

Undead 231

Chapter 231: Festos After A Day Plus Six: Power

Skullius took in deep breaths as a sharp light died down from his body, strings of steam rising from his sweaty (watery) muscles hidden under a linen shirt.

He would never take it off when others were around as they would naturally question what the dark tattoos on his chest were.

"Some Mage you are..." Oliviana who was five meters away from him also breathing rapidly said while shaking her hand and standing up straight from her lowered stance. "You seem to gravitate towards close combat more than actual magic. Or perhaps it's you just holding back?"

Skullius flashed a smile as he also dropped his guard.

"Maybe a bit of both," he said.

The two were in a large room much like one of the evaluation spaces that Skullius had been taken to by Jac to assess his prowess.

There were grey walls that were chipped but sturdy along with a dark floor which resisted much of the force from powerful mana reinforced attack forms.

There was some good lighting within the room, which made every corner clear and enhanced the experience, though it could be tweaked as one saw fit.

"Hmph. When you put it like that it really makes it hard for me to not actively try to help you of my own free will."

Oliviana could admit that Skullius had left a bad impression on her when they had first met. She had felt insulted by how he had looked at her chest disappointedly and as someone who had grown to be sensitive about such her stature, it was really easy for her to get biased off of one wrong move from an individual.

Now however, her thoughts had started to change.

Ever since Silrat approached her, offering her not only a large sum of coin but the promise of any request she desired which he immediately granted as it was wholly within his means, Oliviana had discovered quite a few things about Skullius during the seven-day training period.

First, was that he was apparently a criminal.

Second, was that he wasn't a swordsman as he had claimed.

Third, this bastard was cursed, and there was a risk associated with... associating with him.

These details were shared after she had decided to continue training him and for her, while she wasn't overly concerned with morals, she did have boundaries.

Killing indiscriminately was one of them.

Thus, her initial attitude when training Skullius this time around was extremely harsh.

On the first day, she had not held back her punches, giving the Discount Human heavy blows as she instructed him clearly.

To her surprise, this man didn't react with grunts or groans. Instead, he looked exceedingly focused as he stood and took the stance which she would have told him!

On top of this, he had already mastered [Mana Shroud] and having seemingly evolved it into something else!

Ridiculous!

The silvery eyes of the Discount Human with a figure that was vastly different from when she had last seen him didn't show the hate and fury she had expected for a murderer. Or the cold and nonchalance towards life.

Instead, they strangely held an innocence together.

Neither evil nor pure.

The man seemed to simply exist with what he knew.

What was right was right, what was wrong was wrong.

This detail had lessened her hostility towards Skullius somewhat and she began instructing him properly.

Of the 18 hours per day that she would train him, the first 9 were dedicated to hand-to-hand combat.

Oliviana taught Skullius all the basic techniques she knew and the Discount Human greedily absorbed them all, becoming semi-proficient in them in a few hours!

The rest of the hours would be dedicated to swordsmanship.

It boggled Oliviana why Skullius would want to learn this, as she new very well that there were such things as Mages who preferred close combat while utilising their magic, but ones that used swords, seeking out their true depths like swordsman?

Was it some kind of Advanced class?

She didn't know.

On the fourth day of their training, Skullius was already exhibiting more advanced forms of techniques in both swordsmanship and hand-to-hand combat!

Nothing extraordinary but for someone who just started learning, it was ridiculous!

And to make matters worse, the Discount Human asked for her help in perfecting a few techniques of his own.

Perhaps help was a strong word. The Discount Human didn't ask, but directly tried them out on his tutor who had almost been caught off guard and sustained minor injuries.

How could Oliviana possibly believe that this man was simply ordinary?

With each day, he kept changing physically, his body becoming more robust and his speed gradually increasing along with his form.

She also noticed that Skullius preferred to be excessive during their training sessions.

He would usually run around a lot without much rest while exhibiting some rather quick speeds and during hand-to-hand combat training, the Discount Human would fling as many punches and kicks as he could with his newly learned proper form every chance he got.

It was strange for Oliviana but Skullius would usually emerge with a smile after each training, as if he was seeing something that everyone else couldn't.

Which he was.

Right now, Oliviana couldn't deny that she saw Skullius more favourably.

What else could draw people in than such a hard worker?

"Should we stop here for today?" Oliviana asked.

"That's fine," Skullius said as he started to stretch.

It didn't exactly do him any good but he had begun to learn more human mannerism through his interactions, particularly Oliviana.

As he did this, he looked behind Oliviana and saw something that made him frown.

"He's here again?" he said begrudgingly.

Oliviana turned and saw a particularly old man standing there as he gazed at Skullius while nodding sagely.

The female instructor sighed and turned back to the Discount Human.

"I can't stop him from coming. He said he wanted to see if you're regretting your decisions yet," Oliviana said.

Skullius clicked his tongue.

This old man might fade from the memory of others, but to Skullius, he would never forget that face.

This was the old man who had given him trouble back at then at the gates of the College of Battle Arts.

A single eye open, a hunchback and half a head of white hair... that continued to moonwalk backwards. This was the second time that this old man had appeared here, watching him and Oliviana spar only to walk away again, which made Skullius wonder who the hell gave him permission to enter anyway.

"I see you didn't walk the path to regret. I was sure you would cry and run away. Oliviana tells me you have much potential," the old man said.

"Uh... potential in what? Gardening?" Skullius retorted.

"Oh that too. I could get you some tutelage."

"I'm fine."

Skullius waved his hands in dismissal.

He recalled that the old man had told him that he was but a gardener when they first met.

"Don't regret it later, hahaha!" the old man chortled as he began walking away.

Skullius watched as the old man left, his eyes following the old man's movement until he vanished from sight.

Why was that old man so obsessed with regret?

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The news happening all around Feinheath, in particular Pelian wasn't lost to Skullius but he didn't focus on this as the progress he had made was simply astounding.

