

## Undead 211

Chapter 211: This Discount Human Looks Even More Acceptable!

Yes indeed!

Skullius had used the ring he had given to Red Rage to store the many Enriching gems that he had collected in the Clusters that he, Stylla, Fore and Bron had cleared.

The three didn't have much use for them as they were no longer effective on their bodies.

While they did have commercial value, Bron had told Skullius that special animal parts and dead cores had more value to them.

Thus, the Discount Human had walked away with over 800 purple Enriching gems.

This amount seemed inflated but with the fact that he got hog all the gems from different Clusters, most of which that housed weak Cluster beasts, it was truly not much of an achievement.

Of course, he had also managed to steal some of the different ones on Mount Sagemore which had a mix of red to them.

These made him excited.

He had 35 of them, ripe for absorption.

He couldn't wait to see what changes they would cause within him.

So far, Skullius knew that Enriching gems shaped his flesh and made him...stronger. Apparently, this change was a boost in constitution as he had read from the many books he stole. However, this didn't reflect in his stats but he did find himself being able to exert much more force.

Him soloing a Sage Monkey before was partly as a result of that fact.

"I should have asked Bron how Enriching gems actually help me," Skullius said regretfully.

According to his sources (Bron), after the thousandth gem, there wouldn't be anymore effects that gems would show. Or rather gems of the lower tiers like purple ones.

"Let's get to it," the Discount Human said as he took out two purple gems and started absorbing the essence within.

He felt the soothing energy that trickled into his cosmetic flesh once more, working on a fine level to make him feel stronger.

[Your flesh and bones are augmented. A factor of 0.1 applies]

[Your flesh and bones are augmented. A factor of 0.1 applies]

'Good!'

With that Skullius began absorbing the essence nonstop, replacing the emptied gems with new ones within seconds.

Skullius had absorbed a little over 200 gems last time and he hoped there was something he could gain at the end.

This was merely the mind of a desperate man seeking to reach new heights.

Surely, something happened after he had spent a few hours absorbing all the energy within the gems.

[Your flesh and bones are augmented. A cumulative factor of 100 has been applied to your body]

[Strength increases by 10]

[Agility increases by 10]

[Endurance increases by 10]

[Health increases by 10]

[Mana increases by 10]

"Ohhh...!" Skullius gawked at the sight of all the stats he had received and an explosive energy shot from within him because of the stats!

In his body, his fake muscles screamed of power and the limits he had just a few hours ago were removed as he ascended to a greater height!

Not only this, but Skullius' exterior changed massively unlike last time!

His body which still looked lean and closer to thin as hell even after the first absorption spree, became a bit bulky, glimpses of well toned chest pads and abs showing under his armour, his figure becoming more masculine!

His arm muscles became more defined and so did his cheeks and jaws, giving him a distinct and kind of handsome appearance that was void before.

Such a change!

It was only muddled by the hanging flesh on his side.

Skullius excitedly looked at himself with a grin.

10 points in stats!

It was a shame that intelligence didn't get a boost but he appreciated the gain nonetheless.

It made sense to Skullius now why even with a single point gained after advancing a level to all other beings except those chosen by the Voice of Worlds, he would at times see vast stats figures on his opponents' statuses.

It was all because of these Enriching gems!

With this newfound strength he could...

Not do much actually.

He was still quite lacking, but it was still huge improvement.

As if to defy his atrocious luck, another piece of good news struck Skullius, completely unexpected this time.

When he was absorbing the thousandth gem...

[Flesh It Like You Mean It' levelled up!]

"Huh?!" Skullius was shocked.

How on earth did that skill level up?!

Come to think of it, there were many skills he wondered how to improve. A prime example was [Apostle Summon] and [Flesh It Like You Mean It] was also another.

Now, he knew how to level up one of them!

It made sense.

Enriching gems boosted constitution and even altered his appearance to a degree. Naturally, they could forcefully level up [Flesh It Like You Mean It] which did the same thing.

Until now, Skullius had begun to think that Null Life skills could only level up when he evolved like what had happened last time, but he was glad he was wrong.

Skullius took another Enriching gem and tried to absorb more essence but was not surprised when the energy flowing into him as a result, reluctantly one might add, dissipated without achieving anything.

He had effectively absorbed a thousand gems and now, as Bron (the sources) said, he couldn't gain anything more from them.

"Can the other gems enhance my constitution more?" Skullius wondered.

He also wondered how he would fare with [Crude World Projection] now. How long would it last?

Abusing that power was in his near plans.

He took one out to sample how much it improved his body, cradling its sparkling mass in his hand which became tinted in the purple-red light.

Skullius then pulled on the essence stored within and felt it travel within him.

"Hmmm..."

It was more robust, thicker with a refreshing yet empowering feel.

This was easily better than the purple ones, which made Skullius breathe out as he received another notification.

[Your flesh and bones are augmented. A factor of 0.5 applies]

"Interesting," Skullius remarked as he went on to absorb all 35 gems while relishing in the feeling he derived.

It was magnificent.

At the end, his auburn hair grew a few inches and his eyes gained a vivid sparkle about their satin grey tint which began edging towards sparkling silver.

His face became distinct with a liveliness about it that screamed the name Festos, his muscles becoming visible under his torn armour!

Yet, the Discount Human was oblivious to this.

He didn't care much for appearance at the moment.

He looked at himself in wonder and excitement.

"That's more like it," he said.

With all this taken care of, Skullius was ready for the main event.

It was time to bring the golden boy back!

Chapter 212: On Your Feet, Bro!

The Discount Human had had many thoughts on how to bring back Red Rage. Naturally, his collection of Null Life Essence was because he had this particular objective in mind.

However, as far as he knew, raw Null Life Essence did nothing but simply prolong Red Rage's existence, which led him to theorise.

Null Life Essence was good for sustenance. At least for Null Life species like him and Red Rage.

Then that meant moulding Null Life Essence, weaving it as an independent power source in an intricate way could probably save Red Rage.

The problem Skullius encountered when his thoughts reached this juncture was how to manipulate Null Life Essence.

He could use it for skills but couldn't manipulate it as he did with mana.

Was there a way to manipulate it outside of already established skills?

Nevertheless, outside of this thought process, Skullius had come to one other hopefully useful method to mend his Apostle.

This was through one of the class skills he had heavily neglected until now.

Apostle Armament.

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[Apostle Armament | Lv.2]

A servant needs great strength to protect their master. Using Mana and Null Life Essence, grant your Apostle skills so that they remain useful while standing by your side. Please note that this skill is more effective when your servant has obtained Class.

<Current Limit: 0/2 Common Skills>

Mana Requirements: 250 Mana Points + 2000 Null Life Essence

Duration: None

Cooldown: None

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This skill's purpose was to grant Red Rage a skill from the Null Life arsenal.

At its current rank, it could only grant <Common> skills but from the Discount Human's experience, he knew that <Common> for Null Life was higher than that for Aigas.

An example was the Grand Sword of the Hedonist which he had summoned against Aikil.

It had been a <Common> weapon but if it was appraised by Aigas standards, it would undoubtedly be <Rare> or even <Unique> considering that some of its effects were locked.

(A/N: Rarity rankings for weaponry go from Common, Uncommon, Rare, Unique, Legendary, Mythical and Transcendent. I last mentioned this quite a long time ago.)

He hoped that this skill would spur for Red Rage's repair as it dealt with granting something to the Apostle.

At first it was a passing thought, Skullius merely considering it as a possibility, but then, it turned out to be his only option.

'I hope it works...!' Skullius thought.

It was unfortunate but he had to wait until morning before [Flesh It Like You Mean It] could time out.

Thus, this goal of his had to wait for a little longer.

With that time, Skullius pulled up his status.

