the Emissary of the Immortals – a lackey of the third Herald on Aigas, I mean – Boron was imprisoned, but Quintess and the others meant for him to be released eventually. That's why the method for his release was hidden from the Purity. It was never to be found by them. There's a deeper story there, but..."

Skullius thought it would be nice to get some answers from Suzamete, but he wasn't sure she would tell. In any case, that sort of information wouldn't help him with saving Aigas, he thought. At least not directly.

A silence followed. Uyuniya didn't give much of her thoughts. She wasn't familiar with the Deities of this world and she feared that any insights she had would only confuse everyone. Her original world was like Faaminl, Actuass' home. It was a Richer world than Aigas, responsible for birthing many Divines.

Skullius had crossed his arms in front of his chest when Kintar narrowed her eyes. She saw the tattoo on his wrist.

"What is that, master?" she asked. "I don't suppose it's a fashion trend."

Skullius grumbled.

"Another pain in the pelvis," he replied. "Fulgardt branded me with this. For an hour – or, I guess less than that now – I have been restricted concerning a secret of his."

"Fulgardt? A secret?" Kintar was taken aback.

"It's complicated," Skullius said with an exasperated sigh. The short stack was way behind on the happenings. "However, because of this tattoo, I have formed a few guesses about how Fulgardt intends to move. He said himself that he aims to attack Boron and Suzamete, but the time limit he put on this tattoo suggests to me that he only intends to try that after the hour passes. In the meantime, I assume he is getting Rias ready – helping him familiarise himself with his new Andori, some variant of the Imagining Technique, and inducting him into a contract with AKHASHA so that he can grow his Broader Existence. He's probably preparing himself too. I also imagine he intends to give the spoils for defeating Boron and Suzamete to Rias so that the Imagining Technique grows with his Broader Existence."

Skullius cursed when he finished the last sentence.

The Imagining Technique was already a terrifying ability.

He had seen it in action when he fought the EverSword heir during the Premium Age Royale.

He had seen its potential when it was in Vali's hands as well. She was able to give extra attributes to the Bashful Abomination in Opungale, and she was able to create a ring that could fuse [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness], creating an powerful offensive element, however imperfect it was.

If that technique had become an Andori...

"At the moment, I'm not really concerned about Fulgardt. I'm quite sure he isn't a match for Boron and Suzamete yet. History has proven it. However, I need to use the time I have to match him," Skullius said and he looked at Uyuniya and Elita. "I need more allies and I need to synergise my current powers rather than seeking to increase them broadly. I have methods to accomplish this, but which one I choose first may depend on how you two decide from here on out."

Chapter 1392: Unusual Ally

Skullius wasn't sure what Elita planned to do after 'collecting' Uyuniya. As that had been her real purpose for going to the Purity, the Hybrid Warmoth had realized that he didn't know a lot about her grander goal. Sure, Elita had sworn to help protect Aigas, but if she had agendas of her own, perhaps she wanted to conduct her part for the defence of this world differently to how Skullius planned to do his own.

After agonizing over it, Skullius could only repent of his fury towards her. Elita was her own person, and as she had said, she really hadn't caused any damage with her 'betrayal' at all. She had actually helped Aigas.

Skullius couldn't help but think that Suzamete had foreseen this. This explained why she hadn't commented on it when Elita mentioned her reason for coming here back when they had been invited into the sky domain earlier. He released his tension in a drawn-out breath.

"After settling things on Aigas, Uyuniya and I were going to head on over to her world," Elita explained.

"Her world?" Skullius raised a brow.

"Yes. My world," Uyuniya said. "I've been gone for a while now and I need to see my people. They will be happy to see that I have ascended without any problems."

"I see..." Skullius said. His curiosity only grew, and he didn't hesitate to try and satiate it, even with a question that was a little rude. Oddly enough, the awkward barrier between him and Elita from before was gone. Their familiarity with each other could now allow them to be extremely frank with each other. He looked at her. "Is there a particular reason why you neglected becoming a Divine yourself? Why did you prioritize Uyuniya's ascension to Divinity over yours?"

Elita was a little taken aback by the question. She stalled to answer. Skullius frowned.

"Don't tell me that was just you being nice," he said.

"No. I—"

"You could look at it that way," Uyuniya cut Elita off. She was bolder in her speech. "There's a pragmatic side to it, I suppose. I had already reached the peak of my mortal strength, and in terms of skill and knowledge, I am superior to Elita. It only made sense for me to ascend first." Her words were blunt, but they were strangely devoid of any pride.

Elita wore a strange face. Uyuniya smiled at her.

"There's a sentimental side to it though, and that gave Elita the last push she needed to convince me to draw Divinity before her," she said and turned to Skullius. "But that's a long story. If you wish to know if we have any other goals beside heading for home, we don't."

"Hm. Good then," Skullius said.

Experience tales with empire

"I don't have anywhere better to be either," Aurolio suddenly said, unprompted.

Everyone turned to him with strange expressions. He didn't look at all abashed by the collective attention.

"What?" he said. "Am I not valuable enough for you all to care what I intend to do after this?"

Kenno patted Aurolio's shoulder, almost consolingly.

For the most part, Aurolio's confidence went ignored. Elita addressed Skullius.

"Now that you know our next step, how do we factor into how you intend to move? What kind of allies are you trying to secure?" she asked. "Is there any way we can help?"

Skullius considered for a moment.

"In a way," he said. He hesitated only momentarily before sharing. "I have a sealed Corrupted Deity in my possession. Courtesy of him." He pointed at Aurolio who gave an, "Ah, right."

Skullius briefly explained the ancient page Aurolio had given him way back, at the Bryne Estate. It was apparently a gift from Void.

When assuming Voided Death, bearers were congratulated by Void herself through gifts – Treasures she took from her expansive body. They were quite random, but they were all especially powerful. That was how Elita got Broodweiler and how Aurolio got the ancient page with a mechanism that allowed its user to try and tame the Corrupted Deity it bound.

Aurolio had given it away for two reasons that probably didn't make sense for anyone but Aurolio himself.

For one, he knew he wouldn't have the capability to fight a Deity for a long time, thus he didn't see it worth keeping.

Additionally, Aurolio hated cultivating strength that didn't directly relate to his own body; he loathed using weapons, essentially. None of his interpretations of the great void while applying his aspect with the Mastered Void Gate had anything to do with weaponry, even though he could easily broaden his aspect to cover that too.

Aurolio had exchanged the ancient page for immediately increases to his strength instead. He achieved this with the Tie of Exchange he made with Skullius back then.

