

Undead 151

Chapter 151: Elsewhere: Arrival And Judgement

"They're coming! Dear Listafelle, I can't believe it!"

"Bloody, long-eared purists who can't stay the hell away from our lands! I hope this is a ploy to kill them once an alliance is established!"

"Hmmm... I don't know about that, nor do I care really. What I do care about though, are those foreign breasts, cultivated in nature, washed by untouched waters, brushed by flowers and having a warmth better than freshly baked buns."

"Hehe, this guy knows his stuff. I wonder what a Sif woman tastes like. I heard they all have fair, white skin. Hmmm. I feel something twitching just by imagining such lovely skin around hard, pink nipples. I'll sign any treaty if you give me five of those to milk everyday!"

"Huh? What would you do with five tits?! Wouldn't you want six? As in three beautiful women? Are you some weirdo who likes to jerk off to three breasted women or something?! Because I'd totally agree!"

"That's artistic and erotic. Erotistic!"

"I know right! Finally someone who gets it! I've found my brother from another bosom!"

"GET AWAY FROM HERE, YOU TWO DEGENERATES!"

The expansive streets of the Royal City, Agmold, were bursting with discussions as everyone waited for the arrival of the Sif representatives who had been announced a day ago to be arriving today!

Agmold, one of the four big cities, had the largest population along with the highest security reserved for this momentous occasion that could potentially redefine the entire nation and possibly the entire continent.

Many talks were in the air about the ramifications that a successful signing of the treaty would entail as Pelian as a nation was only one of three and if the Royal family in this nation agreed to

allow the Sif to integrate into the human society of this land, that would be the beginning of a undesirable dilution, as many called it.

If Pelian agreed with the proposal this could spark a war and the majority of the public didn't want to have the long-eared men and women running around except for noblemen, the Purity and perhaps, the DDP society.

(A/N: Degenerate, depraved and pervert society).

The crowded public streets of the large city were littered with hawkers, men and women from the public residences along with curious children who stood on their toes in order to try to get a better view of this awaited visitor.

While many nobles and a few commonfolk had seen at least one Sif before, many only knew of their existence, even within such a large city like Agmold.

As the chaos reigned within wide road that would stretched up to lead all the way to the Royal domain, the clanking of heavy armour was heard as a few Knights walked within the crowd.

No one had to be told.

No one had to forced.

No violence was required.

The masses split hurriedly and ate back their clamour and chatter. A deep silence ensued as everyone gave way to the Capital Knights who had been sent to observe order and make sure that the guests would arrive within the Royal domain without any issues.

Their steps were unhurried as they nodded to the crowd which reciprocated without any words.

A respect for men and women at work was at play as a single Knight stood calmly on either side of the road with a gap of thirty meters from the other, all the way to the designated place.

The uniformity and order was incredible and within the next few minutes, the guests arrived.

Clop! Clop! Clop!

White horses with prideful statures galloped through the bricked streets.

Four of them drew a beautiful and long carriage which had an immaculate design of stars on the shiny, sky blue exterior with golden fittings that were etched with beautiful Sif writings.

Four protruding wings that were sculpted masterfully and fitted to the sides could be seen, yet one could swear that they could see them twitch from time to time as if they were alive.

Two individuals who rode white hordes as well walked on either side of the carriage, their slim structures visible through the white armours they wore, hiding every inch of their skin.

The Capital Knights on the side evaluated these two to be extraordinarily powerful as their awareness brushed against the crowds, cautiously keeping an eye on any suspicious activity.

Everyone held their breaths as the carriage passed.

Such beauty.

Such class.

The crowds watched as the carriage went down the long distance until it reached a massive estate, filled with high rising buildings and fascinating decor where it came to a stop.

Two Knights with different coloured armour from the rest were waiting, their helmets which only covered half their faces reflecting the sun.

The door to the carriage opened, a silk dress, along with a slender foot being what first thing that appeared to.

Soon, the figures of three women stepped out of the carriage.

Two of them were adorned in slender armour that hugged their figures elegantly while being fitted with a type of transparent cloth as capes.

Their faces were covered not by helmets, but by veils that only left their ears and eyes for all to see.

The figure in their midst however, was open for the world to appreciate.

Even the two Knights that were here to receive them couldn't help but grit their teeth as they held back gasps.

Long, pointy ears with slanted crimson-gold eyes that looked like small worlds, fair white skin with a light peppering of freckles to the high cheekbones was what her head expressed.

Long, cherry hair that draped over her shoulder to cover her back which was uncovered as was the design of the long, turquoise blue dress that sparkled like glitter, shaping over her curvy body, could be seen as she went on to give the Knights a sweet smile.

The Knights bowed slightly before extending their hands in the direction of the large building behind them where at the very doors, three people in Royal attire could be seen waiting.

"No need to gesture pointlessly. I can hear and speak the Known Language just fine," the Sif said with a voice that flowed like honey.

The representative of the Sif had arrived.

The third daughter of the High Family, Darwel.

"We are very disappointed, Champion Elita. With your expertise, we thought we could trust your judgement but it seems that we were wrong. Your promotion to the tenth position occurred only recently and we hoped you would scale higher but..." a feminine voice spoke from one of the seven netted doors that were attached to the white wall before a certain Paladin Champion who was kneeling respectfully.

It had been a full day and some since she arrived and a report of what had occurred in Eofel had arrived, prompting this meeting with the highest order of power within the Purity.

The dark-skinned Champion showed no change in her expression as she heard the verdict that came from the behind the walls.

"Thousands were killed in the wake of a mysterious power but the Knights say nothing of praise about you saving lives! Leaving a criminal who attacked a Grand Priest alive and smearing our image was all you did and now those common fodder and noble fools see us as unreliable! You did not even defend your case at the very least!" another voice barked angrily. "Have you anything to say for yourself?!"

Elita raised her head and faced no one in particular as she spoke.

"My decisions seemed appropriate at the time but I realise that I was wrong. I accept whatever punishment you will give. However, I beg of you to consider the Green Neolists as a threat at the same level as the Evenfall. Their cruelty is sacrilegious and must be dealt with. For the good of Feinheath," Elita said while her lips trembled.

Even her tough heart had been shaken when she had to face off against the victims of <Faithful Message Undeath>. Civilians used for evil purposes.

This evil had to be quelled nomatter what, even if she wasn't the one to do it.

There was silence for a while before the same feminine voice from before spoke.

"We have acknowledged it. We will gather information from our forces and mobilise our resources to find those fiends. I give you my word, Champion Elita."

"However, as of this moment, as punishment for your incompetence, your title as a Paladin Champion shall be stripped from you and you shall be indefinitely detained."

Elita clenched her fists as she held back her emotions.

Still, she didn't regret it. Had she not been more open minded, she would have died in her fight with the Cursed Knight and undoubtedly everyone in Eofel would have died if that was the enemy's intent.

She didn't express any of her reasons and took the fall quietly.

This was a merciful punishment all things considered , though it sucked.

"I accept."

Chapter 152: Inhone City

The Discount Human stood, facing the city that was supposed to be small.

Inhone City.

It was bigger than he expected it to be, surrounded by thick walls that had different stations atop which could be manned to attack in times of crisis.

Right now, he was standing in a wide dusty street where several tens of people were lined up, entering the city one by one.