First off, the Discount Human had decided to use the Enriching gems over the seven days as with a bit of research, he found that using Enriching gems changed the looks of other creatures as well, but not as drastically as him unless there was a lot of change that needed to be addressed.

At this point in time, as he sat in his cell after sparring with Oliviana, the only time he was allowed to leave the enclosed space, he had finished absorbing all the purple-red gems, the pure red ones being the only ones that remained.

He would proceed to absorb them right after checking out the progress with his skills.

With this aspect...

Skullius grinned while locking his fingers.

"It's amazing what a can Discount Human can do if he abuses his newfound endurance," Skullius said.

He had been practising so intensely that most of the skills he paid particular attention to had actually evolved.

[Quick Strike] which he spammed during the 18 hours of practise had become [Flash Flicker].

[Great Rush] which he practised by excessively running around during spars had become [Great Rush I].

[Brawn] which had been the first to evolve since it went very well with hand-to-hand combat, had transformed into [Raw Impact].

The last to evolve was [Mana Shield], after the relentless attacks from Oliviana and Skullius attempts at manipulating it manually to focus it on certain points that he aimed to receive the damage with, becoming [Guard Light].

This was the skill he relied on the most during spars after [Elevated Mana Manipulation] which also levelled up crazily.

Him using the abundant mana from his Penetrator form greatly helped with this.

This was the most basic of the progress that Skullius however, as he had more profound results to show from these seven days were from his attempt at fusing the evolved skills plus [Mana Force] which, unfortunately didn't work out.

Apparently, seamlessly combining skills required a lot more than seven days and much more knowledge on the composition of skills.

That said, it wasn't a complete wash as Skullius had actually managed to learn to seamlessly apply all these skills at once to create what one would call a pseudo skill.

A conscious activation of multiple skills simultaneously that made it look like a singular skill.

The result was ultimately weaker than the seamless combination of the skills into one but was still useful.

"I'll eventually get it right, I guess," Skullius mumbled to himself.

This wasn't what he was most proud of though, as there was something else that made all his hardwork worthwhile...

Chapter 232: The 10th Task

[Crude World Projection] had suffered some grand abuse.

Skullius had spammed it to an insane degree, using it to bolster his ability to manipulate [Evil Darkness] at a higher level. He also used it to refine his handling of darkness so that he could use other methods that didn't relate to constantly creating a cloud of darkness.

He aimed to get more skills from the element, as after his affinity with it had increased, the profound results it had shown during the past days was nothing short of ridiculous.

With the things he had unlocked from it alone, he was stronger than himself prior to this stretch of time.

A few new applications were now present for him to control from [Evil Darkness].

The use of [Crude World Projection] was now much easier for Skullius as he move vast distances with the ghastly dark form he would acquire.

In fact, the Discount Human was busy preparing to complete the last Task before the Trial to enter the Advancement Stage which pertained this ability from the Fruit of World Myths.

The 10th Task.

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Exp: 256,000/256,000

Tenth Task: Cross a distance of 10 miles in the Projected form

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This would prove to be a bit difficult.

Ten miles wasn't a joke. He had to cross the entire city from where he was, plus several bundles of change.

The Discount Human wasn't sure if he could do that, unless he flew at high speeds, which was possible for him.

The 9th Task had also been challenging, but not too difficult to achieve as it also pertained to his Insurgent Magnus skills.

For this pending Task, Skullius decided to use the remaining red gems to further bolster his strength so that he could get an added advantage when using [Crude World Projection].

The ability seemed to heavily rely on his body's constitution, weirdly enough.

Skullius assumed it was because the Fruit of World Myths was in his body.

He took out one of the gems, seeing its circular shape with a pulsing red that had numerous lights swirling within.

It was quite mesmerising.

He ultimately wasted no time, beginning to absorb the energy that nested within the Enriching gems which gushed into him like a raging tide!

Skullius was overwhelmed by the energy to the point of almost toppling over with an erotic moan atop as this was simply too satisfying even for him who barely felt physical sensations.

Forty of these red gems awaited him and if all of them had energy like this....

[Your flesh and bones are augmented. A factor of 3 applies]

"Oh! Three?!"

Three whole points of constitution!

Skullius was enthralled by the figure he saw so much that he quickly calmed himself and got to absorbing the energy from the gems faster.

This proved to be a slower task than normal as the energy in these gems felt like vast swaths of syrup drooping over him.

This time, there was no subtlety when it came to the changes on his body. His muscles wriggled as they readjusted and enhanced themselves, becoming more toned and well-shaped.

Skullius hair grew an inch longer while his face gained more detail, his eyes gaining an additional twinkle.

Skullius didn't pay all this any mind as he went to absorb all forty gems after roughly an hour and a half.

Then..

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

[Strength increases by 30]

[Agility increases by 30]

[Endurance increases by 30]

[Health increases by 30]

[Mana increases by 30]

"Phew..."

What a haul of stats.

On top of the stats he had gotten from the purple-red gems, Skullius was stacked when it came to his physical abilities now.

The influx of energy caused his body to tremble and beef up slightly as he took it all in with a grin.

This was it!

Undeniable growth.

He was on the right path!

After the energy settled, Skullius' appearance gained another dramatic change.

His eyes turned complete silver with a dash of twinkling light while his auburn hair reached his chin with a healthy lustre.

His skin spotted sparkles as if made of polished brass, which made Skullius wonder how everyone didn't look like this?

Was this because his body was fake to begin with?

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

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

"Jeez. If this keeps going on, I might end up evolving this skill. I never thought I'd see the day though. Why don't I feel much of a change?"

This Supreme disguise skill was on Level 5 now but Skullius didn't feel any changes.

"We'll see when it reaches level 10. Maybe they'll be something new then. Now."

Skullius set his sights on the agenda he was aiming for.

He took a few glances at his body before closing his eyes and saying the relevant words needlessly.

"Crude World Projection."