"Before the chaos with Fulgardt, I intended to immediately try to subjugate this Deity and bolster my strength, but now I realise that my greatest lacks are in knowledge and experience rather than power. I saw it in Fulgardt. He knows things that can put me at a disadvantage on a dime, even if I have great power. I doubt a single Corrupted Deity would turn the tides in our clash. Thus, I need an ally with great knowledge and experience," Skullius said.

Uyuniya gave a nod. She approved of the manner of thinking Skullius was adopting. Strength wasn't everything in the wider reality.

That was how AKHASHA designed the path for growth. Deities could be killed by lesser Divines and with no more than wit and trickery. But wit and trickery called for knowledge. Immense stores of knowledge.

"Do you have anyone in mind? If not taming the Deity, what or who will you look for now?" Elita asked him.

Skullius scratched his forehead and gave Kintar a glance.

The Unlimited Star gave a creepy smile.

"You're changing your itinerary?" she asked.

"Yes."

"How?" she asked.

Skullius folded all four of his arms.

"Opungale," he said. He could scarcely believe it himself, but it was time for him to finally make good on a promise he had made to a certain Deity.

Strangely enough, fulfilling that promise could actually help him get the better of Fulgardt, even though it had been designed by Fulgardt, or rather, his WILLS in Festos.

Indeed, as Festos had said to Replicus in their fight, there were things he had set into motion that couldn't be reversed, but on the flipside, not all of them were bad for the Hybrid Warmoth.

"Opungale?" Elita asked him, confused. "What's there?"

"I...uh..." Skullius hesitated. "I owe a Deity named Luserus something. I am supposed to breed him an entire generation of 'Luminants' with Darwel, a princess in Opungale. I'm hoping I can make a proper alliance with Luserus afterwards. He might agree if he learns I'm actually up against the real Fulgardt."

Chapter 1393: Defending Sacred Honour!

To dispel the very odd look Elita gave him right after his explanation, Skullius found himself having to tell her about everything that happened in Opungale. Before, when he explained everything in the Empyrean Bosom, he had only been in possession of his memories as Replicus and only after he merged did he get the full scope of what happened when his other body had woken up with the WILLS influencing it.

Skullius first had to explain who Luserus was. Elita was surprised to find out that the Deity had ties to the Sif. Luserus was, after all, the one who made the Luminants. Fulgardt, after reaching Divinity had invaded Luserus' world and nearly slaughtered the entirety of the Luminant race. He had only spared a few, including Dezrael the Arch-Luminant, and relocating them to Opungale in Aigas where they were well-received by the Sif.

The Luminants never forgot their roots. They made a shrine for Luserus, and the Deity could actually communicate with them to a degree using that shrine as a conduit.

Skullius' alter had visited this shrine and made a deal with Luserus that exploited his desperation to keep the Luminants alive as leverage. Since Skullius had part of the DNA of the Luminants, as his race had hinted at (Hybrid Luman), Luserus had been willing to grant him three wishes.

Luserus got rid of his atrocious luck, allowed him to use the skill, [Son of Luserus], which had refused to activate when Festos desired it due to some restriction, and gave him a blessing: Graceful Monolith of the Eminent.

In exchange, Skullius was supposed to produce spawn with Luminant qualities. He imagined that Luserus hoped to rebuild the Luminant race and relocate them from Aigas.

The way Skullius' possessed self was going to go about making sure he met his end of the deal was rather bold though. He had proclaimed before a council of Sif, including the High Family, that he had fallen for Darwel, and after defeating the Ode of the First Horn, he had declared that he would appreciate it if the High Family allowed him to 'use' both their daughters.

Skullius didn't dare mention this part to Elita. It made even him want to collapse in on himself with shame. To think he had been brazen enough to say things like that...

It was all Fulgardt. Only Fulgardt would casually, arrogantly, do things like that. That immediately became another reason Skullius was looking forward to killing the bastard.

After his lengthy explanation, Elita had an odd look on her face. It was somewhere between a cheeky smile and a frown. She took a seat as she processed this information. Skullius didn't know what there was to process though.

Kintar had flat-out laughed at Skullius. Kenno had done the same, but he had the grace to at least warp away and laugh his ass off several kilometers away where Skullius wouldn't hear. Sila merely shook his head. He limited his mirth to a smile. Aurolio did the same.

Uyuniya didn't know what was so funny. Sure, what Skullius had done in Opungale was bold and a little cheesy, but in other ways it was attractive.

It was unfortunate that she didn't get the funny in it. After all, even Skullius could see it, but he couldn't laugh at himself.

Elita let a bit of her mirth leak in a poorly-stifled chuckle.

"Hold on, Skullius. Don't take this the wrong way but..." she said, a big smile appearing on her face. "...Do you even know how to... you know? How to do it?"

Skullius would have kicked her head off right then.

Kintar hugged her tummy and roared in laughter all the more. Skullius killed her twice, but she kept laughing so hard that her face turned blue.

Uyuniya was left drifting in confusion again.

"Why wouldn't he know how to have intercourse?" she asked Elita seriously.

Elita's cheeks inflated. She might have been a balloon. For Skullius' sake, she did not laugh very hard. She instead explained to Uyuniya what she was missing.

Even after Uyuniya found out that Skullius had been a skeletal undead in the domain of Liches before obtaining the power of Null Life, she was still confused.

"But hasn't he been living on this world for a while? Surely, he knows how to—"

Kintar interrupted Uyuniya's sentence with a goat-like laugh.

Skullius killed her again, and when she revived with [Granted Restoration] he kicked her to Aigas' boundary.

The Monarch and the Arch-Mages might have lost their minds at this point. Fear couldn't even describe what they felt after what they had just witnessed. Even if they had been lucid enough to follow the conversation between Skullius and the three women, they wouldn't have dared to laugh.

The Monarch, in particular might have wet himself.

He remembered how he completely disregarded Skullius before, when he had simply been 'Kintar's master'. He had laughed, wondering how Kintar could possibly have a master and even used that reasoning to deny that she was, in fact, a Realm Source Mage. Yet now...

He had barely managed to comprehend it, but he had seen Kintar, a genuine Realm Source Mage get killed four times now... and she had been laughing through it all.

He slumped to the dusty, debris-covered floor, questioning common sense.

Meanwhile, Skullius defended his honour.

"I know everything there is to know," he said firmly. "I've absorbed the memories of hundreds, maybe thousands of people on Aigas. I know it all. Some would even say because I've experienced it through their memories—"

"No, no, no," Elita cut him off, wagging a finger. "You don't get a cheap pass with this one."

Skullius frowned.