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[ Name : Festos Dawn ]

[ Level : 7 ]

[ Experience : 64000/64000, <Pending Task> ]

[ Class : Insurgent Magnus ]

[ Race : Discount Human ]



[ Inv. Status : Still doomed ×2, Cursed ]

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[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 150 ]

[ Agility : 50 ]

[ Intelligence : 70 ]

[ Endurance : 85 ]

[ Luck : Atrocious? ]

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[ Health : 249/249 ]

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[ Mana : 189/285+(250) ]

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[ Null Life Essence : 6000/6000 ]

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[ Skills ]

[ Advanced Mana Manipulation | Lv.28 ]

[ Greater Communication (I) | Lv.2 ]

[ Flesh It Like You Mean It | Lv. 3 ]

[ Revenant Flames of Ecstasy| Lv. 1 ]

[ Artless Dodger | Lv.2 ]

[ Manassault | Lv. 1 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Mana Shroud | Lv.4 ]

[ Mana Blast | Lv.2 ]

[ Quick Strike | Lv.1 ]

[ Brawn | Lv.1 ]

[ Great Rush | Lv.1 ]

[<Class>]

[ Advanced Evil Weaving | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Evil Production | Lv.8 ]

[ Basic Evil Invasion | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Evil Sanction (Special) | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Light Production | Lv.1 ]

[ Crude World Projection ]

[<Arts>]

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration (1%) ]

[<Oddities>]

[ Luminant Seed (Dormant) ]

[ Binds of Fukal ]

[ Fruit of World Myths ]

----

[<Affinities>]

[ Evil Darkness - B ]

[ Just Light ]

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"Hmmm.... right. Since I'm level 7 now, I might as well work towards getting to level 10 so that I can finally see what the Luminant Seed can do. I hope it's something good," Skullius thought as he perused over all his stats and skills.

The more he thought about these, the more he realised how much he hadn't used his Penetrator form in such a long time, which was a bit disheartening but not anything to cry about.

The Discount Human form was growing stronger and Skullius could see how in the near future, he would be able to enjoy using both his sides equally.

When a sufficient amount of his mana regenerated, Skullius used [Luminant Healing] to heal up his flesh and changed his clothes.

He was slowly developing a habit of being conscious about his appearance due to his surroundings.

He decided to wait out the time, beginning to read the books he had in storage which really passed the time well.

After another few hours, his mana was back to full and the Discount Human shifted from reading to spamming skills in order to level them up.

While he could start learning about what [Evil Darkness] could now do, he put that off to the side for the time being.

He also put off messing with all his class skills for a bit.

The reason for this was related to what he had termed as his plan for after clearing the Clusters. He intended to clear another few Clusters on his own and for that, he hoped to have more options than just his class skills.

He had quite the good amount of other skills that could be useful if he gave them more attention and his class skills would probably only grow so much if he focused on them until sunrise.

Time passed, with Skullius spamming and reading while also thinking about his other contingencies should his current plan fail.

He still found nothing else that he could rely on.

On the bright side, by the time the sun was emerging from the horizon, Skullius had made some progress with some of his skills.

[Mana Shroud] became [Mana Shield] which added a rather powerful and bright layer of protection over Skullius' body that exceeded that of [Mana Shroud]. As far as he could remember, he barely felt [Man Shroud] protect him when he was assaulted by Yamogogofafa.

[Mana Blast] become [Mana Force], which produced even more condensed bursts of mana.

In reality, Skullius didn't know what he would use this skill for, but he would find out in the future.

Finally, Skullius also managed to level up [Advanced Mana Manipulation] which had been level 28. This had taken him the most time as he had reverted back to using the mana condensing technique. However, the Discount Human also added something else to the mix that provided a fun result.

With his memories from the Sage Monkeys and how they developed their skills, Skullius managed to try new and different ways to manipulate Mana which crazily levelled up the skill.

In an unexpected twist, Skullius learned a skill called [Untouched], which used the same principle as [Indomitable Sage's Will] but was vastly weaker.

He had to clasp his hands together to activate the technique and use huge amounts of mana to negate damage.

On top of this, Skullius naturally levelled up [Advanced Mana Manipulation].

This was his first skill to evolve twice, becoming [Elevated Mana Manipulation] which enhanced his sensory range greatly and bolstered his ability to control mana at a level that exceeded [Advanced Mana Manipulation].

It was to be expected after Skullius scaled the remaining levels to Level 40!

The moment it evolved, Skullius felt his connection to mana greatly expand and trickles of ideas infiltrated his mind on how to use mana. Which was weird.

Nonetheless, this raised him to an even greater league.

Unfortunately, Skullius couldn't level up skills like [Great Rush], [Quick Strike] and [Brawn] because they required actual combat to effectively spam on top of a large amount of mana to evolve each of them.

In training with these, Skullius noticed the major differences in his body post Enriching gem absorption.

He was much faster and stronger than he thought. It wasn't just exciting visual aesthetics. His body truly felt like a weapon as it became lighter and more reactive.

This was particularly compatible with [Great Rush].

Soon, it was time for his cosmetic flesh to take a temporary hike and for his dark blue bones to rise.

Skullius pulled out the Null Devil's Aegis of Damnation where his Apostle was housed and his four sockets blazed with a light blue flame.

The Silentburn Levin on his bones crackled silently as he removed Red Rage from the armour and set him on the ground, watching the broken white core within his ribcage that had a golden glowing 'U' and 'T' symbol, start to fragment.

"Let's bring you back on your feet," Skullius said to his bro.

He quickly lay his hand on Red Rage and cast [Apostle Armament].

Though the requirement for the skill was steep, being 250 Mana Points and 2000 Null Life Essence points, Skullius had more than enough.

The light of Null Life gushed from his body as Null Life Essence, unlike Mana, was an energy shared between his two forms.

It engulfed the body of Red Rage in its entirety, swirling endlessly like a whirlpool, a presenceless energy bubbling around.

Red Rage's body gained a bright glow that encased his figure brilliantly, raising him up to float a meter above ground.

Skullius became hopeful at this, watching Red Rage's shattered figure in hopes of seeing it integrate again into its full form.

"Is it going to work?"

Suddenly...

[The subject's core has been damaged. Unable to grant any skills]

"Damn it!" Skullius cursed in a hoarse voice.

However, another notification appeared.

[Subject's body is in a broken state. 'Apostle Armament' can repair the subject's body core and body provided a fee of 5000 Null Life Essence is paid]

"...bro, that's a lot of Null Life Essence points. Argh! Fine, I can't put a price on my bro's life. Wait, what? Let's do this already!"

Of the 6000 points he had, Skullius used 5000 into Apostle Armament, a profound change beginning to happen!

Chapter 213: 100 Favourability!

A brighter light than the one that had emanated before raged all over Red Rage's body. Slowly, Skullius saw the Apostle's body start to get mended, a crunching sound acting as the background effect.

Red Rage's core also started to get patched up, returning to its white spherical magnificence from its shattered state!

Throughout all this, Skullius would have loved to smile, hiding the bleeding he felt at losing all those Null Life Essence Points, but he couldn't.

Perhaps an emotionless skull face was not bad for this.

While he had planned to use them for Red Rage's benefit, the Penetrator had hoped to have some spares left for other things.

1000 points would have to do for now. Until he went hunting for more that is.

Soon, the brilliant flare-like effects ended as Red Rage dropped to the ground, standing heroically as the flash of light died down.

His silvery appearance was restored with his above average height paling in comparison to Skullius' form.

It was finally done.

The Penetrator was right after all. [Apostle Armament] was the key.

Unfortunately, Red Rage didn't receive a skill from [Apostle Armament].

'That's unfair...!' Skullius thought to himself. But then again, it seemed that the skill's formal effect had been sacrificed to revive Red Rage.

"This is the second time I've had to revive you, bro. This can't keep happening. Well.... I guess truthfully, both times it wasn't exactly your fault but I hope you learnt a few things from this," Skullius lectured.

Red Rage first scratched his skull and then nodded.

On top of this...

[Red Rage approves of your actions. +50 Favourability]

"Huh? 50?" Skullius was shocked.



He had had more than 50 favourability points prior to this and now, he had a 100.

Red Rage then bowed to Skullius, his golden glowing eyes facing his master reverently.

"Oh..."