The surroundings were as verdant as they had been for all his journey which enraged Skullius as it almost seemed like he was the only one whom the sun wanted to bully.

Among the people around him were some had carts and carriages, others on foot as they all endured the procedure that was taking place at the wide open space at the wall where the gates were lifted.

Verification of identity before entry was really important in Inhone as well as all proper cities.

New entrants had to pay a fee that was in line with how long they would be staying in the city. If they wished to remain permanent residents of the region or the city, they had to pay for it, gaining an identification that could last for up to ten years given the right pocket before needing to be renewed.

Locals had it easy as people from this hot region could identify themselves easily and distinguish the foreigners because of their skin and tolerance to the hot one above.

Skullius had heard in the many conversations that were taking place around him of the situation and he was glad in this moment, that he had some coin.

In all truth, he didn't know what coin was until just a few minutes ago when he listened to a few blabbering merchants who tossed a few silver coins in the air playfully.

"This heat is a pain in the pelvis.. " Skullius thought as he sweated.

The sun had not been kind to him over his journey from Santhi.

He was glad that Red Rage had secured for him clothing and water, otherwise he would have died in the most embarrassing way for an evolved Boneman in disguise.

It had been a rough journey but he had made it anyway, silent as it was, with Skullius running away from strangers and seeking for monsters to kill to gather Null Life Essence from.

He had found none as except for domestic animals that were kept in the many settlements which he had seen on his way, nothing else could be found.

His Conqueror's Halo had vanished some time ago, though Skullius couldn't be bothered as it had been made known to him that it was just a decoration.

An advertisement.

The Discount Human had become devoted to mastering the abilities of the Insurgent Magnus after his fight with Jackpot.

Since he would be stuck in cosmetic flesh for most of the time while he was with humans, he had to practise harder.

And practise he did.

[Basic Evil Weaving] had reached level 8 while [Evil Darkness Production] had reached level 6 following some dedicated work.

Skullius couldn't wait to evolve the skills and unlock more options in his use of the power.

His current goal hadn't changed as he aimed to find a way to save Red Rage while harvesting Null Life Essence.

Searching for more Clusters wasn't a bad idea but during his journey here, he had found it rather difficult to come across a Cluster.

Hopefully, the word he had heard being tossed around a day ago in Namu and Santhi could help him with his goals.

Guild.

The line kept moving as the service was not stunted by any means, Skullius following along until he reached the front.

Now, he could clearly see the ones managing all the work.

A few men dressed formally sat on desks while at the edges of the gates, men in sparkling silver armour could be seen.

Capital Knights.

These men seemed more... professional and powerful than the ones Skullius had seen in Eofel. They had an air about them that demanded respect and even though Skullius didn't dare use [Advanced Mana Manipulation], he could still feel that there crazy strong.

Two of them wore stern faces as they asked the same questions over and over again, the entrants paying up to the formally dressed men who sat desks collecting the coin in spatial rings.

As Skullius' turn came, his figure standing before the Knight, he saw the man's face twitch a little upon looking at his face.

"State your business," the Knight said sternly with a bit of roughness that he didn't inflict on anyone else.

"I'm here to... visit," Skullius answered.

"For how long do you wish to stay?"

"A few days."

"For how long do you wish to stay?"

"Bro, I said a few days."

"For how long do you wish to stay?!"

The sword at the Knight's side was unsheathed.

"Five days, bro," Skullius relented, the Knight's malicious air finally dying down.

Skullius had already been holding five silver coins that he had taken from Reon's ring which he handed to the man at the desk who also looked at his face with grimace.

'Give it a rest you bastards!' Skill growled inwardly.

Upon entering the city, he was met with a vast world that announced everything within it quite blatantly. Tall purposeful structures that rose from the ground had different colourations and styles with symbols that showed what their function was.

Orderly streets that carried people of different kinds, some rich, some poor were artfully placed around the city.

Clamour and chatter along with sweet smells were everywhere, though Skullius couldn't detect them.

No loud and disorderly marketplaces were evident as this seemed like a proper city with purpose.

Perhaps it was just a biased opinion from Skullius as he hated the reception from Eofel.

"Now. Where do I start?" Skullius thought as his eyes ran around, taking in full scenes of various activities.

He couldn't bring himself to just ask as he feared provoking UNcoddled and getting himself screwed all over again.

Skullius gazed to the side and found a group of six men and women wearing colourful armour and holding impressive looking weapons.

They were on their way out of the city as they chatted joyfully while on the other side of the street, a few other figures with the same armour were walking towards a tall and wide building hidden behind several smaller ones in the distance.

"Hmmm... that would be a good place to start right?" Skullius asked himself as he walked towards the building.

Chapter 153: Guilds Association (1)

The National Guilds Association building.

This structure reminded Skullius of the Capital Knights building in Eofel but it was bigger and better.

It didn't look like a building made just for show as the thick grey walls had a certain weight to them, of age and... success.

The steps that led into the building made Skullius feel like it was a sacred place as many powerful individuals walked up and down, in and out of the establishment proudly.

Skullius walked into the wide and tall structure and saw an expansive space that could almost be classified as classy, with a professional reception opposite him a distance away and what looked like a mini restaurant far off to the side with the men as well as women seated down while eating being barely visible.

A large board to his other side could also be seen, where many folks were huddled in groups as they took a look at pieces of paper that held written requests for requests.

The property setup for any settlements in Pelian was to have small cities overlooking different portions of the same region they were located in while a large city overlooked the entirety of the region, cities and all.

The National Guilds Association was an organisation setup to create work for those that wished to do work outside of the Capital work setup.

These people were called Mercenaries.

Their job was basically clearing Clusters and hunting down dangerous monsters while any other form of hired work that leaned into assassinations and such was prohibited.

Skullius looked to and fro while trying to figure out where to go first. He hadn't planned adequately and one wrong move would get him killed, especially with UNCOddled searching for targets.

"Hey, get your ass out of the way, idiot!"

A hoarse voice boomed from behind Skullius and he turned.

Behind was a group of twelve tall, thick men packed into black shiny armours, all glaring at him with fierce eyes.

Skullius quickly moved to the side without a word and watched the men walk with heavy steps into the building, their entrance garnering no small amount of attention.

"Oh my Suzamete! Look there! It's the EdgeKings Guild!"

"Tsk! Those bastards finally returned huh?"

"Why are they always so... angry?"

The men walked over to the large board that had the requests stuck to it. Most of the other Guilds moved aside for the prominent Guild as they feared offending them.

However, one particular group of seven with a mix of beautiful women and men of different structures didn't move as they continued browsing through the requests.

The man at the forefront of the EdgeKings Guild members frowned even deeper than he had been before, his face looking as if it would sink further into his skull.

"Still hoping to overtake us by attempting more Clusters, Jarek?" the man said with a thick hostility detectable in his voice. His deep hazel eyes looked threateningly at the young man who glared back at him.

"You bet. I refuse to believe that such an unbalanced crew of mutts like you can be called one of the best Guilds in this region! Just you wait till we dethrone you from the number three spot!" the young man from the opposite Guild replied, making the EdgeKings Guild members grind their teeth visibly.

They were the easiest bunch to rile up.