"What about you? Aren't you the typical saintly knight saving herself for the 'perfect one'?"

"You wish. Don't confuse my identity. I was a knight not a nun," she said with a wave of her curly hair. "Anyway, is your body even equipped with such... functions? Isn't it supposed to be fake or something?"

Skullius narrowed his eyes dangerously.

"Don't listen to her," Uyuniya said assuringly. "You'll do just fine."

"I'm not worried about that, you socketholes!"

...

Minutes later, Kenno and Kintar had returned and the discussion on Skullius' possible impotence had ended. He had fully explained how Luserus would be of help as an ally, but his willingness to help was not at all guaranteed.

"Can you even contact him?" Kenno asked the Hybrid Warmoth.

"Yes. I used the Blessing he gave me, Graceful Monolith of the Eminent, to absorb the shrine the Luminants used to contact him. It was mixed into the Preeminent Attegoth. I can use that," Skullius replied and he looked at Sila. The Tower General gave him a nod of understanding. "If Luserus agrees to help, I'll convince Suzamete to allow him into Aigas. But in the case that this falls through, I'll have to fall back to relying on just the Corrupted Deity I have to tame."

Everyone nodded, but then Red Rage spoke up. He had been suspiciously silent in all this.

He had been engaged in his own thoughts.

"While you check to see if you can obtain an ally in Luserus, I might have a way we can use to do something about these crystals all over Aigas."

Chapter 1394: Red Rage's Suggestion

Skullius was taken aback.

The last person he'd have thought to have a solution to the trouble with the crystals was Red Rage. But that wasn't to say he was displeased though. He quite looked forward to hearing Red Rage explain himself. After being prompted, the Apostle explained.

"I'm not sure if you recall, master, but I once took to a different name when I was still a species of Null Lifeform known as the Abominable Pelvis Boar-Man - Prisma Avaris OverMould."

Skullius nodded.

"How could I forget? I remember it as though it were yesterday. It was weird. Actually, it's still weird," he said.

And genuinely, Skullius felt so.

Red Rage had been critically wounded by a Cluster Beast a long time ago and incapacitated. When Skullius managed to help him recover using the skill [Granted Armament], the Apostle had acquired a skill called [Incandescent Attire of the Omnipotent Pelvis-Hegemon]. This skill, whenever Red Rage used it, brought onto him the name and persona of a being named Prisma Avaris OverMould, a righteous do-gooder who was exceptionally friendly and chivalrous.

There had been many mysteries to this individual, but Skullius hadn't been able to extract them. However, now that Skullius thought about it, even though Red Rage had evolved a few times since he was the Pelvis Boar-Man, and lost this skill, he seemed to have adopted a similar persona to this Prisma. Evidence of this - above the fact that he still talked and acted like Prisma - was when Replicus had used his evolved skill [Bringer of All] to merge with all his available Apostles in the battle against the masked man.

His full name then had been Prisma Vohnvolt Exonn, which was a mix of Araeyn's and Red Rage's names.

Skullius didn't know how or why this name - Prisma - appeared representing Red Rage, but he urged the Apostle to continue with his explanation.

The Apostle began to float upward in a grand fashion, his hands extended outwards as if he was some kind of saviour.

"Get back down here!" Skullius commanded and Red Rage descended. The damned Apostle was always trying to appear saintly and heroic. Skullius had almost forgotten that it was in his nature because for the longest time, Red Rage had been left to guard the Bryne Estate, and Skullius had been relying on Araeyn; at least as Replucus, he had.

"Well, you see, master... I suppose you haven't checked on my abilities in a while, what with the task you had me stick to keeping us apart, but after you ascended a limited Class like 'Vehement Bone Nullmancer' into the 'Nullmancer', I grew in more ways than just the typical evolutions," Red Rage said. Inwardly, he thought what he had just said would have sounded better if he was rising into the air. "As your first Apostle, I believe I have always been special, and no doubt, I have always been loyal."

Skullius gnashed his teeth.

The gall on this diseased Apostle!

"Go on..." But he was determined to be the bigger man.

"I experienced a great many things as I evolved. Of course, I did not tell you because you were preoccupied with your urgent tasks - defeating the Null Devil King and all. I seem to share a mind and senses with the being known as Prisma Avaris OverMould in the Null Verse. Well, I can, but only in special circumstances, such as during evolution," Red Rage explained. He hunched down and pointed to the floor... for no better purpose than to look like some ethereal master bowing on hallowed ground.

"You see, master, each time you evolved, you got the chance to speak with Serenity back then, before you formed a close connection with her due to your growing strength. We Apostles experience something different when we evolve. The experience becomes more vivid as we grow. We get glimpses into spaces within the Null Verse. These spaces are usually where creatures from the racial characteristics we have taken on make their home, and in my case, where I found myself during my Triplefold evolution... I believe that's where Prisma is from." This was an interesting bit of news to Skullius. Indeed, when he was weaker, every evolution of his prompted him before Serenity in a place where he had no body. She would speak and advise him and only then would he receive his evolutionary options.

'Is what he is saying true, Serenity?' Skullius asked his benefactor.

"I believe so. You are going to have to trust him. Since you are the first Nullmancer to ever use creatures in the wider reality as a base for your Apostles, you're treading new ground," she said.

"Though, if I had to venture a guess as to why this happens, it'd have to be because of the unusual connection between the corpse you use to form an Apostle and the body that results after. The body has Null Life traits and I would assume that its strong ties to the Null Verse and the native lands it was bred in causes these glimpses."

Skullius nodded.

He actually thought this made sense.

'It's especially meaningful when considering that during evolution, the connection of the Apostle to Null Life grows stronger, especially if they choose a stronger species to evolve into. The connection to the Null Verse expands,' he thought.

'What about what he said about being special as a first Apostle. As I recall, he was just granted the [Blessing of Serenity] because of it right? Was he given anything else?' he asked Serenity.

"I believe that is correct. He didn't get anything else. I think what he might be referring to is the fact that he is beyond his peers when understanding this concept of connecting with the Null Verse since he is older," Serenity said.

Skullius nodded.

Essentially, Red Rage was just gassing himself up.

Skullius turned back to him.

"Alright, with all this in mind, why do you think you can solve the issue with the crystals?" he asked.

The Apostle spread his arms wide. Skullius was annoyed.

"First, master, I must test my own theory. Please, grant me a Rank and a Trait."

Chapter 1395: Into The Null Verse?

There were other aspects to Apostles that even Skullius had begun to forget due to the fact that his relationship with his Apostles was somewhat complex.

