

Undead 191

Chapter 191: Back To The Party

A low breeze escaped from the man's mouth. It brushed against his mask as he finally raised his head from its initial hanging position while remaining seated on the chair.

His hazel eyes focused, gazing at the man with slicked back hair opposite him, hiding his expectant emotion behind a cold exterior while his fierce yellow eyes demanding the results.

Fulina and two others had been standing beside Actuass throughout the entire endeavor, in case their new allies decided to change their minds and make a move on the man they respected and revered.

Thankfully, it hadn't come to that.

Fulina knew full well how desperate the Evenfall were for their victory, so much so that collaborating with the Green Neolists wasn't a problem for them.

It was unlikely that they would be backstabbing them... at least before they had been granted what they wanted.

This wasn't a collaboration based on the power of friendship after all.

Seeing that Actuass had woken up from his dive, Fulina finally relaxed.

The charismatic and dependable air of Actuass was so comforting to every member of the Green Neolists, that they felt like he was the only true Deity in Aigas.

"It's done. My vessel is on the way with the Champion as we agreed," Actuass said. "Though I must say, I'm not very appreciative of the fact that you left out some details about this particular Champion that could have jeopardised the operation."

The man with black hair narrowed his eyes and scoffed.

"I left nothing out. The Paladin Champions are like every other living creature. They evolve. They get stronger. It's not strange for them to gain new abilities over time. Is it?" the man asked.

"Is that so...?" Actuass said in a low tone, locking his arms while his long robes were illuminated by the light in a mysterious gradient of black and orange.

"I would wager that this is enough goodwill for us to work with, is it not? This will undoubtedly rattle the Purity far more than the last incident. You'll be seeing more of these... 'heroes' and we'll cull a few more."

"That was the objective from the start."

"Indeed it was," said Actuass. " By the way, I've been hearing of a new development that you have been orchestrating. Is it to keep the Royal fools on their toes? I doubt they can pin it on you though."

"Well, you could put it that way. We need sufficient cover for what happens next. I don't plan on holding off the ritual until we have pile of Champion corpses. Proceeding with this one before the others arrive is not a problem. As an experiment, it might serve us well."

"Also, depending on whether or not the Royal family declines or accepts the Sif's proposal, we might just have just gained an additional distraction," the black hair man said a hint of pride in his voice. "What of your plans? You spoke of a grand endeavour that you had enacted with all your members across the nation a few days ago?"

A soft hmph, was heard from the confines of Actuass' green and white mask.

Fulina and the other two by Actuass' side visibly shuddered when they were reminded of this.

"All in good time," said Actuass.

The striding of three horses lifted up the dust and bore heavily on the ground which was used to it this at this point.

This was evidenced by the somewhat thick, bald trail leading through knee-high grass that pointed to the mountains and lakes beyond.

There were barely any trees to be seen around, only bushes and shrubs that seemed to thirst for the burning light of the old golden fat man in the sky being seen, swaying as if to express their joy.

For such a hot region, momentary breezes with such a cooling effect were not that uncommon as they were the reason non-locals could stomach making long journeys through this brutal place.

This did not stop a certain Discount Human from constantly drinking from the many water skins he had brought to alleviate the heat though.

He remained glued to Stylla as they rode, the redhead not bearing much of a reaction to it, much to the other two's surprise, as sometimes it seemed like she was being fondled in broad daylight.

The journey had been quite a long one, but after a few more minutes, a tall crack in space emerged in the four's vision, standing in the thick of tall grasses.

This Cluster was akin to a crooked diagonal slash on the fabric of reality, a white hue oozing from it with a bright luminance that made everyone squint their eyes from time to time.

The four disembarked from their horses and stood before it, getting washed by the ominous yet refreshing air that the Cluster spewed.

"You know, I'm a bit doubtful that you've never entered a Cluster, Festos," Stylla suddenly said while gazing at the Cluster before them.

"Well I just haven't. I like to be prepared before getting into dangerous situations," Skullius responded.

"Really? If that's the case, then can I convince you to take down at least one of the conditions you asked?"

"Nope."

"You really don't want us to help you in any way, shape or form in the Cluster? Even if you're about to die."

"Yes."

"Sir Mage, if I may..." one of the other party members said. He was a thin man with sunken blue eyes and curly black hair that settled in bangs over his forehead. "If we agree to that and you actually die, we'd be in big trouble! We'll be known as the fools that failed to protect a Mage!"

"He's right," said the other man. He was much shorter, with broad arms and a thick body that held toned muscles. Rough amber hair made into a crew cut was seeded on his head, with large green eyes making their presence known on his face.

"What's the point of a party if we can't help each other when in danger?"

Stylla turned to Skullius with a 'they make great points' look on her face, her arms crossed on her chest.

"Look. I am very capable of protecting myself so you don't have to worry. It's only a white Cluster anyway. What could possibly-, we'll be fine," Skullius said.

Naturally, no one was convinced at all, except Stylla who had been given more than enough reassurance by her uncle in terms of Skullius' abilities.

At least when dealing with the current threat.

"I can't work with you if don't agree to this. I might as well leave if that's the case."

"When you can't ride a horse?" pointed out Stylla with a smirk.

"... I can walk..."

Stylla sighed in exasperation.

What was this? Pride? She had met a few Mages in her life and while they were some really proud and entitled bastards among them, they didn't claim to not want any help in a Cluster.

"Fine, then. We won't lend a hand. No need to get all fussy about it. I also have no problem with letting you deal with the Cluster General and taking its dead core. As long as no one else has a problem with it."

The other two shrugged as they didn't have a problem with conceding the dead core. But fighting a Cluster General alone though, especially when you only had a white core. That was just...

"Alright. Let's head in then," Stylla said as she went into the Cluster first, the others following.

Skullius could finally sigh in relief. His conditions were noted and accepted.

Now it was time to kill.

Chapter 192: Showcase And Gardening (1)

The creatures found within Clusters were different and varied. Obviously.

However, the existence of Clusters was something that predated the existence of extremely intelligent life, such as the humans, the Sif and the giants.

Over millenia, as these races battled Clusters, patterns and conclusions began to be made as long after this trend started, knowledge on the creatures spawning from Clusters became very integral for a simple reason.

There were recurring combinations.

The same type of monsters were seen from time to time.

Contrary to what was believed, there wasn't an infinite set of combinations from the power of the Deities that would in turn create an endless variety. It was finite.

Granted, finite was in the sense of millions of species, but finite nonetheless.

This made battling Clusters easier and filled the people with hope as they now had a way to document and fight creatures they had fought before.

This was most true when it came to high level Clusters to which the beasts spawning from them were more easily recognised, probably because their creation required larger amount of clashing energies than the lower level beasts.

The variations were different when it came to the habitats of these creatures though, as many different subspaces had been seen before but in most circumstances, they were usually not inherently harmful to mankind. Unless of course, the environment was a beast itself.

Stylla marvelled at the beautiful sky above, bearing a crystal-like beauty as it produced a faint light to make everything beneath visible without the need of a sun.

Strangely, a wide plain was all there was of the environment with no vegetation in sight. A rough brown ground was the decor along with a seemingly endless horizon, but it was an illusion.

Hundreds of purple gems were strewn over the hard surface, reflecting the light that came from above as if being grown as crops.

Skullius' eyes sparkled. He had been hoping to see these.

However, it seemed like he was the only one interested in them as no one else paid them any mind.

"Hah. This is only the second time I've come into a Cluster and felt underwhelmed," said Stylla.

She didn't look relaxed though as her hand remained on the sheathed sword at her side, the vigilance wrought by many battles coming into play.

The same was true for the other two who looked around vigilantly.

"You guys don't care about the Enriching gems?" Skullius asked.

The short man, his name Bron, turned to Skullius as if a little confused by the question. He couldn't tell if it was a trick question or not.

"Well, of course we do, but purple Enriching gems don't do us any good. They barely help after the first thousand and then they stop working for you altogether," the man explained.

"Have you ever absorbed any?"

"Yes. Two hundred or so."

"Oh. It's surprising that you found that many without becoming a mercenary. They are still quite pricey on the market."