"That's right. Neither you nor that womaniser, Tulnas know what it means to have a proper Guild. You focus on one aspect and neglect others. You're bound to fall soon," a blonde beauty who didn't wear armour like the rest in her Guild said with a smug look on her face.

The surrounding Guilds began chatting among themselves over the current squabble between the third and fourth strongest Guilds in the city.

"The Ravenclad Guild sure have guts. I hope they don't get beaten up after provoking those behemoths."

"Right. They are playing with fire, though I guess their achievements don't shy away from the EdgeKings' by much. Where did the Ideal Ark go all of a sudden? All these Guilds are now fighting over their position as the best Guild, try as they may to deny their identity as one. Did they get wiped out in a Cluster or something?"

"Why are you asking me, you bastard?!"

Skullius merely listened while walking with his head hung long. With the 'entertaining' confrontation between two large Guilds, his presence went unnoticed and uncared for as he headed to the reception where he saw some people getting served.

'Things are tense here,' he thought before focusing at the four receptionists that served various people. 'What I've discovered in the past days has to work right? As long as someone doesn't have the intent to benefit me, they'll be fine right?'

This was Skullius' thought.

While he was apprehensive about asking for information, his experience with Elita who interacted with him quite a bit without getting offed by UNCoddled had given him a bit of hope.

There was no way he was going to keep this up without information.

'I just have to find a sockethole who will answer me without the intent to help me. Someone who hates life. That seems about right.'

Scanning over the faces of the seated receptions behind one large desk, Skullius saw two smiling ladies, one that didn't have a particular expression and one who showed annoyance.

'That's the one! Definitely! A uhm... a female sockethole!'

Skullius walked up to her line and waited to be served like the rest.

His attention and anxiety was broken when the clamour and chatter behind him was disturbed by a new group that entered the Guilds Association building.

"Look, look! It's them! The second strongest Guild!"

"What's with every major Guild just happening to be here at the same time?!"

"Kya! It's them! The Harem Guild!"

Excitement, jealousy and anxiety flooded the National Guilds Association building as one man surrounded by bevy of beautiful women walked in with one of the most epic of entrances a man could ask for.

Chapter 154: Guilds Association (2)

"Tsk! While others are busy hunting monsters and Clusters, this bastard is out there hunting for beauties and he still remains on top!"

"Look, he even added a few more to his collection since a week ago!"

"Rar! I wish I could get even one of them to 'take care' of me just for one night. Don't you?"

"You bet! Too bad that bastard is very protective of his girls! Should we ask the Guild leader to raid their place and do—"

"GET AWAY FROM HERE, YOU DEGENERATES!"

One tall and muscular man walked into the building while having fifteen girls around him.

They all had distinctive characteristics, all of them looking to be proud to be by his side, expressing their excitement in different ways; shyness, brushless, intimacy.

The man at the forefront glanced at the two groups that were standing side by side at the request board and smiled lightly.

His dark hair which was combed back and tied into a bun behind his head glimmered under the artificial lights above, his ocean blue eyes giving many women weak knees whenever they happened to scan by.

His muscular stature buried under a perfect, black and green armour looked quite intimidating, especially with the power that leaked from him.

The Guild leader of the EdgeKings, Beck, gritted his teeth with a twitch of his nose as he glared at this man.

"Tulnas..." he said.

"How's it going, Beck? I trust you took care of that high level Cluster?"

"Of course I did. What about you? We hunted like-coloured Clusters, right? Your bunch didn't finally start to drag you down did they?"

"Haha, of course not. If anything, they're all becoming stronger at a rate I didn't imagine to be possible. One of them could kill a Cluster General all on their own. Or better yet... your pitiful bromance circle," Tulnas said with a subtle hostile glint in his eye.

Beck huffed in rage as veins throbbed on his temples.

"Oh~, the big bad man can't handle a small poke? That's too bad~" one of the girls from the Harem Guild caressed Tulnas' armour and intimately rubbed her face against his as she taunted Beck.

"I told you they were all virgins. Such brash and abrasive behaviour only belongs to those whose hymen is hasn't left home," another one of the girls said as she pushed up her glasses.

"Shut up, bitch! You want me to rip your nose off?!" an agitated member of the EdgeKings stepped forward, his face turning red from Rage.

"Pfft! Rip her nose off! Such child-friendly insults really don't work for you big guy."

"I'm warning you, Tulnas! You better keep your bitches on a leash!" another man said as he pointed his finger at Tulnas.

Tulnas took a step forward, his mana flaring powerfully as he wore his slight smile.

"Or what?" he said, his women also stepping forward, showing that they were ready to go whenever their opponents were.

The Ravenclad Guild took a few steps back as they didn't want to involve themselves in the potential chaos.

"Alright! Cut it out. You both know that this isn't a place where you can beat each other up. If you want, prove your mettle outside the city," a woman who wore formal attire addressed the two groups.

Tulnas was the first to take a step back and wore a broad smile.

"My apologies. It seems like we went too far," he said as his hand zipped through the air and grabbed the request on the board detailing a high level Cluster emergence in a distant town in the North.

Beck gritted his teeth as he had been eyeing the request from the time he had been bickering with the Ravenclad Guild.

Tulnas and his women wore cheeky smiles as they walked away, leaving the EdgeKings with frowns that would put twisters to shame.

Skullius who was watching from the reception couldn't help but gulp audibly.

'Who are those freaks?! And that power!' he thought.

He had noticed that the above average threshold was the blue core as every powerhouse he had met since arriving in Pelian had a blue core. Excluding Elita that is.

What differed among these blue cores was the brightness. Some of them were dull, other mildly bright and the others glowing with a sun-like intensity when he analysed them with [Advanced Mana Manipulation]!

This was actually true for all core colours.

Yet, when Skullius sensed the level of power of these people, he found that there was something else about them that dictated how strong they were.

Their bodies!

Something about them was different.

'Is this related to the Stages stuff? I'll know soon enough.'

Skullius' turn finally arrived in the line as he merely looked blankly at the middle-aged woman behind the desk in silence.

The woman, upon realising that Skullius wasn't speaking, decided to ask in the most blasé way possible.

"Anything I can help you with... sir?"

'This is it! She doesn't give a boneshit! This confirms it, right?! Look at those eyes! They don't care about me at all! She doesn't even care about my face!

Perfect!' Skullius cheered inwardly.

"Uhhh... how can I join a Guild and fight in Clusters?"

Skullius' eavesdropping had paid off as he was now asking what he deemed to be the appropriate question. He hoped. He truly hoped.

The woman at the desk looked at him with her brow raised.

She wanted to erupt on Skullius for not knowing basic knowledge but she held herself back.

"That's something you should be asking the Guild you want to join, not us. That is, unless you are not a licensed mercenary."

"Oh... I don't have the license thing. How do I get it?"

The woman looked increasingly annoyed which Skullius grinned to as he identified her as being someone who didn't give a flying fuck about him.

Finally! Someone who didn't care!

High five to all socketholes out there!

"You have to be evaluated by the Guild staff on whether or not you're fit to fight in Clusters. IF you don't know anything beyond this as well, I advise that you head to the temple to see which Direction is suited for you. An evaluation by the priests would help. NEXT PLEASE!"

Someone behind Skullius pushed him out of the line, the Discount Human hatefully glaring at the person before walking away.

