

# Undead 201

## Chapter 201: Atrocious!

Sword Techniques were an integral part of a Swordsman's arsenal. Having a sword technique dictated the level of a sword man in skill, which was what made this very common class, more diverse.

Mana wasn't just a substance used to strengthen one's body but to also strengthen and consolidate the power of weapons.

While Energy Formers were more adept at wielding energies and manipulating them intricately even from a distance, Arma and Form Users were the opposite.

They had the capacity to maximise the use of energies within their bodies while then using powerful effects that could be measured in range and scope.

For Arma Users like Swordsmen, this pertained to their weapons of choice.

Moulding mana in a different ways that spawned specific techniques that were then refined and passed down through generations was the essence of being a wielder of the sword.

Stylla never forgot her heritage. She never forgot her purpose.

Yet... she always seemed to be behind.

It wasn't by coincidence that she was in Inhone City. Gathering a party in order to clear Clusters was a massively lacking and disingenuous understatement.

When it came to tradition, she took her family seriously and the upcoming event needed her to form a suitable team to participate with.

Unfortunately, because of certain unpredictable elements, she wasn't able to find the time to properly peruse through her options.

Nevertheless, all this didn't matter if she didn't get out of here alive.

For that, her saber blazed with a ferocious stream of heat that instantaneously permeated into the atmosphere and started to make the white leaved trees shrivel and the ground to heat up considerably!

The area 20 meters around her became a scorching, humid hellscape that caused the weaker of the monkeys before her to screech loudly as the skill [Unbroken Saint's Will] failed to save them!

The Tier 3 monkeys continued to clasp their hands together with grimaces as they lunged atop the hot lands, ready to deliver the [Sage's Rebuke]!

Stylla's saber emitted visible, pulsing streams of steam as its colour became red with a loud sound of burning water that roared incessantly!

Stylla looked ahead and mumbled under her breath.

"Elemental Contrast, Steam Glow."

She swiped her sword before her enemies could arrive and with her swing, the power unleashed right then proved that the lady didn't need her opponents to be within close proximity for her to harm them as the steam that rose from her saber turned erect and acted like a solid stream of energy with a faint white glow, powering through like a laser over everything in sight!

One swipe of Steam Glow, pressurised scalding hot steam released from a saber, dissected most her enemies, directly slashing them without mercy despite even the protection afforded by [Indomitable Sage's Will]!

Blood rained over the white grasses as Stylla then bolted forward while the trees that had been included in the attack fell all around her with resounding crashes to the ground!

Her eyes darted towards the lower end of the Mountain. She had lost sight of Skullius for few moments after deciding to using the only sword technique at her disposal and that had shockingly been enough time for the Discount Human to vanish from her sight.

Now all she could see was a bunch of monkeys chasing each other in the distance.

On the other side, Fore had no choice but to resort to something a bit more high end.

As his training in Mind Casting wasn't quite solid, he had no techniques that he had grasped. This was also true for his physical training which hadn't progressed to the part where he would begin training in techniques as he wanted to start with a strong foundation.

However, this didn't stop the tall man from using something that bolstered his individual properties to a higher level!

Full Body Aura!

An almost blinding light adorned Fore as his curly black hair rose up slightly, his muscles tensing while everything around him leaned back from the sudden surge of power.

A Full Body Aura could be refined to be specific and carry special traits instead of loosely boosting the user's power, but this wasn't something for someone who was barely into the Advancement Stage to know.

Stages unlocked a variety of different traits to users and these could be used regardless of class and mana core, which made Stages a very reliable path to follow!

Fore's figure hunkered down as he dug into the ground with his continued surge in strength!

He then raised a hand and swiped down, an enormous force acting upon the fearful Tier 2 monkeys and the anxious Tier 3 veterans!

Unfortunately for them, their minds were hammered on by the man before them who first caused immense confusion in their minds by exerting the force of his mental faculties onto theirs and then crushing them physically into bloody pools!

Craters formed as each monkey could be seen flattened into bloody pancakes within!

Fore's bet was on the fact that even in the event that the boss popped up, at least he could support Stylla who hadn't resorted to using her Full Body Aura yet as she had a technique to rely on.

A distance from the two, Skullius was bashing monkeys left and right, forcefully removing them from their state of invincibility and then ruthlessly killing them!

Unfortunately, this didn't earn him any experience points, but he wasn't complaining. He had learned a lot already.

If he had opened up his mind to letting even a sliver of Eldris' memories back then, he probably would have become a martial king, but the tension in that moment days ago, was too much for such a lax attitude and mindset.

The Mountain Sage Monkeys continued to pour but when Skullius killed those that were going for his body, he immediately dashed upwards, leading the rest that chased him away!

Going up posed a really big risk because of what Skullius now knew but he couldn't let up. He could just avoid a particular section anyway as he led away the monkeys while passing the time.

VWOOOSH!

A scorching sensation rippled through his body as in an instant, Skullius found his white fur burning intensely!

The pain!

He had forgotten the pain!

He would experience it when he was using [Basic Evil Invasion]!

Bountiful bursts of steam emerged around and Skullius heard screams behind him!

'Oh no!' Skullius exclaimed mentally.

He turned back only to see a lady with curly red hair a distance behind the wailing monkeys that screeched in pain under the engulfing of hot steam!

The lady whipped her saber and then slashed laterally in an elegant yet cruel arc that shot a glowing ray of steam that cut apart everything ahead in instantaneously!

Skullius wasn't fast enough!

He had been caught off guard!

He felt the sizzling sensation of the steam that was sharper than a blade split him cleanly down the middle while rupturing the organs within!

It was only when he felt his lower half detaching that he managed to deactivate [Basic Evil Invasion], a storm of pain already assaulting him!

Skullius felt himself get pulled back a distance away before he finally settled with a different view before him.

He was floating above pristine and clear waters, the sound of colliding liquid bearing a serene and soothing effect.

He was in a large pond surrounded by what looked like lanky, thick white leaved trees that leaned in the direction of the pond.

The vegetation seemed whiter here and for a moment, Skullius relaxed while also taking in the scene of what the trees around him bore.

Purple gems with hints of red swirling within them!

They were Enriching gems!

They hung from small stems in the trees in abundance, making Skullius' eyes sparkle.

The time he had spent, which was almost two minutes in the body of the Sage Monkey, was made worth it with this.

However, a gripping force of pain barrelled against his head making him gnash his teeth and grunt.

[Your host has died. You have accrued soul damage]

Soul damage!

One of the risks of using [Basic Evil Invasion] as stipulated by the skill description.

This time, Skullius didn't have any deus ex machina like a piece of the soul of the Tower General Sila that had relieved the damage. Even this had its side effects that would come into play, but at least they weren't inherently bad.

As if this wasn't bad enough, Skullius saw a notification that made him grimace.

[Doom Factor 2 has been triggered by damage to the soul. Your mind begins to fracture. 10%]

...!

"Damn it!" Skullius growled. This terrified him.

This could potentially be fatal if he didn't solve it soon!

And yet, the bad news only continued to pile on.

A suffocating aura radiated from afar, bearing with it a unique signature that made every creature on the mountain shudder!

At the very top of the mountain, this presence made itself known as a deep voice crossed the distance while carrying with it a shocking level of power!

"SHA, SUUN!" the voice called, sounding like an ancient language from the depths of legendary society to the humans who heard.

But...

To Skullius who had learned the language of the Mountain Sage Monkeys, he understood what it meant quite well.

"Kneel, ye heathens!"

Chapter 202: Natural Treasure!

A short man with large green eyes and amber hair in a crew cut suddenly shook and came to his senses.

His eyes peeled open and his smile receded.

"Huh?" he muttered as he struggled to remember just what was happening. Or rather, what had happened to him.

As the vision of the white forest expanse on the side of a mountain clearly drew into his eyes, it all suddenly came back to him.

"That thing slapped the crap out of me..."

He remembered a rather solemn looking monkey dishing out an honest slap that put him out of commission.