Skullius understood Red Rage's intent instantly. The Apostle was thankful to Skullius for bringing him back.

According to Red Rage, it was his own fault for not taking the opponent (Jackpot) seriously and he only had himself to blame.

Accountability.

A trait of a true hero.

Skullius was impressed.

It even seemed like Red Rage was being more respectful than before.

With all this happening, Skullius couldn't help but recall what VOW bro had said about favourability.

This was indeed different from undeath. Only his actions could attract the respect of his summons.

As he pondered over this...

[A 100 points of favourability have been reached between you and your Apostle]

[Apostle 'Red Rage' has made his first pledge of loyalty to you]

[The following options are available for your Apostle. You may choose one:]

[-Skill Amalgamation | Tier 1]

[-Rank Bestowal]

"Hmmm. So this really is a big deal huh? VOW bro did say that there would be boosts available the higher the favourability, right? What can these do I wonder?"

Skullius tapped to get more information.

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[Skill Amalgamation]

You are able to combine any two skills into a more powerful one regardless of their differences.

<Chances – 2>

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[Rank Bestowal]

Bestow upon your Apostle a Rank. The effects of a Rank will be exposed after the Vehement Bone Nullmancer has 5 or more of the 10 Apostles they are allowed to summon.

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"WAIT! Am I seeing this right?!" Skullius bellowed as his eyes immediately rushed over to the [Rank Bestowal].

"10 Apostles! I can only have 10 Apostles?! Why wasn't I ever told this?!"

Skullius clutched his head.

A few things started to make sense in his head a he thought about this.

It just made sense.

No wonder [Apostle Summon] just seemed like a skill that wouldn't budge in terms of levels.

No wonder there were so many aspects of his class that pointed towards quality more than quantity.

This was insane!

It also meant that Skullius couldn't be reckless when summoning his Apostles. He didn't know if he could unsummon them or not but still...

He was gravely limited in terms of quantity.

"Hmmm... well, I guess it really is different from what I thought," said Skullius as he once again re-read the two options while releasing his disappointment.

"If a Rank is only useful when I have five Apostles then flesh that! I'm still quite far from getting that much. I'll choose [Skill Amalgamation]."

[You have chosen 'Skill Amalgamation'. Please choose two skills to combine from Apostle 'Red Rage's arsenal]

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[ Skills ]

[ Null Life Aura | Lv. 2 ]

[ Storming Charge | Lv. 1 ]

[ Dead End | Lv. 1 ]

[ Flash Throw | Lv. 2 ]

[ Swift Stab | Lv. 1 ]

[ Dash in Dust | Lv. 2 ]

[ Climb | Lv. 1 ]

[ Basic Bow Mastery | Lv.3 ]

[ River Dance Technique | Lv.5 ]

[ Solid Punch | Lv. 8 ]

[ Weaver | Lv. 6 ]

[ Mana Shroud | Lv. 2 ]

[ Basic Mana Manipulation | Lv. 5 ]

[ Blessing of Serenity ]

<Racial>

[ Tusks of Justice | Lv.1 ]

[ Brilliant Boar Balance Buckler | Lv.1 ]

[ Pelvis Boar-Man Majestic Attire | Lv.1 ]

[ Hero's Fist | Lv.1 ]

[ Hero's Hero | Lv.1 ]

<Class>

[ Tempered Armament of the Hegemon | Lv.1 ]

[ Tempered Ascension | Lv.1 ]

[ Forged Steel Bones | Lv.1 ]

[ Glorious Rebirth of the Berserk Hegemon | Lv.1 ]

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"Hmmm....the only options I think are worthwhile are probably from the class and race. Oh.... hold up! Where the hell did all those skills come from, Red bro?!"

Skullius pointed to the skills that had popped up which he had never seen before.

[River Dance Technique]?

Wasn't that Shirota's sword technique?!

[Mana Shroud], [Basic Mana Manipulation], what the flesh?

"How did you get all these?"

Red Rage happily explained through his link with Skullius.

The Penetrator was dumbfounded.

All those times that he left his Apostle to his own, the bastard had been mastering these skills.

Furthermore, that wasn't all.

According to Red Rage, he had used Null Life Essence to see through Skullius' eyes when he was training with Oliviana or learning new skills even while hidden in the spatial storage ring!

This bro could manipulate Null Life Essence!

Apparently, he had learnt it out of desperation. Doing nothing had caused him to evolve while in the ring.

"That blessing of yours. I need to have a chat with Serenity about this on my next evolution. And with you too. I was just thinking about how to manipulate Null Life Essence."

Tch! Honestly!

The Penetrator shook his head and then turned back his attention to the current matter.

Skullius read through the descriptions of all the skills and made his two choices quite easily.

He turned to Red Rage who looked at him with confusion and emitted a laugh.

"Let's make you the strongest Pelvis Boar-Man!"

The guidance field immediately responded to Skullius' intent as two chances were used to make the Pelvis Boar-Man the strongest he could be at the moment.

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['Tempered Armament of the Hegemon' has been combined with 'Pelvis Boar-Man Majestic Attire']

[...]

[The skill 'Incandescent Attire of The Omnipotent Pelvis Hegemon' has been born!]

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['Hero's Hero' has been combined with 'Glorious Rebirth of the Berserk Hegemon']

[...]

[The skill 'Berserk Guardian of Golden Legends' (Special), has been born!]

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"Oh... there's a Special Skill?" Skullius muttered as he stroked his chin.

He had not expected such a development but it was welcome nonetheless.

He read through the descriptions of the two skills and grinned to himself.

[Skill Amalgamation] was very intriguing. Surely Red Rage was about to get vastly more powerful. At least with the first skill.

As for the second...

"I guess I'll have to find a way to grant you a blue core. Speaking of which..."

Skullius immediately remembered. Perhaps it was time to find out what a particular skill could do for him.

The skill [Depths of Core]!

Chapter 214: Can I Get A Blue Core, Please?

[Depths of the Core | Lv.2]

To attain great strength, one must understand their own source of power. The core. The more one understands the more they can evolve their strength from the standard to the elite boundary where very few reside. When this skill is used, the user can alter their core in the direction they want.

<Current limit: Blue>

Mana Requirements: 500 Mana Points

Duration: 1 minute

Cooldown: 100 days

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Skullius had more than enough mana to cast this skill but what caused him some hesitation was the fact it had a 100 day cool down.

That was a very long time.

Was the skill able to grant him a blue core in one use though. Skullius didn't know. It's description was more hype than detail.

It was too vague.

But the Penetrator knew he had to try this class specific skill now and at least get to know what it could do.

1 minute.

That was the entire duration of the skill and he had make it count...somehow.



"Alright, here goes. You've had your share of benefits. Now let's see what I can get," Skullius said to Red Rage as he activated [Depths of the Core].

His vision dove deep within him at an incredible speed, hastening towards a large white object which emitted a bright white light.

OOOOM!

'Interesting,' Skullius thought as he gazed at his own core which lit up an unknown space where it seemed to reside on its lonesome.

As he looked at it closely, he saw channels leading in and out of it, carrying a white stream of energy.

Mana!

These channels were like glass tubes that ran from within the core, looking like blue coloured lines when they were within the sphere and assuming the aforementioned appearance when outside of it.

There were endless networks of these lines within the large spherical core, Skullius finding this arrangement familiar.

'It kind of looks like how the internal structure of objects I try to extract skills from looks...  
Hmmm...'

Skullius felt attracted to the thin blue lines, sinking his sight into the core where he seamlessly entered without restriction.

1 minute.

His time was limited so he had to make the most out of this time.

For convenience's sake, a prompt appeared in his vision, showing the time he had left.

As he delved within, Skullius saw the bunch of networks he had seen explode in size, becoming more vivid in their appearance.

One thing that Skullius noticed was how these networks never joined together. In fact, it seemed like they were making an effort to not meet, which was strange.

'What if I try to join these blue lines? I don't think it's a coincidence that they have the same colour as the next core level. Maybe if I can join all of them, I can attain a blue core. But...'