'At least I found some useful information. Those merchants weren't lying. These services really have the worst people! I love it! I guess I can safely use my coin to find someone who sells information! I'm sure they would be unaffected by UNCoddled too!'

The conversation with the two merchants outside the city had taught Skullius quite a lot of things.

Apparently, any service that was sold didn't come with a 100% benefit for the buyer as the individual who was selling also wanted to benefit, which made this the perfect scenario for Skullius.

Such people were his best friends and he wanted to meet them so badly for his additional plan which involved the powers of the Vehement Bone Nullmancer that he had yet to exploit to the fullest!

With unmatched zeal, Skullius walked briskly and happily towards the door while being deep into his thoughts.

Things were working out well. He was on a good streak to his ultimate goals.

DUM!

"Hey!"

Skullius accidentally bumped into one of the beauties that was following after the black-haired man!

His non-existent heart almost stopped when the whole group turned to focus on the incident between him and the woman he bumped into.

Chapter 155: The Discount Human's Name

Skullius sucked in a deep breath with his eyes opened wide when the gaze of Tulnas landed on him. He felt the unconscious release of power from the leader of the Harem Guild press against him and he couldn't help but feel overwhelmed.

He didn't even focus on the woman before him who was glaring at him with burning eyes as his only concern at the moment was the man with one of the strongest blue cores he had ever felt so far!

Surely, he was imposing.

His image as he walked over to Skullius with his slight smile made the Discount Human start sweating.

What was he going to do?

Was he going to be angry?

The busty, silver haired woman he had bumped into poked Skullius in the chest, the Discount Human almost toppling over.

"Hey! Shouldn't you apologise if you bump into someone?! What are you acting all dazed for?" she hissed.

"Uh... I'm sorry... it was a mistake. I was just in a hurry," Skullius said as he wore a sheepish smile.

As the silver-haired beauty focused more on his face, she frowned.

She was about to say something about Skullius' face when Tulnas came between the two and looked down at Skullius who was quite short in comparison.

"It's alright. Renia. He didn't mean it. Could you forgive him? For me," Tulnas said as he gave a short-lived glance to the silver haired beauty who lightly blushed and turned her head with a 'hmp!'

The other women stood behind Tulnas as he refocused on Skullius' figure.

He had a mysterious smile that seemed to make the entire world revolve around him making Skullius even more nervous and unsettled.

"What's your name?" he asked.

'Oh crap! Why does he want to know my name?! Wait... that reminds me! I don't have a name for my Discount Human form! I can't use the name Skullius right?!

That would be too suspicious right?!' Skullius thought.

He recalled that his Discount Human form didn't even have a name, according to the guidance field at least. What was the significance of a name anyway?

Naturally Skullius would love to use his original name but he had never told it to anyone. Only Elita knew it.

"Uh..." Skullius stammered under the many gazes.

'What name should I tell him? I would have to stick with it, right, for consistency? GAH! This is stressful! Should I go with Bonet? No!

No! Why is that bastard's name still in my head?! What other names can I choose?!

As his thoughts spiralled, searching for a name...

[Have you chosen the name 'Bonet' for 'Discount Human' form?]

'What?! Wait! No! No! Why so suddenly...?!'

[Alternative option available...]

[Would you like the Voice of Worlds to choose a name for you?]

'Huh?!'

"Do you seriously not know your own name?" the silver-haired beauty behind Tulnas said with a tone oozing of condescension, reminding Skullius that time wasn't standing still, waiting for him to think things through.

His smile grew deeper as he stammered some more while within...

'Yes! Yes! Give me a 'name'! Hurry!' he replied to the guidance field, new notifications instantly replacing the inquisitive one.

[.....]

[A name has been chosen for you by the Voice of Worlds]

[Your name shall be... 'Festos Dawn']

[Congratulations, you have earned a name!]

'...uhm... okay.'

"Hahaha. Sorry about that. I'm just embarrassed by my name," Skullius said to Tulnas. "My name is Festos. Festos Dawn."

"Hmmm. I see. What an exotic name. One that I've never heard in all my travels around the three nations. The world still remains large doesn't it?" Tulnas said while Skullius nodded viciously.

"Well, Festos. I have a proposition for you. Join my Guild."

....!

"WHAT?!"

The collective shock of fifteen beauties, several eavesdroppers and Skullius himself, shook the surroundings.

What was with this proposition?!

Many degenerates thought of the same thing.

Had Tulnas had his fair share of women and was now recruiting...men into his... harem?!

Would it still even be called a harem?!

Before any of the more than a dozen women could verbally complain, Tulnas raised his hand to shut them up, which they did.

After the initial shock, Skullius became terrified as he realised... this man was offering him...HELP!

'Please don't melt! Please don't melt! Please don't melt!' Skullius pleaded in spirit.

Thankfully, Tulnas didn't start screaming as he instead continued to speak.

"I feel something special about you. Call it the intuition cultivated after being able to smell fortune from a mile away for years or whatever but... I feel that having you by my side will bring me this fortune and you will benefit by rising in fame and strength if you join us."

"Mutual benefit."

Skullius stared blankly at Tulnas before he turned his gaze to the thirty eyes that were brimming with calamity behind Tulnas, warning that they would make his life a living hell if he agreed.

Skullius ignored them as he thought deeply.

Solemnly.

'I get it now.'

His heart relaxed. There was never danger.

He had no reason to worry.

This man before him... was a sockethole.

He had no intention of helping him at all. But then again, Skullius wouldn't exactly call himself.. fortune.

He smiled brightly at this 'good person'.

"Thank you for the kind offer, but I can't take it right now. I have a few issues that I have to deal with for now, though I might consider it in the future," he said.

Tulnas enthusiasm didn't die down one bit. He wasn't rejected outright and he could feel that this man before him really wasn't trying to dodge.

"Very well. When you have finished your so-called affairs, you can find me at our residence. I'm looking forward to our meeting."

Tulnas turned and began walking to what had been his original destination from the start, his harem of fifteen collectively giving Skullius deathly glares before following after him.

'Terrifying,' Skullius thought. Each of those women had a bright blue core, though nowhere as luminescent as Tulnas'.

He then rushed towards the exit before anything else happened, while around him, the chatter continued as many discussed.

"What kind of a person rejects such a glorious offer?! He's a fool, I say!"

"I know right! I've been dying to join a worthwhile Guild for years!"

"Yeah, my too! Especially one with descent women!"

".... What are you two trying to say?"

"...."

".... nothing...?"

The Discount Human walked out the doors to the National Guilds Association and looked to both his sides.

"That was tense. I guess it wasn't too bad though, all things considered. I even got a name too. Festos Dawn. It's not bad, I guess. Now!

To find information. My best bet is to find someone selling it. But first... let's go to this Temple place and see what that lady was talking about.'

Chapter 156: Temple, No Temple

(A/N: I won't be changing how I address Skullius with 'Festos' yet. There will come a time...)

....

Shortly after navigating through the clean but crowded streets, following the word 'temple' every where he heard it, Skullius finally found the building he was looking for.

The structure was magnificent to say the least. From an aerial view, the building looked like a three leaf clover, rounded edges and all.

It was massive in size, painted in white with a large and captivating golden three point star at the face of its build.

Its entrance was elevated from the ground, with quite the long stretch of stairs that led into the building.