The monkey that had slapped him had been dealt with by Fore in his mass murder of the monkeys, dispelling the effects he was suffering from moments ago.

Bron began to wonder where the others were, turning his head this way and that but then...

GUUUM!

A loud roar of the crust underneath his feet sounded as a ripple travelled through the ground from atop the mountain!

...!

Bron was shocked.

What was this!

He saw a change in the lines of trees above as the visible shockwave descended madly, all the vegetation it crossed starting to...bend forward!

The trees, the grasses, the shrubs, they all bend in the direction of the mountain's peak, as if revering whatever force caused the loud thrum!

As the shockwave reached him, Bron didn't know what to do except try to tank whatever force sought to bash him into submission.

Yet, this proved ineffective immediately!

A strange power bore down on his burly body and caused him to imitate what the trees were doing!

However, while the trees bend forward, Bron found himself bowing his head directly into the ground with a vehement force!

BAM!

"Oow!" he groaned.

His body was prostrated in the same direction as the trees and grasses and nomatter how he tried to move, his body wouldn't budge from this position!

As the shockwave descended, the same became true for Stylla who was shocked to find her body plunging head first into the hard ground while she bowed, Fore following afterwards!

All living things on the mountain bowed down in the direction of where the shockwave had originated before it reached the foot of the large structure where it settled!



All living things...

All except, a certain Discount Human who was awed by the shocking presence that had just bloomed and the descendent of the ripple from atop the mountain that passed by everything except this place!

None of the trees on this section of the mountain prostrated themselves and by extension, him.

He merely floated over the waters while wincing at the soul damage he received and wondering what was so special about this place to not be affected by the rippling phenomenon, when he discovered another oddity.

Skullius moved his hand.

Then his legs.

When he exerted his weight by asserting control over his body, he began to sink into the water, but this didn't stop him from thinking... and a moment later, rejoicing.

He could move!

He could actually move!

Despite using [Crude World Projection], Skullius could move!

His mind was still flaring with pain but he did his best to ignore it for the sake of enjoying this moment.

The Discount Human then started flailing his arms and legs in the water, creating splatters and splashes while trying to reach dry ground.

Eventually he exited the water body clumsily but he lifted his hands up high and wore a cheerful grin!

Even though a terrible sense of heaviness washed over him, he could move.

The side effects of using the Fruit of World Myths had lessened considerably!

"Yes! Some good news!" he called.

When he considered what could be candidates for making this possible, what popped in his mind was that it was either the progression in Tasks or the Enriching gems.

Skullius wagered that it was Enriching gems.

Surely.

Still though, he was stuck in the thick of tension as while almost sinking himself into full thoughts about this, the trees and shrubs in this special section of the mouth rustled as a Sage Monkey assaulted him!

It lunged towards Skullius, a slap at the ready with a solemn expression.

Skullius pulled his heavy body while relying on [Great Rush] to grant him the boost in speed he needed to avoid the attack that would potentially lead him to peace.

'Are these bros not affected by that shockwave thing too?!' Skullius thought.

He ducked down, barely being missed by the slap!

This was a Tier 2 Sage Monkey which meant that it wasn't as fast as the other more vivacious ones!

As Skullius knew how to tackle these monsters, he quickly flashed forward and held the Monkey's wrists!

...!

The monkey gawked at this move in surprise as it felt Skullius pull its hands apart for but a second and then...

BAM!

He quickly launched a series of jabs into the monkey's face with another skill he extracted from the items he bought from Frock!

[Quick Strike]!

It sped up his attacks considerably, allowing for quick successions of short ranged attacks!

Skullius also added on [Brawn] to boost his maximum damage!

In a few moments, the monkey bled from its nose, its skull caving in!

[You have killed (II) LV17 Mountain Sage Monkey. 59,000 Exp awarded]

[Your prey emits the essence of Null Life...]

"Ha.. this reminds me of the time I killed Red bro..." Skullius reminisced before he looked around.

He didn't know what caused that tremendous shockwave, but what he could do now was stay here and loot the abundant Enriching gems around him!

He dashed from one tree to the other, storing many of the Enriching gems while being completely oblivious to the actual grand scale of ridiculousness that was happening outside, with his partners stuck in prostrating positions!

He had taken a few tens of the purple and red gems when...

GUUUM! GUUUM! GUUUM!

It wasn't shockwaves this time!

It was the sound of something heavy, walking down in slow steps.

Skullius was curious.

He looked up to where the noise originated, and his eyes saw something among the hunched trees that suddenly began to return to normal in a ripple that descended!

At the very top of the mountain, a taller than normal monkey stood with its chest jutting out!

It was thick, with its physique visible from under the coat of fur that shrouded it.

It was not white like those of the other monkeys, but golden with a twinkling lustre as though it had been smothered by a high quality gel.

The monkey's eyes were ocean blue with a mysteriousness about them that made Skullius gulp subconsciously.

The Discount Human's attention was then drawn by the massive structure that this monkey held over its shoulder in a comical scene that most wouldn't believe.

A three meter tall statue with a girth of almost two meters rested upon the shoulder of the monkey, the undisputed Cluster General digging its fingers into a groove at the corner of the statue.

The statue looked to be made of cobblestone, smooth all round while having a dark blue hue with its entire design being that of a fat monkey with its eyes closed and hands clasped together.

It was almost ball shaped, with the feet in a traditional sitting position.

On top of the statue, above what was supposed to be the head, was a web-like rune that glowed with a sky blue colour, the same being visible beneath the statue.

Skullius couldn't resist using the guidance field to check the description of this item as it clearly wasn't normal and when he saw the name, he was dumbfounded, the description making him shake his head!

This would be Skullius' first encounter with a natural treasure.

No!

The natural treasure....Yamogogofafa!

Chapter 203: Super Saiy... Ahem... Greater Monkey Sage!

[Yamogogofafa]

<Rare+>

An incredibly heavy statue weighing ten tonnes, carved after Guddhar was blessed with an enlightenment, carving out this structure which is an object of representation for peace and an inanimate enforcer of the it.

-Defence-

10,500

-Durability-

9450/12,000

-Special Effects-

- Can deflect 80% of all incoming attacks back to the target
- Reflects 65% elemental damage received by wielder
- Returns to the user after <Righteous Throw>

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[Skill: Bow to Peace]

When the top rune smashes against the ground, all living things targeted by the user within a 200 meter radius will be forced to kneel headfirst on the ground for as long as the rune tastes dirt. The effect depends on the strength of the target.

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[Skill: Righteous Throw]

The Yamogogofafa can be thrown, attaining quick speed in its flight towards the target while retaining its immense weight.

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[Skill: Ascend to Peace]

When the bottom rune touches the ground, all intended targets are sent flying to calm their bodies and mind with the fresh air at the very same height as the tip of the Mount. Sagemore.

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"That's.. actually insane bro...." Skullius mumbled as his eyes zoomed in on the object that was wielded by the golden furred monkey.

He then checked the Monkey's stats, seeing the outrageous amounts of strength and mana it possesses, befitting for creatures said to possess the power equivalent to all the creatures within the Cluster combined or more.

It was Tier 4!

"Oh.. so you're.... Guddhar..." said Skullius as he sweated water.

He felt intimidated by the creature's presence even as it was a distance away, majestically standing while holding a statue that weighed ten tonnes, its fur blowing in the wind while it held a solemn expression.

This creature was of a unique race called the Greater Monkey Sage, which had a dangerous ring to it given the current context.

Guddhar's sharp eyes roamed over the mountain before they settled over Skullius' position, the Discount Human's non-existent insides tumbling down in fright!

Guddhar immediately locked onto him and his energy flared horrendously, the trees shaking as it seemed like an invisible presence flashed over the distance and blew roughly onto Skullius.

"That can't be good," Skullius said with a grimace.

Guddar took a step forward and tensed his arm muscles.

The Greater Sage Monkey then sucked in a deep breath and roared as it hurled the mass of stone, the natural treasure, in Skullius' direction with the activation of the skill [Righteous Throw]!