Skullius nodded in affirmation.

"They should still work for you. Want any HELP collecting them?" the thin man, whose name was Fore said with a joking glint in his eye.

Stylla laughed.

Skullius' eyes widened as he slowly took a step back.

He realised that it was a joke at his expense a few moments later and coughed a few times.

"Of course not, I'm fine," Skullius said as he then proceeded to hurriedly pull out the Enright gems from the ground and store them in his spatial storage ring.

He collected hundreds excitedly, dashing from one spot to the next until he had almost cleared an entire section of the Cluster subspace.

Skullius couldn't wait to absorb them all and see just how strong he would become then. Even now, the pulsing of energy within his body was visibly different from before he had absorbed the Enriching gems.

The anticipation was palpable.

Bron, Fore and Stylla looked at Skullius' childish zeal and sighed.

Was this really a Mage?

Weren't they supposed to be dignified and contained instead of being overzealous and... active?

Perhaps that was the price for power. A bit of the screws upstairs going loose.

As Skullius picked up another Enriching gem, he noticed something odd.

A flower awaiting its time to bloom was beside the gem, squirming as if alive.

It had a dark purple stem that stretched out to form the covers for the unseen petals that awaited release.

Skullius naturally turned vigilant but not enough to notice that he was in real danger.

The flower suddenly bloomed, within its centre a gaping hole that was fettered by white petals.

The gaping hole suddenly glowed, a radiant light and heat bellowing from it as it hurtled towards Skullius!

Stylla immediately dashed towards Skullius but it was too late.

BOOM!

Orange flames and little spikes shot from the flower with a cloud of smoke, the Discount Human being sent flying up in the air violently!

He spun and twirled in mid-air, his party members assuming the worst immediately as the Discount Human emerged from the thick cloud of smoke, yet...

...!

In a surprising twist, Skullius wasn't battered and burnt as they had imagined.

A tall and broad shield was extended in his hand , its ocean blue and crystal white design being a cause for awe and relied from his party members!

An attack from below wasn't all that common, especially in low level Clusters where the spaces weren't all that well developed. Besides, none of the three would have gotten taken by surprise with an attack like this.

Skullius landed smoothly on the ground and looked ahead where the flower had been.

Stylla gave Skullius a quick glance before focusing ahead.

"Ha! You really can pull your own weight. Glad you didn't disappoint," she called while unsheathing her sword.

Skullius grinned with a scoff also focused ahead where the enemy was starting to show itself.

The ground caved in as something dug out.

A tall, dark green figure with a thick torso and thick, veiny arms spawned from underground, welding a weapon of sorts.

Soils and small rocks fell of its body as it then shook itself and gazed ahead with its 'head'.

A bright yellow head.

Once more, it seemed like only Skullius had much of a reaction to this thing as even though he didn't know much about life in general, he was sure...

He was sure...

He was vaguely sure that this was a... sunflower-man?

Chapter 193: Showcase and Gardening (2)

CRACK! FSSHHH!

The hard ground broke as another of these strange creatures crawled out with a human-like movement, holding a very similar appearance to the first one that had popped out.

Then another and another and on and on...

Soon, the four were surrounded on all sides by the creatures with none but Skullius questioning what the heck these things were.

"They are Sunlight Shooters. We're in luck. At least it won't be as hard of a time as we thought it would," said Stylla confidently as she drew the sword at her side.

It was a silver saber, its sharpened edge glistening under the light from the sky. The hilt with a blue, simplistic design looked quite beautiful, its sway in the hands of the lady being professional.

"Uh... Sunlight shooters?" asked Skullius with a 'confused as flesh' face. He then checked with his guidance field, marvelling at the fact this was the name of these monsters.

The name wasn't the most creative but it did sum up the creatures' abilities quite well.

Literal sunflowers with humanoid bodies that shot light projectiles from flowers they held tightly at their sides!

Skullius squinted, watching as the yellow petals and fruit at the centre which was the head of the creatures quivered in a lively way as they faced the four.

Thick green limbs extended from ripped stems with abs and toned chest pads visibly planted onto them.

The creatures didn't have the structure of arms as humans did though, as it could be seen that at the end of these muscular arms, there were tipped ends as leaves should be, curling around what was

the weapons - long stemmed flowers that would coil their petals and unfurl them regularly when ready to launch projectiles.

These are what had almost gotten the better of Skullius before as they released brilliant lights akin to fire explosions.

Information about these creatures was widely known as they were categorised as very weak creatures in the bottom wrung within white Clusters.

Despite their physiques, they were actually very weak and relied on long range attacks.

Roughly 300 hundred of these things kept popping from the ground and circling the four silently, with muscle bound limbs.

"This is already proving to be an easy clear. Sunlight shooters aren't anything to worry about. Let's get this over with," Bron said as he flexed his tough muscles and called mana from his core.

Skullius didn't ask further questions about the Sunlight Shooters. As far as he was concerned, they were indeed weak.

A look from the guidance field gave the details he needed about these monsters. Most of it anyway.

The shield he had pulled out was the, The Keep shield he had bought from Frock.

He had used [Unbound] with the 1000 Null Life Essence points he had obtained after killing the Knights from the library incident to enhance it.

The enhanced version of the shield was called the Crystalline Hold, an Uncommon+ item with acceptable stats.

This was only the second time Skullius had gotten a bad roll on an item, which reminded him that [Unbound] could be less generous if it so chose.

The shield was coated in blue and white, the colours forming something similar to a bird on the face of the shield.

It didn't have much in the way of special effects aside from absorbing impacts and spreading them in different directions in a rather visually pleasing way.

Still, Skullius saw it fit for use.

Stylla zoomed forward, lunging into the sea of Sunlight Shooters that began firing their 'weapons'.

Bright beams of light flashed out of the flowers that they held like gatling guns, speeding towards their targets with both heat and bright hues!

Stylla's sword arched in the air, faint illusory streaks of running water trailing along the edges of the blade along with a blue hue along with similar counterparts that looked like tongues of fire!

After she swiped her sword once, the blue and red illusory waves of what seemed like genuine water and fire, her hand turned into a blur as in the next moment, ten Sunlight shooters were lit on fire with the sizzling of water also echoing on their bodies before they were slashed apart!

Her figure moved seamlessly through the waves of these creatures that didn't seem to have any other game plan other than to shoot their loads!

Stylla's application came from her family's inherited sword technique that channelled mana in a way that mimicked the effects of water and fire. The stronger one became in practise, the more these elemental effects could be manifested through a medium such as a sword by the user.

Fore and Bron dashed in different directions as well, wrecking the Sunlight Shooters as if they were paper.

Bron's technique was rather simple. As a Form User, a Warrior to be more specific, he honed his body to use mana for different physical effects.

He leapt with great intensity and fell like a meteor amidst the sea of Sunlight Shooters!

With a dignified look on his face, he put strength into his arm and pushed it forward towards his enemies with his three fingers extended!

The motion of his arm and hand wasn't slow or fast, but the resulting effect, was nothing short of extraordinary.

A hazy ring with terrifying amount of power behind it pushed ahead, breaking apart tens of Sunlight Shooters as if they were made of... well....plant tissue.

The ground shattered in a continuous trail with a shockwave that ignored the thicc of the Sunlight Shooters and demolished their weapons. Then as if this wasn't enough, a second and a third shockwave blasted out with Bron's one move, carrying stronger forces than that of the first!

Soon, nothing remained in front of Bron except the corpses of his foes, green blood sprinkled over the hard surface. The bright flashes of firepower from the other beefy sunflowers didn't do any damage to him at all!

Fore breathed lightly before facing his enemies that kept shooting at him like the fodder they were. Fore weaved through their attacks with his quick, nimble feet and set his gaze on a group of Sunlight Shooters.

His pupils constricted and instantly, a warp like effect applied on the space, covering nearly thirty Sunlight Shooters that were then pulled to a singular point in the air where they smashed against each other!

Fore increased his focus, the pulling force that drew on these monsters intensifying as they began to get crushed, being compounded against each other until they formed a large ball of green and yellow with plant limbs flailing helplessly.