Around the structure was a free space devoid of commercial constructs for almost forty meters on every side as the space was occupied instead by pools, benches and three grand statues that lacked distinctive features except gender.

No detail to their faces was added as it was believed that no one had the right to give a definitive appearance to the three Deities, thus tall, rock outlines were made to simply represent the ones above Divinity.

A long line of people could be seen waiting for a turn to enter the temple, while a few others were leaving with either glad or depressed faces down the opposite side to those that stood with anticipation while looking ahead.

Skullius looked at these people as he wondered what they wanted so badly that hundreds of them would stand in a long line that descended down the stone stairs. The line was just that long and the heat was so much that Skullius didn't see how it was worth it to stand all day enduring it for anything.

He saw one of those that were coming from the building with a depressed face, muttering to himself as he stomped in rage.

"How can my Direction be so cruel?! Why can I not become a warrior like my father?! Me, a farmer?! Are those priests really convening with the Deities or just feeding us nonsense?!"

The Discount Human couldn't help but catch on to one word the man said which he was familiar with.

Direction.

That reception lady had said the same thing.

What exactly was that?

Skullius had half a mind to wait in line but he knew that if he did, the countdown for [Flesh It Like You Mean It] would catch him while he was in the midst of the crowd and he would be fleshed.

So he might as well leave and search for information first.

He turned to walk away when a voice called to him.

"Hello, sir."

The Discount Human turned to see a woman in a white robe with a three-pointed star, her dark hair flowing down the pristine piece of clothing in a beautiful contrast.

She wore a sweet smile as she looked at Skullius with kindness and a cute tilt of her head, no grimace being seen as she remained impartially sweet.

"Have you been enlightened to the beauty of the Deities, the influence of their Direction and the goodness of their... Eh?"

Skullius... had bolted away at full speed.

The Discount Human had seen the red flag and immediately decided to dip before it was too late!

One needed to learn from previous mistakes.

The dust he raised as he took off was vivid from where the kind young lady was standing, wondering what she had done wrong.

'I won't fall for it again! Damn goody goodies trying to get themselves killed!' Skullius thought as he made a sharp turn.

He had a feeling that such a person was one of those that would willingly offer their help.

'Flesh good people! I only hang out with socketholes now!'

The racing Discount Human only came to a stop when he truly felt safe, assimilating into the crowds as he followed after those who seemed to have a purposeful journey.

His aimless tour led him find some rather interesting discoveries about himself and the city.

First off, he heard some people speaking in a language he didn't understand, the language being outside the scope of [Greater Communication]. It wasn't something ground-breaking but it opened Skullius' eyes to the limit of his skill which had reached level 7 from constant use.

The second was the various structures within the city that could accomplish one of his goals. For instance, the several blacksmith shops he had seen with gruff, thick-bearded men covered in soot and sweat, publicly pounding on hot metal as they forged different weapons.

Skullius didn't need to be a genius to know that one of these was the solution to fixing the sword he wanted to fix so badly.

[Demion's Dance].

He didn't rush to that though, as he felt that he needed to be careful with such a powerful weapon and who he showed it to.

Socketholes were good and all, but they tended to want to screw someone over.

The last discovery he made was that there were services he couldn't get publicly as when he was about to enter a certain part of the city, a certain man who fit the typical sockethole profile according to his evaluation on the human side, stopped him and asked what his business was in that area.

Skullius had happily answered that he wanted to buy information, his sincerity and coin earning him an escort to the large market of shady goods and services.

So many socketholes to choose from!

What looked like a normal residential area was actually littered with illegal activity hidden behind wooden doors.

Skullius' escort had offered him a recommendation, leading him to a man who looked like he was running a generic food stall where roasted meat and fish were neatly placed on clay slates.

The man had short, dark hair and a stubble, downturned, brown eyes that focused on the fish he was frying being additions to the features on his face.

He wore nothing extraordinary as he looked like a typical hawker on the side of the uncrowded street, trying to earn as little as he could.

The only strange thing was that nobody stopped to even glance at his stall which almost made it seem out of place in this place.

'Alright. Let's finally get some answers,' Skullius thought as he walked up to this man.

The world he resided was about to explode in his perception...

Chapter 157: All You Can Learn Buffet (1)

Throughout the three nations, the currency comprised of naturally bronze, silver and gold coins.

Ten bronze coins made one silver coin and a hundred silvers made one gold coin.

The value of silver and gold could not be underestimated as they were precious as a means of buying and selling in different yet no so different ways, and for the longest time, the three stood as the medium of exchange.

However, what truly made their value work, was the unique trade that happened in all of Feinheath.

Because of this unique trade where new incoming materials with higher value, as the merchants and mercenaries put it, an addition had been made due to the ridiculous asking prices that some of these mystical goods had that, the costs having fashioned by those who risked their lives to procure them. Mercenaries.

The new addition was the diamond coin.

There were things much more precious than even diamond, the resource being used merely as elevated currency that mostly moved in trade of high value goods among nobles, top Guilds and Academies, one of these valued at a thousand gold coins.

Still, this did not do anything to tear away the value of gold as it was remained a dream for others to hold it one hand, especially those who remained at the bottom for all their lives.

With that in mind, a certain man couldn't help but narrow his downturned eyes as he looked at the three gold coins laid on top of his fish and a rather enthusiastic, weirdly-faced man who looked at him with shining eyes.

"Are you sure that's all you want?" he asked.

"That's right," Skullius replied.

"Perhaps I misunderstood you. You want to know everything about how to become strong...because you want to become a mercenary? Everything?"

"Yes. Throw in some knowledge about who runs everything in these cities too, I'd really appreciate it."

The dark haired man had wanted to confirm as this wasn't a request he normally got from anyone.

He was worried it was a scam but his intuition told him that the man before him could make him rich.

"Hmm. It's the first time someone has come to me wanting to know such basic things but hey, who I am to judge?"

'You could pay half this amount to get all this knowledge at a College,' the man said inwardly, withholding it from Skullius in case he changed his mind as a result.

He swiped the gold coins into who knew where and began to speak in a friendly tone.

"My name is Frock. I feel we'll be doing business together for a while, so we might as well get acquainted. By what name shall I address you?"

"You can call me Festos," Skullius replied as Frock gave him a seat on the opposite side of his stall.

"Good. Nice to meet you, Festos. As for what you need, I am a man of integrity, so I shall be generous and give you an adequate overview."

"If someone wants to know the best way to move with their life, the best or rather obvious choice is always to visit the Temple where the priests convene with the Deities to find which Direction is most suited for you."

"Wait," Skullius interrupted. "What is this Direction thing? I've been hearing it a lot."

"Right," Frock said, still shocked that there was genuine curiosity in the eyes of his customer. He really didn't know? "Direction is something like fate. Apparently, the Deities can show which path you are best suited for, A predetermined fate. Everyone has a Deity they favour and they often go to a priest who represents said Deity. I never believed in that Direction crap but I do favour Quintess."

The Discount Human mulled it over.

So essentially it was a set path that you would be given.

Most didn't believe such a thing as the belief in the Deities' doctrines was fading. Many were beginning to think of them as decorations whose only purpose was for granting them Tasks, when it came mercenaries at least.