The large dark blue structure flew with a quick spin, its speed and weight exerting over the forestry around which it did not even touch!

Leaves and trunks were blown apart with even the hard ground getting shredded from the object that flew overhead at an almost indecipherable speed to the Discount Human!

Before the Yamogogofafa was even a twenty meters from him, Skullius already felt the immense pressure of its weight and hidden power!

Shockingly, he found that he couldn't dodge!

The object was simply too vast and fast for him to escape damage.

What he could do was try to mitigate this damage that he was about to receive which he knew would 100% kill him!

The Discount Human used a large portion of his remaining mana to conjure a mass of [Evil Darkness] in the form of a cloud that he immediately shaped into a large ball with [Basic Evil Weaving]!

The giant ball stood between him and the Yamogogofafa and when the large object reach him, the crust of the earth was rocked to a gobsmacking degree!

This place which was hailed by the Sage Monkeys as sacred was obliterated, with the waters within the lake flying out and leaving an empty crater, the trees around being shredded by the force, their leaves releasing the Enriching gems they kept within their grasp!

A nasty shockwave blew, leaving the place looking like a 40 meter bald spot on the mountain's!

As for the Discount Human who had literally seen stars at the moment of collision, he was in a horrible state!

His skin was chipped off with part of bones peering from the bleeding and torn flesh.

This was what plagued his right side from the chest to the leg, his leather armour having failed to protect him.

The massive orb of darkness that he had conjured had actually negated some of the Yamogogofafa's force before exploding and this was in actual fact, a very much desired outcome!

Yet, this wasn't the end.

"Gah! Are you kidding me bro?!" Skullius yelled as even after surviving the terrible attack, he found his head plunged into the ground, his body prostrating towards the massive statue that lay ten meters beside him!

It's head dug into the ground, the rune atop it tasting the crust, thereby activating the skill, [Bow to Peace]!



The sacred place of the monkeys was called so because it held the most amount of the chaotic energies that formed the Clusters in the first place, which was why Enriching gems grew from it.

In actuality, there wasn't only one of these places and because of the concentration of the energies here, it was common for intricate skills to not have their effects prevailing over these places from a long distance, thus why Skullius had been exempt from [Bow to Peace] before.

Now however, with the large statue near him, the effects overpowered the trait of this place, pulling him and every tree and shrub here to bow!

"EKSHUL, SUUN, VAGAY'R" Guddhar called with his freakishly powerful voice that travelled throughout the lone mountain and reached all the Sage Monkeys!

"Bring them to me, huh?" Skullius translated with sheepish smile on his face.

He knew what the monkeys wanted to do to him. He would basically get pounded into a paste under the statue's weight and get made into a stew that Guddhar would drink to 'fuel the peace within.'

Guddhar would do this with some unlucky monkeys now and then too.

To Skullius that just sounded like trying out new recipes.

Several monkeys rushed to him, most preparing to slap the crap out of him.

With the statue here, he couldn't move an inch, which proved troublesome.

VWOOOSH!

A bright pillar of red rose into the sky suddenly as an overbearing heat stormed the mountain!

Clouds of steam rose, followed by the feminine grunts of a hot blooded red head who had activated her Full Body Aura!

Skullius deeply hoped that his party could deal with Guddhar but so far, the odds said otherwise.

The Yamogogofafa here which imposed [Bow to Peace] on every individual on the mountain excluding the monkeys and the sacred places was too powerful.

How would Stylla salvage this?!

Was she even able to move right now?!

The surging of a qualitative mana answered Skullius' questions as a skill was cast from a saber.

Not a simple one but a Special one that turned the situation around!

Chapter 204: Insane Clash!

Guddhar turned to the pillar of red that rose into the air, seeking attention and eager to be seen.

The Greater Monkey Sage noticed that one of the intruders was trying to resist [Bow to Peace]!

Foolish and stubborn!

What a profound enemy.

The Sage Monkey welcomed an eager tainted that sought to be delivered to peace the hard way and ultimately, be digested in his belly.

Billows of steam and concentrated mana churned from a blue core like his own surging from the distance amidst the white leaved trees that bowed under the might of the Yamogogofafa as in the next instance, a rapidly barrelling cloud of scorching steam shot in his direction, imitating the charge of a certain locomotive from a distant and modern reality!

Within but a moment, it was already before Guddhar, blowing his golden fur back while burning everything else around him.

An amusing attempt.

This was a Special Skill from Stylla's sword technique, the single one that she had been able to master!

When the steam was just a meter away from the Greater Mountain Sage, Stylla's figure appeared with a vicious expression painted onto her face as her body radiated an immense heat!

Her saber fumed with humid steam that actively whistled and heated the air as she slashed diagonally with her might!

Guddhar scoffed in the slowed time that he and Stylla were tangling in.

With an absurdly fast movement, he stretched his hand to the Yamogogofafa which was beside Skullius a distance away, the rare item dislodging itself from the ground and shooting towards its master's position before Stylla's blade touched Guddhar!

BOOM! PFFFSSSS!

An explosive collision of hard material and steam echoed, reverberating with such a crazy intensity that ploughed through the mountain's crust!

Stylla found her heated saber clashing against the large dark blue statue and grunted angrily, beginning to slash with crazy speed as she sought to at least graze the Cluster General!

She had just used a Special Skill, more specifically, an advanced application of her sword technique, Steam Glow, called Steamed Rapid Body which accelerated her physical capabilities for a couple of seconds, allowing her to escape from adverse imposed conditions like poisoning, capture or magical ailments by temporarily changing her form into steam!

The inclusion of her Full Body Aura added a greater enhancement to her technique, granting her the mentioned boons!

Guddhar grinned as he merely twirled the giant statue as if it weighed nothing at all, seamlessly blocking all of Stylla's attacks!

To make matters worse for the tenacious lady, she felt most of her attacks rushing back at her, much of the elemental damage rebounding right back at her instead which chipped at her armour!

'This is thing ridiculously heavy and can counter my attacks! Even if its a Cluster General, shouldn't it have some kind of difficulty using that thing or least in carrying it?!' Stylla wondered frustratedly.

She had wanted to keep a close eye on Skullius just a few minutes ago, but the situation had gotten out of her hand with her losing sight of the Mage entirely.

She had been overconfident.

Survival was not certain even for her and yet she had thought that this would be an easy raid where she could look after a potential addition to her team.

What tragic luck to face a Cluster this troublesome.

Fortunately, she wasn't alone!

An intangible yet visible force fired down on Guddhar like a flood and caused the creature to bend its knees as a massive crater blew under its feet from the force!

...!

The Cluster General was shocked by the sudden attack which couldn't be stopped by the Yamogogofafa.

Fore was standing a distance away while focusing what remained of his Full Body Aura to assault the monkey with his basic psychokinetic abilities!

Since Guddhar had withdrawn Yamogogofafa, [Bow to Peace] had been dispelled, leaving him free.

The force kept intensifying at a rapid rate, threatening to break Guddhar's bones while at the same moment, the Sage Monkey felt a presence rushing from behind him, charging up mana as before he could do anything to not fall for what came next, a shattering blunt force pounded from his back with a hazy ring that exposed his flesh from the golden furred back!

Bron had charged from behind the monkey and released his technique, the Dissipating Fistful Arcs!

Each ring of hazy light conjured by the user would do additional damage from their base strength, stacking on top of each other!

The principle behind the technique was to harness force and use it without waste, maximising damage.

A second and third ring emerged, releasing a crisp clap-like noise which blew the ground apart and sent Guddhar flying!

However, right as the Monkey was in flight, Stylla with her body covered in the immense heat began slashing as hard as she could at the Monkey, her blade chipping away at the flesh of Guddhar whose imbalance hindered him from wielding Yamogogofafa properly!

Red blood flew from several spots on the Sage Monkey's body, steam sizzling from each wound, but that was it!

It not lethal!

The bastard was too damn tough!

They needed more!

Bron's body flared with his Aura which was a basic enhancement to his already existing properties!

He growled, gaining a thick white glow around him before he dashed towards Guddhar and launched an uppercut to its chin!