Red Rage had at one point decided he wanted to become a mother and left to raise little octopi he had saved.

Ferex had once succumbed to his Flaw and transformed into the Full Deck BoneTender who in turn brought upon Aigas the Null Devil King.

Araeyn was a special kind of sockethole who was guaranteed to rebel against Skullius in the future because of his race. His name was even indicative of that: 'He Who Rebels Against Order.'

The only one without an unusual quirk of some kind so far was Beyrmir, but he was still quite new, all things considered.

Asides from Class, races and levels, Apostles had three other ways to grow, all of which more or less centred around their favourability towards Skullius.

The first was Skill Amalgamation. Each time an Apostle was compelled by Skullius' achievements or actions to the point of feeling more favourable towards him - more accurately, reaching 100 points in favourability - they were awarded two chances to combine two skills of their choosing, regardless of the differences between them, into a stronger one.

This was how Red Rage had acquired the skill [Incandescent Attire of the Omnipotent Pelvis-Hegemon].

As Apostles grew, just like how they could choose their own race in later evolutions, they could also complete the skill amalgamation on their own.

Alternatively, an Apostle could acquire a Rank with those 100 points to favourability. But as far as Skullius knew from what the guidance field told him back when he found out about these boons for the first time, a Rank could only be bestowed on an Apostle only if Skullius had 5 or more Apostles in his possession.

Skullius only had four at the moment.

"Why would you want a Rank? Do you know its effects, because I don't. Even if you do though, I can't grant you a Rank yet. I'd have to summon a fifth Apostle first," he said to Red Rage.

"I see," Red Rage said. "Is the same true for an Apostle Trait?"

"I'm not too sure," Skullius said, considering that he didn't actually know much about Apostle Traits, if anything at all.

After Red Rage had reached Tier 1, his guidance field status had manifested a tag called 'Apostle Trait'. Like the 'Rank' one, it was also filled with a 'None.'

Skullius inquired the Apostle Trait's purpose from Serenity.

"If I recall correctly, it's a supernatural affix to an Apostle that focuses their growth in a single area. In a way, you could think of it as a bunch of Skill Amalgamations that produces abilities in the same line. The abilities formed won't be mere skills, as far as I remember. In exchange for severely limiting the scope of the Apostle's growth, the powers they awaken will be stronger than any in a similar vein wielded by most enemies," she explained. "But when assigning a Trait - and indeed, YOU have to do it, Skullius - you must ensure that the Trait matches the qualities of the Apostle. Also, two or more Apostles can't possess the same Trait, otherwise... the energy from the Trait will backfire on both you and the Apostles."

Skullius frowned.

'Backfire?' he asked.

"Yes. Essentially, it will make you go extinct."

Skullius hadn't thought the Apostle Trait could be such a nasty thing. On the other hand, the benefits were quite interesting. Having an Apostle focus on one field was greatly beneficial, especially if you had 9 more of them. The collection will be extremely versatile.

Some would argue that evolution already made way for this benefit to be achieved eventually, if it was well planned, that is, but Skullius' counter to that notion would be that any ability that wasn't on

the level of a general skill could change the entire nature of a combatant, and achieving something like that sooner rather later was always better.

But Skullius did wonder just what kind of aspects he could choose as Apostle Traits? What exactly qualified?

Where these aspects unlimited such as with the Mastered Void Gate applications?

Beyond that, what was the process he'd have to follow to grant Apostle Traits?

"To that, I couldn't tell you. You'd have to try it out yourself," Serenity said when he asked her, "Or... you can ask a Nullmancer."

Skullius was astonished.

'What?'

"You must have already forgotten. When you reached Tier 4, you were given four rewards - Personal Configuration, Flaw De-demonisation, Class Reinforcement, and In-Verse Glimpse. You never used this fourth reward because you didn't have the time and it didn't yield any immediate benefits," Serenity reminded him.

Skullius facepalmed.

That's right!

He had this all along!

But of course, just as Serenity had pointed out, In-Verse Glimpse didn't exactly have any real answers to the troubles which had been plaguing Skullius when he reached Tier 4 - Caxellac and his possessed self.

'Wait, I could really go into the Null Verse and interact with the creatures there?' he asked Serenity. He was a little suspicious. He had received an ability similar to this before, called [Celestial Hack]. However, this ability only allowed him travel to places he had been before as an ethereal being who

couldn't interact with any of the lifeforms there. Skullius had used it to check in on his bros in Deadmanland.

"Yes. You could talk to them. But the effect only lasts for about thirty minutes. Originally, this reward was designed for you to get a basic, broad look at what the Null Verse is like, but you could be more specific. You'd have to search for a Nullmancer yourself though, and while manoeuvring isn't all too difficult, the Null Verse is a reality of its own and Nullmancers can be of any race imaginable."

Skullius rubbed his chin.

He was intrigued. Very intrigued.

But if he spent the whole chunk of the time he was allotted with In-Verse Glimpse searching for a Nullmancer...

'That would be a waste. I don't know the first thing about the places in the Null Verse,' Skullius thought. 'Couldn't you help me find a Nullmancer?' He thought Serenity could help.

"It's been a while since I've actively roamed the Null Verse. The Nullmancers I knew might have already moved on or died by now. But let's give it a try," she said.

Chapter 1396: Stand-In Apostle (1)

Skullius explained what Serenity had told him to Red Rage. In his excitement, he completely ignored everyone else even though they were listening closely to what he said.

"Must be nice. Your benefactor communicates with you directly?" Uyuniya said after Skullius explained. It might have been the only thing she truly grasped from what he said to Red Rage.

"Their relationship is a whole lot more intimate than that, believe me," Aurolio chimed in with a chuckle. It was no baseless remark. He had been standing right next to Serenity when Void had tried to kill Skullius, and he hadn't missed it when Serenity had flowed back into Skullius from Sila's body.

Skullius kept his focus on Red Rage though, ignoring the comments.

"If it helps narrow down exactly what needs to be done, then I think you should get on with it, master," Red Rage said. "However, before you do, I think you should hear what I have to say, and understand even a smidgeon of my reasoning."

"Alright," Skullius said while dialling down his excitement. "But it's still related to the connection you feel from the Null Verse, right?"

"Yes," said Red Rage, and the glow around him intensified. "The connection I've felt when evolving has taught me a few things about my race, the Imperfect Judicial Saint. The powers I have are along the same lines as the ones I had when I was the Juvenile Pelvic Arbiter. The essence of my abilities revolves around the idea of judging enemies, imposing punishments and taking something of theirs in return. But unlike when I was the Arbiter, now I can take what I deem to be fitting or issue commands that enemies cannot avoid simply by judging their intent and actions, and then invoking your name, master."