Such was the case with the long lines at Temples as those that wanted to become mercenaries rushed to the Temples to try and get blessings while some genuinely wanted to know their Direction, holding onto their faith.

As for personality, less and less believed that the Deities actually spoke as testimonies from some priests who had quit their jobs while claiming that they didn't speak to the Deities at all, fueled the unbelief. The fact that no retribution befell the masses even as they expressed their insults made people bolder.

"Essentially, if one has been Directed towards the path of being a fighting force in any way, they have to complete the first Task. It is to get recognised by the Deity they favour and earn their blessing. This is what keeps people flooding at the Temples despite not giving a rat's ass about devotion."

"The First Task..." Skullius muttered to himself. He recalled that Benzard had once told him about this.

However, he eventually saw an issue with this.

'Wait. I didn't get a First Task. Didn't I start as a level 1 with the guidance field demanding that I accomplish that Second Task before I could get to level 2?' he thought.

"So the Deities give these tasks?" Skullius asked.

"Yes," replied Frock, looking slightly annoyed at a memory that suddenly surfaced in his head. "As far as I know, everyone's Tasks differ even if they favour the same Deity."

The reply troubled Skullius deeply.

'I don't have any Deities' favour, right? So where are my Tasks coming from? Could it be the Voice of Worlds...?'

"The blessings people get are also different, most of which are not as ridiculous, as they grow with how much an individual enhances their strength or by clearing Clusters. Its different for those who devote themselves to the path of Paladins, as they have a chance to get a Divine blessing, which is vast degrees higher than the regular blessing."

Even with this knowledge, though, fewer and fewer people think its worth it to become a Paladin. There are other diverse ways to grow regularthough, but they require much more than coin to divulge," said Frock with a cunning glint in his eyes.

Skullius raised his brow. He could feel that this guy had a white core. A bright one but nothing too shocking.

However, after his encounter with Tulnas, he knew that judging someone's strength only by their core was a very misguided way of approaching this system.

He hoped all the avenues of strength would be cleared for him as one, blessings, was already closed off.

"Now, to the good stuff. The very important things about growth."

Chapter 158: All You Can Learn Buffet (2)

Cough, cough, cough!

"Arghh!" Frock suddenly started coughing while showing a pained look on his face which alarmed Skullius as he instantly started to think that he was screwed.

'Damn it.. again?!

"Ah! This is bad," Frock said as he gazed at Skullius.

"What? What's happening?!" Skullius asked as he stood.

"<Cough>. This happens... to me sometimes. My throat gets all parched and makes it... hard for me to <cough> ... speak."

"Huh?!" Skullius confusedly exclaimed.

He was also somewhat relieved at the same time.

It wasn't UNCoddled?

Frankly, he had been starting to get to comfortable. This guy didn't seem like a sockethole at all and he seemed to be genuinely helping him. On the surface at least.

But what was with this situation?

"Gold... gold usually makes it better... <cough>... <cough>..."

The Discount Human narrowed his eyes. He wasn't an expert when it came to trading but he knew there was something fishy going on here.

Did people eat gold or something?

Since he wanted information and there was a lot of coin in his ring, he pushed a few more coins onto the hot fish placed on clay slates.

"Ahem.. ahem! Wow, that worked like a charm. The cough's gone. Thank Quintess. Now, where were we?"

Right, right!"

'SHAMELESS!' Skullius thought. Deep from within, something clicked.

This guy was a sockethole alright.

"There are three things that are the central focus of power. Classes, mana cores and stages. I'll use examples from the Guilds since you wish to join the Guilds Association anyway."

"Let's start with classes. They have three main categories which dictate difficulty of mastery, power and efficiency. The first and simplest category, is the Arma Users. It consists of every weapon wielding class there is. Swordsman, Spearman, Archer among others.

This is a category that most people choose as it easier to learn than most, but the downside is, the ways of advancement to these classes are mostly known, meaning, becoming something special, even with the advanced version of an Arma type class is very difficult."

Skullius nodded.

'I see. Come to think of it, I haven't really met fighters who don't use swords or bows since coming here. I guess those goblins were different though...' Skullius thought back to the leader of the Bloated River clan, Ukur and the other one, Vjik who used spells.

It was weird that he had seen low level monsters that could use magic but not humans. Was there a good reason for it?

"The second category is the Form Users. This is made of classes whose foundation is firmly hinged on the use physical and mental abilities, with classes like Warriors, Blacksmiths, Mind Casters being found here. It is difficult to master these and fewer people with these classes actually manage advance them, but they can be found."

Skullius listened attentively. This was crucial for him to understand what kind of enemies he would be facing, after all.

"The last category is... the Energy Formers. This is by far the hardest class and has very, very few people who even qualify to choose the class for their own usage. There aren't many classes in this category, as the main ones are Mages, Diviners, Tamers, Summoners and Shamans.

Anyone with a class like this is a powerhouse that is respected and revered, though some of them have a hard time mastering the spells, especially when they are budding."

Frock looked particularly serious when he divulged this information, searing the caution of these people in Skullius' mind.

This category of classes could change the direction of a war entirely as if a mage managed to gain an advanced class, they would become particularly terrifying on a national level.

"There are only six Energy Formers in this entire city. Two of them are mages from the leading 'Guild', the Ideal Ark, though as I recall they only joined a month ago and were still fresh from some small Academy, probably with the basic mage class. Another, is the leader of the Harem Guild, Tulnas and the rest are Capital Mages, working for the City lord."

Skullius gulped audibly.

Tulnas was an Energy Former?!

With the impression he had been given, he couldn't help but see that sockethole in a different light!

Suddenly, he wanted to replace his mental image of Tulnas in the black and green armour with a robe and staff.

'Maybe I should join that Guild after all. Maybe...'

"What about the mana cores?" Skullius asked.

"<Cough>... <cough>... my throat!"

CLNK!

Skullius begrudgingly threw a few more coins at the dark-haired bastard who instantly 'recovered'.

"Right! Mana cores are an internal storage structure for mana. On a basic level, they take in mana from the world and personalise it. Normal people develop a white core which is the most basic form of a core and by condensing mana, it gets purer and stronger, forming other colours. White, blue, purple and gold are the publicly known colours.

With each colour comes a condensing of mana by ten times and a vast improvement in its quality. This also affects the attributes of an individual."

"The blue core is the upper standard for a majority of people though. It's extremely hard to condense mana into purple and gold. That's something you will see with some older and more prodigious individuals. Only one person has a purple core in this city and if you stay you might just see them."

'I already know someone with that kind of core though,' Skullius thought of Elita. In her battle against the Cursed Knight, her core has visibly produced a purple light as she fought. 'That was terrifying. Condensed by ten times. That's insane. But...'

[Depths of the core].

This skill should be allow him to have an easier time. Or so Skullius thought.

With this knowledge, he kind of understood why the stat representation for people with blue cores was different on the guidance field.

"And stages?"

"<Bwaff!>... <bwaff!>... it's killing me!"

"Come on, bro!" Skullius barked.

CLNK! CLNK!

Coins fell on the clay plates, Frock grinning as he looked at his earnings. Who knew that gaining so much gold would be so easy?

This idiot must be some rich kid from a noble family who just wanted to splurge somewhere else.

At this point, he couldn't care less.