At the same time, Fore zipped forward with his honed speed, and used his psychokinesis to blow away the Yamogogofafa that Guddhar tried to wield!

BAM!

The Monkey's chin flew up as its weapon left its hand simultaneously, Stylla flying in to slice with her sword at the Cluster beast's neck!

"HUMGH!" Guddhar grunted with its freakishly loud voice and as it steadied its head and with another extraordinary show of agility and dexterity, the Monkey brought its hands together in a clap!

PWAAA!

A profound clap of peace resounded as the thick palms of the Monkey touched, an energy like excessive gusts of wind blowing out to overpower Stylla's steam covered sword and Bron's follow up punch with his radiating Aura!

The three mercenaries were blown away at rocket speed, their attacks being negated easily!

Guddhar drew one of his hands towards the Yamogogofafa, the large piece which had been blown away seconds ago flashing into his hands once again as this time, the Monkey pounded the bottom rune of the Yamogogofafa into the solid ground!

[Ascend to Peace] was cast, targeting Stylla, Fore and Bron who shot into the air with speeds mildly suggesting that they had been shot from cannons!

Guddhar grunted as it then pulled the mass of stone from the ground, focused on Stylla who could barely concentrate from the speeds she was launched at and hurled the Yamogogofafa at her using the skill [Righteous Throw]!

The giant statue flew while spinning irregularly at Stylla, becoming a dark mass that seemingly could not be stopped!

Stylla grit her teeth as she braced for the impact, bringing her saber before her while pumping her mana into it!

The silver saber shone with light and bursts of steam as this was as much as she could do before the object smashed into her, otherwise, she would have used [Steam Rapid Body]!

Shockingly, right before she could meet the incoming smiling stone monkey, Stylla felt a distinct tug dragging her out of the way in the air!

The Yamogogofafa passed where she had been with a ruthless force whose inertia slightly pulled her in its charge!

Yet ultimately, she was safe!

She looked to the side and found Fore with his face shuddering from the speed of upward flight, his mouth opened with his teeth clenched as if in a smile.

His hand was extended towards him, revealing him to be her saviour.

Stylla sighed in relief, deciding to thank Fore later as for now, as their momentum decreased, she looked down at the ground, her eyes not being drawn to Guddhar at first but to the small figure of Skullius who was being assaulted by tens of Monkeys, slapping the crap out of him!

'Shit!' she cursed as a sense of urgency raged within her.

OOOOM!

Yet once more, she found her mind torn from her attention to Skullius as Guddhar in another direction from her aerial view exploded with an enormous amount of mana!

Qualitative mana was being used for an absurd skill!

It seemed the Greater Sage Monkey also had a few more tricks up his sleeve!

Chapter 205: Struggle On Two Fronts!

There was a phrase that Skullius recalled just a few moments before the showdown between his three partners and Guddhar started.

What was it again?

Ah, that's right!

'Sic 'em!'

He vaguely remembered something like that.

From his perspective, this was exactly what had happened to him, with Guddhar sending in his crazed solemn monkeys at him while he was down!

Unfortunately, he had been left with limited options when he was flooded by the monkeys all over.

Amidst this chaos, Skullius felt the pain from his soul damage increase. It wasn't dying down!

Was 10% in Doom Factor 2 some form of benchmark that did not just quell itself?!

Something was wrong.

But this wasn't the time to therapise himself. He needed to act, against the ravaging pain!  
Regardless of the consequences!

A few moments later, the Yamogogofafa had flown away, leaving him free but he was tackled to the ground right before he could move away!

Some of the Monkeys pinned him down but Skullius immediately released a plume of [Evil Darkness] with his half of his remaining mana, leaving only a 100 points!

The darkness caused the monkeys that were about to slap him to pause, paralysed by it, but unfortunately, the amount had been too little to stop all the monkeys, and as Skullius didn't maintain it, it slowly started to dissipate, allowing the monkeys to move!

With that, one of the monkeys pressed him against the ground, raised its hand and brought down a phenomenal slap!

Skullius grit his teeth and tried to struggle but ultimately failed!

Right before the slap descended however, he bit the bullet and gambled on yet another [Crude World Projection]!



With his improved tolerance towards the effects of this ability, he hoped that he could somehow spam it a second time and still retain enough strength for movement.

Furthermore, he hoped projecting himself in this other world would spare him from 'peace.'

Skullius' felt himself rise, the familiar dark image he assumed with dark wisps of black rising infinitely emerging!

He looked down to see his Discount cheeks ripple from the slap he had received and he grimaced.

'Bastards!' he grumbled.

However, there was no time for this.

He was already feeling a severe weakness that threatened to pull him back to his physical body!

The Sage Monkeys turned to the air and saw the dark image of Skullius floating above!

They were surprised and shocked, backing away with vigilance!

Skullius merely gazed at the dissipating remnants of the darkness he had just used and exerted his enhanced control and power over it in this state!

The darkness coiled around and forged a small ball, just like he had done against Jackpot.

'Why do I like balls so much?!' Skullius had a passing thought before twiddling his fingers as he manoeuvred the ball which shot at a speed exceeding that of sound at all the monkeys that held him, not using [Unbreakable Saint's Will] and [Indomitable Sage's Will]!

Within less than three seconds, five Sage Monkey's were dead, their heads having been blown apart by the small ball of [Evil Darkness] that blew through them easily!

Skullius felt the weakness that stormed him pull him down, but he was unwilling!

He didn't know what state his body would be in post slap, even with him not inhabiting it at the moment!

OOOOM!

Right then, Skullius felt a massive surge of mana that came from none other than Guddhar, shaking the entire mountain as the Cluster General seemed to be about to use a ridiculous skill!

Wait!

Guddhar!

The Cluster General!

Could he actually...?

Even in this...?

It could be...

Pounding pain raged within his mind from soul damage but Skullius ignored!

He had no other plays!

While the Discount Human struggled with a decision against time, the three who were still airborne shuddered at what was about to come next.

If it came with their bodies suspended in the air, they would be screwed.

Fore gritted his teeth and extended both his hands at Bron and Stylla before using all the excess strength from his Full Body Aura activation to plunge the two down to the ground!

Stylla and Bron flew before landing to safety in their own ways, looking up at Fore who began free falling, then at each other and nodding.

Both shot ahead towards Guddhar, their Full Body Auras blazing with the recency of activation as they sought to interrupt Guddhar from casting whatever skill he wanted to!

This was the perfect chance with the Yamogogofafa still on its descent and with the Cluster General not calling for it.

Guddhar growled and roared, his voice echoing through the trees. He then sucked in a deep breath, his chest puffing up as his fur glowed slightly, the massive charge of mana being very distinct in the air.

The Cluster General's arms were brought to his chest as he steadied the flow of mana, concentrating it in his lungs!

'No, you don't!' Stylla thought as she swiped, her sword burning with a steamed glow, flashy and hot steam bursting from the blade as it smashed into the Sage Monkey even while she was still twenty meters away!

The steam glow razed the fur and skin of the Cluster General, but that was it, as it failed to cleave it like it had done with the other Sage Monkeys!

Bron was not adept at long range techniques, so at this time, he figured that instead of trying to damage the General from a distance, it was better to defend from its oncoming attack which was released right after Stylla's failed attempt at slaughtering the Monkey!

The burly man flashed before Stylla and brought his two hands before his body!

Three hazy rings blossomed from his palms and stood defensively before him in wide arcs that radiated with mana!

Guddhar let loose what he had been concocting within his chest, opening his mouth wide to release a surge of pristine silver light that with its appearance shook Mount. Sagemore and ravaged everything in sight!

It was blinding with a duality about it that it made difficult to tell if it was hot or cold and yet, the brightness it emitted was undisputed!

Without producing a scorching heat or chilling cold, the flare-like pillar of light, a Special Skill of the Greater Sage Monkey that stole all light in the atmosphere, powered through!

BOOOOOOVVVVV!