And indeed. Red Rage was capable of taking elements from his enemies nigh instantaneously. He had even demonstrated this power when he had paired with Elita to fight the swarm of Cavern Boron had called forth earlier.

Skullius remembered this ability of Red Rage's. He had used it himself actually, when he was Prisma Vohnvolt Exonn on Actuass. That was how he had extracted the masked man's powerful soul which he later used to create the Transcendent grade artefact, Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow.

When Skullius confirmed that he did understand Red Rage's former powers, the Apostle continued to explain.

"There are subsets of abilities I will obtain under the Imperfect Judicial Saint species. With the glimpses I have been getting because of this connection to Prisma, I am sure these abilities will work wonders. But of course, if I were to awaken them in my current state, they would be too weak to affect the crystals. I wished for a Rank or an Apostle Trait because I know both will transform my present state into something far superior."

"I see. But what do these... sub-abilities do exactly?" Skullius asked the Apostle suspiciously. Just what made Red Rage so confident?

The Apostle was silent for a while. He likely wanted to create room for awe when he finally answered.

"For the sake of tempering expectations, master, please allow me to keep it a secret until I verify if I'm right or wrong," he said.

Skullius scoffed. He didn't know if the bastard was seriously worried that whatever he was cooking up would fail, or if he just wanted to make an even greater show of his powers when the time came.

In the end, he relented and didn't press the matter. Thus, Red Rage continued.

"So, before you leave with Serenity, please grant me a Rank," he said. "You can create a fifth Apostle just to fill the count of five required for me to receive one. You can easily discard the Apostle later, right?"

Skullius supposed that was fair.

It wasn't the first time he had created Apostles only to destroy them, after all. As Replicus, he had done a lot of experiments with his Nullmancer powers. Araeyn was the product of one of the successes of Skullius demented trial and errors. The pasty, pale Apostle had actually been hatched by Skullius alongside Yuyui's Bubbles.

"Alright," Skullius said with a nod. "But what shall I kill to make an Apostle?" His vision swept across the room even when his eyes didn't move.

Unlike typical summoners or necromancers, Skullius could not resurrect anything that he had not killed himself. Thus, he began searching for candidates. He looked at the Arch-Mages and Monarch. They flinched.

He wouldn't kill them though. That went against everything he had argued with Elita and Uyuniya about just now.

"I have a solution to that already," Red Rage said confidently.

"What? How?" Skullius asked him.

As though it was the simplest thing in the world, Red Rage snapped his fingers and after a white flash of light suddenly sparked in front of him, a large, extremely muscular goblin appeared.

Skullius raised a brow, as did Elita. Uyuniya made a curious "Hmm?". The rest merely watched blankly.

The Hybrid Warmoth meant to ask Red Rage what this goblin was when he came to a realisation himself.

"You still have that army of yours?" he asked the Apostle.

Red Rage nodded proudly.

"I managed to keep a lot of them safe even against that last attack from your possessed body which wiped out a chunk of Pelian. I have great plans for these children of mine, but what I intend to do also hinges upon my ascension," he said. "In any case, feel free to use this one."

Skullius found it eerily discomfoting that Red Rage had offered one of his 'children' as a sacrifice. But then it was all for the greater goo-

Skullius cursed at that.

No.

He had yet to reconcile with the fact apparently, he could give himself a pass to kill or invoke chaos just for his own sake - his own good.

Perhaps killing the goblin looking blankly from him to Red Rage would be a conscious

initiation into accepting the fact that some wrongs needed doing After all, realistically, Skullius did know there was no way he could become a complete saint. He sighed.

'Well, I can at least make it painless,' he thought.

His intent was instant and powerful.

The [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] sent forth a microscopic string of Ju'wte that the goblin couldn't have seen or felt. The string passed through one of the goblin's ears and fried

its brain in less than an instant.

The creature fell to the ground, dead, but it couldn't have even processed how.

"Now, let's make the stand-in Apostle then," Skullius said.

Chapter 1397: Stand-In Apostle (2)

"Are you sure you want to demonstrate your power in front of Void users?" Serenity asked right as Skullius was prompting his nimbus to use [Apostles' Liege] on the goblin corpse. "Do you trust them now?"

Skullius shook his head.

'Not at all,' he said to her and made a sweep of the room. 'Trust is far from something I will willingly give anyone new to my company, even Elita. I'm sure that even with our little moments, she still has her reservations too. We might have opened up to each other, but it will take some time to repair any bond we might have had before.'

"Then why are you so casually showing off your powers? I understand that allowing them to listen in to your explanation to Red Rage might have been passable since they wouldn't glean much from it but this?"

'Don't worry about that, Serenity. You know as well as I do that the Nullmancer power is far from being a secret or an ace up my sleeve now. Even if they understand its mechanics and try to use it against me in the future, I have a new Class that applies concepts beyond their

imaginations. So, let them see what I have in my Default Body.'

Serenity let out a scoff.

Skullius had an interesting relationship with his War Body. Or rather, his War Body had an interesting dynamic. It was both terrible and amazing, reliable and unreliable. But all in all, it did contain all of Skullius' ingenuity, and all that others gleaned from his Default Body - unbeknownst to them - was scrap.

Of course, Serenity understood that Skullius wasn't willing to completely shut off these allies of his. Him allowing them to witness how he used his Null Life powers was a way for him to try and reach out to them to form a veritable relationship; he wouldn't pass up the chance to create an alliance with other anomalies. No one could survive on their own in the wider reality after all.

Thus, as everyone watched, Skullius' [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] lurched forth and bathed the goblin corpse on the floor. Bits of Ju`wte and a ton of Null Life Essence gushed and devoured it whole.

[Apostles' Liege] was activated right then.

The [Entropy's Harmonising Nimbus] was created from a collection of Skullius' Class skills - Nullmancer Class skills. It pretty much acted as a control system that he used to activate the effects of those abilities he had as a Nullmancer.

Guidance field panels poured in Skullius' vision, but he ignored them.

When it came to summoning an Apostle, the quality of the corpse was important since it formed a baseline for what kind of power the Apostle it produced would start with. Additionally, if the quality of the corpse was great enough, some of its racial qualities and abilities could even be retained as it awakened as an Apostle.

Unfortunately, the goblin corpse was not really anything special, at least when compared to Skullius' last Apostle.

Even with the boost to Skullius' Class, which made it so that each Apostle Skullius summoned would automatically be raised to the Fourth Tier, the goblin wasn't exactly a match for any of Skullius' old Apostles. At least that was what Skullius assumed.