The ball fell to the ground with a heavy thud, Fore not looking like he had broken even a drop of sweat.

He was a Mind Caster. A variation of Form Users that focused more on psychic strength than physical strength. Fore himself wasn't of the belief that physical strength was to be neglected completely in the pursuit of mental supremacy like many Mind Casters, which was why he was so nimble.

He had achieved this through intense practise, not wanting to put all his eggs in one basket.

His mental abilities were not very powerful, but he was more interested in reaching a balance between his mental and physical capacities, thus he carried a sword with him.

Skullius watched with a sagely nod of his head.

'They are strong. Especially Stylla...!' Skullius thought as he watched the lady leisurely mow down the Sunlight Shooters without even trying hard.

'Also, they are making life even easier for me too.'

Skullius dashed towards the corpses of all the Sunlight Shooters and immediately began taking what he wanted before the timer ran out.

Null Life Essence!

Chapter 194: One Shoting A Cluster General! (1)

"What is he doing now?" asked Fore as he turned in Skullius' direction, watching the Discount Human dash from corpse to corpse while stretching out his hand.

"He's surprisingly quick for a Mage, though. I can take away at least that much," said Bron as he propped his hands on his waist. "Though I doubt he can handle the Cluster General single-handedly."

Stylla didn't give any remarks. She just watched as Skullius did his thing.

The passive, [Great Rush] amplified Skullius' speed to a considerable degree and with his constant usage of the skill, Skullius was looking forward to when it would evolve.

He also had [Mana Shroud] active, a firm layer of protection surrounding his body.

In the next twenty seconds, he collected the Null Life Essence from fifty Sunlight Shooters before the timers ran out, continuing with the hot rush against time while not giving his party members who gazed at him questioning eyes any mind.

The Sunlight Shooters gave 25 Null Life Essence points each, the amount being slightly higher than that of the goblins, the weakest creatures he had ever fought.

Some Sunlight Shooters converged towards Skullius as he ran, collecting the precious resources he aimed for which annoyed him.

The orange blobs of light that whizzed through the air were nothing to him as he easily ducked and dodged, reaching his enemies.

Bron's brow furrowed when he saw Skullius getting close to these creatures.

'Does he think he can replicate what we have been doing just because we said the Sunlight Shooters were weak?' he thought concernedly, really beginning to wonder if the Deities had done him a favour by not allowing him a chance to fanboy over Skullius back at the Association building earlier when the Discount Human had ignored him and Fore.

'That's idiotic. Even with that much pride, he should at least know tha—'

WHAM!

A crisp and resounding blunt force was heard as three Sunlight Shooters were blown away by a single punch from Skullius!

'The hell?!'

Bron was shocked!

He watched as a light gust of air circled around the point of impact, the two unfortunate opponents of Skullius flying into their companions pitifully.

That power!

Seeing Skullius' form, he could see that he was heavily lacking in skill but his power and speed were incredible for his stage!

Stylla nodded while hacking away at the Sunlight Shooters, finding Skullius more intriguing despite his other questionable antics.

The Discount Human himself was also shocked by the development too. He was quite sure that the enhancement from the Enriching gems played a huge role in making the force he unleashed to be devastating, especially when he coupled it with the skill, [Brawn], which amplified his blunt damage force.

He had extracted this skill from one of the items he bought from Frock.

After creating some space for himself, Skullius decided to earn a few experience points.

He stretched out his hand, conjuring a small mass of [Evil Darkness] that he hurriedly compressed and formed into a small ball that began to spin with his advanced control until it generated a breeze!

Without any delay, he sent it towards the most Sunlight Shooter congested place around, the ball blasting out like a missile towards them!

This unlike the merely intriguing display of physical power that Skullius had displayed earlier, thoroughly fascinated the trio that Skullius called temporary partners!

What was that mass of darkness?!

Was it a spell?

Some form of mystic arts?!

Was this man actually a prodigy?!

A smile bloomed on Stylla's face as many thoughts already began to spawn inside her mind.

VWAAAP!

A circling impact shot out with ruthlessly loud clap, dozens of Sunlight Shooters having been pierced by the quick ball of darkness that spun ferociously!

Juices sprayed as the Sunlight Shooters died helplessly, Skullius not stopping to celebrate even while piles of notifications flashed in his vision.

He had already known that these creatures couldn't take an attack that like that.

He went about collecting Null Life Essence while his partners grew a bit more interested from the earlier perspective they had begun to impose on Skullius because of his behaviour.

Within a few minutes, the Sunlight Shooters were all killed yet no one was tired. Except Skullius.

All the running around had drained him somewhat, but it was worth it. He collected plenty of Null Life Essence.

He hadn't used much mana as he had to save up for the Cluster General but his body refused to give him an easy time.

He looked around, wondering if the Cluster General would emerge similar to how Jackpot did back then.

This simple action made him feel weird though.

Here he was, actively looking for a Cluster General as if it wasn't anything special.

Perhaps it was an instinct spawned by the fact that the opponents in this Cluster were abysmally weak.

He wondered what kind of special trait they were supposed to have, but it was possible that they wouldn't have any as well.

"You're looking in the wrong places. The Sunlight Shooters emerged from underground, so where do you think the big one will come from?" Stylla asked with a brow raised in amusement.

Skullius looked under him, realising that naturally, the strongest enemy should emerge from where the others came from.

The space within Clusters differed depending on the level of the Cluster and this one wasn't all that impressive.

It also determined how strong opponents one met would be like.

RUMBLE!

A bright flash of golden light dug from below, exploding upwards and blowing away the dirt as it shot up in a brilliant display of luminance!

The entire subspace became tinged in gold as multiple spots of golden flew up in a fantastical light, the ground beginning to quake unsettlingly!

The sudden shudders almost made Skullius topple over as he focused his vision on what was emerging from the ground.

Massive blocks of crust rose as a brilliant, massive sunflower rose from the ground, its petals fluttering vivaciously while producing a light so bright, it made the party turn away while still bearing protective coatings of mana!

After the sunflower came out, the six meter body of thick and muscular stem with leaves as tough limbs that looked like they were used solely for bench pressing all their lives, it emitted a low growl!

Thick, veggie thighs made squelching noise over the ground as the giant sunflower stood, its petals now directly facing the party of four.

The size of the flower was intimidating and Bron found himself excited to fight this monstrosity.

Fore merely covered his eyes with his hand while Stylla prepared a stance.

Bron turned to Skullius who had made the request to get the Cluster General for himself.

"Are you still planning on fighting on your own?" he asked in a mocking fashion.

Naturally, the three knew the massive Sunlight Shooter's special skill and were aware that Skullius would be affected by it too.

The Discount Human propped up his shield as with continued exposure to the bright Sunlight, he felt himself growing weaker and weaker!

His body grew heavy and he had to try and prop up his shield to try and mitigate the skills effect.

The guidance field had shown him the attributes of this creature along with its name.

Father Sunlight!

On top of this skill, it also had some high physical stats as a Tier 3 monster unlike its smaller counterparts.

Fore, Bron and Stylla watched as Skullius struggled, the thin man sighing as he looked pitifully at the Discount Human. They completely ignored the sunlight effect as if it didn't affect them at all while watching Skullius' performance.

Father Sunlight's large petals increased their light intensity, responding to the nonchalance of the three.

"Do you really not want any help? Pride will only get you killed!" Bron called to Skullius with a slight grin on his face.

The Discount Human did not respond.

Not verbally at least.

His response to the eyes that expected him to swallow his pride, was the coiling of a large amount of mana as skill was cast, a bright red overtaking the gold hue within the Cluster...!

Chapter 195: One Shouting A Cluster General! (2)

The abrupt change in the colour of the subspace caused Skullius' three companions to grow wary.

At first, they hadn't recognised that this change had been brought about by the same Discount Human who looked to be cowering under the blue and white shield.

It didn't seem like it.

Who would believe that someone like that could suddenly spawn such a skill that not only changed the atmosphere visually, but brought on a rippling heat into the air?!