His Projection shot from his body like a missile as Skullius didn't intend on wasting time or showing down.

Unlike the first time he had used this ability back in Eofel, he had remained hidden until he gained the visible Projection form.

Strangely, it could attack using [Evil Darkness] and the Discount Human wagered that the same would be true for [Just Light] as well which he hadn't had much luck with.

Even as he spammed [Basic Light Production], the results were dismal.

It was as if the element just didn't want to surrender to him even when it came to production.

The issue as Skullius had surmised, was that it had something to do with his non-existent affinity to the element.

He would have to find a way to connect with that one.

For now, his dark figure flew up into the sky through physical matter as he didn't want to be seen.

He wasn't sure if he could be sensed as he had never dared to wander too far from his cell in this form during his seven-days of training.

The black, white and grey view shrouded the world, people appearing with different shades of desaturated colours.

In Eofel, Skullius had inferred that the differences in colour were supposed to be related to how much righteousness and evil one had within them, but he didn't understand these concepts better than the next person.

'Hmm...' Skullius thought as he looked far to his right. 'If I just go straight at full speed, I might be able to reach the ten mile mark in no time.'

Skullius cocked back and shot in the direction he intended.

He whizzed through the air like a bullet, making sure that his altitude was high enough for him to be obscure.

In all truth, he had travelled quite the distance with his upward ascent already.

He flashed through the winds which he couldn't feel as the dull colours raged around him.

Scenes flashed past as he flew while he himself still felt full of energy.

'Heh, I can do this all day. Wait, what?!' Skullius once again shook his head at another unintentional phrase that bolted out of his mouth.

As he flashed into the distance, something peculiar caught his eye.

A pitch black figure was travelling slowly down below.

This was the darkest thing he had ever seen since he had started using [Crude World Projection]!

Curiosity burned within him and Skullius thought to take a closer look from afar.

Chapter 233: Is It A Bird? Is It A Plane? No, It's A Freakin' Shadow!

What could this be?

Was it a human?

Moving through the rough, de-grassed lands away from Inhone City was a lone carriage pulled along by two horses which had a dash of grayish back to them.

It was strange.

While the carriage itself seemed to be a hazy grey in colour, the figure within was so dark that its colour stood out.

The second most eye catching thing within the carriage was the two bundles wrapped in cloth tightly. They were in a storage space in the back part of the carriage.

With normal vision, one wouldn't be able to tell what was wrapped up within them, but Skullius saw it clearly in a hazy grey colour as well which made him squint.

Corpses.

They were dead bodies wrapped up in the pieces of cloth.

'Now that's fishy...' Skullius thought. He knew suspicious activity when he saw it. And this was it.

Naturally, he had all the reason to believe that whoever this was, was not a goody two-shoes.

The incredibly shady setup didn't look like something that should be let slide.

However, Skullius decided not to pursue this matter.

For one reason, he didn't want to waste time with different agendas and this wasn't his problem.

The other was, well...

There was a cruel and raging energy that leaked from this figure!

It was different from Terian's controlled raw energy that stemmed from both his class and stage or from a powerful core.

No, it was outright malicious as didn't seem to simply be from power accumulated through a core.

The Discount Human let this go as he rushed up ahead after taking one last glance at the dark figure.

He flashed at an insane speed over the stretch of distance covering two additional miles in a few short minutes!

This was going well.

Below, Skullius saw the thousands of people in different settlements all with a variety of colour, mixes of the dark and white colour staining almost every individual he could see.

It was... beautiful to see from up here.

This was one of the few times that Skullius considered something to be beautiful since he came here.

He was used to calling the dreadful designs of Somanda's tower beautiful and attractive and not this mash of dull colour with the small existences walking with it in them.

How quickly he had strayed from the path of undeath.

While enjoying the view, the Projected Discount Human felt a tug at his body.

He suddenly started to decelerate as a slight pull drew him back, forcing his speed to dip despite his efforts.

'I knew it wouldn't be so simple. I'm guessing I can't be too far away from my body even after these enhancements?' Skullius thought.

But he would power through anyway.

How else would he surpass his limits?

How else had he been able to break through the seemingly insurmountable challenges that had brought themselves before him time and time again other than through going beyond his limits... plus the obscure favour that Serenity had talked about which supposedly battled his atrocious luck.

Had he truly been unlucky since the Tremur Forest though?

Well... one could argue, yes.

From being accused of being a Green Neolist member to almost dying while fighting Jackpot who could literally control luck, to the library incident and how it was coming back to bite him in his fake ass, to the near death experience with Guddhar and all.

All these might seem like a casual hero's journey features but even the most protagonist amongst protagonists didn't get into all these within a mere six days!

Skullius wasn't constantly in trouble.

The Discount Human struggled on, pushing against the resistance that sought to pull him back!

He crossed another miles worth of distance which brought him up to five miles covered, the Discount Human continuing on even as the tug at his Projected figure grew!

Sadly, he couldn't use any of his skills in this state or interact with physical matter as he had left his core and body behind!

He could only manipulate the elements that had already been conjured by his skills beforehand.

'HNGH!' Skullius' Projected form showed vague outlines of his face scrunching up as he put in more effort!

With each bout of flight over a vast distance, his speed reduced by half and now, he was barely able to finish a mile in an hour!

The Discount Human sincerely hoped nothing bad was happening back where he had left his body as that would truly be atrocious.

He hadn't shared many of his abilities with Oliviana and Silrat and didn't intend to tell them about [Crude World Projection] because that would entail telling them about the Fruit of World Myths.

Fortunately, the ToE he was engaged in didn't mentioned anything about him disclosing more information about himself.

FSHH!

8 miles!

At this point, Skullius felt himself come to a complete halt as the pull on him grew stronger than the strength of his flight!

'Not when I'm just two away from the goal!' Skullius groaned while exerting more of his force.

The strength he gained from this boost only earned him a dismal level of speed which he soldiered through with still.