The sheer quantity of these lines are insane. They looked to be thousands of them and surely the task to join them all would be incredibly arduous!

Still though, Skullius decided to give it a try. With 50 seconds left on the clock, the Penetrator rushed up to one of the blue lines.

He focused on it and tried to make it move by exerting his will, as he did when extracting skills from objects.

The blue line began to sway this way and that as per his will, which made Skullius a bit more confident in this endeavour of his.

'Okay then. Now let's try...'

Skullius pulled the line towards another blue line which was at the side and...

...!

'I knew it!'

The blue line he held refused to touch the other one!

Its end began to resist furiously and it took much of Skullius' focus to even maintain his hold over the it!

But still, the Penetrator refused to be beaten by a mere line. A simplistic construct whose entire existence depended on thousands of others like itself to give it any semblance of meaning!

Was that rude?

Maybe.

Skullius pulled the line with all his might, particularly its end which still resisted but ultimately touched on the body of another blue line!

The moment this occurred...

GOOOONG!

A loud noise rang throughout the entire core with a slight quake!

Skullius was bewildered.

Did he do something wrong?

The answer to this question was revealed when he turned to the lines that had touched each other.

A seamless connection had been made at the point of contact, a surge of energy moving from one blue line to the next!

No!

This was definitely correct.

Skullius thoughts were pinpoint.

He had to connect the blue lines, regardless of the immense difficulty attached to the task.

The Penetrator began to focus on the objective, connecting all the lines he could by exerting immense amounts of strength despite how much the lines struggled.

Why did these lines resist?

Was it just to make his life difficult?

Or was it a fundamental mechanism in all things that restricted their elevation to higher levels as a way to make them put in more effort and evolve.

Perhaps.

Skullius watched the timer reach the last five seconds when he had barely connected three dozen lines together with each time producing a loud thrum that caused a change which was unknown to him.

Then...

As Skullius had just finished linking another blue line to one other, he felt his vision forcefully being pulled away, his image flying from within his core.

When he exited, he saw his spherical core again, noticing a subtle change about.

It was several shades brighter, with its size reducing somewhat.

Maybe that was just because he kept being pulled away from it, creating the visual illusion of reduction in its size.

'Did I accomplish something?' Skullius asked himself sceptically.

He had hoped to see at least hints of blue but that didn't seem to be a possibility.

The reason was, cores only had absolute colours when one was ascending.

Dual colour effects only applied in special circumstances like the monstrous guardians within the Labyrinth of the Yoke.

Skullius found himself looking at Red Rage back in the outside world.

[Depths of Core] had timed out.

"Hmmm I can't tell if there is a change or not," Skullius said.

One thing was for sure though, he didn't have a blue core yet.

It was rather disappointing. So to get one, he had go through the task of joining all those blue lines?

That seemed to be the only valid explanation.

"That's too hard to do in one minute. Gah! The skill is on cooldown now!" Skullius frustratedly groaned.

It seemed the only possible way forward with this skill was to level it up. Perhaps there would be a more optimistic change then.

Or...

"I guess I could ask look into how the mercenaries get their blue cores. The books didn't mention how to. At least the ones I've read. I'll have to find socketholes worth asking. Would Frock know?"

Skullius unconsciously sighed but nothing came out in this form of his.

Since this turned out to be a long term thing, the Penetrator once again shifted his focus towards another goal.

'I plan to focus entirely on my lessons with Oliviana in Inhone City while I wait for [Demion's Dance] to be repaired. I won't be clearing Clusters within that time. So...'

"Red bro. I've come to a decision," Skullius said, jolting the Pelvis Boar-Man up. "We'll hunt some Clusters together for a few hours before going back to the city. We should be able to find some. Before that... let's get some levels. Enough stocking up experience!"

Chapter 215: A Kind Invitation

"Well... that wasn't as epic as I expected it to be..." Skullius said as he walked towards the gates of Inhone City.

The sun was already high up, beating against him like a heavyweight champion in the sky and yet, he didn't feel himself getting the annoying heavy sensation from its heat.

His Discount Human form was way stronger now and he couldn't help but be more thankful as he discovered more and more about just how much had lost some of his previous shortcomings.

Right after making the fancy declaration on levelling up himself and Red Rage, Skullius had... immediately done so.

He had decided that withholding experience wasn't productive. Even though the amount he had wasn't nearly enough to level him up as much as he wanted because of the 3x multiplier on the experience required, he would at least salvage the levels he could for himself and Red bro.

At that moment, Skullius had roughly 15,000,000 Exp.

While this seemed like a huge figure, the Discount Human couldn't help but grumble.

It was far from enough to get him much.

From the remnants of experience that were left after he killed the last members of the Ideal Ark except Benzard, finishing off the Cursed Knight, the Gremlins, Jackpot, the mercenary he killed before getting to Inhone, the 8 Capital Knights he killed in the library and the Cluster Beasts he had killed on his party up with Stylla, Fore and Bron, this figure could only be this much.

Skullius left 2,500,000 in reserve for his Discount Human form and the potential speedy summon he wished to get when he found the suitable candidate.

The start up experience for Tier 1 was 2,000,000 Exp to get to Level 2 which Skullius gave up along with another 6,000,000 to get to Level 3.

He used what was left to boost Red Rage a level, wondering later if having a different coloured core eliminated the problem of having such inflated experience point requirements.

Right after levelling, Skullius and Red Rage both decked in full armour, with the Penetrator giving his Apostle the armour he had requested from Frock along with all the weapons he had bought to the prodigious underling, had searched and found three white Clusters which they absolutely demolished.

Skullius kept upgrading the equipment he had given Red Rage with [Unbound], using the Null Life Essence points they had reaped until the Apostle was became an ideal fighting force with a mastery of many weaponry at the level of <Uncommon> to <Rare>.

The use of the new skills and weapons by Red Rage had heavily pleased Skullius, making his socket flames flare furiously in excitement.

"Kek... now you look more like an Apostle..." Skullius had said.

The Discount Human sighed as he recalled those moments a few hours ago.

Unfortunately, he hadn't fought strong monsters as he had hoped, as with his Penetrator form he was confident that he could deal with creatures at the level of Guddhar easily.

Now he had to go back to being tactical and mingle with the humans to get more knowledge as he entered the city again.

Such a bother.

During his decimation of Cluster beasts, he had also been visited by the ever present Doom Factor 1 which required its due and this time, he had given it enough mana for 3 days as he had enough of that as the tall skeleton.

Another problem off his back for now.

Skullius approached the gates and though he didn't notice it, he gained quite a lot of looks from the men and women who stood in the line to get into Inhone.

Particularly the women.

As he donned his linen white shirt which accentuated his new toned and muscular upper torso, the shiny, dark brown leather pants that outlined his sturdy legs along with a pair of black shoes covering his lower body, a few women smiled and couldn't stop staring at this line-cutter.

On top of that, there was also the multiple Conqueror's Halos around Skullius that made many gulp and even applaud at him for seeing as he was alone, many commonfolk were led to believe that he had single-handedly cleared multiple Clusters.

Which he had done.

Skullius walked up to the front where he met with the same Capital Knight he had seen on the first day he had come to the city.

When the man saw him, he visibly frowned and inquired in a slightly gruff yet respectful tone.

"Are you a mercenary, sir?"

The Knight wouldn't disrespect any personage that held a Conqueror's Halo but he did despise those that were full of themselves as a result of it.

The dashing young man before him didn't have anything on him that would tie him as a mercenary so he had to verify as Conqueror's Halos alone weren't truly an indicator.

Skullius took out his identification from the spatial storage ring and flashed it at the Knight who inspected it.

The Discount Human didn't believe that as a mercenary he would have to wait in this line also to get into the city, which is why he had cut it.



The aspect about the privileges of being a mercenary that he was most interested in however, laid in the fact that he would automatically gain citizenship.

He hoped to get that settled soon.

The Capital Knight nodded at Skullius, his expression loosening a bit.

"Thank you for your service," he said in a neutral tone, allowing Skullius entry.