This was incomparable to that small darting ball that he had conjured which could be classified as a mere parlour trick when truly powerful Cluster beasts were involved.

Yet...

When the three saw the bright red orb that Skullius held in his other hand, they were beyond shocked.

Bron took a step back.

Skullius first gave him a glance before dropping his shield and facing Father Sunlight!

The Discount Human had requested to face the Cluster General alone in addition to taking its core as his own because he feared the technicalities he had seen when it came to his Tasks. It had to be him who acquired whatever was required of him from the source.

The human head sized ball warped the air with its heat, its colour giving everyone a deep sense of dread.

Skullius didn't waste time appreciating the three's faces a bit more especially Bron's and flung the ball at Father Sunlight, who had backed away a bit from having this fierce heat exposed to his body!

And thus the skill, [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] flew in its compounded form, rushing over to devour its opponent which merely crossed its arms before its body!

The trailing red that followed the ball echoed with malice as in the next moment, an explosion of pure flame lit up the space further, dying it in a deep red before releasing roaring flames that bathed the dry lands!

The flames washed over Father Sunlight like a sea, the giant sunflower releasing pained groans from a mouth that did not exist as quickly, its green and yellow shades turned darker and darker!

"I'll be damned..." Bron muttered as he looked at the scene ahead in shock.

He had taken the words out of Fore's mouth.

He and crew had dashed a distance away to avoid facing the full brunt of the heat as it seemed to only exclude Skullius from its clutches!

Fore had on an expression of surprise too along with Stylla, but unlike the other two, she merely expressed it mildly with her eyes.

What an interesting find Skullius was.

Such an individual who was both passionate about physical combat and mage craft was rare just like with most other classes.

Diversification was rarely seen even though it was one of the ways to unlock advanced classes.

As everyone was truly convinced that this was done with, gaining a newfound respect for Skullius as well, something... peculiar occurred.

The groans of pain from Father Sunlight turned... erotic.

It was strange that this registered in all four of the minds of the party members.

The giant man-flower swooned and swayed, rubbing its giant leaf arms against its 'sensitive' parts; the petals and its fruit that were already burning away!

It was naturally flexible as it seemed to be doing an erotic dance for Skullius who speechless stood before it as it burned, thick fumes gushing from its massive body.

Conspicuous marking ran along its petals as it burned but just like with the Knights at the library, this escaped Skullius' view.

"..."

No one said anything during the performance, the flower turning to ash less than a minute later as thereafter, the flames died down.

[You have killed (III) Sun Gazer. 540,000 Exp awarded]

[Congratulations you have killed a Cluster General]

[This Cluster General fueling this space has been killed. Cluster will commence collapse. Please exit immediately]

Skullius tore himself out of his embarrassed paralysis and dashed over to the ashes of Father Sunlight, the Sun Gazer.

He rummaged through the ashes and found the dead core he sought, sighing in relief afterwards.

He decisively used the strongest skill available to him to defeat the Cluster General as waiting any longer would have warranted his party members helping him which posed a risk for obvious reasons.

He was happy to find that even the [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] couldn't destroy a dead core as that would have been... problematic.

A crack in the space leading to Aigas had emerged where they had entered from and Skullius found Stylla urging him to hurry up.

Soon, the four were out of the Cluster and they watched the cracks that represented the space within disappear from the grassy view.

Four Conqueror's Halos appeared around the four individuals, flare light lights giving them a unique brilliance.

Skullius saw a few other notifications along with this change but one of them wasn't beneficial to him.

Four Conqueror's Halos appeared around the four individuals, flare light lights giving them a unique brilliance.

[You have relieved the good people of Aigas from a great danger. You will now be bestowed a BLESSING from the Deities]

....

[The 'Binds of Fukal' resist. The BLESSING bestowal has failed]

[You have received a 'Conqueror's Halo' for clearing a 'Low level Cluster']

Skullius sighed in disappointment. Faint glows appeared over his partners in addition to the halos which he assumed were the augmentation to their blessings.

"I must say, I underestimated you. I thought it was all talk but you really just took out a Cluster General on your own. I thought Stylla was bluffing you out when she agreed to your conditions too," Fore said while Bron nodded with a 'hah' expression, his lips downturned in lingering emotions of shock.

That power.

"I hate to admit it but I was also ready to jump in and void our agreement. Glad you proved us wrong though," Stylla said with a smile.

For some reason, she didn't seem nearly as surprised as he hoped she would be.

"You got your core right? You won't be needing more Cluster General cores?"

"No, this is enough," replied Skullius as he saw the blinking notification that told of his elevation to level 3, the boosts of five points to each stat washing over him.

Skullius' muscles tightened as he felt a distinct change, his mana increasing by 10 whole point along with his health.

'I can't get used to this...' he said.

This was better.

The Discount Human then input more experience to fulfill the required of Exp for the next level which was 4000 and received the next Task immediately.

When looking at it, Skullius wasn't at all surprised or perturbed. It seemed reasonable really. The only issue was that he had done it before, but probably because it wasn't the current required Task at the time, it wasn't registered.

~~~

Exp : 4000/4000

Fourth Task : Clear a Cluster without assistance

~~~

'I wonder if these guys will allow it. They just admitted to not wanting to let me do anything alone earlier.'

Stylla noticed Skullius' expression and guessed that he had probably finished attempting a Task. It had only been a guess at first but after seeing him relish in the addition to his strength, she confirmed it.

But which Deity would ask a human to not get help from others though?

It wasn't exactly outlandish but it was just too... specific for a Foundation Stage combatant.

This was particularly dangerous for someone of Skullius' level despite what he had shown.

Unlike Fore and Bron, she had noticed Skullius' band which seemed to have some sort of effect on his mana. Probably increasing its amount.

She was very sensitive to stuff like this, and the existence of this band on Skullius made her less impressed with his earlier show of power.

Not that she didn't think he was decently strong though.

"Are you good to go for a few more before the main course?" Stylla asked Skullius.

"Of course," Skullius replied to which Stylla nodded. "But... I do have another small condition..."

Chapter 196: Breezing Through Tasks! NOT!

The Discount Human flew out of a crack in space and fell into the waters with a great splash!

Behind him, the white crack depicting a low level Cluster shuddered and vanished as if it had never existed in the first place!

Skullius stood from the waist high waters and breathed out a sigh of relief.

"Well done. Took you quite some time, but well done," Fore said with a slow clap of his hands. "Some starter Tasks you're getting."

Skullius gave Fore the stink eye before walking out of the river.

Who did he think he was?

Starter Tasks?!

He had just cleared a white Cluster on his own, a second Conqueror's Halo appearing above the last one which looked brighter than this one.

Convincing the group to let him enter the Cluster alone had been a very big hassle. They had refused, all except Stylla of course who merely watched the three bicker, Fore and Bron claiming that even if he relied on that ridiculous flame attack, it was bound to cost a large amount of mana.

They were right.

Skullius had finally decided to tell them that it was a Task from the Deity Quintess, by far the most popular Deity he had heard of.

This had made his life much easier as the group had finally unanimously agreed to let him enter the Cluster on his own.

Skullius had to battle the sense of camaraderie that kept welling up from within him but he suppressed it with the thought that these guys were probably only alive because they were not actually concerned about Skullius in terms of his benefit, but for their own sakes.

The Cluster they had found was a few meters into a wide river and Skullius had had quite an interesting experience within it.

First of all, he had taken every Enriching gem he had come across before he faced hundreds of bee-like creatures that flew in the air at high speed. These large bee-like creatures would spread out a certain gas which would be harmful to the body when inhaled.

The gas had caused Skullius insides to swell but he obviously didn't suffer from anything else, his Crystalline Hold being able to tank attacks from the monsters.

The bee-like creatures had then stormed towards him with the sharp and pointy stingers at their backs.

Frankly, defeating these creatures wasn't too hard even as they fought alongside their Cluster General, a giant hairy brown and black creature with a scary presence.

[Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] had dealt with it though, as when Skullius torched the creatures, all of them died, save for five that turned into his burning thralls, aiding him in the fight against the general.