Fortunately, what Skullius had wasn't a physical body and fatigue wasn't exactly what he would feel.

Instead it was a heavy sensation that tried to pull him back to his body.

After a prolonged struggle, Skullius finally reached the ninth mile, and the moment he passed, a dark, distorted chain shot through from the direction of Inhone City and clutched onto his back with a metal clink!

...!

'Crap!' Skullius exclaimed right before he was pulled back at a shocking speed over the distance he had crossed straight into his cosmetic body!

The sensation of his flesh returned and perhaps from shock, Skullius spun and knocked against the walls animatedly!

The Discount Human took a few moments to relax his mind before sitting up straight.

'I really failed, huh? What a troublesome Task,' he thought with a slight tone of frustration.

He was quite dejected, but not by much.

With a little more Enriching gems, he didn't see why he couldn't break through this barrier. It was just one more mile.

Another thing that he had found to be interesting was that while purple gems had the 1000+ limit, the limit for purple-red gems was above 2,500+.

He didn't know the limit for red gems, but it was bound to be higher than this.

'Well... on to refining other promising aspects of my strength then.'

Chapter 234: Your Presence Has Been Requested

A matter that many would question was how Skullius had been lucky enough to not be spotted in his Fulgurant Penetrator form while he was held in the cell.

While he would get training with Oliviana, he still had a few hours to stay in the cell.

Well, naturally as someone who did not want to be found out, especially by those two monsters Terian and Damilla, Skullius had devised a simple method to ward off half of the problem.

It was a desperate attempt really.

He had requested for Silrat to allow him to have the entirety of the second day of his training to himself.

Bound by the privacy clause he had promised with the Tie of Exchange, Silrat naturally concurred as his cunning mind didn't bother with such slight details. His end goal and benefits were still shining on the horizon, and grand they were.

In that day he had requested, Skullius waited out the activation of [Flesh It Like You Mean It] after it timed out, spending the entire day as a skeleton behind bars.

Of course Skullius had been apprehensive of suddenly being visited unexpectedly but no such thing had happened, as this was the very day when the news of the final decision about the pressing matter concerning the collusive arrangements with Opungale was released.

Matters pertaining to Skullius and his genocide case didn't hold a candle to the potential disasters that awaited Erkus and the other city Lords and thus, Erkus had been racking his brain along with the two high level Capital service personnel over what would be the next best steps.

Call it luck or chance.

Skullius was just glad that his plan ultimately worked.

When night came, he activated [Flesh It Like You Mean It], effectively creating a new timestamp for where the skill timed out; the time after his training with Oliviana where he retired to his cell.

It was unlikely for people to visit him during the time. At least there was a lesser chance of it happening.

This had saved him from the potential hassle.

During the following days, he had not seen the hot-headed woman and Terian, which allowed him to recover from his earlier experiences with the two.

Between travelling to meet with other City Lords and Governors to addressing the social unrest which spread to even the mercenaries who began to make move after move to secure their safety, the Capital service as a whole had its hands full.

Skullius had enjoyed the peace.

Sadly, that peace had finally come to an end as things had settled down quite a bit compared to five days ago.

As he had been dismissed by Oliviana rather early today, Skullius had started working himself to death again after his failed attempt at reaching the 10 mile mark while in his Projected.

It was in the midst of this inhuman training session when his benefactor walked in.

Silrat raised a brow when he saw Skullius, undoubtedly shocked by the drastic change in appearance that the Discount Human had undergone.

Even the look in the man's eyes had changed just from a mere six days since he saw him.

He hadn't been able to visit the Skullius in the past few days.

"Either you're eating a bit too much of your greens or the Enriching gems I gave you really compensated for, well... everything," he said with a chuckle.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Skullius asked in annoyed tone of voice.

"Nothing enough for you to be concerned about. I'm glad to see results."

Skullius spotted hints of exhaustion from Silrat who had had to tackle all the matters concerning the rise in misconduct in the Guilds Association.

The news had caused quite a few mercenaries to run away to larger cities in preparation for the possible responses of the other nations.

He had to deal with all this while mobilising the internal staff of the Association which was much too few to handle the chaos of such a scale.

Silrat had considered requesting 'Unbreakable' for help in disciplining the disorderly mercenaries but had withheld himself.

It was not proper and would harm his reputation as the man was from the Capital service.

The man was literally a killing machine when he switched.

Silrat could easily see a sea of corpses being left all around even after asking for what would be a restricted disciplinary action from 'Unbreakable'.

Eventually, he solved it though after appealing to the mercenaries' hearts through coin and valuables. An increase in rewards for clearing Clusters and a cut on charges for hauled spoils had worked like a change.

"What do you want?" Skullius asked.

"Right. It seems much like me, the Capital service isn't under too much pressure anymore. You-know-who has requested your presence. You're needed for more Divining."

..!

"Damn it! Again?! Isn't it too soon?"

"Well, they assumed that seven days would be enough for rest or something like that. Besides, Terian claims he'll keep Damilla under control this time," Silrat explained with a shrug.

Skullius wasn't ready for this yet.

Being poked again by that...bitch wasn't at all pleasant even if she held herself back.

"You're just going to let them to do this to me?" Skullius asked with a frown.

Silrat laughed heartily which made the Discount Human even more upset.

"Hahaha. Don't worry. I see you're still deeply mistrusting despite our Tie of Exchange but don't worry. I already told you of how I plan to deal with this. At the moment, Erkus doesn't know what my stance is concerning you. I will reveal my cards when we face them shortly with the entrance of a certain genius."

What the hell was that supposed to mean?

Silrat waved his hand which dimmed the runes on the iron bars to Skullius' cell.

With a snap of his finger, the bars rose up, disappearing into the hard ground above.

"Come. At worst you'll have to endure one session of Divining. At best you won't have to go through one at all."

The Discount Human rose and looked deeply into Silrat's eyes.