Even Ferex was on a higher plane, he was sure.

Desperate as the Apostle was to prove himself, he had actually picked up a few interesting things from being in Caxellac, but Skullius had forbidden him from using any of it on Aigas - unless he was in fatal danger, of course.

Yet nonetheless, Skullius and everyone else watched as the result emerged from the mad cloud.

It was... a goblin, but not like any Skullius had ever seen.

"Huh?" He was taken aback.

The goblin had grown to thrice its previous size and beyond that, its entire body had changed. It was no longer flesh. It looked like a giant sculpture of scarlet diamond or maybe ice - it was hard to tell. Its details were incredibly sharp. Its face spotted two large, lamp-like eyes issuing glaring white lights, a large pointed nose, and a wide mouth drawn in a grin. It had two pairs of pointed ears and a large icy, diamond-y beard that reached its waist.

It might have been a troll with how blocky its torso was.

But there were two features that distinguished the creature from the rest.

A top hat made from glowing characters that looked like 10s floated over its head and a great staff of a similar nature was in its hand, looking more conceptual than material.

Skullius was astonished.

'Why do I get the feeling that I suddenly summoned something unusually special,' he thought, but then he reeled all the more. 'HOLD ON! I didn't even decide this Apostle's race!'

Sila found himself squinting at the goblin. Before even Skullius, he noticed the cores hidden deep within the goblin's body; seventeen cores, all holding seventeen different types of Null Life Essence.

'It must be because Serenity used my body before. I'm terribly sensitive to this stuff now,' Sila thought.

When Skullius sensed the seventeen cores of power himself, he gave a light gasp.

The goblin quickly got on one knee.

Araeyn and Red Rage gave it wary looks. For some reason, they felt threatened by this new addition and they both couldn't tell why. It certainly wasn't because it was innately stronger than both of them, and that confused them all the more.

"My Liege..." the Apostle said and it looked at Skullius. "Why do you appear especially surprised with me? Did you, perchance, expect so little from me?"

...!!!

Skullius gaped.

What?

What did the Apostle say? How did it know?

"Please. Allow me the chance to demonstrate my worth," the Apostle continued.

"Skullius!" Serenity suddenly called right then.

"What?" Skullius cried aloud.

He got an ugly sense of déjà vu. What was it now? Was another Apostle going to screw him

over?

"Skullius! You have struck gold!" Serenity said. There was a bizarre cheer in her voice. "You've just summoned a..."

But the Apostle beat Serenity to the punch.

He made Skullius aware of what he was excitedly and with great confidence.

"You may yet understand, my Liege. I am a Nulliergrapher - one who divides territories in the Null Verse. I may yet be valuable to you."

Chapter 1398: Stand-In Apostle (3)

A Nulliergrapher?

Skullius couldn't have guessed such a word existed in all his life, or Null Life for that matter.

It sounded grand and rich with purpose. But of course, its meaning had already been alluded to by the new Apostle.

One who divides Territories in the Null Verse.

A crazy designation indeed.

But a part of Skullius' mind still insisted that something was amiss here, extraordinary as the prospect of this new Apostle was.

'How did this guy get a race before I selected it for him?' he wondered. 'After becoming a Nullmancer, my Apostles evolve to the Fourth time upon summoning, but only after I pick their initial race. Could this guy have...?'

But Serenity tore through Skullius' nest of speculation with her elation.

"Skullius, this is unprecedented!" she said. "This is a race of the first living things I ever made when I had just established the Null Verse. Because of the limitless growth I knew the Null Verse would harbour, I felt that it needed to be divided into four sections - North, West, East and South. Mundane, I know you might think, but these designations give some kind of order to something as large and complicated as the Null Verse. These four sections are what the Four Authorities of the Null Verse rule now as their territories."

"Oh..."

Oh, indeed.

At once, what Serenity seemed to connect seamlessly with the information Skullius had derived after using <Counsel> for the first time. Back then, he had asked VOW about authorities of the Null Verse and learned about the places they ruled. And indeed, it was as simple as North, East, West and South.

'So does that mean carving out the Null Verse into these four sections is such a god-like feat?' Skullius asked Serenity.

"It's far more than that. The Null Verse is far denser than the wider reality and Amras doesn't govern it. It operates under strange, ever-changing horrid principles. Things like Treasures, Physiques and Andori don't apply to it. To be able to partition it cleanly using simple expertise in the different types of Null Life Essence is beyond Divine. The Nulliergraphers are masters of marking, contorting and sealing."

Skullius was impressed.

To think he had managed to get his hands on the oldest creatures in the Null Verse.

He gave the goblin kneeling before him a greater appraisal. Suddenly, it felt inappropriate for such a creature to be bowing before him. The top hat and staff on it - both made from collections of 10s - seemed to represent not just its race, but its prestige. The seventeen mana cores it was already in possession of did the same.

'How did I manage to draw something like this when I didn't even choose its race? The guidance field hadn't even offered me the evolutionary options,' Skullius said to Serenity.

"Alas, even I don't understand. That's something else you will have to ask a Nullmancer from the Null Verse."

Skullius gave a deep sigh.

Seeing as there were no more answers to be gained from Serenity, he checked the Apostle's stats.

[Name: None]

[Tier: 4]

[Apostle Trait : None]

[Rank: None]

[Level: 1]

[EXP (NLE): 0/2,000]

[Core(s): ---]

[Class: None]

[Race: Primordial Nulliergrapher]

Primordial Nulliergraphers are an ancient race of the Null Verse that predate much of its following, known history. They are responsible for carving and dividing it into cardinal sections and have some of the deepest understanding of the fickle nature of Null Life Essence.

[Inv. Status: Eagerly awaiting your permission to demonstrate its prowess]

+Stats+

[Strength: Depends of Null Life Essence]

[Agility: Depends of Null Life Essence]

[Intelligence: On perpetual rise]

[Endurance: Depends on Null Life Essence]

[Luck: 0]

[Health: Depends on Null Life Essence capacity]

[Mana : None]

[Null Core (s) x17: 165,900,550/165,900,550]

The number of Null Cores in this Apostle's possession will grow perpetually. As time passes, it learns more unique ways to use Null Life Essence and develops cores that hold the type of Null Life Essence suitable for certain purposes.

+Skills+

None

Be advised. This Apostle will develop skills according to need. Every Nulliergrapher's collection of powers is solely based on how they weave the Null Life Essence at their disposal and this ability goes beyond simple skill. If there is a need for supplementary powers to its ability to seal and divide, the Primordial Nulliergrapher will develop them impressively

quickly.