The Discount passed and immediately began walking towards the Guilds Association.

His first order of business was to verify with the Association that he had cleared a Cluster, as he had taken the head of the bee Cluster General he had obliterated on his own as proof.

Luckily it hadn't been turned to ash.

Also, he hoped to get some information about how to get a blue core.

On his way, it was the same as when he had been at the gates.

Women gave him prolonged glances with some even making an effort to call to him.

This made Skullius uncomfortable, for he did not what they wanted.

He hurried to the Guilds Association building where he found many mercenaries with and without Conqueror's Halos rushing in and out.

The Discount Human hurried over to one of the long lines where mercenaries were delivering their evidence to get money and record that they had cleared the Cluster they had accepted the request for.

'I guess there's still that many Clusters around. So many mercenaries...!' Skullius thought as he looked around.

The line moved pretty fast, with Skullius' turn reaching pretty fast.

He took out the bee's head which was almost as large as his upper torso and gave it to the woman who sat behind the counter.

The woman quickly stored it in a fancy spatial storage ring which was leagues above his own.

The woman then asked for Skullius' identification which he gave and when she saw it, she cocked her head back and looked back at him.

"Y..you're the new Mage?" she asked in a rather loud voice that attracted the attention of the many mercenaries that heard.

All eyes turned to Skullius who face palmed and squeezed a response through his teeth.

"Yes..."

The woman bit her lips as she flushed with excitement.

'The hell?' Skullius was visibly concerned with this. 'Should I run?'

He felt the many presences of mercenaries stare at him as those who hadn't been here to witness his induction took in his figure.

"Heh... so that's the Mage? He doesn't look like much. Just a pretty boy with no experience if you ask me! So what if he cleared multiple Clusters? Any one of us can do it."

"He seems to be pretty weak at the moment. Strange. I thought you had to have at least a blue core to qualify for the Academies? He's pretty handsome though, that's a plus."

"Ah~. Come on, loosen up guys. We have one more Mage in the Association! That paired with those two from the Ideal Ark and we'll be a force to be reckoned with!"

Differing opinions were heard around the Association building and soon, many began to approach the Discount Human who stared daggers at the woman behind the counter.

Now he had to deal with this.

Skullius was about to make a run for it and return later when a thunderous presence stormed the Guilds Association Hall!

Everyone immediately quieted down as the heavy clank of armour sounded, approaching the counter where Skullius was being showered with opinions.

Six men donning dark armours with their faces showing some rather edgy details appeared.

At the forefront was a tall man whose body radiated overwhelming power, his eyes that shot towards Skullius bearing a heavy weight to them.

Skullius met the man's gaze and frowned.

Soon, there was barely a meter's distance between Skullius and these men who were from the third strongest Guild in Inhone.

The EdgeKings Guild.

The man who led this group opened his mouth and inquired in a rather masculine voice.

"So you're the Mage I've heard about?"

Skullius didn't reply, narrowing his eyes as he wondered what was about to happen.

"Hmph! I suppose there's no need to question it with all the attention you've drawn," the man said.

'Obviously,' Skullius thought.

The man then wore a harsh make of a face and spoke in a domineering tone.

"Join my Guild or you'll be sorry!"

Chapter 216: Follow Me, Festos

"Huh?!" Skullius raised a brow.

Was this a threat?

Was this bastard seriously trying to threaten him into joining his Guild?

The tension immediately grew as many drew back from the confrontation.

"What did you just say?" Skullius voiced towards the man who had just casually given him a hostile invite.

Many gasps resounded within the hall as many were shocked.

Even though Skullius was a Mage, many knew that he wasn't high up because of his white core which was a weird circumstance.

His ranking which had started as a rumour a day ago had spread like wildfire, making the other mercenaries see him as a flame to be raised and not a powerhouse as of yet.

So seeing him confront Jarek, the leader of the EdgeKings like this was rather shocking.

Jac popped from his usual corner and smiled slyly while watching Skullius confront Jarek.

He was surprised at Skullius' different appearance at first but was torn from its handsomeness by the current occurrence.

'This kid sure has some balls,' he thought. He too knew that Skullius wasn't someone who could be counted as a game-changing piece like true mages yet.

The multiple halos around him were probably from him being carried by Stylla's team.

Jarek narrowed his hazel eyes as his body began fuming with jagged wisps of mana.

"I said, join my Guild or you'll be sorry. I thought Mages were supposed to be sensitive to everything," Jarek said.

"Hey! Where else are you going to go? You going to join those Ravenclad pansies or us, the manliest Guild of them all?!" another one of the EdgeKings Guild members said while pointing at Skullius.

The Discount Human tilted his head.

He had planned before to visit Tulnas and see what he could get from the Harem Guild a few days ago.

He didn't plan on going back on his word.

Tulnas had supposedly seen something interesting about him, asking him to join way before he announced himself as a Mage and he wanted to know what it was that attracted him. Perhaps he could even milk the situation.

That pun would have worked if Skullius had a semblance of understanding towards jokes.

"What do I get if I join?" Skullius asked, trying to see what these guys would offer despite their rude and tactless invitation.

Perhaps he could get some good stuff.

"We're a large Guild with over forty members, an entire portion of the region under our jurisdiction and a formal Guild residence within the city. What do you think we can offer?" Jarek replied in a proud tone.

Skullius did not like this response.

This man was a god-tier sockethole!

He was way too prideful.

"Then I refuse," Skullius replied while waving his hands and turning away to gaze back at the shocked woman at the counter.

Jarek's gaze didn't so much as flicker from being rejected.

However, the young man by his side who was known for always taking things too far both verbally and physically fumed at the Discount Human's response!

He gnashed his teeth with glowing red eyes and barked as he suddenly stepped forward.

"You little bastard! You dare dismiss us like some petty fools!"

The young man lunged at Skullius, his light blue core churning mana as he didn't intend to actually harm Skullius but to grab his shoulder and make him kneel.

To cripple his hubris so to speak.

Jarek didn't intervene. He merely watched attentively.

Skullius wasn't oblivious to the incoming threat.

His gaze turned cold as [Elevated Mana Manipulation] let him see and sense every major shift in mana within a vast distance.

He knew everything that was happening within the hall and such an obvious attack didn't escape his sense.

'Seriously? I thought calling myself a Mage would bring me more benefits,' Skullius thought before taking action.

'Subtle' action.

With [Elevated Mana Manipulation] overseeing his next moves, Skullius seamlessly activated [Mana Shield] and [Mana Force], his body suddenly being covered in a burst of white light!

The activation was so quick that Jarek narrowed his eyes in mild surprise.

The young man who had lunged at Skullius saw a bright flash of white where Skullius' back had been and in the moment where he was dazed and shocked by this...

BAM!

A tremendous force knocked against his dark armour and sent him flying over the heads of the mercenaries in the hall!

He soared and landed thirty meters away at the entrance of the Guilds Association Building, rolling to stop with the chest plate of his armour emitting light steam!

....

Silence.

Skullius' body lost its luminance as the details of his figure were revealed once more, his right hand being outstretched from his previous action.

His silvery eyes gazed at the man he had just blasted away when he launched a punch supported by [Quick Strike], [Brawn] and [Great Rush] while being fuelled by [Mana Force], revealing an arrogant lustre.

In reality though, Skullius had known this man wouldn't do anything excessive but that was it.

He used that to his advantage.

He did exactly to the young man what he had sought to do to him.

Jac guffawed silently in his corner while everyone else was still in a daze.

Skullius turned to the woman behind the desk.

"Can I get my money now?"

The woman fumbled over herself and tried to calm her shocked mind under Skullius' gaze.

She had felt the immense surge of power that was released in that single moment when Skullius had attacked even as someone without training and she was awed, as was every mercenary who didn't have as good of a mastery over mana like Skullius.

She immediately calculated the amount and gave Skullius a bag full of coins.

"Interesting," said Jarek as he walked closer to Skullius. "Such a fine control of mana. Now I'm more motivated to take you for myself."