Trust was something he was yet to share with anyone and he certainly wasn't ready to give it to Silrat.

At least not yet.

The missing detail or rather, the differing details on the ToE he engaged with the man still made him apprehensive.

Yet..

"Fine..." Skullius said.

There was simply no other choice.

Chapter 235: Arrogant Bastards

During the ascent from the cell where Skullius was led from by Silrat, the Discount Human discovered that his cell was located quite some ways below the Association building.

He had been brought to his cell when he had passed out (turned off) after Damilla had drop kicked his soul with her Divining so he didn't know where he had been.

The training space he used to train with Oliviana was several paces from his cell on the same floor, which housed a cluster of similar cells, seemingly meant for criminals like him.

They even had grades, according to the strength of the criminal.

"Since we have a long term working relationship, would you mind telling me about the more obviously unnatural aspects of your powers?" Silrat said, sparking conversation.

Skullius raised a brow as the two rose through a narrow winding of stone stairs lit up by flaming wooden torches, faint markings that glowed tinging the walls, ever at the ready to maintain the integrity of the building visible all around.

"What obvious aspects?" Skullius questioned.

"Well. Every building in this city, as long as it has Capital value, has powerful runes engraved into its walls. It's a privilege that only cities like this one can enjoy. Class holders with potent runecrafting are rare, and it was only by the combined efforts of Zax, the old man from the College of the Esteemed as well as Erkus that such a thing is even seen in a small city like ours.

For your flames to have even caused chars and slight burns on the walls, that would require some serious firepower."

"I'm inclined to believe that you don't own something that dangerous as an artefact but as a spell of some kind. Your spatial storage didn't have much in it for there to be suspicions for you owning such powerful utilities. Save for what Damilla saw you using of course."

Skullius could admit that was a proper deduction that kind of nailed him to the wall.

He didn't know that his [Revenant Flames of Ecstasy] had left marks on the walls or that it was a profound feat to even cause such a minor change to something protected by the runes.

Was it wise to share some of his powers with Silrat?

The man was right, they would be engaging in a long term commitment where mutual benefit was derived and funnelled into Skullius' growth.

"Come now. You realise that having me come to escort you in person is a privilege right? I thought this would do well to at least show my sincerity."

Skullius sighed.

This guy...

"I don't know how exactly I'd even show you my abilities. Besides, can't you just ask Oliviana? She's seen many of them," Skullius said.

"Surface level abilities I'm sure. A demonstration would be nice. Of your real abilities being utilised to their full extent. Not now of course but after the whole ordeal that we are about to face. Can I count on you for that?"

The Discount Human took a few moments to think.

Ultimately, it would benefit him if he kept much of the more intimate details to himself.

He wouldn't want anyone to know that he had a hidden class.

"I guess..."

Once again, Skullius found himself succumbing. It seemed like nomatter the question, he was bound to say yes, provided with no other alternative when it came to Silrat.

The two finally reached a room that Skullius was familiar with, adorned with fine furniture befitting of a room reserved for special personages to sit down and chat.

Terian and Damilla were seated on two luxurious chairs awaiting the twos' arrival

With Skullius and Silrat entering, the atmosphere instantly turned heavy as a stare down immediately ensued as the Discount Human eyed Damilla dangerously.

The woman snorted while locking eyes with Skullius and as she fully took in his figure, her expression changed, her eyes darted to Silrat who immediately knew what she was thinking.

And she was right to think so.

Terian also noticed this and narrowed his eyes.

Such a drastic change in Skullius' appearance could only mean one thing, but he decided to not address it yet, as he focused on Skullius for now.

"Hello, Festos. I apologise if this is on too much of a short notice.

It would seem that the days you were afforded to rest were insufficient, and perhaps rightfully so..." Terian said, shooting a glance to Damilla when he mentioned this part, "...but as you may have been made to know, there are many things that we as the Capital service have been dealing with and this is the only window we have to engage with you."

"Also... this might be your last chance to give us some of the details we require."

A dangerous underlining intent lay lazily within that statement, making Skullius nervous. What else did these guys want to know?

"The City Lord won't be joining us today as he has matters to attend and we shall also leave you to rest after we are done. That is, if you're cooperative."

With regards to the Capital service, what Frock had mentioned about there being three Energy Formers in this facet of the city, was true.

At least to his own outdated knowledge.

Two of the other Mages in the Capital service had been transferred to another small city while Damilla was transferred here to work with Terian.

The old man himself was stronger than the other two Mages combined so he was to stay in Inhone while Damilla was to assist him.

So, in essence, Damilla was fairly new to Inhone.

"What Silrat managed to fish out of you wasn't nearly enough. It still leaves out a lot of questions," Damilla said in a strict tone that somehow sounded like she was addressing a criminal and a toddler at the same time.

"Even with this curse accounted for. I want to know everything to do with the dark energy Jac mentioned you to use, the artefact you used to destroy that monster in Eofel and EVERYTHING about that girl in the last vision I saw."

Skullius frowned.

'The dark energy refers to my [Evil Darkness], huh? I can't tell them about that.'

Even if he did share all this, it wasn't guaranteed that he would be set free.

What angered Skullius the most was the fact that this woman was still trying to pry about the girl in his memory.

Even he didn't know who she was dammit!

Would he just tell them all these sensitive details even if he was sure they wouldn't let him off.

FLESH NO!

For this, he really hoped that Silrat had a plan, his eye darting to the man for a split second.

Damilla didn't miss this detail.

"Silrat," she said in an accusing tone.

"Yes. It is as you think," Silrat said with his confident smile plastered on his face as he sat. "I have chosen to become Festos' benefactor. I will support his case and handle the finer details under the authority of the Guilds Association."

"That is a wildly risky decision, Silrat. You might just fall along with Festos here. In fact, your stance does not exempt Festos from any investigations," Terian said, not expecting this to be Silrat's decision.