The pillar of light plundered everything as it descended down towards Bron who shielded Stylla while activating his own Special Skill!

Stylla wasn't idling though, as she stood with a striking stance, aiming to use every bit of her Full Body Aura to augment her speed, and every bit of her mana into her Special Skill, stemming from her sword technique!

As this clash was happening though, another player approached the proximity of the battle, using the remnants of his profound power to strain through the stretch of distance...!

Chapter 206: The Third Party Swoops In!

One would likely be confused on what was the connection between a Special Skill and the technique it was derived from when it was established that the term 'skill' was a broad term for applications of mana.

The answer was a simple fact of semantics.

Some sword Techniques came with extension moves that utilised the qualitative concentration of mana from a blue core like Steamed Rapid Body which was derived from the Sword Technique, Steam Glow.

In essence, one could also call the Elemental Contrast, Steam Glow, a Special Technique as it was capable of unleashing attacks of such a standard. Special.

However, this wasn't the highlight of the current showdown as what stole the limelight, literally, was the silver beam of light that disintegrated everything it touched as it barrelled down the mountain!

The ground crumbled, the trees turned to ash in the light's wake, everything that the light didn't touch being pushed away and breaking apart horribly!

The atmosphere on the mountain darkened considerably as the pillar of light dashed forward with speed and might!

This silvery light was the Special Skill, Rage of the Peace-Loving Sage!

It left no fancy after effects asides from a deep and wide gouge on the earth as it went, all things shivering as it passed!

Bron's figure was illuminated by the incoming attack as he had his hands at the ready to receive the impact of this skill!

With his Full Body Aura brimming around his body, he consolidated the hazy rings, the very fundamentals of his technique as he used a Special Skill geared towards offense for defense.

The Dissipating Fistful Arcs around his arms attained a luminescent shine while producing a low hum.

'I have to time it correctly...' Bron thought as sweat trickled down his brow, the anxiety he felt being unreal!

Learning Special Skills was difficult.

With the three paths that were usually available for growth; stages, classes and cores, one would be hard pressed to keep them all balanced, though many chose to specialise in one.

Bron had distributed his effort unevenly, giving the skill required to improve his class to a advanced one priority, thus neglecting his progression in the stages.

However, he had been rewarded with a Special Technique that he developed on his own after many years of practise which enhanced the focus of his power.

It was merely the first hurdle he had to transcend before reaching his goal!

The Dissipating Fistful Arcs thrummed with a sound akin to static, distorting the air before him right before the impact!

The sheer force behind the [Rage of the Peace-Loving Sage] astounded him, but he pushed all his strength into not letting it pass with his rings!

Blood curdling screeches of colliding energies smashed against the ears of every sentient species on the mountain along with a blinding light and a shockwave that turned things in Guddhar's favour!

"URRNGHHH!" Bron grunted while gnashing his teeth as he felt the skin on his hands disintegrate from the explosion of power!

It seemed bits of Guddhar's skill reached him after the clash, causing him extensive damage!

"HOLD ON!" Stylla called as with all her mana coming into use, her body emitted a devastating storm of scorching steam that rose up high and descended onto the figure of Guddhar that was only now becoming visible after the bright flash!

Stylla had become the charging burst of steam once more as right when she was a few meters above Guddhar, she turned back into her human form and brought down her blade with the bright lustre of Steam Glow!

At this point, the Greater Sage Monkey had just finished the cast of its Special Skill and was not prepared for this sudden attack!

With its extreme agility, it launched a heavy punch towards Stylla while extending its other hand into the distance as it called for Yamogogofafa!

Stylla's blade flashed crazily as it shredded the fingers of the Monkey, which were a little less tougher than the flesh on its torso!

Blood flew as the Monkey screamed but the howling sound of wind as Yamogogofafa approached gave the Monkey confidence as right when the large object returned to its grasp, it didn't use any of the skills contained in the statue but just bashed the raw stone carving against Stylla!

Stylla's steam engulfed the entire area as she used much of its remnants to tank the attack but was ultimately blown away bleeding with the bones of her arm and fingers crushed!

Guddhar then raised Yamogogofafa to plunge it into the ground with an immense force but an intangible yet powerful energy repelled the statue from the ground strenuously!

Fore was roughly twenty meters away, laying upside down on the broken branches of a tree in the same way that he had fallen a few moments ago.

His hands were outstretched as he exerted all the mana he had post his Full Body Aura activation to try and stop the statue from touching ground!

"Argghhhhh!" he roared as he strained his body. "GET HIM!"

It didn't take a genius to identify the runes on the bottom and top of Yamogogofafa and determine that they had the outlandish effects of tossing people up or down.

All three of the mercenaries had gotten a taste of it with the flight earlier.

Fore wouldn't let it happen again!

Stylla got up from where she had been flung and sped towards Guddhar who was still trying to force Yamogogofafa into the ground!

Bron also grit his teeth and roared as he dashed towards the golden Monkey!

Guddhar saw the incoming mercenaries and frowned, puffing up its cheeks to use its Special Skill once again for which it had the abundance of mana for it!

Stylla accelerated and so did Bron, eager to stop it from doing it again, their failure to do so last time motivating them based on what they had seen!

Then...

Like an image that didn't belong.

Like an artistic trail of darkness that a certain Deity had just painted.

A quick steam of darkness that shifted constantly, trying to maintain a humanoid form flew from the sky and blasted into Guddhar!

All of sudden, the Greater Sage Monkey stopped moving as while covered by the dissipating darkness that seemed to be flowing into its body, its eyes turned black.

...!

Fore, Bron and Stylla were bewildered by this phenomenon but it didn't stop them from going for the kill!

Within Guddhar's mind though, a tumultuous scene occurred where a vast well of darkness started to invade the colourful space with moving images of memories that was the Cluster General's mind!

A massive silvery image of the angry Guddhar looked down on the wafting darkness that was obviously Skullius using [Crude World Projection]!

Right when Skullius had smashed into Guddhar, he had used his remaining points of mana to exploit [Basic Evil Invasion]'s main advantage!

It did not have a cooldown!

Now, with his strained [Crude World Projection] that was almost fading while even in this form, gripping pain stormed against him with the soul damage, the Discount Human persevered.

He knew that the pain from the soul damage wasn't normal, but if he could just...

"RAAAAR!"



With the enhancement that [Crude World Projection] offered, Skullius sought to invade and conquer Guddhar's mind, but the Monkey didn't let him do as he pleased!

His huge form radiated with a brilliant light as he clapped his hand together, a staggering force gushing out like a vicious wind to blow away the advancing waves of Skullius' darkness!

The Discount Human felt himself being overpowered.

He wasn't used to being repelled and didn't know what else he could do.

One thing was for sure though.

If he allowed himself to fall here, it was likely that he was going to die!

With that motivation in mind, Skullius powered through, with every exertion that he put himself through bringing him immense pain as the soul damage kept piling!

The fierce winds from Guddhar's clasped hands didn't recede and Skullius thought about changing tactics.

Looking at the many memories that were linked to linking brilliant lights, he thought to try a baseless idea.

His darkness shot through and plunged into the blotches of images and when it did, the colourful image turned dark!

Guddhar's eyes peeled open in its starry, simplistic outline, shocked!

Skullius didn't miss this reaction.

'Heh... seems like it does something then...' he thought before injecting more of his darkness to all the memory spots that were nearest to him, turning them dark and void!

"MUKAV'ARRR!" Guddhar barked at Skullius as it withheld its attack and rushed at him, flying through the starry space with rage!

'Yes! That's it!' Skullius thought as he proceeded to rush to meet the Monkey, his image flowing with darkness as at this point, he ignored everything just to get this Monkey!

If he could seize it, it would end all his problems in the Cluster and even help with his stage progression!

Right when the two bashed into each other...

[Doom Factor 2 takes advantage of the growing soul damage. You will now...]

Chapter 207: Consequences and Result

Skullius' vision was cut off before he could see what the notification said at the end of what happened when he clashed with Guddhar in a final attempt to commandeer his mind for a brief period.