Of course, even while scamming the poor fellow, he didn't neglect integrity. At the very least he gave Skullius valid information so his conscience was clear.

"Alright then. Stages. These are undoubtedly the foundation that's necessary before anything else. With a high enough stage, classes can become inconsequential and meaningless as fights can be won without the need for a condensed core. Stages are the result of scaling levels and completing Tasks. The true path to what beasts do superficially..."

Chapter 159: All You Can Learn Buffet (3)

The Stages of power.

After each level, one was subjected to a Task by their favoured Deity and only when they completed it could they move on to the next level.

The order went as so.

Foundation, Advancement, Master, Incandescent, Transcendent and Beyond the Veil.

In terms of levels, which could also be defined by those without the guidance field but in a harder to use sensory technique, the Foundation stage went from level 1 to level 10, the Advancement going from level 11 to 20.

There was a vast chasm after this, as the Master stage had 20 levels to scale, the Incandescent Stage having the same, up to level 60.

From there, another chasm would be felt as for the Transcendent Stage, 35 levels with their own horrendous Tasks had to be scaled with the last stage, Beyond the Veil, having only 5 levels as it maxed at level 100.

At the last level of every stage, a Challenge was given, which was a specific hurdle that had to be overcome to break onto the next stage.

(A/N: It's not as tedious as it sounds. Trust me, you'll enjoy it).

The last two stages were considered myths in the eyes of the public as such levels of power were only ever detailed in historical records. With the absence of significant wars, there had been a sharp decline in dedication to mastery as the main purpose for most, was to obtain fame or self sufficiency.

What were the boons for stages?

Physicality boosts were an obvious one for each stage, being more significant than level ups.

The others were special techniques that boosted an individual's natural abilities.

For instance, the Full Body Aura obtained when one reached the Advancement Stage.

What awaited for the other stages were things that commonfolk couldn't even imagine as their use was strictly regulated.

...

"And that's about it. This system is said to have been learned and universally agreed upon by the humans, the Sif and the giants back in the day, so it's functional," Frock said as he looked at the contemplative gaze of Skullius.

The Discount Human took all this in as he tried to fit it all into his 'schedule'.

His one year time limit with Doom Factor 2 came to mind.

Was a year enough to do all this?

Probably not. Those were a lot of levels to pass through, not to mention that amount of Tasks as well as the so-called Challenges!

He was still on the second level of the Foundation Stage and to imagining himself reaching the Beyond the Veil Stage was...

Besides...

'I wonder. Even if I reach that level, will I be able to beat Somanda?'

This was a question that Skullius immediately asked himself. At his very best, could he really defeat an Arch-Lich with tens of thousands of years worth of experience?

This was a lot to take in for Skullius. He didn't want to rely solely on the potential help that could be rendered by Sause given their Tie of Exchange.

He wasn't even sure if that would work out.

The more preferable route would be to quickly gather strength. He would at least fight the battle too after acquiring strength.

With this knowledge, though basic, now he had a clearer path!

Speeding through with all he had clicked in his mind as a goal.

He had a hidden class and strange power that he hadn't gotten clarity on, yet both were ridiculous.

Speaking of which...

"How come you didn't mention anything about hidden classes?"

Frock raised a brow.

"So you do know some things..." a barely visible glint twinkled in the dark-haired man's eyes as he had been keeping a close eye on Skullius' face. He was a bit rattled by it at first but now, he found himself intrigued.

"Hidden classes are both a guarantee to great strength and a trap to a grand fall. I don't presume you know the tale of Escus and Demion?"

...!

Skullius' eyes rose as he heard this but he quickly calmed himself.

Wasn't that in the description of the sword, [Demion's Dance]?

"I don't know if it's true or not, and I'm not retelling it to you if you don't know it, but hidden classes are usually imbedded with the previous carrier's will. If they want something done through the new inheritor then..."

Frock didn't finish, but Skullius was already feeling nervous.

Just a day ago, he had been thinking about what those pieces of soul from Sila, Dezrael and Fulgardt could do within him. Would they benefit him?

Did Fulgardt's Labyrinth have something significant for those absorbed souls planned?

Perhaps, one day he would be forced on some dangerous quest through the will that was forever stuck to him.

That couldn't be true right?

"By the way, you can go to a College and get this information for a quarter of the price you just paid here," said Frock with a mocking grin but Skullius wasn't affected by it at all, latching onto something else from his statement.

"What's a College?"

Frock ground his teeth. He had wanted to at least see a frown on Skullius' face but the Discount Human was greedily asking for more knowledge.

Dejectedly, he answered.

"A College is a place where this kind of information is fed to anyone aspiring to be master in any art. You can learn just about anything from there, though they don't teach anything to do with classes like Energy Formers. That kind of knowledge is found in big cities. In Academies."

"And before you ask, Academies are larger, wealthier versions of Colleges. Right! I think we're done talking now."

"Wait," Skullius urgently stopped Frock who had begun to stand.

"What?" Frock asked as his brows skewed.

"Do you have any useful equipment I could trade with you?"

"The word 'trade' is a little redundant, but sure! Come see what I got!" the man's mouth featured a grin in place of the frown he had been wearing a few seconds ago as he urged Skullius to follow.

Tulnas sat on an expensive looking chair while looked at the extravagant ceiling up above. He was deep in his thoughts as his mind kept replaying the moment when he had first laid eyes on Skullius.

Deep within him, from his very soul which he shared with multiple, powerful creatures that he had tamed, came a voice that encouraged him to rope in the existence that looked like a generic character from a bland folktale.

He hadn't even known if his decision to ask Skullius to join his Guild was a good one or not but he couldn't bring himself to doubt the being he had brought into his soul, successfully taming it after a very strenuous year in a forest within three nation of Maqi.

Tulnas loosened his hair and let it floor to his shoulders as he relaxed, watching the sun begin its descend from its daily high.

"Are you sure about this? At the very least can you tell me whether its fortune or something else that your eyes sees on this... Festos..." Tulnas said as he grabbed a glass of wine.

From behind his back, dark furs sprang forth rapidly as they then puffed up and closed in on themselves as flesh and bone appeared within them, creating the head... of a fox.

The fox head with dark fur peered from Tulnas' shoulder and nudged his cheek while he drank.

"Come now... When did you start to doubt me? Am I not your eyes for fortune and misfortune? Am I not your strength? Have you become too arrogant now that I give you a sliver of my strength, Tulnas?" a hoarse voice that shook the furniture in the room emerged from the fox's mouth.

Tulnas sighed.

"How you're so easily provoked. I'm the one running things on this end. Could I get a bit more information? Blind trust in you will only lead me in a ditch. Literally and figuratively."

"Hmmm.... ignorant. Very well, I shall tell you," the fox said as upon its mouth, an extremely eerie grin appeared!

[Author's Note]

So I know these three chapters were quite dialogue and exposition heavy but I found it necessary to do so. I've merely brushed through the power system from the first Volume as it was, as explained in the story, a primal way of growth that the beasts used.

It's different and complicated for humans, which is why its more suited to be explored in this volume where more humans feature.

If you don't fully understand the mechanics, don't worry. They'll be reiterated in NOT-IN-YOUR-FACE ways as we go.

Also, as I said before, this won't be tedious with a Task for every level as we'll only focus on what it's like for Skullius.