At that moment, everyone ignored the actually unharmed figure of the young man who had flown to the doors, rising up with his face red with fury and turned to Jarek.

Skullius turned to the large man with a deeper frown than before.

"I just made it clear. I don't want to join your Guild," he said.

"That's true. But I won't let you go so easily. We're men. We don't deal in verbal exchanges to determine the answer. How about a challenge? A reasonable one.

The winner gets to ask what they want from the loser," Jarek said in his dominant tone of voice.

Skullius couldn't believe this.

Even with his crude understanding of human custom and norms, he knew that public challenges were a big deal.



Even though he had saved his public image by sending that young man flying despite the differences in their core, a challenge had been called for by Jarek, who was wearing a light smile, on his lips written the words 'I got you now, bitch'.

Skullius recalled that there was something similar in Deadmanland too.

It was frowned upon to resist a challenge, unless you were facing against an undead with [Boneman of Steel] that is.

The Undead captains would even come to watch the challenges while monitoring to prevent circumstances where the challengers went overboard by saying the 'f' word to others.

Skullius was about to reply when an unexpected turn pushed itself into the mix.

"My, my. I wish my old bones still had enough of a fire for such thrill," an aged voiced echoed throughout the hall as a certain old man donning lavish robes walked in from one of the many Association buildings' secret doors whose arrangement none of the mercenaries were privy to.

His appearance with his close set red eyes scouring through the hall made everyone subconsciously give a low bow.

This man was not a minor player.

Jarek frowned and so did Skullius.

'This guy again!' he cursed.

It was the same old man who had interrogated him about the fire at the library along with that woman who never smiled.

The old man gave a friendly smile as he gazed at

Skullius, then at Jarek.

"Pardon my intrusion, but can I borrow this young man for a bit?" he 'asked' Jarek.

The EdgeKings Guild leader shook his head while hiding his frustration.

He would probably not get this chance again any time soon.

"Not at all."

"Good, good," the old man said and then turned to Skullius.

"Follow me, Festos."

Chapter 217: An Audience With Authorities

The old man walked a distance and the Discount Human followed until he saw the man stop.

Skullius felt tense.

Incredibly tense.

The old man turned and smiled at him, emitting a calm yet deadly presence. Mana flowed in a serene wave around his body, a subtle heat blowing in it as it swirled.

In this serene wave of mana, Skullius felt like there were hundreds of thousands of angry and crazy powerful beasts swimming within.

Was it merely the feeling his mana gave or was it real?

He couldn't tell and neither could he entertain such a thought for long.

His [Elevated Mana Manipulation] allowed him to notice these details that hadn't been present when he had met this man before.

Perhaps the man had wanted to present a less intimidating image that time.

"Come to think of it, I'd rather not go through the trouble of walking down some stairs again. The one who rushed to tell me of your return was not as subtle as I'd hoped," Terian said, his words not making sense for Skullius.

'So... what do you want me to do?' the Discount Human thought.

As the old man whose name was Terian, looked at Skullius, he couldn't help but wonder if this was the same person he had seen just two days ago.

It was impolite to point it out but such a contrast was incredibly daunting.

The crowds in the hall all remained silent as they watched the two, Jarek's never leaving the interaction.

The old man extended his hand to Skullius and the Discount Human figured that Terian wanted him to grab it, and so he did.

The moment his hand fell into the crusty yet warm hand of the old man, Skullius felt like he had fallen into a deep void!

His vision darkened for but a moment and in the next, he found himself in a large, well furnished room where two men sat while one woman stood.

It took a few seconds for Skullius to clearly grasped what had happened.

'The hell?'

Wasn't he just in the hall?

How did he get here?!

Was it teleportation?!

Skullius focused and saw the images around him get clearer. Terian was standing beside him, grasping his hand and he quickly withdrew it.

"I apologise for the sudden transit but an audience to clear up the situation with you is required," said Terian as he then extended his hand, respectfully presenting the two men who sat down.

"Don't be so tense, Festos. We just want to speak to you. Be at ease," Silrat said with a casual smile that didn't make Skullius feel at ease at all.

Erkus merely nodded with a light in his eyes that heavy suggested authority.

Damilla gave Skullius a harsh look as if she had already deemed him as the culprit responsible for the inexplicable fire at the College of the Esteemed which gave the Discount Human a hard time when it came to settling in this place that had some high authority figures.

"Please, sit," said Terian as he pointed to a chair that was opposite Erkus and Silrat.

'Alright. Calm down you sockethole and do as they say,' Skullius thought to himself.

He walked over and sat down at the chair he had been assigned while trying to withstand the gaze of Damilla.

Why was he here?

Was it because of the library incident?

Skullius knew he hadn't tended to that matter exceedingly well but to think that it would return to bite him so soon was... kind of unexpected.

'If it's really about that... I should have thought it through well enough...' he thought.

Dealing with humans was always going to be different from dealing with Moronic Undead, unfortunately.

This circumstance was already starting to make him feel like it was him, against the world.

A lump of saliva squirmed in Skullius' throat.

He was wearing his spatial ring right now.

What if he was thoroughly investigated and Red Rage, whom he had decided to hide in the ring when he was in the city was found?!

Or worse yet, if the Null Devil's Aegis of Damnation was found?!

Would he really escape this in the same way he had done back in Eofel?

"Festos. It is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Silrat. I am the Head of the Guilds Association in Inhone City and this is the City Lord, Erkus Savont. I know you're fairly new here but we have been looking forward to meet with you.

In fact, Erkus and I were having a debate over who would get to speak to you first the other day but it seems none of us will be winning that bet, haha," Silrat said with a gentle smile.

Skullius merely smiled back sheepishly as he simply couldn't relax before he knew what the status on his safety was.

Erkus cut in upon seeing Skullius' still tense expression.

"It would seem that you still feel pressured by our presence. That much I can understand. Well, to cut to the chase, we'd like to start by saying we appreciate your presence as a Mage in Inhone City. There's a severe lack of Energy Formers among our forces and seeing an addition like you, whichever side you choose to join is a welcome benefit.

Please, accept our welcome into the great folds of power in the system."

Skullius nodded, not knowing what to say in this situation.

Erkus had an undisguised and distinguished air about him that made it easier for Skullius to associate with, compared to Silrat whose presence was like that of a snake.

Silrat kept eyeing the multiple dull Halos around him with a slight smile that gave Skullius' cosmetic flesh the chills.

"Naturally, if it was only that much, we would have met you on different occasions but there is a pressing matter that we would like you to shed some light on for us," Erkus said with a gentle voice as he leaned in from his seat.

'There it is!' Skullius tensed up.

"Alright," Skullius said.

"I believe you have already had this conversation with Terian and Damilla over here and they have made efforts to verify your account. Your current teacher, Oliviana Highdirk attested to the fact that what you claimed was true and we verified your enrolment into the College of Battle Arts. Basically, we do not doubt your words."

"However, what we intend to do now is to verify if there wasn't anything we missed. Perhaps by using you, as the sole survivor of the incident who was there when all later events occurred, we can see glimpses into what happened that day through Damilla's special abilities."

'The bloody flesh are you saying here, bro?' Skullius questioned but didn't show any of his emotions on his face.

"We will her peak into the past using you as an anchor to search for the oddity that has escaped our grasp. In the worst case scenario, it may be a powerful enemy," Erkus stressed as Damilla walked forward with her gaze not leaving Skullius.

'Jeez...!' Skullius grumbled as he saw the unveiled suspicion in the woman's eyes.

"This won't take long. If you're not guilty, you have nothing to worry about," Damilla said as she reached out her hand towards Skullius.

In all honestly, the Discount Human was extremely stressed.

Because he was GUILTY!

Naturally, he was the suspect and the inciter of the incident.

How was he going to get out of this?!

Was there no break for his character?!

Chapter 218: Divining On The Discount Human

Divining.

This was a technique only available to Diviners, individuals that hailed from the Energy Forming category of classes.