All he saw was darkness but that didn't faze him as much as the loud pounding in his mind!

Soul damage!

Through Serenity, Skullius had discovered that a part of his soul was missing and the part that he had at this moment was incomplete.

However, Serenity had neglected to tell him a rather obvious truth because she lacked the time.

A broken soul was fragile.

[Basic Evil Invasion] was a terrifying skill but in its description it warned of a penalty when the host died while their consciousness was still in it.

The damage Skullius had accrued this time was less extensive in comparison to what he had received when he was in Eldris' body but the difference between this and that time, was that Skullius had supplemented the damage by using a piece of General Sila's soul that he had absorbed.

However, that hadn't been his doing, but the machination of the Labyrinth.

Now, the damage kept extending, Doom Factor 2 taking advantage of the chaos and Skullius' spamming of [Crude World Projection] and [Basic Evil Invasion] without rest.

All this was not yet clear to Skullius as while he could not see anything, he felt himself... acting.

Something was happening... outside?

Hold on.

It seemed like he was trapped somewhere.

Yet he could feel the activity raging outside.

Clashes of vibrant power.

Was this his battle with Guddhar?

'What's going on?! I need to get that bastard before my time runs out! I even saved enough mana for a full minute using [Basic Evil Invasion]! Come on!' Skullius barked within in panic.

He felt the shuddering pain intensify and his mind whirled.

Thoughts and words screeched in his mind as he wondered.

What was happening?!

What if he was getting pummelled by Guddhar while his consciousness was trapped here?!

What if his original body was being shredded to pieces by the other Monkeys?!

And the most terrifying thought of all...

What if Stylla, Bron and Fore managed to kill Guddhar while he was still trapped inside?!

That would be... extremely dangerous.

He was struggling with soul damage right now!

If it increased any further...

VWOOOOSH!

Amidst Skullius' apprehension and anxiety, something finally showed itself.

White appeared in his field of vision and for a few moments the pain subsided a bit with the occasional pounding at his mind like a hammer!

Snow.

The moment Skullius saw this... he almost froze.

This again!

Snow littered the ground and created a beautiful image.

A cold image.

Skullius shivered as he actually felt cold.

He looked down to see that he had a body and snow was trickling over him.

He couldn't describe the clothes he wore but they seemed to deter much of the humid frost.

With another painful gong-like echo of pain in his mind, Skullius found a girl kneeling before him in the snow.

She wore nothing on her body, her fair skin bare with everything that should have been hidden from others' eyes jutting out. Clothes that were vastly different from what he had seen in Aigas lay around the girl, clearly belonging to her.

The girl stared at him with emotionless eyes while quivering in the cold, her body covered in flakes.

For a few moments, Skullius kept gazing at the girl before a deep feeling welled up within him.

Rage. Fury. Hatred. Guilt. Disgust.

The emotions he felt when he looked at this girl could not fully be expressed in words.

Tears began running down Skullius' face as his face turned ugly, scrunching up with a fierce, almost tangible hate.

"You...!" he hissed unconsciously, his gloved finger pointing at the girl accusingly, devoid of his control.

Yet, Skullius just rode the wave.

"Are you happy now?! You twisted little brat! Did it make you happy?! You feel like you achieved something fantastic, don't you? And now you can brag to those new 'friends' of yours, huh?" he barked, hot breaths fuming from his mouth.

The girl before him merely frowned and rubbed her skin while shivering.

"Answer me, damn it! Are you even the same person?! Have you been on something since camp? Bro this, bro that... I should have realised it... I should have known you were up to something...

distancing me from them so you could whatever the fuck you wanted!"

"So what..." the girl finally said as she looked straight into Skullius' eyes. "I'm here aren't I? Naked and stuff. In the cold. Will my death make you feel better...?"

Skullius' emotions tangled within as he felt the unreal amount of frustration.

It was too much...

He raised his hand and dropped it to his side.

He opened his mouth and closed it as tears flooded nonstop.

The next thing he knew, he lunged at the girl with his hand raised and...

BAM!

A thunderous amount of pain struck Skullius' mind and he screamed, the vision before him shattering like glass.

He roared in the empty space he appeared in once again, feeling himself clashing outside, a brutal fight happening but without a way to know exactly what...

However, right at this moment, Skullius' emotions from the scene he had just laid his vision upon carried over to this moment and he felt a berserk rage clasp his mind!

A primal roar sounded from him as with its reverberation, Skullius blacked out in the black.

....

BA-DUM! BA...DUM! BA...DUM!

Skullius heard the dying calls of a heart while feeling the hard ground beneath him.

He opened his eyes and saw the familiar sunless skies above, partially blocked by white fur.

"Huh?" he mumbled as he pushed away the mass above him, scanning around to see that he was surrounded by the dead and dying bodies of Mountain Sage Monkeys!

They were everywhere, grotesque injuries all over their bodies with some of their blood on him.

"The... hell...?"

He no longer felt the raging pain from his soul, but it was still detectable with a faint tinge.

Skullius rose and saw the devastation around.

The ground was ploughed deep all over with circular craters as large as tens of meters ripping away the beauty of the Mountain.

Most of the white vegetation was gone, trails of criss-crossing cylindrical gouges in the earth having effectively crumbled much of its mass.

What on earth had happened here?

A flurry of notifications started appearing in Skullius vision and he welcomed them, though with a great amount of surprise.

[You have crossed a wide gulf of power as a result of utilising the Fruit of World Myths partially as intended]

['Evil Darkness' has been promoted to 'B' rank, and can now manifest a portion of its true nature]

['Basic Evil Invasion' levelled up!]

"I see..." Skullius said. Strangely, he didn't feel all too excited.

Instead, he felt.. overwhelmed.

Not by the information from the notification, but from what he had experienced.

Even the state of the mountain didn't quite capture his shock as his mind was still digesting what he had seen.

However, the notifications were not done.

[You have successfully completed your Seventh Task, invading the mind of a Cluster General]

[You have reached Level 7!]

A surge of strength powered through Skullius as he felt his body react happily despite its shredded nature with flesh hanging down.

"Wait! I did?" Skullius questioned.

He looked around, ignoring the increase in his stats.

How had he succeeded?!

That didn't make any sense!

He hadn't won the battle when he blacked out and he didn't remember anything at the moment.

The Discount Human rushed up, trying to go in the direction where he had flown to when he was using [Crude World Projection].

It didn't take him too long to see even more disastrous scenes, the one that caught his attention the most being a humongous crater that oozed of mana and heat.

Within it, bare, scorched land could be seen, with the large body of Guddhar sitting within it.



The Greater Sage Monkey was missing an armour, with blood staining its golden fur.

What made Skullius even more confused was that it was alive but it looked... lost, mumbling gibberish while bobbing its head to and fro as if in a daze.

Beside it, was the Yamogogofafa, broken into six pieces that no longer held the authoritative air and in front of the monkey that leaned against the edge of the crater, Stylla stood before it with a hard expression, her sword pointing at Guddhar's neck.

A few meters behind her, Bron could be seen leaning over Fore who laid down, the lower half of his body crushed into a bloody paste.

Chapter 208: I Did This?

The hell?

Skullius looked intently at the figure laying on the ground.

It really was Fore, dead as a door nail with his eyes closed while splatters of blood were painted over his face and armour.

What in the world had happened?

Skullius walked closer but first took a glance at himself, the hanging flesh that bled making him hesitate to just stroll over to his partners like it was any other Tuesday.

Wouldn't they ask questions?

Flesh questions!

He didn't have any mana to use [Luminant Healing] on himself so why bother.

It didn't matter anyways.

Stylla infused her sword with mana and plunged it into Guddhar's eye socket!

The swaying, seemingly out of it Cluster General barely reacted, the most it did from receiving a killing blow being to open its mouth wide and grunting softly.

Stylla grit her teeth as she pushed her saber deeper into the creature's head before it finally breathed its last.

As Skullius approached, because of his [Advanced Mana Manipulation] which doubled as a mana sensory tool, he felt an enormous surge of mana flow from Guddhar and into Stylla!