After avoiding being skewered by the Cluster General and finishing it off with [Manassault], Skullius had completed the Fourth Task, and ascended another level in the Foundation Stage.

'I should really spend my experience. I've accumulated quite a lot of it. But should I still save some for my potential next Apostle? Hmm... I wonder....' Skullius thought as he looked at Fore with an intrigued glint. 'What would happen if I...

got a human Apostle? Would I get a good bro from him?'

For a moment, Skullius considered this but he quickly tore his mind away from it. If he killed Fore, he would probably be hunted down by the others.

Besides, could he even kill the bastard?

"Alright then, let's meet up with the others. We'll clear a few other Clusters before taking on the tough one. After a proper rest of course," said Fore as he sat atop the horse, patting at the space he had left for Skullius behind him.

The Discount Human grumbled.

He felt it better to be behind Stylla. It was strangely... soothing.

Nevertheless, he jumped on the horse and the two rode ahead.

They had split up from the others as Stylla and Bron had already cleared two white Clusters that were nearby while waiting for Skullius.

The four then met back up and began their clearing spree which saw them wiping out the existences within six white Clusters.

Each clear didn't take much time, but the travelling from one spot to another was what caused them to lose a great deal of sunlight.

He also managed to finish his Fifth and Sixth which were at dealing with large numbers of monsters as well as obtaining unique resources from Cluster beasts, which wasn't all that hard.

In addition to this, Skullius managed to fill up his Null Life Essence bar.

6000 Null Life Essence points!

There was also quite a bit of experience and with this much of the two resources, Skullius resolved himself to an additional plan after he was done partying up with the three for the day.

Skullius had seen quite a bit of special equipment in his time in Aigas.

The rarest items he had seen so far were undoubtedly the All Eater scroll and the ArchLight Generation Keeper. The former was legendary and the latter was rare+, meaning it was just shy of the legendary status. He wagered that whatever was in the chest he had found in the Labyrinth of the Yoke was also bound to be legendary too.

That was if he was ever able to open it.

This was in terms of Aigas standards though, as Null Life standards were higher than this.

This thought reminded him of the work that needed to be done.

He had to get more familiar with [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light], especially the latter because he didn't have much of an appreciation of it and the answer to this was naturally... the Fruit of World Myths!

But then again...

'Maybe with this amount of Null Life Essence points, I can probably get something legendary from Serenity!' Skullius thought.

The dichotomy between Null Life and the powers of the Insurgent Magnus made him both excited and frustrated as he was torn over which to start with.

For now, he would put those thoughts aside.

The party rode the vast stretches of lands, passing many settlements in the region until they reached their destination.

The final Cluster to be cleared for the day.

This one, was different.

A white-blue Cluster.

A large tear in space that was almost too straight to call natural, stood before the four.

It rose up to five meters into the air, having not a single colour but two, a prevalent white with smoky trails of blue that swirled within the gap in a turquoise hue.

The pressure released from the Cluster was more intense than the others, causing Skullius to feel both excited and frightened...

As he focused on it, he realised that what gave him a sense of dread was not the whole Cluster but the swirls of blue.

They made this experience different from the other ones.

"I hope you're all well rested. We had a good long journey to get here and I trust we're all at our peak," said Stylla.

Everyone nodded.

Skullius had recovered all his mana and after downing a few water skins he was feeling great, along with the new stats he had acquired with his arrival into level 6.

Bron then turned to Skullius, this time with concern.

"The experience inside will be different from what you're used to. Do you still want no help?"

"Yes," Skullius answered succinctly.

This time, Stylla who had picked up on the fact that Skullius was trying to complete Tasks before, turned to the Discount Human and questioned.

"You claimed that clearing a Cluster alone was the Task you had. So, tell me. Is fighting without help another Task? And if that's the case, then how did you have two Tasks at the same time? Isn't it supposed to have been completed already?"

Stylla wasn't the type to invade the privacy of her party members, but this was seriously starting to annoy her.

Was there something else involved?

"That's not something you should be worried about. I don't need to explain it to you, do I? We're not permanent partners," Skullius said coldly.

He had made an effort to keep himself from falling down the rabid hole of camaraderie and he would continue to do so by being distant.

Fore and Bron gave him displeased looks but he ignored.

Stylla turned away with a shake of her head and unsheathed her sword.

"Let's go in."

Skullius sighed. At least this was his last hunt with these guys and he would be free.

Besides, he didn't have time to worry about these guys' feelings as he had received a rather problematic Seventh Task.

There was a major change in the Tasks. While they had been unspecific before, being general and loosely related to Clusters, this one was strangely related to him and his power.

Chapter 197: Against Sages (1)

The skill [Basic Evil Invasion] was finally called to play.

This was quite the strange Task for Skullius. He hadn't thought that something like this would pop up and for the first time since he started completing these Tasks, he truly felt them become personal.

As for the skill required for this undertaking, Skullius had thought about it before. However, the reason he hadn't used it was because of its cost.

It required 100 Mana Points per minute and before he had acquired the mana band, it was something that he hadn't dreamed of using any time soon.

'Well... let's see what kind of monsters are in the Cluster first. I can then decide whether I can complete the Task here or not,' Skullius thought.

He didn't need to rush it anyway.

The four entered the Cluster, their faces being blasted by light trickles of moisture and fresh air spawned by a healthy and humid atmosphere.

The scene that appeared before them was very beautiful, almost making them loosen up their tense bodies as it felt unnatural to hold such hostility in such a pristine place.

White coloured vegetation covered every inch of the party's vision. Grasses, leaves, bushes.

With the exception of wood and stems that remained with their natural shades of brown, everything was white, the lush forest ahead being very welcoming.

A mountain stood before them, in its middle, a waterfall of pure, crystal like water falling down to settle into a wide lake at the foot of it.

The water created a white mist, this soft cloud being from where the humidity came from.

"Ha. I'll count this as one of the times I've been surprised by what's behind a Cluster," Stylla said, almost feeling guilty for welding her sword openly in this tranquil space.

"Yeah, as if some deadly beetle isn't lurking around waiting for the chance to pounce at us," Bron said with a frown, convincing himself that enemies were around. Always.

"You know, I agree with you there, but what's with you and bugs," Fore gave Bron a suspicious look.

"I don't want to talk about it," the bulky mercenaries said while turning to the side.

Skullius was equally shocked.

This wasn't enough to allow him to let his guard down but he had momentarily forgotten where he was upon entering this place.

The four walked on slowly, scaling up the not so steep mountain with a steady pace while trying to detect the presence of monsters.

There was no sun in the sky once again, as for Clusters, developing worlds of that scale was rare, at least for low level Clusters.

The development of species and the environment usually took thousands of years, but due to distortions in time within Clusters, that process didn't show in Aigas.

It was also theorised that when a Cluster broke through into Aigas, that distortion in time which multiplied it hundreds or even thousands fold within the minispaces would be stabilised by the overall stable energies of a complete world.

That's why time would remain the same before and after raiding a Cluster for mercenaries.

The white vegetation crunched under the feet of the four.

As they moved deeper into the thickets of brown trees with white leaves...

Shashashasha!

Everyone turned towards the sound but found nothing.

Shashashasha!

Once again, nothing.

The breeze made it difficult to tell whether something had passed or if the vegetation was simply responding to the motions of moving air.

Once the sound appeared again, Fore focused his sunken eyes and his vision let him see....

"The hell?" he spoke with mild surprise.

"What is it?" asked Stylla.

"I think it was a.... a white monkey wearing... robes of some kind?"

"Huh?" Bron uttered.

"Yes. I'm sure of it... It's almost like it was praying or something. Its hands were pressed together while it passed by really fast."

There were many strange things that happened in Clusters but this was hard to wrap a mind around.

Everyone continued to look while the sounds kept repeating themselves.

This was exceptionally creepy because no one actually sensed anything. They all had to rely on their basic senses to detect where the enemy was, which wasn't working.

Soon, the sounds became very loud, clearly expressing that many of the enemies were around.

"Any ideas, Mage?" Bron called to Skullius.

The Discount Human thought hard.

This was not the best of situations. Using a devastating attack from the get go would be idiotic and thus, Skullius decided to try something else while budgeting his limited mana.