"I'm aware but I choose to support this man anyway."

Damilla seethed with rage in her seat, watching as Silrat smiled, seemingly implying that he had everything planned out and nothing to worry about that.

'Arrogant bastard,' Damilla thought as she stood, walking up to Skullius.

"Fine. Let's get this over wi—"

BAAM!

The doors to the room blasted open, cutting off Damilla as she spoke.

"NO ONE will force a cherished member of my Guild to do ANYTHING," a voice reverberated through the room with a powerful intensity while an even more arrogant bastard walked into the room, a confident smile etched on his face...

Chapter 236: Tangible Confidence

A young man with dark hair that drew in the lights from the chandelier above walked in, his muscular figure which was buried under a thin, low collar linen shirt that seemed to be made from high quality material showing its elegant contours clearly through the fabric.

His ocean blue eyes exuded nothing but confidence as he walked in and stared down Damilla who was outraged by the sudden grand entry which interrupted her statement to Festos.

Confidence and arrogance could almost be scooped up with pails from his face as he was as eerie relaxed, his posture carrying a sense of unbound intensity.

Terian narrowed his eyes as he saw beyond just the unexpected entry of this young man, sensing a well-knotted scheme behind this.

This hypothesis arose from the fact that the young man who had walked in wasn't just any young man, but THE young man who more or less stood as the face of the Guilds Association at the moment.

Tulnas, the leader of the Harem Guild.

Damilla frowned as she turned her head to Silrat. After a few moments, she too had realised that this couldn't be a coincidence.

"What are you doing here, Tulnas?" Terian asked before Damilla could.

He feared that if the woman spoke out of terms with Tulnas whom she didn't know much about because of her recency, which was more biased towards the extravagant Ideal Ark, the Capital service might end up offending the Guilds Association in quite a massively inappropriate fashion or worse.

"Greetings to you too, Terian. This man here.." Tulnas said as he turned to Skullius, raising a brow for a second before continuing, "...is a delayed member of my Guild."

"What?!" Damilla's face scrunched up as she glared at Tulnas.

At this point, it should be mentioned that while she was shocked by this news, a certain Discount Human was gawking and gaping even more at this development.

This guy?!

He was the genius and prodigy that Silrat was talking about?!

The one his plan was centred around?!

But... but...

There were so many questions!

'How is this going to help us?!' Skullius screamed in his mind.

Sure, Skullius had said that he would think about joining the Harem Guild after finishing off some of his own personal stuff, but this wasn't enough of a loophole, right?

Right?!

"Isn't that right, Festos Dawn?" Tulnas said with a slight smile to Skullius.

This time, the Discount Human didn't turn to Silrat who maintained his expression.

If this was the only lifeline available, naturally he would draw on it until he reached its end.

"That's right," Skullius responded with a nervous nod.

"That's ridiculous! Do you take us for fools! Do you think such a stu—"

"On the contrary, Damita or whatever your name is," Tulnas cut off Damilla while waving his hands dismissively and dropping himself on one of the comfortable seats in the room, "I have many witnesses who were there on the day that I asked this man to join my Guild. An overwhelming number of witnesses. But please, don't poke me for verification. It's irritating and weird."

Damilla turned red with rage while Skullius' head which had been drooping slowly rose as an excited grin plastered itself on his face.

Seeing that Damilla was being crushed and manipulated into becoming a tomato, Terian took over.

"There's no need for that. Even if it so, and Festos here is a member of your Guild, that only serves to put your entire establishment under investigation as well," Terian said with stern tone.

He knew why Tulnas was so confident and arrogant.

It was because even when the shine of the Ideal Ark came, he still stood out among the locals.

As someone who was born and raised in this region, who grew to stand at the levels of power that rivalled even this old man, he was well respected and loved.

However, this wasn't the bulk of it.

Much of the respect came from the fact that many Energy Formers in the Guilds had been stolen by other cities and even the local Capital service before, but he remained in the city and in this branch of the Guilds Association.

The amount of backing and resources he controlled was also bountiful because of the prosperity of the region that was under the Harem Guild's jurisdiction.

All this in addition to the fact that he was in very good books with the City Lord because of how his portion of the region never had problems like the others, it was basically impossible to touch him.

But...

He was protecting a criminal without much evidence as to why.

This couldn't just be left alone.

"Naturally I'm aware of this and I accept it even though I can easily use the fact that Festos here had no ties to my Guild before now. I fully take on the charges against him over me and my ladies," Tulnas said as his eyes didn't flicker one bit, one of his legs going to rest over the other.

...!

Damilla was out of expressions to make.

She thought that perhaps they could definitely nail this man with the fact that Festos was guilty of some serious crimes but...

A lot of good that did.

She couldn't help but have a bad feeling about this. There was probably an endgame level play coming.

Terian breathed out in frustration. His calm face starting to show exasperated wrinkles.

This was getting more and more complicated by the minute.

Worse yet, Tulnas didn't seem to want to reveal this big ace in the hole bombshell that he definitely had, wanting to be asked about it instead so that he could reveal it in an extravagant manner.

"So then... Will you also accept the punishments that come with genocide and the penalty I assume Silrat will also have to impose on your Guild," Terian spoke as he turned his gaze to Silrat who remained silent while watching the show.

Tulnas scoffed.

"All of that won't be necessary. I'm sure you won't have the time or the gall to continue stressing about that after I eliminate one of the thorns in your ass."

Terian narrowed his eyes and Damilla put aside her rage to listen to this.

Even Skullius almost leaned in to hear this.

This was it!

What made this man so confident.

Tulnas smirked before locking his fingers and speaking in a domineering voice.

"I know how to stop the rapidly emerging Clusters."

Chapter 237: Festos Is Relevant

It almost seemed like a tremor had emerged in the room as everyone, excluding Silrat and Tulnas showed expressions of shock!

What did this man just say?!