Generally, Energy Forming referred to the ability to freely harness energies in order to not only wield it, but to listen and gain information from it, communicate with it and to derive its origin.

Form and Arma Users mainly dealt with application and thus their use of energies was more superficial when compared to the intense and in-depth quality of utilisation that came with Energy Forming.

This wasn't enough to shed more light on Energy Forming still.

Divining usually started with requiring contact with specific items to gain any semblance of a trace of history or in higher level circumstances, the future.

One would either taste, feel, see or hear details of what they were trying to divine.

For most when starting, it wasn't a choice as whatever they managed to grasp, they held onto.

As Diviners grew, they could more easily search for what they wanted, though contact with something that referred them to the time and place they required was also needed.

It was only when one transcended a large gulf that they would graduate from this and begin to appreciate Divining at a level where they no longer needed to come into contact with anything to divine.

Damilla was at a sufficiently high stage of Divining as she could freely choose which sense she wished to connect to when divining however, she preferred to experience everything through sight, with the other senses being outside of her comfort zone.

Back at the College of the Esteemed, Damilla had used the heated air around the library to try and get the overview of what had happened as it seemed that a fire type spell had been used.

This was also her way of trying to transcend using objects as conduits for her Divining.

However, she had found nothing. Everything kept turning dark after a certain point in the chaotic scenes she saw.

She had then tried to use the building, the burnt ground and even some of the people who had been there at the scene as well as the corpse of the Knight who had 'saved' Skullius, but all to no avail.

The result was the same.

Now, however, it was different. At least she hoped so.

She had the permission to touch Skullius and use him to find out what really went on.

The reason such a thing required permission was because it could be... uncomfortable for the victim of Divining.

Damilla laid her thumb on Skullius' forehead and took a deep breath.

She was really curious to find out.

Perhaps her persistence on the matter was just an annoyance that would turn out to be unfounded.



Even Terian doubted if there was anything useful they could find on Skullius which made her incredibly angry.

'Senile fool!' she thought.

At the same time, Skullius was sweating internally.

This was it.

This could be the thing that did the thing that ended up with the thing he didn't want!

And what bigger of a thing did he see other death and worse yet, meeting his half-maker again.

Somanda.

'Should I try to lie? No! That would probably not work. They intend on doing this wierd thing to me either way!'

Skullius didn't know what Divining was exactly, but he could kind of get what Erkus had said.

All he knew was, some mysteries about him were about to be revealed, which he didn't like at all. That was extremely dangerous!

'Damn it! How much will she be able to find out?! Will she see that I'm actually a skeleton with fake flesh?! Will she see what I've been up to since yesterday? Or since I got here?! No!

That can't happen! Should I use [Basic Evil Invasion]?!' Skullius thought, his eyes darting towards Terian whose eyes were flashing down at him like a tower light, devoid of the same accusing glint as Damilla's but vividly paying attention.

The term Mage to Skullius was unrecognisable when he first came to Aigas, but with some clarification from Frock, Skullius had gotten to know of a likely substitute that he was familiar with.

Spell caster.

Back in Deadmanland, Somanda had many spellcasting undead at the level of Death Knights or higher under his command and since he figured that these were pretty similar to Mages, he had managed to understand what a Mage was capable of.

'Damn it!'

And he didn't like it.

This guy, Terian, could probably tell if and when he used a skill, which would just make Skullius appear more suspicious.

Furthermore, everyone in here had a blue core with the exception of the City Lord.

On top of this, Damilla and Terian's cores shone like mini suns, flaring with an intensity of elites.

This wasn't a situation he could escape from.

'The only card left for me to play now is probably to just try to explain whatever this woman sees, right? The great story-teller Skullius can easily swindle anyone with words right?!'

Skullius didn't believe his own words.

Mana surged from Damilla as she activated her Divining.

Her eyes turned white as she peeked into the past, her vision travelling through the folds of restrictions that stood protectively around sounds and sights of what had already passed.

Skullius waited anxiously, beginning to feel like something was being rattled within him.

He began to sweat and it seemed like his body was being heated and shaken up by an unknown force.

Everything he experienced didn't extend beyond that though, but it was definitely not something one would be comfortable experiencing.

Skullius could partly ignore much of it as he couldn't feel what dealt on his body, but some of it seemed to rattle even his soul!

He peeked at Damilla's face and saw her frowning and tossing her head this way and that.

She seemed to be having difficulties navigating and searching for what she wanted to find.

Skullius didn't know whether or not to celebrate.

For the time being, he could only rejoice at seeing Damilla seemingly not find anything.

Would his fortune coming in clutch?

Damilla frowned deeper and deeper as she looked in until she finally reeled in shock, backing away hurriedly from Skullius!

She gazed at him with wide eyes which caused the Discount Human to want to bet it all on one move that could possibly let him escape!

Mana was beginning to churn in his core.

Terian, Erkus and Silrat narrowed their eyes and paid attention to Damilla.

They didn't immediately go hostile on Skullius as they weren't sure what Damilla had seen.

The woman with short, blonde hair turned pale.

"You.... what in the world are you?!"

Chapter 219: A Mage's Display

Damilla's words caused a wave of both confusion and apprehension in the room. They could mean anything.

Terian was the most confused.

As per his thoughts, this could only go either of two ways.

Either Skullius was guilty, in which case Damilla would be elated and spend the rest of her days rubbing it in his aged face, a possibility that he genuinely hoped to not be true.

Or, Skullius could be innocent, in which case Damilla would just sulk to herself and watch Silrat and Erkus gush over Skullius' class while brushing off her instinctual observation.

With that in mind, what was with this excessive reaction?

"What's wrong?" he asked Damilla who shot him a glance, seemingly not yet recovered from what she had seen. The middle aged woman then blurted as she pointed at Skullius, "He did it! He's the one who caused the incident, but..."

Skullius' silvery irises shrunk as he reflexively tried to activate a skill!

Unfortunately for the Discount Human, while this action was still in the form of a thought in his small head, a blazing circle of orange fire roared from the tiled floor and surrounded him and his seat, illuminating the entire room with sunny light!

From the gushing flames, a massive creature, its entire build being one of the scorching orange element emerged and clenched its jaw hard at Skullius who was still seated, yet to even act!

Only the creature's head had appeared from under Skullius, its image being something that utterly terrified the Discount Human!

It was a shark!

When the rows of blazing teeth bit Skullius from both sides, the Discount Human did not see himself take damage as he had expected!

Instead, he saw flames flicker over his entire being like resplendent vortices and with this effect applied, he could no longer move anything other his head!

...!

At the same time, mana from his core refused to budge, resisting his will for it to move it so that he could manipulate it into different forms!

When wisps of it did move, the flames that circled around his body would... burn them.

Burn mana.

'WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THIS?!' Skullius screamed in his mind, panicking.

He had never felt something like this in a while!

Something other than just overwhelming strength!

He momentarily shook as he found himself in this perilous circumstance.

The shark's fiery teeth that locked onto him from the chest down, leaving on his chest and head untouched while effectively nullifying his vision of anything of his body beyond that point made him realise just how screwed he was.

Terian's calm gaze was locked onto Skullius with his mana gushing around his body.

He emitted a sigh of disappointment as he gazed at the Discount Human, Erkus and Silrat similarly having the same expressions.

"And here I was hoping that I had found someone I could nurture for the actual good of the city for a change. I must say, I'm very disappointed," Terian said.

Strangely, Silrat still had on his sly smile but Erkus wore a furious visage that needed no words to interpret as his current state of mind was not hidden.

"Indeed. I can't believe someone with such a rare class, a practitioner of the energies, would do something so unsightly. Ending many lives, destroying property afforded to the commonfolk and for what? Enlighten me," Erkus said in a subdued voice but his tone was rather chilly.

"To even be bold enough to try and cast a spell in our presence, haha, you're quite brave, Festos," Silrat added.

This little detail had gone a long way in verifying Damilla's words as a shaky individual usually had something to hide.

Skullius sweated, but all the water he expelled from his body was toasted by the heat.

He was lost for words.