Skullius used [Basic Evil Production] and produced a small cloud of darkness that he then manipulated with [Basic Evil Weaving].

He dispersed it in a random direction as they all seemed to be surrounded anyway.

The cloud burst ahead, being very distinct from the white all around.

Stylla, Bron and Fore paid attention to the potential changes.

They had grown used to seeing this peculiar power that their distant partner wouldn't share the details of and they would appreciate any opening he created.

The results...?

Gaps in the cloud of smoke started to appear as individuals zooming past could be spotted, creating trails in the cloud!

"Right there!" Fore called before he extended his hand towards a fallen branch on the white coloured grass, the item floating in the air immediately before it shot towards the gap in the moving cloud of darkness where an enemy was briskly passing!

The darting branch turned into a blur for a short moment as it was manipulated by the Basic expertise of the Mind Caster, psychokinesis, before it suddenly stopped when it faced the invisible but clearly tangible figure!

The figure also stopped moving, its body finally becoming visible.

What Fore had described before wasn't too far from the real thing.

A white furred monkey stood with its blue eyes squinted at the party.

Its skin could barely be seen as most of the caramel coloured flesh was hidden by the spotless fur except its rough, crusty hands that were clasped together.

The creature wore a garment of white grasses and leaves spun together in a shockingly neat fashion making the four question their eyes.

What made the four vigilant towards this creature however was the branch that Fore had thrown which was still hanging in the air before the monkey, its momentum having been culled for some reason.

The monkey remained in its humble pose, hands clasped together.

Bron was the first to act, his body brimming with flaring mana from his blue core as he suddenly appeared right in front of the monkey, a trail of charred grasses and ground crust following after his speedy movement which impressed Skullius!

He pushed his palm with three fingers extended as with staggering force, he slammed right into the monkeys' face!

POW!

The nearby trees were blown away in a wide arc of force that pushed everything a distance, Skullius having to erect his shield to remain standing!

Just as soon as the impact died down though, another resounded, hazy rings bashing against Bron who had slammed his palm onto the monkey just a second earlier!

The burly mercenary flew at high speed, his skin crumbling while his armour dented at the repulsive force that resembled his own!

...!

This was supposed to be the monkey, flying away after eating the attack or worse, but it seemed, Bron's attack had just been redirected at him!

Chapter 198: Against Sages (2)

Skullius' eyes honed in on the monkey as he searched for its details from the guidance field, his vision being blasted with the information immediately.

~~~

[ Name : None ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Level : 18 ]

[ Race : Mountain Sage Monkey ]

[ Inv. Status : At peace ]

-----

[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 57 ]

[ Agility : 48 ]

[ Intelligence : 42 ]

[ Endurance : 50 ]

[ Luck : 12 ]

-----

[ Health : 305/305 ]

-----

[ Mana : 215/215 ]

....

Its stats weren't anything special as far as Skullius could tell but he turned vigilant nevertheless when he saw the Warrior fly a distance and shatter a few tree trunks before skidding on the ground!

Fore and Stylla remained composed as they analysed.

Skullius' cloud of darkness still roamed and continued to show invisible figures walking within it clearly.

Stylla's mind raced as she tried to figure out what exactly had happened.

'There's no doubt about it. The attack from Bron was redirected at him by some kind of skill. Does this work for any and all attacks?' she thought while beginning to coat her saber with mana.

As she gathered the facts, more of these Mountain Sage Monkeys started becoming visible and advancing towards the four.

At this point, Bron had stood up, dashing back to the group with quick steps.

"Damn it! That was rough! I'll kill that damned thing!" he bellowed. "That's the first time I've eaten my own technique!"

Stylla raised her hand to stop the Warrior from lunging back into danger.

"Let me check something first..." she said before she disappeared from her initial position and popped up in mid-air as she then swiped her saber laterally to cut apart one of the Mountain Sage Monkeys!

Bron furrowed his brows. If her attack was redirected at her...

Stylla's sword gleamed with illusory glows of blue and red, both carrying the characteristics of fire and water.

She then increased the speed of her slash and coated her entire body with a thick blanket of mana, her weapon swiping at the monkey's neck!

At the point of impact, which was just around an inch from the creature's neck where something protectively guarded its body, Stylla felt it...

An immense amount of feedback!

A blistering heat and biting cold pounded towards her with a sharp sensation touching her neck!

However, this wasn't what she was focusing on.

Her eyes that were glued to the Sage Monkey saw a few droplets of blood stain its fur at the neck and she grinned...

She then compressed her mana and gathered it around her neck and then with her left hand, she twirled her fingers, using her great knowledge about her own technique to deconstruct the fire and water effects she had conjured!

The heat and cold dissipated and the sharp sensation that threatened to decapitate her was warded off by the thick layer of her mana in an instant!

Stylla drew back as she many of the monkeys rushing over, but she didn't retreat back to the party. Instead...

"It's not how it looks. These bastards can't redirect your attacks 100%. With a strong enough attack, they can only divert it so much of it while some it actually reaches them. Use your stronger techniques and when they get redirected towards you, tear them apart before you suffer any damage.

You show know how..." Stylla called before her body exploded with mana and vanished again, this time with an immense shockwave rupturing where she initially stood!

A second later, five Mountain Sage Monkeys were slashed apart, dismembered!

Their limbs went flying with trails blood that oozed and stained their spotless white furs in an epic scene of carnage!

What was unusual about the cuts on the creatures was how every severed limb released scorching bursts of steam that were tinged in red, a raw aroma diffusing into the air!

This was the Twin Contrast Sword Technique of Stylla's family.

A sword technique that combined any opposing elements into swordplay. Of course, it was more nuanced than it sounded at face value.

Stylla herself was the first daughter of the Bryne Family, a small but decently influential family which hailed from one of the large cities.

She was not very good at the technique as she had even chosen the more simpler elements to use.

Stylla zipped through the trees before dashing towards the monkeys once more.

Even though she was glad she had figured a way to fight these beasts, she was unnerved by the monkeys' reaction towards the death of their comrades.

Nothing at all.

They were unfazed

They merely looked and continued to rush around.

"Heh! So that's all we need to do?" Bron yelled.

Fore turned to the bulky man and scoffed.

"I don't think you're smart enough to do that."

The thin man then extended his hand in a grasping motion towards one of the monkeys and then closed his hand into a fist!

One of the monkeys moaned as it was compacted together, bones and flesh being squeezed into each other in a very cruel fashion!

Fore felt the feedback hit him but he was already prepared.

He knew how his psychokinesis worked and for him who had only learnt it at the basic level, it was easy to counter the force that sought to replicate the effect he applied on the monkey back to him.

Bron frowned.

In the spirit of not wanting to be left out, he decisively formed his hand into a fist, channelled mana into it and then struck the ground hard!

BOOM!

A powerful shockwave burst with incredible force!



With this entire exchange happening on the side of the mountain, the integrity of the crust on the geographical feature broke, the broken and hard ground they stood on becoming susceptible to gravity!

"Incoming!" Bron growled, signalling for his companions to not be swept away by the resulting avalanche!

Many of the monkeys lost their footing and began to fall down the mountain.

However, even as they dropped, they had on solemn expressions with their hands continuing to be clasped together.

Skullius had dashed to safety before he was swept away.

He had seen the entire thing but hadn't made a move.

This was not a good situation for him.

Going by what Stylla had said, he probably wouldn't be able to deconstruct the attacks he used on the monkeys.

'Gah! I guess this is the difference between me and these guys...' he thought. They actually knew the ins and outs of their techniques.

From way up on the mountain, bigger monkeys started rushing down in great numbers, responding to the assault happening beneath.

The four noticed the differences.

These monkeys were Tier 3 and there were almost forty of them, rushing with their hands plastered together!

Their eyes were cold, depicting a sagely wisdom.

When Skullius checked their statuses, he was surprised to see all of them at the peak of their tiers with relatively high stats.

One the monkeys rushed towards Bron, looking at him with a sagely light of rebuke for his act of desecrating their pristine home!

Bron gave it his attention and as it drew closer, he blasted it with his fist, four hazy rings surrounding his arms as the Warrior added more strength to his attack than the last!

The punch landed on the monkey's face... but no damage registered!

There was no feedback however.

No recoil.

When Bron's fist touched the monkey, it simply lost all momentum, much to his shock!

Then...

PWAA!

A resounding slap smacked Bron at the side of his face, turning his head one way.

He had been slapped by the serious monkey which genuinely looked to be rebuking him!

It didn't look to do any damage at all and for a few seconds... there was no reaction from Bron.

A few moments later though, the brawny man turned to his companions with a unnatural smile that stretched from one ear to the other.

His eyes were closed and his cheeks puffed a bit.

He clasped his hands and uttered a few words that rattled Skullius more than anyone else.

"Now... I am at peace..."

## Chapter 199: Return Of The Evil Invader! (1)

A crisp slap had brought about the repentance of a certain burly man who wore a deep smile that almost split his face in half!

Stylla and Fore were lost for words.

What manner of bizarre skill was this?!

Even though they didn't have time to waste with questioning this, their faces said it clearly.

It was natural to assume that something had happened to him but trying to figure it out now would only serve to distant them from the incoming enemies.

Bron just stood there like a statue, his flightless hair doing loosely nested on his head while he he nothing else but show a happy expression.

The surprise in Skullius was even more palpable as when he looked at the status of the smiling man who looked to had been baptised to a new faith, he saw something more or less unnerving.