+Oddity+

Bone Needle

"Goes beyond simple skill?" Skullius said with a frown. Once again, he pretended as though everyone around him didn't exist. "Even Araeyn's ability to warp dimensions is a Skill." Serenity addressed Skullius' astonishment at once. Her proud tone was quite understandable. "Their ability to seal and divide comes as second nature. Its something they can do even as mere souls without skills to harness. Its something they know how to do even without using the Null Life Essence in their

own bodies. I needed beings like that at the time." Skullius circled around the new Apostle. Serenity's justification for the existence of the Nulliergraphers reminded him of the explanation behind the Eternal Drakkens of Aigas. Araeyn and Ferex continued to stab the Nulliergrapher with wary looks.

The goblin waiting patiently for Skullius.

The Hybrid Warmoth was re-reading its status from the guidance field. He imagined Elita, Aurolio and Uyuniya were doing the same.

Well, it was fine if they received the same information about the goblin he did. Them knowing getting to know a bit more about the lore of the Null Verse was harmless.

Skullius ignored them. He instead continued to marvel at his new combat unit.

To think that this goblin... this Apostle could develop skills easily just from need. Skullius

shuddered at the possibilities. This went beyond even the [Blessing of Serenity].

'Did I get this kind of Apostle as a result of advancing my Class?' he wondered.

He sighed.

"Rise," he ordered the goblin and it stood tall.

"Will you measure my worth now, my Liege?" the Apostle asked.

"No. Not yet. So far, I'm more than satisfied with you. Before I dive into the deepest bits of your powers, I have something to do. You will hang here for a little while," Skullius said.

"Yes, my Liege," said the Primordial Nulliergrapher. "But will you at least grant me a name?"

"Right."

Skullius considered, but not for too long. Unlike with his two previous Apostles, he decided to simplify the naming convention for the Nulliergrapher.

"You will be...Weaver. Eternity's Weaver."

Chapter 1399 First Rank

1399 First Rank

The guidance field acknowledged the name Skullius had given his new Apostle. The name of the Apostle immediately solidified the fact that Weaver was not a mere stand-in Apostle after all. He had officially joined the gang, his worth proven to be a lot greater than Skullius had originally imagined.

Weaver seemed immensely pleased with his name. It was meaningful indeed.

Red Rage and Araeyn still regarded him with an odd sort of stubborn jealousy and wariness. Skullius noticed, but he didn't address it. It wouldn't do to address it in front of his allies. A part of him hoped they wouldn't notice the odd behavior of his Apostles. Well, besides things like Red Rage's excessive chivalry, of course.

Skullius was sure the one thing Uyuniya, Elita and Aurolio didn't know about his summoning powers was that his Apostles had the ability to rebel against him. Red Rage's earlier behavior – supporting Kintar's atrocity – didn't appear as rebellion, especially when Elita and Uyuniya supported it as the correct course for a Divine. They interpreted it as Red Rage helping Skullius chose the right path.

Skullius didn't want any of the Void Users to know that there was worse than his Apostles could do if he didn't earn favour with them. For reference, Araeyn was a lot more well-behaved now compared to before because he saw Skullius in a little more of a favourable light since the advancement of his Nullmancer Class. The bastard had been really stubborn and uncooperative before then.

"Alright then, Red Rage," Skullius said. "It's time for this Rank Bestowal."

"Indeed, master," the Apostle said and he rushed to bow before Skullius. He was a vague figure of light with a vague cape sticking behind him.

Skullius sighed, but he decided to get it over with.

He was quite curious about the changes Red Rage would go through after obtaining a Rank. Well, he was curious about the effects of a Rank to begin with. It was a pity he couldn't discover the effects of an Apostle Trait right then as well. Perhaps there was a lot of lore attached to that.

[You are bestowing a Rank upon the Apostle 'Red Rage']

[...]

[...]

[The First Rank, also dubbed as the Commanding Rank, will be granted to the Apostle 'Red Rage'. Do you accept?]

'That's the minimum I expected, I guess. Glad to know this bit was as I thought.'

Skullius didn't immediately confirm.

He knew his decision either way, would go uncontested, but he decided, for interest's sake, to ask the other Apostles for their opinion on this matter. Would they accept Red Rage as their commander?

It might have been counter to his goal of hiding how much freedom his Apostles had, but in this case, they wouldn't be rebelling against him.

Beyrmir was the first to be approached for his opinion.

"My Liege. I do not care for what position I have in your army. You have already graced me with a task far dearer to me than heading the rest of your intimate troops. I will accept Red Rage as my Commander, if you wish it."

'Of course.' Skullius laughed. Beyrmir valued his duty as the one to bring Skullius out from the effects of Doom Factor 2 more than anything else.

Skullius turned to Araeyn.

He voiced his question for all to hear.

"Do you have a problem with it?"

Araeyn's response could easily be the most interesting or most boring depending on where his headspace was currently, Skullius imagined.

The pasty-faced, pale Apostle folded his arms before his chest and stared at Skullius with the darkness in his sockets.

"I do."

Skullius chuckled. There it was!

The Apostle who was supposed to rebel against him in the future had a problem with accepting Red Rage as his leader.

"Why?" Skullius asked.

"Because..." the Apostle said, "...I feel I have a greater propensity to utilize the full fighting force of all your Apostles with my abilities. I can augment their properties as I please in the Null Remnants, especially when considering what Eternity's Weaver can do. The possibilities are endless. And I consider the history behind my race – with the Null Devil King as a case study – to be best suited at handling authority over Null Lifeforms. Red Rage, on the other hand, has no other advantage over me other than seniority."

"..."

Skullius had not been expecting such a sound argument from Araeyn. Not at all. The eloquence stumped him too.

Sure, he expected the Apostle to use his strength – as he indeed was the strongest Apostle at the moment – as a basis for why he deserved to be given the First Rank, but not in such a well-reasoned argument.

Before Skullius could address Araeyn's response to his question, Red Rage fired back... respectfully.

"I cannot contest your strengths, Araeyn. Indeed, you have a very diverse ability set and it would suit us well if you were the Commander, but I have more advantages over you than just seniority. I have a great well of experience with coordinating large numbers of troops and I have abilities tailored towards supporting those troops as well. Indeed, they may fall short in comparison to yours, but once I get the First Rank, they will be far more effective and are utilizable even outside of a Null Remnant," Red Rage said.

"On top of this, while I understand that you passively gain knowledge of all the Null Remnants available in the Null Verse, I have acquired information that helps Apostles like us at a personal level. Once I confirm it with the Rank Bestowal, you all will benefit too."