With all that said, please do tell me what you think of the story so far. I'd really appreciate it if you left REVIEWS as that'd help me out a ton.

Please leave Golden Tickets and Power Stones if you're enjoying as with such an extensive run ahead, I would be more motivated to not drop this if it at least rises in popularity and ranking.

Thanks y'all.

Chapter 160: Trading With Frock

"What would you like?" Frock's voice resounded within the small space where a lot of different kinds of equipment were neatly placed on racks and holders.

Skullius looked around as he searched for anything useful in the brightly lit space he had been taken to from a trap door within an empty house after following Frock around the strange neighbourhood for a full ten minutes.

There were armours, swords, bracelets, necklaces, gems among other things, hung or laid somewhere.

Frock wore a grin as he waited for Skullius to splurge again, hopefully on a useless item.

'And I thought this day wouldn't get better!' he thought.

After having the extensive conversation with Skullius, he had been too annoyed to consider showing him this stash, but as it so happened, the strangely-faced young man didn't have any lack of charity. He was willing to make a dozennaire in a single day!

Bless, Quintess!

The young man in question walked around the room, looking at the armours with a frown as he had a hack that proved to be exceptionally efficient in helping him pick up the more unique and useful items.

'What's all this worthless garbage? There isn't anything unique here at all! Even Aikil's sword is better than some of the swords in here,' Skullius complained as he moved around.

The way he approached an item and went on to pass over it with a frown made Frock feel nervous.

Suddenly, this supposed idiot seemed like an expert appraiser who could see the value of items with nothing but a glance!

'Was I wrong? Is he actually an expert who was scamming me this entire time?! No! That's impossible!' Frock struggled with his thoughts.

"There's nothing I want here. Do you have anything useful?' Skullius asked while turning to Frock.

The man withdrew his earlier obvious con-attitude and assumed a more neutral one.

"Well, if it's items that are above common that you're looking for, you might want to come with me."

Frock waved further into the room and touched the wall at its end, pushing it to reveal that there was a door that was masked through unknown means.

Skullius was surprised as he saw this, following Frock into another slightly larger room where better looking stuff could be seen.

Some of it was even closed off behind sheets or glass as the thing that immediately drew Skullius' attention was a dark blue shield in the corner.

It was shaped like a kite with grove designs on its face that looked quite neat. It's surface was concave, looking a bit bloated as that appeared to be an intentional design feature.

Skullius walked up to it and checked its details.

~~~

[The Keep]

<Uncommon>

A shield created with the duty to keep its wielder safe at all costs. It spreads its belly to tank damage for the wielder.

-Defense-

350-400

-Durability-

600

-Special Effect-

None

~~~

Naturally, this shield wasn't anything special but Skullius wanted it.

He wouldn't use it in its original form, but he wanted to subject it to [Unbound] to gain a powerful weapon to use!

The original item's rarity didn't affect the skill, [Unbound] so Skullius wasn't too concerned to with finding something better.

During his latest big fight with Jackpot, he had realised that he needed not just a weapon for offense but one for defence as well. At least one he could whip out when he was facing a heavy hitting attack.

Such a convenience was something that his Apostle Red Rage had as a skill and this was part of the reason he wanted a shield of his own.

"I'll take this," Skullius said.

Frock narrowed his eyes.

'Why would he choose something like that? Among all the things here, that's one of the least valuable in terms of usefulness. Heh, he's definitely not an appraiser as I assumed it seems.'

Frock visibly relaxed as he then went on to charge.

"That'll be ten golds."

CLNK!

Skullius gave Frock the required coins without saying anything else as he then took the shield from where it hung and stored it in his spatial ring.

Frock's gaze lingered on Skullius' ring for a moment. He had obviously seen it when the Discount Human was pulling out gold coins earlier but now that he had a closer look at it, he noticed that it wasn't as luxurious as he thought it would be.

He was still under the impression that Skullius was some high noble's child with thick pockets and had assumed that his ring would be a rare one at least but it merely looked to be an uncommon one.

With that, he lost interest in it as he had plenty of these.

Heck, the entire city was flooded with these!

Skullius continued to scroll through the items within the room until his eyes landed on something that he decided he would buy at all costs!

~~~

[Mana Band]

<Rare>

Increases mana by 250 (white).

~~~

The description was short and concise.

It summed it all up.

Skullius searched for others like this but couldn't find any, which made him feel a bit dejected.

"I see you've taken a liking to this band. Do you want to buy it?" Frock said.

This young man had finally spotted a unique item.

Something that could actually increase mana.

He didn't know what method Skullius used to find it or if it was just luck but he was glad that it seemed he would be selling it off today.

The truth was, while this item increase mana, its basic use was for those with white cores, making its marketability among mercenaries difficult.

If someone with a blue core used this band, then the effect would be divided by 10.

"How much is it?" Skullius asked.

Frock pretended to mull it over as in the end..

"150 gold coins."

"What?!"

"Yes!"

Skullius frowned.

Even though he didn't have an appreciation of trade and money, he knew that he was probably getting screwed over.

There was a lesson to be learned from this experience.

Socketholes were to be appreciated in moderation.

The amount of coins he had left weren't enough. They definitely didn't reach a hundred.

Skullius couldn't bring himself to leave this item behind though.

He would probably be able to find other such items but when and how was the problem. He would have to figure out where what could be found in the whole of Inhone City and that would probably strain his five day limit in Inhone City. However that was tracked.

Besides, there was the issue that he had a little over an hour before he transformed back into Penetrator form!

He had to act fast!

Since his gold was insufficient, Skullius searched for something else of value he could trade with and after a few minutes, the Discount Human pulled out...

A dead core!

Frock was shocked to beyond shocked when he saw Skullius casually pull out a dead core.

It even belonged to a Tier 3 beast!

"Where did you get that?!" Frock asked as he sweated.

Many false assumptions were beginning to gush into his mind from this one thing before him.

"Does it matter?" Skullius asked. "I can pay with this right?"

The look on Frock's face told Skullius quite a lot as he then went on to take advantage of the situation.

"This seems to be more valuable than I thought. So, I guess I should grab a few more things right?"

Frock merely nodded as he watched Skullius grab a few more valuable items on top of the mana band.

After everything was done, Skullius handed the core to Frock who didn't know how to respond anymore.

His over-calculating mind could only continue to make guesses.

'I might have been playing with fire! Who just happens to have the dead core of a Tier 3 monster on them?! And uses it for trading for stuff like this on top of that!' Frock frustratedly grumbled.

He didn't let out a peep as he lead Skullius out of the room and back into the street where Skullius immediately rushed off to his next destination, leaving him behind.

The Discount rushed over to reach a certain Inn that he had passed by when he had been roaming around earlier.

He had heard the boisterous chatter of a few men as they talked about how the living conditions had improved from the place, which instantly gave Skullius the idea to find shelter.

The outside of the Inn didn't look so bad as the large building with a mix of wood and masonry looked quite sturdy, an aged wooden sign swaying above the doors with the words "Beefy Bosom Betsy's".

Skullius merely gave it a glance before entering, the cheery atmosphere with commonfolk as they laughed, cackled and loudly called as they ate making Skullius have the feeling, that this was vaguely familiar.

His eyes roamed until they reached the position of a certain woman behind the counter who also looked at him in the same moment...