~~~

[Inv. Status : At peace]

~~~

Just like the ever calm Mountain Sage Monkeys, Bron was now 'at peace'. Whatever that meant.

Stylla didn't remain still for long, gaping at the sudden change as she dashed to rip apart the weaker Monkeys without mercy before the Tier 3 ones arrived.

Frankly, while she was concerned about the fate of her partners, it was supercifial, with more of the emphasis lying on Skullius, whose value was greater than the other two.

She turned to him who was also being assaulted by the monkeys and narrowed her eyes. She would keep him well within her sights despite the bullshit conditions he proposed. He was important to her now despite her declaration at the Association. She needed his help now that she knew his potential.

Blood rained under the eyes of the Tier 3 Monkey Sages who split to attack Stylla, Skullius and Fore!

Stylla's eyes blazed as the mana around her roared ferociously!

Tens of the stronger monkeys ran towards her with eyes that depicted the coldness of true, untainted belief, eager to deliver repentance with but a slap!

Their mouths moved with incomprehensible words coming from them but one would assume that they were chanting, "You too shall know the slap."

"These ones seem to have a skill that negates damage instead of redistributing it. I assume its a stronger version of what the smaller monkeys use. While it is a gamble.... I feel like it's worth it... if these beasts are that confident in their skills, then I'm confident in mine!" Stylla thought as she seized bullying the weaker Monkeys and rushed to meet the incoming wave of Tier 3s.

The one in the lead leapt with its hands linked together, the others following at full speed with glares of rebuke.

Stylla came to a halt and wielded her sword with both hands, brighter shades of red and blue lighting up on her sword beautifully as thick billows of steam erupted with a resounding 'pffsssss'!

The hot white steam blew outwards and the sheer intensity of the scorching moisture and the pressure it bore destroyed the white vegetation around and outright killed the weaker Monkeys with its sudden emergence!

The Tier 3 Monkeys rushed into the expansive steam fearlessly, the one leading the charge suddenly shuddering as with its entry, it saw a saber coated in blue and red swipe down at it!

The speed of strike was incredible, guaranteeing that it wouldn't be able to dodge.

So, the creature stood there and tanked it like a Sage while locking its fingers desperately!

VWOOOOSH!

Instead of the crisp cracking of the ground underneath being heard, the expansive steam from which this fight took place was the one that screamed and drew back with greater intensity!

The result of Stylla's attack was less than desirable, the lead monkey that had just taken the attack having nothing but a daunting, bleeding red line from its mouth to its belly; a shallow cut from Stylla's powerful sword slash!

Most of her attack was negated!

"Ha..." Stylla sighed as she drew back within the thick mist that made her figure with red, curly hair more extravagant.

She swiped her sword left and right while thinking of the best way to salvage the situation..

'Guess I can't keep holding back then...' she thought as the qualitative change in her mana took effect.

On the other hand, Fore had rushed off in a different direction, wanting to steer clear of Stylla's steam which could do him harm.

Some of the Tier 3 monkeys dashed towards him, attempting to do what they did to Bron, to him.

'Damn it! I hope that bastard is alright. Hopefully killing whichever of these did that to him to will bring him back to reality...' he thought.

He and Bron had been friends for a while, having joined Stylla on her request for a temporary party up just recently.

In that short time though, he had understood what kind of person she was and their teamwork would be considered decent, especially with the addition of Skullius, though he preferred to be distant.

The tall and thin man suddenly stopped, turned and stretched out his hand towards the monkeys!

His eyes opened wide as he exerted the strength of his mind over the group of monkeys!

The ground shattered as a force akin to ten fold gravity pummelled the monkeys into the ground, making their bodies crouch under the weight!

'Here it comes!' Fore growled in his mind as he was bashed by a portion of the feedback as among the monkeys included in his attack, some were the weaker ones redirecting the force of the attack!

The monkeys had their movements restricted but the Tier 3 ones tensed their muscles as they resisted, gazing forward as they shook their heads, withstanding much of the force!

However, this was enough for Fore who burst ahead, pulled his other hand towards a rather lean tree which then swayed in his direction, tearing off from the ground and flying over to him with psychokinesis before he wielded it and smashed it towards one the Tier 3 monkeys!

A horrendous air force blew as the trunk of the tree met a monkey's face, the structure shattering into many fragments!

The monkey resisted!

However, Fore wasn't disheartened!

The dispersing parts of the tree were suddenly pulled together, especially the particularly sharp ones, raining down onto the monkey mercilessly!

Hundreds of sharp spikes fired towards the monkey which kept its hands together confidently!

Another one of the monkeys took the chance to dash towards Fore and attempt to slap him but he was aware of his enemies' positions and dodged!

The thin man breathed out a sigh, his bangs jutting up.

'I wish the merits of my choice to strengthen both my mind and body would show already. My mental attacks are pathetic...' he thought as his body surged with mana. 'Oh well... might as well hit them hard with what I got.'

The Discount Human on the other hand was relying heavily on [Great Rush] while scaling down the mountain, several of the monkeys hot on his tail!

The look on his face didn't hide what he was feeling; wide eyes taking in every detail with his teeth clenched in tension.

He was anxious.

'This is not how I thought this would play out, damn it!'

Skullius had been of the mind that this would be a slightly harder than normal Cluster given that it was classified as a weak one.

However, the gap between this one and the Sunlight Shooters Clusters was vast.

The Cluster General hadn't even shown up for skull's sake!

Skullius peeked behind him where his enemies were rapidly closing in.

'Should I use [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy]? No, that probably won't work! If they can redirect the damage or negate it completely then.... wait! No, the flames can't hurt me! But still...

I might end up wasting mana with no results!' Skullius thought.

At this current moment, he had over 550 points of mana with the Mana Band on which would be cut up if he wasted them on such a skill.

The Discount Human quickly scrolled through his options but was disturbed by the sudden lunge of a monkey whose crusty hand blew towards him intending to deliver a righteous slap!

Skullius immediately had [Artless Dodger] active and his speed was boosted as he ducked and struggled to keep his body balanced for a prolonged run!

'That was close!' Skullius exclaimed as he subconsciously took in a deep breath.

All his offensive moves were useless in the situation.

Most of them couldn't measure up to what he had seen being negated or redirected by the Sage Monkeys.

What was left?!

His party members couldn't come to his rescue even if they wanted to. Probably.

Then what...

'Wait... Gah! I can't afford to think about this anymore! I'd rather survive then try later! That's how a human should think right? Flesh the Task!'

Skullius turned and locked onto a target.

It was worth a shot!

The same monkey that had tried to slap him lunged at him again and in that exact moment, Skullius activated his skill.

[Basic Evil Invasion]!

Ripples of darkness roared from Skullius' body as unlike his previous experience with the skill, he didn't just end up in a different body!

His vision sped towards the head of the subtly aggressive white furred monkey and he felt his consciousness penetrate a thick and murky space that resisted him!



It was vast scape with varying colours that collided, many branches ending in starry sparks that had moving images visible within them showing.

Skullius felt raging emotions of the mind he had invaded and before he even made progress, he was beginning to get pushed back!

"Come on! Wasn't it convenient the last time I used it?!" Skullius roared frustratedly into the darkness.

A mini version of the Mountain Sage Monkey appeared in the far distance, being a silvery outline that looked down on Skullius arrogantly!

"Flesh you!" Skullius roared as he felt the monkey's gaze emitting a force that repelled his consciousness back.

'Not yet!' Skullius thought.