"Have you any idea what you are talking about?! This is a—"

"I'm not dense and neither has my wild popularity gone to my head. Please respect the fact that my Guild protects hundreds of thousands of lives on a daily basis. Don't demean me. I don't jest when it comes to such sensitive issues," Tulnas said while cutting off Damilla once again, his eyes turning sharp as he gifted the woman a vicious glare.

Damilla heaved in heavy breaths as her eyes turned into saucers, but she still held her tongue. Her words essentially questioned if Tulnas would give false hope in such trying times, which he clearly wasn't impressed by.

Once again, Terian took over.

He was equally shocked by this news and yet, he didn't choose to show outright doubt, but to question the veracity of these words tactfully.

"If you know such a thing, then share it with us. This is an international crisis that has yet to be solved anywhere," Terian said with a slightly agitated tone.

"I know it's a crisis. But I also know a thing or two about credit-sharing. The Capital service and the Guilds Association have been under constant competition over credit. The constant losses hurt the Guilds Association more than they hurt you. So... of course, I'm not telling you jack," Tulnas said with a demeaning rise of his chin, a smirk returning to his face.

At this, Terian couldn't hold himself back as a tremendous burst of energy erupted from his body with a sound akin to thunder, a kinetic force pushing away all unoccupied furniture!

A scalding heat followed, blasting everyone in the face!

"You would consider such petty games we play in times of peace when lives are at stake here?! This is not a game! If you truly know how to stop thousands from dying each day then share with us and help save those lives! This transcends your overgrown ego!" Terian boomed with an ugly face painted atop his skin.

Skullius had been flung along with the furniture during Terian's outburst.

He had been shocked by Tulnas' words but had already turned to almost giggling in a corner while watching Tulnas dominate the conversation.

He especially enjoyed watching Damilla being put in her place.

He really liked that part.

'This is a first class sockethole!' had been Skullius' exact words.

With the incoming pressure from Terian raging all around the room, Tulnas didn't flinch or even blink at it as a sturdy, yet soft layer of his mana coated him protectively.

The same was true for Silrat and Damilla but they had reacted much, much slower than Tulnas had and had thus suffered being blown back a step.

"Relax old man. Like I said, I'm not dense. I won't be sharing this information with you. However, the Guilds Association has already sent word to all the other branches all over the nation to try this method. The Guilds Associations there will handle it how they see fit. We've also disseminated the information to our Designated mercenaries where relevant," Tulnas said.

Designated mercenaries were covert individuals from the Guilds Association Headquarters tasked with sensitive missions concerning internal affairs.

Telling these people was a move to ensure that even areas which had hardships pertaining to information passage and resource mobilisation would be catered for, as Designated mercenaries could simply take over the task.

Tulnas' words forced Terian to cool off, his intense energy dying down as his face showed a somewhat calm temperament.

Thinking it over, it was an efficient move on the part of the Guilds Association.

It seemed they had truly accounted for many variables.

Silrat finally joined the conversation as it reached this point.

"We should be getting results from other branches soon, though they heavily depend on us. Operations within the Guilds Association are efficient after all," he said, his intent all but invisible.

Damilla however, had heard an interesting detail from Tulnas' defence.

"Did you just say 'try'? As in you're not sure whether this method of yours will work or not?" she asked.

"Did I neglect to mention that I haven't tested this method of mine yet? Well, if I did, I'm telling you now. It's just an idea I had but I'm sure it will work. Also, because it's just an idea, I have taken it upon myself and my Guild to test it out before all the other Guilds can. I don't want anyone's blood on my hands if this fails," Tulnas said with a straight face.

Terian was dumbfounded and so was Damilla.

It was only now that they realised that before they even got confirmation, they were already believing Tulnas' words!

Was it Tulnas' charisma causing this?

'If it's just an untested hypothesis, then... No. Erkus will probably agree with Tulnas and grant him every resource he needs to find out about whether or not his conjecture is real,' Terian said.

Tulnas relished in seeing the faces of Terian and Damilla like this.

He hadn't mentioned how it was hard to verify the method for stopping the emerging Clusters as it would rein in the forces of other factions once it was revealed.

He didn't want that hassle at the moment.

Terian drew himself from his thoughts, finally posing a question that even Skullius wondered about.

"If it's judging this matter after you and your Guild have tested this secret method of yours, that, I can let pass. But, does Festos have any significance in this?"

Tulnas turned to Skullius with a sly smile.

"First of all, Festos here, shares the same cultural interests as me, thus he is absolutely relevant. Unlike most limb men I've seen, he appreciates fat, wobbly cheeks that bounce when you smack them just as much as I do. Don't you, Festos?" Tulnas said.

Silrat breathed out a sigh while Damilla looked at Tulnas with disgust, her upper lip rising as if she was nauseous.

Terian remained expressionless, ignoring this jest, which probably wasn't a jest in his thoughts.

Skullius looked around in confusion, having missed what Tulnas said entirely.

"And second... is something I'll only disclose after the mission is done and the credit we deserve has been paid. However, you should know that Festos is very relevant."

"..."

This bastard.

Even Skullius cursed when he heard this.

Well, nevertheless, the points Tulnas had made were pretty strong.

The tension grew as a decision was soon about to be made.

Chapter 238: As Expected

"So. What do you say?" Tulnas pumped the pressure on Terian and Damilla.

In an ideal situation, it would have been very appropriate to reject Tulnas' proposal and explain to the City Lord later.

These twos' judgement mattered too after all as they were high ranking officials in the Capital service.

Unfortunately for them, it wasn't that simple.

Tulnas merely stated that Festos was relevant for the mission. But how relevant?

Was he what tied the whole thing together, or was this just a ruse to free this man and make him a centrepiece for the Guilds Association because of his supposed dangerous abilities?

It wasn't clear.

"That depends. If Festos is so important in this method of yours, then he will be needed over all the three nations for your method to work? Doesn't this make your so-called message to all the other branches of the Guilds Association worthless?" Damilla asked without the slightest intention of hiding her hostility towards Tulnas.