As Erkus, Terian and Silrat stood, surrounding him, he felt so little.

"Wait..." Damilla's voice echoed from behind the three men.

She still had on a petrified expression as she gazed at Skullius.

Terian was confused.

What else was there?

"What is it?" he asked.

"The things I saw... this man... he... he seems to be accompanied by an inhuman creature that possesses a strange power! He brought it into the city! Something tall and dark with sparks of lightning all over!"

Erkus and Silrat looked at each other, then at Skullius whose eyes opened so wide that they threatened to spill from his sockets!

'Is she talking about my Penetrator form?!' he thought with his nonexistent heart beginning to exceedingly fast!

Terian's body flared with a mighty presence, the energy characteristic that Skullius had felt over the man minutes ago, turning out to not be some form of imagination but reality as an array of wild forms, crafted with white light of mana surged from his body with a tremendous heat while exploding upwards!

The old man's hair danced in the air while his calm eyes spat out orange flames that engulfed the room, burning the air such that it swayed but didn't touch the furniture or the four other people that were present!

At this point, Skullius was shaking.

This...

This was the power of a Mage on display!

Merely on display without the intent to harm... yet.

"Boy. I'm too old to engage in prolonged questioning. Your actions have heavily defended the fact that you are responsible for damage to precious life and property. That is a heavy crime, even for precious human resources like Energy Formers.

However, to collude with profane creatures is a very serious offense that warrants a fate worse than death..." the old man said in a low voice that wasn't so low.

"Now. I will only request this of you ONCE. If you fail to acquiesce, I shall rend something of yours from you permanently."

Terian said as his hand stretched out to Skullius, seamlessly entered through the flame shark's body and touching the Discount Human's chest under the flames.

"I will destroy your core and steer the rest of your Direction as I see fit."

...!

Skullius felt not the heat on his skin, but the burning sensation that scalded his core as Terian laid his hand on his chest.

After having said his piece and giving evidence as to the truthfulness of his words, Terian finally spoke of what he requested from the Discount Human.

"Tell me. Who are you and what is this creature that you have brought into this city?"

Chapter 220: Shattered Resolve

There would not be another bout of questions, as declared by Terian whose image right now scared the null living crap out of Skullius.

The Discount Human's mind turned blank as he literally couldn't think of anything at this moment other than to be submissive and perhaps answer the question truthfully.

The coercion by a powerful force.

Skullius had first experienced such a thing in Aigas by the hands of Azila, the Great Mane Mountain Ape.

Now, he was being subjected to a ferocious might that demanded the truth and nothing but the truth.

Damilla looked at Skullius with a more relaxed expression now, but she couldn't help still get lost in thought from what she had witnessed during her dive.

Because this hadn't been a situation where she had been Divining on a hostile subject, she had limited herself to not peeking at much else other than what was needed.

Privacy was to be respected after all.



During her session, she had only seen blotches as scenes as most of them that actually concerned Skullius were blurred out, as if a tangle of black and gold resisted, while another foreign energy refused to let her see his full human figure.

It was bizarre.

She had managed to see that Skullius was behind the library incident after witnessing, with great difficulty, flames roaring from his blocked out body!

There were many things involved that kept cutting away, like a large and terrifying piece of armour that housed another figure that she couldn't properly see but those were insignificant, at least as she saw it.

What she did manage to see glimpses of, was the tall figure with crackling lightning over its figure as it sat in what looked like an inn with various books that looked to belong to the College by virtue of the insignia plastered on their covers.

With this much, even though in mere glimpses, she had managed to identify Skullius as the menace as she had been saying all along!

Damilla sighed as she cast a glance at Terian's figure covered in a burst of raging white mana.

'I guess I can count on you sometimes,' she thought with a light smile flickering over her expression for a brief moment.

She was grateful that Terian had managed to pick up on the fact that she was having difficulties Divining more details about Skullius, which is why the old man had suddenly started intimidating the Discount Human and asking him to spill who he was instead of asking Damilla to continue Divining.

Erkus and Silrat while illuminated by the glowing flames gazed at Skullius, waiting for his response to the question.

As they knew nothing about him, they didn't know what he would do, but answering the question instead of getting his core destroyed seemed like the most reasonable that he would take.

Skullius merely gazed ahead.

It was over.

If his core was destroyed, he would be done for.

Maybe if he could freely summon his Penetrator form, there would be a chance, but no.

It didn't seem like things would devolve in that direction.

'I... I'm screwed. There's no way I can escape this...' Skullius thought as he gulped.

'I don't know how much that woman saw but...'

Skullius stuttered even in his internal monologue.

He couldn't even look at all these people as he felt himself continuously lose confidence.

He thought he was getting smarter, outwitting this world's structure fairly well against different odds that were stacked against him.

He had started getting deluded into thinking that the only true obstacles that he faced were the Doom Factors and perhaps UNCoddled but now, he was proved wrong.

Strong.

He was far from that word.

All words seized forming sentences in Skullius' mind as the raging mana barreled against his skin viciously from Terian!

His resolve and will was challenged and shattered by the gap in strength.

At this moment, Skullius wouldn't want to get his core destroyed. At least if he could live through this moment, perhaps he would be spared.

If he told the whole story, maybe...

"I am..." Skullius began, intending to tell the whole truth as if it could all be Divined anyway, then what was use in lying?

"I am... or... I was an undea-"

OOOM!

A sliver of energy coiled around his finger right when he was about to blurt everything!

Skullius paused as it took a moment for him to realise what was happening!

'Uh...'

It was...

Null Life Essence!

The silent and presenceless energy swooned as it vibrated against his spatial storage ring that wrapped the upper part of his middle finger which was hidden under the flames of the shark's body!

'Red Rage?' Skullius thought.

For a moment, Skullius' broken resolve was rejuvenated and he tossed his gaze to Terian who seemed to be waiting for him to continue.

'Did he notice?'

As Skullius gazed at the old man, he discovered that Terian couldn't sense the Null Life Essence brimming around his finger!

'He didn't!' Skullius was shocked.

Even this terrifying old man was oblivious to the Null Life Essence!

As Skullius was still coming to terms with this detail, realising that surely, in all his use of [Null Extraction], no one so far had been able to perceive it through sense or sight as blue lights hailed from dead bodies and into his hand, another shocking thing occurred!

His spatial storage ring became encased in a thick layer of Null Life Essence while at the same time, another ring actually popped from this spatial storage ring and settled on Skullius' left finger!

'Red bro!' Skullius screamed in his mind, getting what the Pelvis Boar-Man was up to while trapped in the ring!

The Apostle was masking the ring he was stored in with Null Life Essence!

This ring had many of Skullius' secrets and it was very important for it to remain hidden!

'That's right! That little bastard said he could manipulate Null Life Essence!'

Skullius assumed that what his Apostle hoped to achieve by covering the spatial storage ring with Null Life Essence was Red Rage's way of preventing it from being detected, though he wasn't sure how that would work

The other ring which had appeared on his other finger was actually the ring he had given to Red Rage, which, he also assumed, was meant to be a decoy!

But hold up!

Skullius was so confused.

Since he couldn't communicate with his Apostle at this moment he couldn't ask but there were so many questions!

Indeed, the Apostle had said that he could now use Null Life Essence but...

How in the world could he expel objects from the ring?!

And how could he do all this stuff with Null Life Essence?!

"Well?" the thunderous voice of Terian spoke, shattering Skullius' safe thought haven.

The Discount Human was immediately brought back into the real world where he was minutes away from a possible tragic end.

Fear gripped him again, but the Discount Human collected himself, feeling a bit of bravery stemming from Red Rage's display.

'Come on, Skullius! Don't lose hope yet! That prodigy bastard that sees you as a god is still fighting! You can't fall here! Come on!' Skullius psyched himself up while thanking his Apostle.

He looked up at the authorities before him, his mouth opening as he spoke in a firm but trembling voice.

"I really am at fault and I apologise. But... there's more to my story. The truth is..." he said, his face showing a distinct despair.

"I am cursed."