He wouldn't let this life-ridden heathen get a kick out of seeing him fail miserably.

Not like this!

In a spur of the moment action, Skullius roared as he called for help in an all or nothing, risk abundant move!

"Crude World Projection!"

Chapter 200: Return Of The Evil Invader! (2)

Skullius' first thought while facing the piling anxiety and tension was to turn to the thing that had saved him the last time he had been in such a situation..

The Fruit of World Myths!

He had made the decision to not use it often because it usually left him paralysed from exhaustion but this was a do or die situation that demanded that he make the tough decision against the many odds!

A burst of energy surged from his centre as what was merely a consciousness staring up against the silvery outline of a Mountain Sage Monkey, became a dark humanoid being that brimmed with dark power!

The familiar image manifested on Skullius as he took up the figure of a human shaped body with ever rising wisps of darkness!

He felt his consciousness and skill get empowered as he glared at his opponent, rejoicing that his strategy was working and also at the prospect that his enemy, was now wearing a bewildered frown!

The silver image up ahead didn't look so arrogant anymore and Skullius wasn't being pushed back like before!

He advanced and spread his arms wide while feeling the will of [Basic Evil Invasion] which sought to invade the privacy of all living things with consciousness and he freely let it loose!

Thick swaths of darkness flooded the entire multi-coloured space and hid the image of the terrified monkey under the blanket of black before it could resist. Not that it could.

Skullius felt himself dissolve, losing individuality for but a few moments before his vision changed!

His eyes focused on his hand that was close to slapping a rather 'handsome' face whose eyes were rolled with the body falling!

...!

Skullius didn't need more than a moment to recognise what was happening!

He had succeeded!

He had successfully commandeered the body of a Tier 3 Mountain Sage Monkey!

'Kek!'

Joy gushed into him as he grabbed his original body instead of slapping it.

His eyes perused over his body and he saw the white coat of fur that covered him, the rough hands and long fingers that attached to his arms along with the conspicuous, toned muscles that he owned.

It was glorious!

Several quick steps resounded around him and Skullius knew that it was about to go down.

The instance of when he took over Eldris' body was seared into his mind permanently and he remembered it all quite vividly.

This detail was important because Skullius noted that this skill wasn't as convenient as it seemed in the Labyrinth of the Yoke, just like [Pseudo Evil Veneration]!

For one, Skullius could see a timer from his guidance field depicting the amount of mana he had along with the estimated time he had left according to the skill's mana expenditure.

He had five minutes that correlated directly to his 565 points of mana!

Also, unlike with the whole 'preexisting conditions' thing that Fulgardt had fabricated, Skullius had to fight off the consciousnesses of opponents whenever he used this skill, which proved to not be the easiest thing to do.

This was the real world!

Time was ticking and he had to make full use of this chance well.

Luckily for him though, all the memories and techniques of the monkey he inhabited flooded into him as he had claimed its body and surprise after surprise overwhelmed Skullius for a full three seconds!

Knowledge, secrets, secrets and knowledge!

He closed his eyes while taking it all in.

"Brother! Why are you caring for that hideous pagan of the outside world? Rebuke him and prepare him for the elder!" a voice reached Skullius' ears, disturbing his peace.

Skullius turned and found one of the Sage Monkeys speaking to him.

He now understood their language!

However, as soon as the monkeys saw Skullius' face, they all backed away vigilantly before he could answer.

The invader scoffed.

He already knew the reason why.

This was exactly how he had been discovered the first time.

His eyes.

Instead of the blue that could be seen within the whites of all the Sage Monkeys, Skullius' were different.

Soft wisps of darkness coiled from the socketholes and blazed outwards, giving a rather creepy image that led the Sage Monkeys to immediate call out, "Evil has befallen our brother! Put him to rest!"

Skullius tossed his body a vast distance away after flooding his arm with the abundant mana coursed through him, the cosmetic flesh body flying over the trees to land somewhere Skullius had learned from his memories, was a sacred place.

It was also a place where certain revered items grew and was quite the distance away!

The Monkeys looked at Skullius' act with incredulity before they split up, half of them followed after the body while the rest stayed in order to put Skullius to rest (kill)!

The Discount Human was not afraid at this moment.

He now knew how these beasts fought and also knew their skills.

The first monkey reached him and threw against him not a slap, but a chop that was aimed at slicing him in two!

The hand had almost half of the Sage Monkey's mana within it for the maximum effect!

The sheer force it radiated was daunting!

The Discount Human in monkey clothing grinned and clasped his hands together as if in prayer!

Pat!

The opponent monkey's chop did nothing but pat away the fur on Skullius' forehead lightly, which made the Sage Monkey grimace and back away, quickly bringing both its hands together.

Skullius didn't waste any more of his limited time and countered with his newfound knowledge!

He used both his hands to grab the other monkey's hands and parted them in one quick motion!

The opponent Sage Monkey was caught off guard and before it could bring its hands together once more, Skullius had already thrown a vicious straight punch into its face after gathering quite the amount of mana into his hand!

With a crisp crack, the skull of the monkey fractured after eating the attack and right afterwards, the invader bashed the dazed monkey's head on the ground ruthlessly which immediately killed it!

The other monkeys were displeased upon seeing their own get killed by a fellow Sage Monkey.

The others backed away a bit, overwhelmed by the savagery and the fact that this tainted brother of theirs still had recollection of their weaknesses and was using it against them!

Preposterous!

Skullius immediately dashed away, chasing after the other monkeys that sought to harm his body.

The body he inhabited had quite the large amount of mana sitting at almost 700 points and Skullius used this amount to augmented his body, increasing his speed while layering himself with mana!

The monkeys he had left behind immediately followed, roaring in rage while yelling saintly expletives!

Unfortunately, they would find that catching up to Skullius would be near impossible as the Discount Human knew the most basic thing about these monkeys now.

They lacked proper endurance and strength!

They had frail bodies that barely held strength befitting of their tiers which made them extremely vulnerable to physical attacks!

This also made them weak when it came to combat which was why Skullius augmented his earlier punch with mana to deal the most damage he could.

The Tier 3 monkeys were enlightened, learning how to improve their physical strengths by abusing the vast amounts of mana they had!

What truly made these monkeys a problem was the fact that they had skills that naturally covered their weaknesses; racial skills that made them seem invincible and dangerous.

Three of these skills relied on the user to constantly have their palms clasped together as if in prayer.

[Hidden Saint], which allowed the Sage Monkeys to hide in the literal plain white sight of the white vegetation while masking their presences.

[Unbroken Saint's Will], which redirected portions of any attack to the user while only letting the monkeys receive only the insignificant portions of the insignificant portions of the damage.

[Indomitable Sage's Will], which completely negated attacks below a certain level and retaliated by trying to break them when the attacks passed a certain threshold beyond its negation.

The last skill that was common among the monkeys was the [Sage's Rebuke], a skill that allowed the user to pass on the profound message of peace to any target with a mind weak enough to not be able to resist.

Knowing these things, Skullius was thrilled as he doubted that he would be defeated easily. He also had partners he could rely on for everything else after he had gotten out of this situation anyway.

As he ran, two extremely oppressive forces thrashed the ground and caused the mountain to quake as if it was the end of the world!

Two powerful combatants had decisively unleashed their true strength...!