Cumulative mana experience!

This wasn't his first time seeing it as the group had been clearing Cluster left and right all day, and generally, Skullius knew that it was a thing for all creatures with only those with the guidance field being able to see this quantified.

He could only sense it when large amounts of mana were extracted after a kill though and only felt this phenomenon for this first time on this trip.

Stylla then gazed at the dead creature's chest. She debated on whether or not take its core, but decided to leave it. Her family owned many after all and the reason she had even entertained the idea was because Guddhar had been a pain the ass.

As the Discount Human approached, Stylla turned to him with a grimace.

It needed no words what she was reacting to.

She had been about to go and search for him as the battle had just concluded but seeing him walking up, 'alive', she sighed in relief.

At least she didn't lose the Mage and a definite candidate for her team in the event she wished for.

She was about to speak, concerning Skullius' wounds when the Discount Human raised his hand and shook his head.

"Please. Don't ask," he said succinctly.

"...alright."

Stylla sighed, surprise livid in her eyes. How tough did you have to be in order to walk off something like this?!

For a few moments, she remained gawking at Skullius flesh when the Discount Human finally asked, gazing at Fore.

"What happened? How did he die?"

Stylla looked at the corpse, with Bron at the side emitting low grunts of grievin pain while he loomed over the body.

"It happened so fast. I don't know what in the world it was that suddenly hit the Cluster General and caused it to go feral. Mad, in fact. Maybe it was something to do with the Mountain but I highly doubt it. We had the General cornered in a pincer attack but then... it just...

didn't go as planned..." Stylla explained with a tinge of sorrow noticeable in her eyes.

'Mad?' Skullius asked himself.

Naturally, what Stylla was talking about was Skullius invading Guddhar, but the Discount Human couldn't image what happened after.

Or perhaps... he did.

When he was stuck in that mysterious state, there was always that sensation that he was doing something... or experiencing something....

He was missing out.

Was that what he felt?

But wait... it didn't add up.

The last piece to understanding this was potentially....that guidance field notification that said something about Doom Factor 2 taking advantage of his soul damage for the second time.

There was something else that was cut off...

This thought unsettled Skullius.

Doom Factor 2.

Skullius immediately pulled up the information on the Doom Factor, and when he did, it all made sense. Tragic sense that weighed on him.

~~~

Doomed Factor 2: Existential Crisis

Your distinct perception and absorption of mana throughout the years has caused you to start awakening what should have been lost a long time ago. If you fail to recover and remember this in time you will suffer a crisis of your own existence and descend into madness.

Time till DF2 : 8 months

~~~

Descend into madness...

Was this it?

If it was, then it made sense that reaching 10% in mind fracturing from Doom Factor 2 was a really bad thing.

Then all of this...

Skullius looked around at everything. The destruction, the death.

He had successfully invaded Guddhar's body but in a mad state, using the Cluster General's immense capabilities to rampage all around.

'Damn it... This is even worse than Doom Factor 1,' Skullius thought.

Frankly he was shocked that Bron and Stylla had survived, but after the full account from the redhead, Skullius kind of understood.

They had held on for a minute, which wasn't impossible for physical combatants.

When [Basic Evil Invasion] finally ended, apparently Guddhar turned into... an idiot.

'Is it because I was messing with those memories? I can't imagine what I did after I went mad.'

A matter of note that made things worse was that the time limit for Doom Factor 2 had changed.

While it was due to ultimately claim him in a year, now it was 8 months.

The time frame wasn't exactly clear to Skullius, but he knew there was a reduction in his time and it was probably due to variables like [Basic Evil Invasion] that caused damage to his soul.

Skullius grimaced and looked at Fore.

He didn't care for the guy but this was just a taste of what he could descend to if this kept happening.

A crack appeared at the foot of the mountain from where they had appeared, signalling that it was time to depart.

Bron looked at it, then at Fore's body. He held out a storage ring and took in Fore's corpse before glaring at Skullius.

The Discount Human noticed the blame in Bron's eyes which vanished a second later as he dispiritedly sighed.

"Let's go."

Soon, the three were out of the Cluster, several towns noticeable in the darkening horizon.

Stylla turned to Skullius immediately, giving out her proposition, though not after looking at Skullius' hanging flesh and still wondering how he was feeling no pain.

"I know I said that we would be ending our collaboration here, but... I have something else in mind if you're interested," she began when Skullius instantly shook his head.

"I don't want to hear it..." Skullius said, intending to dismiss Stylla entirely, but then he had a thought.

"Just not now. We can talk some time later. I'll still be in Inhone, after all."

Stylla nodded before she realised...

"Are you not coming with us?"

"No, I have some business to attend to..."

"Should we leave a horse for you?"

Bron twitched uncomfortably.

Skullius turned to the horse and consequently, the horse turned to him and shuddered, the Discount Human doing the same as both he and the animal avoided gazes.

"No. I'll be fine."

With her gesture declined, Stylla took one last glance at Skullius, wondering what business he had before climbing up her horse, she and Bron departing.

She had no reason to doubt Skullius could take care of himself now.

In such a dangerous Cluster, he had survived what she had seen when she was in mid-air, the Discount Human getting besieged by the monkeys.

'I'll definitely rope him in...' she thought.

Skullius watched the two leave before sighing unconsciously.

"Now... let's sort this out..." he said as he sat down.

Chapter 209: Exploitable Option, Famous Suspect

Inhone City.

National Guilds Association Building.

Two men sat at a nicely furnished table while drinking hot beverages with refined etiquette.

A familiar lean man with hair and beard coloured in a mix of black and white sat on one end of the table while holding a ceramic cup, sitting the tea within.

This was the City Lord, Erkus Savont.

He donned a rather serious expression on his face, as was his custom, in an effort to conjure a no-funny-business atmosphere whenever he was meeting up with other influential personages.

Opposite him sat a middle aged man with long, crushed garnet coloured hair that reached his shoulders. His build was athletic, accentuated by the sleek fitting silver suit he wore.

His sharp satin grey eyes kept staring at the City Lord as he also sipped on the tea with the exact less-than-likely-to-this-seriously disposition that Erkus despised.

"Not a matter of much concern you say?" Erkus said with grunt of disbelief. "I find tens of Clusters appearing in such a short time a matter of concern, Silrat. We're talking about many potential deaths in a few days, I highly doubt that mobilising all of your mercenaries would alleviate this situation."

The man named Silrat edged forward with a slight smile that always made Erkus uncomfortable blooming on his face.

He relished in making people crumble, but not for cruel or evil purpose. Some would call it teasing.

"I understand your view point, City Lord. From your perspective, which is mostly centralised around maintaining the wellbeing of the normal civilians within the region, this is a dangerous hazard. That much is certainly true. But what about from my view point ? Can you guess what I see?"

Erkus grumbled.

"You obviously see profits from the many Clusters. The gems that can be harvested along with the dead cores," he answered.

"That's a true, yet shallow deduction, City Lord," Silrat said. "As Branch Chief for the Association, it is my duty to spur mercenaries into action, especially with regard to the current times. I'll admit, this wasn't always what my intent, but once the issue with the Sif extending their hand to form an alliance with Pelian began, I started to expect the worst."

"In a few days, the result of the meeting that took place days ago will be announced and I'm sure you know what's the most likely conclusion."

Erkus frowned.

"I've had my reservations about that. But what does this have to do with your point of view on the Clusters?"



Silrat's smile vanished as he said one word.

"Maqi."

Erkus frowned even deeper.

"We both know what that impulsive nation will do when the obvious outcome of the meeting between the Royal Family and the Sif comes out. If worse comes to worst, the Capital service in the entire nation won't be enough to fend those even half of those madmen. But..."

"What if you had well equipped, battle ready mercenaries who have been groomed by the pressure from having to deal with many Clusters? The resources are necessary to defend this small city as well. Who will give a damn about Inhone when those mad warriors storm Agmold?"