Red Rage had good points as well, but needless to say, they did not convince Araeyn to step down at all.

Skullius laughed and so did Kintar.

"Are they really having a civilized debate over the Rank?" she asked Skullius.

"Yes. They are far more civil than I imagined."

"They might be better than us," Kenno commented.

The looks on Uyuniya and Elita's faces said it all. They were just as surprised.

The Apostles continued to debate without raising their voices, going into the nitty-gritties of their earlier broad points to beat the other down.

Skullius sighed and turned to Weaver who was also watching the exchange.

"Are you also interested in the First Rank?" he asked.

"Not at all, my Liege. My kind are always satisfied to exist as keen observers," Weaver said.

Skullius had expected that. In any case, Red Rage would contest it if Weaver was to claim the Commanding position.

The Hybrid Warmoth had been wondering how long the debate would go on when Araeyn suddenly exploded with Null Life Essence.

"Since it seems words will not decide this, how about we have quick bout with simple rules. Whoever loses has to concede to the winner," he proposed.

"I would quite like that," Red Rage said.

Chapter 1400 Araeyn V. Red Rage

1400 Araeyn V. Red Rage

"I would quite like that," Red Rage said.

Skullius slapped his face.

Just when he was commending his Apostles for being civil, they turned to combat to solve the deadlock of wills they had reached. He wondered if they even considered that he was the one with the final say and that it was by his own whims that the two Apostles were even allowed to battle over the position.

"I never thought your summons could disagree among themselves like this," Elita said to Skullius. The Hybrid Warmoth grumbled.

"Are you going to stop them?" Uyuniya asked him, a coy smile on her face.

In all truth, Skullius was split between either option at his disposal. Both had a mound of advantages.

He got one more good reason for either of these options with Uyuniya's taunt just now. He knew why she was asking if he'd stop the Apostles or not. It was a trap.

With the revelation that Uyuniya was a princess who was quite experienced when dealing with leadership roles, Skullius understood that she was very much interested in his ability as a leader. She had shown it when commending him for choosing Kintar as a Deputy.

Now, it seemed she was interested in seeing how he would deal with these summons. She, of course, could tell that they had a staggering degree of freedom.

Would Skullius overwrite it and simply choose Red Rage for the Commanding Rank or would he allow his subordinates to decide for themselves?

Skullius didn't know which one Uyuniya deemed right in this situation. He cursed.

'You already know a lot about how I treat my subordinates by now,' he thought, eyeing the terrestrial woman.

Red Rage and Araeyn walked up to him all dignified like.

"Master. Will you allow us a duel to settle this matter?" the former asked, bowing. Araeyn remained standing aloof.

Skullius secretly rejoiced. He gave Uyuniya another glance.

'You must be closing in on the fact that my summons can rebel against me,' he thought. 'Thankfully, my summons didn't decide to ignore my position this time. They saved me some face.'

Skullius folded his arms.

"I will allow it. But you only have thirty seconds. The first one to be knocked down loses. However, if neither of you is bested according to that rule in the next thirty seconds, I will pick a different Apostle to grant the First Rank."

The decision astounded the Apostles.

Skullius grinned... inwardly.

He was quite serious. Indeed, the original idea was to test Red Rage's theory of growing strong enough to do something about Boron's crystals, but that – seemingly – could be accomplished with either the Rank Bestowal or the Apostle Trait. If Red Rage failed at his chance to earn the First Rank, he'd get just have to settle for the Apostle Trait.

Skullius would have learned how to awaken it in his Apostles by the time he got back from the Null Verse.

Speaking of time, Skullius had limited the time of the two Apostles' bout simply because there was a lack of time to entertain a long battle. Skullius needed to go to the Null Verse after this, and after that, he had to go to Opungale to settle the matter with Luserus.

Both of his contending Apostles were powerful and Skullius doubted that in a full-fledged battle Red Rage, the weaker of the two, would go down easily.

Thus, he made the contest only 30 seconds. It wasn't only strength that could win the prize now.

Aurolio looked especially excited.

"Well, this is going to be interesting," he said, grinning.

*

Skullius finally addressed the Monarch and the Arch-Mages before the battle between the two Apostles. He had already known that his showings in their presence had killed all opportunity for the calm, collected, diplomatic relations he had planned for, but he decided to be friendly still.

It felt meaningless doing such a thing, and for the first time, Skullius actually felt as though... it was beneath him.

He quickly cast aside the thought though.

"Ready?" he said to the two Apostles standing outside, in front of the Monarch's barely-standing Royal Dwelling.

14:02

'Araeyn will probably start with...' he thought.

...And Araeyn whipped his hand forward and grasped at the air.

"[Micro-Dimensioning]!"

At once, the space around Red Rage was scraped off like paper. The background of the Royal Dwelling, the gloomy hue inspired by the night and the ground... Everything was stripped away within three meters of the Saint, replaced by a torrent of clouds mixed in with turbulent Levin!

At once, Red Rage sank into the Null Remnant Araeyn had created a gateway to, and the Authority of Dimensions (Araeyn's race) closed it immediately and opened another to follow after his opponent.

Skullius smirked.

'You are severely underestimating your opponent, Araeyn,' he thought.

And sure enough, the Authority of Dimensions had been looking down on Red Rage a bit too much. A spinning golden light suddenly sprang forth where Red Rage had been before, and the Apostle stormed out of this light, whipping towards Araeyn at full speed!

Indeed, Red Rage had a powerful warping ability that transcended dimensions. He had used it before right after his evolution back then.

'But you don't want to be rushing for a physical contest with Araeyn, Red Rage,' Skullius thought.

It appeared he was right.

Araeyn noticed Red Rage's appearance a little too late, but his response was anything but swift.

The Apostle was constantly protected by two odd Skills that erected barriers around him. One disintegrated anything that touched him and the other transported foreign matter to Null Remnants upon contact.

Araeyn could freely control these barriers, making them larger or smaller. He opted for the former, in this case.

The barriers expanded around him, shredding everything they came into contact with as they rushed to meet Red Rage.

And then the battle was over, Skullius knew.

Araeyn's barriers smashed against Red Rage and began breaking down every part of his form. Great, scorching sparks flew in every direction, wild and furious and greedy. They spelled the end for one of the two contenders.

"Fall on your back. I command you in the name of master Skullius!"

BOOOM!

Araeyn was down before he knew it, lying on his back. His body obeyed the voice that commanded it without so much as a finger of resistance. And just like that, it was decided that Red Rage would be the one to hold the Commanding Rank.