"I see," Erkus said with a low tone of voice. "I will commend your foresight, but that doesn't dismiss the fact that the origins of these Clusters must be traced. What is causing this absolutely must be found. We can't stake evolution over civil safety."

"I agree, but don't be too comfortable in it either. When things go awry, even Unbreakable himself can't protect this city by his lonesome," said Silrat, a smile retaining to his face. "Besides, we are already tracing the source, though we have no results as of yet. We also haven't sustained many casualties because of the readiness of the mercenaries. Rest assured."

Erkus shifted in his seat, thinking deeply for a few minutes before sighing and placing down his cup.

He rubbed his temples frustratedly as he wrestled with his thoughts. So many things seemed to be happening at once which greatly stressed his aging mind.

"Fine. Any good news to speak of then? I could really use some."

Silrat perked up at this question.

"There has indeed been some news in the Association. A new Mage has appeared. He was evaluated today and given the D rank immediately. Apparently, he's still fresh but has some combat experience."

"Oh.. is it?" Erkus found himself intrigued too. "In this case, I will concede. It doesn't matter who has more Energy Formers now anyway. Do you have a name? I might want to meet him."

Silrat burst into laughter.

"I'll beat you to that soon. He's out hunting at the moment. He goes by the name Festos Dawn."

"Interesting."

The doors to the room were opened, a certain old man and a woman, both donning robes entering in hurried but formal steps that depicted their standing.

Silrat smiled and gave a short nod of acknowledgement to them.

"Terian, Damilla. Please tell me you have some worthwhile news," Erkus said as he looked at the duo.

"Well....concerning the incident at the College of the Esteemed yesterday, we had a suspect but it turned out that he was innocent as we traced his steps according to his words and found them reliable. However, Damilla disagrees and seeks permission to divine the suspect," said the old man whose name was Terian.

The woman at the side wore a displeased expression before speaking her piece.

"I just feel that we need to ensure that we covered all our bases. It would be a shame if we missed something significant because of carelessness."

Erkus nodded.

"Very well. The College has been breathing down my neck since yesterday and suppose I owe them this much. That library was filled with basic history anyway. Copies at that..." Erkus said, mumbling the last part to himself in an annoyed tone.

There were even book stalls with translated books in there, how valuable could that place had been?

"What is the name of this suspect anyway?"

"Festos Dawn," replied Damilla.

Chapter 210: If You Can't Beat 'Em, Ignore 'Em

In the mind of the Discount Human, only introspective and retrospective thoughts roamed.

It still bothered him how he had gone mad. It felt... anticlimactic in a way. Where was the whole show? The satisfying ending.

He needed to see it at least.

He had had many plans for when he successfully took over the body of Guddhar and one of those was to steal the Yamogogofafa.

Such a treasure would be incredibly useful to him.

Unfortunately, seeing it destroyed when he came to, was rather disappointing and infuriating especially when he now knew it was his fault.

What a waste.

Worse yet, the state of Mount Sagemore afterwards was rather intense.

Stylla even described it as him going feral, which was insane to imagine.

Therefore, as Skullius sat down, he refused to let this go as he delved within, searching for exactly what happened. He wanted to know the full scope of what this madness could do. What it felt like.

He had to remember.

He was Level 7 right now because he had succeeded in taking over a body and though he didn't know how it would work to have memory outside of his own body, Skullius decided to try anyway.

Trying to skim through memory was a nasty endeavour.

Now that he thought about it, messing with memories was a rather critical affair really.

The state that Guddhar was left in after his invasion was very telling of how much damage he could cause with this.

Did that also mean that through [Basic Evil Invasion], a path for manipulating foreign memories was opened? Or could he alter his own memories?

Perhaps. Perhaps not.

"Damn it!" Skullius grumbled as he opened his eyes.

He couldn't see or remember anything. Perhaps it was by virtue of him not being in Guddhar's body anymore.

But that didn't make sense still.

Since this was a dead-end, Skullius decided to focus on the other elephant in the room.

In all truth, this particular elephant had passed through his room some time ago too but what mattered was, it was here now, weighing the room down and making a lot of noise.

Skullius just had to announce it verbally to vent his frustration.

"Who the flesh is this girl?!"

That girl who had made an appearance in his mind. Just who was she?

As Skullius had a clearer view of her now than when he fought Jackpot, he could surmise that this was the same girl he saw in the block of ice in Somanda's whatchamacallit place!

At least the outline seemed the same as she wasn't very clear in the block of ice.

"I was even having a conversation with her and... all that...anger..." Skullius mumbled to himself.

He had been gesturing and bellowing in that weird space subconsciously as this character he seemed to inhabit yelled.

Yet, he felt no close connection to this character at all.

Skullius didn't dare to peek into these memories some more as unlike the case with his rampage, this could cause him severe pain, a lesson he had learnt back then.

Gah, so many instances teaching so much.

The Discount Human was intensely bothered by the lingering emotion. It was uncomfortable.

The text for Doom Factor 2's description didn't make him feel any better either.

Since the answers to both these were unattainable at the moment, Skullius decided to focus on something that could potentially improve his mood.

The notification about his affinity to [Evil Darkness] being promoted to rank 'B' was hopefully something significant.

Apparently, having a greater affinity allowed one to use whatever was attached to said affinity with better efficiency.

So far, while Skullius did enjoy using this peculiar element, it didn't seem like anything special compared to any of his more insane Null Life abilities.

Also, he had put off learning [Just Light] enough now. He had been hoping that improving in one element would boost his strength faster than dividing his attention.

Perhaps if there was a major change, he could now begin to try out [Just Light].

Even though he had witnessed the more ridiculous stuff that he could do using the two elements in the Labyrinth, such as binding powerful foes, warping space and literally giving out immortality, Skullius didn't believe that it was just the power of the elements required for that.

Wasn't Fulgardt said to be someone who had achieved Divinity? Whatever that meant?

"Oh well... Let's see then what this thing can do," said Skullius as he conjured some darkness with the bits of mana he had recovered.

Skullius' face changed the moment he saw and felt the presence of the single wisp of darkness that coiled around his finger.

He drew back his head with sweat (water) starting to pour from his face.

What he saw was not some odd pitch black darkness.

No.

It was darkness indeed and sure it did not reflect the dimming world's light but...

It looked like it didn't belong as he focused on it, with the background of nature behind making this all the more true.

What made this even more frightening was the way that space seemed to avoid this wisp of darkness as inches around it, disfigured and disorderly lines scrambled as if space was being made to unravel, forming incomprehensible doodles when one looked closely.

Worse yet, Skullius felt something oddly unsettling when he faced the darkness, as if it was speaking to him... trying to convince him that it could flesh up all things.

All this was from a wisp.

After the initial shock, Skullius couldn't help but feel hyped.

"Hey now. Don't get me too excited bro," he said with a smile.

He began twirling around the wisp of darkness into different forms with [Basic Evil Weaving] before noticing another change a minute later.

Manipulating the darkness became... vastly easier and as he got more and more familiar with it, a notification that Skullius should have expected popped up.

[Basic Evil Weaving] has reached LV10. Would you like to evolve it into its next form?]

"Of course I would," Skullius excitedly responded.

A tingling sensation surged within him as he felt his class skill evolve, its efficacy improving vastly as the wisp of darkness in his hand quivered and shook during the process.

[Basic Evil Weaving] has evolved into 'Advanced Evil Weaving']

Skullius felt himself improve significantly in his feel and hold over [Evil Darkness].

With how much he used [Evil Darkness] related skills every day, Skullius only expected this, just not now.

[Basic Evil Production] was probably on its way to evolving too since he used it in tandem with [Basic Evil Weaving].

This managed to take his mind off of his current depression quite a bit but when Skullius recalled that he had another prize that Stylla and the others had not been able to obtain, he grinned.

The wisp of darkness vanished, Skullius not being able to make it last too long.

While the Discount Human was really interested in what [Evil Darkness] could do now, he didn't have the mana to test it out.

However, he had another option to quench his sorrow and apprehensions.

The hundreds of Enriching gems that sat in his storage rings!