"No," Tulnas replied succinctly, also openly showing his complete disregard for the twos' opposition and authority.

He didn't explain further.

He could but he didn't.

Terian's skin creased.

This man was refusing to be reasonable.

He could just tell them why Festos was important for this but no doubt, he enjoyed his social and economic position which he rightfully claimed with his own hard work.

As he saw it now, the best option was to let Festos go with Tulnas.

He staked it all on the fact that this arrogant bastard wouldn't suddenly help Skullius leave the city as that would bruise his reputation with the City Lord and the College of the Esteemed.

That would be viewed as letting a serial killer walk away without paying for crimes.

Potentially, this could extend to the whole city, which could appease Terian's wrath which kept gnawing at his throat like a virus.

He turned to Damilla who seemed to want to initiate a staredown, probably because she was still sour from having been shown such disrespect, a gesture she wasn't used to.

She truly didn't know as much as she thought about the people of this city, especially about this Guild that was hailed as the second strongest.

"Very well. I'll allow you to have temporary custody of Festos, but this will not exempt him from his punishment. A limit of two days is what I'll afford you. He must be back here by then," Terian said with a dangerous tone.

Tulnas leaned forward and stared him down fearlessly.

"Sure, old man," he said.

He knew that Terian was just as stubborn as him and had thus conceded.

Without the City lord's intervention, this was as much as he could get from Terian and it wasn't all that bad.

The priority was to get Skullius out and about, and that had been a success.

Also, he didn't haggle on a better alternative because while he hid it quite well, time was running out as this method of his concerned not an object, but a certain party.

Terian stood up and breathed out an agitated cloud of hot air that had traces of crackling flames before leaving the room, Damilla following behind.

She gave Skullius one last glare but the Discount Human merely grinned at her, holding himself back from saying any bone profanities.

He had to give it to Silrat.

This was a rather cool and unexpected play.

Naturally, many questions remained, including the fact that Skullius didn't actually know the real reason why Tulnas wanted him.

Even back then, the man had shown interest in him before he publicised his class.

Silrat planted his fingers to the side of his temples and gently rubbed them.

"I wouldn't call it a stellar victory but it is a victory nonetheless. Will two days be enough though, Tulnas? You know that geezer will haunt you if you take your time, right?" he asked as he gazed at Tulnas, whose temperament didn't change.

"Yeah. I can work with it. Although I didn't tell him how dangerous this mission is, it matters that I fully know that. Time is of the essence so I don't mind about the deadline. Still though..." Tulnas said as he turned his sharp eyes to Skullius. "You really better be worth it for me to go through all this trouble."

Skullius shook. Not from fright but from the sudden shift in Tulnas' tone.

He was dead serious, which made him wonder why he was the one supposed to prove his worth when this guy was the one who expressed interest first!

"Oh, he is. I value Oliviana's opinion greatly and she says that he is well beyond the D rank he was first assigned and is potentially already a C rank," Silrat defended Skullius.

"Rank C? From D? In a few days? Hmm. That's ridiculous to hear. Yet I can't find it within myself to doubt it," Tulnas said.

The ranks within the Association were adopted outside the organisation as well as most of the cities chose to grade their fighting forces this way.

Rank C and above was given to those that were stable powerhouses strong enough to be used in situations where high ranking Clusters were involved.

For more context on the power gaps, Stylla would be considered a high end C rank.

Terian was a powerhouse considered to be at the B+ rank, just shy of A rank.

Tulnas, was a high end B ranker.

The Guild leader suddenly paused and shook his head lightly, emitting an annoyed 'tsk.'

Though he did this while staring at Skullius, this gesture didn't seem to be directed at the Discount Human.

Silrat knew what it was though but didn't comment.

After a brief moment, Tulnas looked focused again and addressed Skullius.

"I suppose I'll be having the privilege of having another Energy Former in my Guild. At least for a few weeks..."

"Days!" Silrat corrected with a high pitched voice.

"Right. Days. I'm definitely being swindled here," Tulnas said as he leaned lazily on the comfy chair.

"Huh?" Skullius had a giant question mark above his head.

What the hell were these guys talking about?

Was he being loaned to Tulnas or something?

But...

"Anyway, according to Silrat, it's much safer to see and treat you like an asset more than a partner or friend. Can't say it's that hard when it's another man I have to endure. I'm not used to it," Tulnas said while nodding to himself, seemingly spacing out. "Don't be too mesmerised by my pretties, alright? They can bite. Literally."

The Discount Human didn't quite catch that, but Tulnas didn't care.

He rose and turned to Silrat.

"Anything else you need to say before we leave?"

Sensing that this meeting was drawn to a close, Skullius decided to slide in a plea of his.

"Uhm...excuse me. Could I do something before we go?"

"What would that be?" Silrat asked.

"Well, you see. There's this sword I was having fixed..."

Chapter 239: Are You A Man of Culture?

"I see," Silrat said while stroking his chin. "HammerDown Gruff, huh? That's interesting. I hoped this kind of thing would be something you'd have already shared with me."

Skullius had explained how he had [Demion's Dance] way overdue at HammerDown's shop.

The sword was probably completed by now and he had intended on getting it himself after he was set free.

One would then wonder why Skullius didn't simply ask for Silrat to collect it for him.

Well, Skullius was rather cautious with his items.

[Demion's Dance] was sword he picked up in the Labyrinth of the Yoke and from its labelled value, he didn't want people seeing it.

With him seeing how much items were valued, he began taking their rarity seriously and the history behind the sword was something he had heard from Frock, which meant that someone with their historic facts intact could potentially recognise the sword.

He was yet to trust Silrat and frankly, he would have preferred to fix the sword himself if he could instead of resorting to having someone else do it for him.

But, he couldn't have it all.

The sword was the last piece to perfecting the templates he had created.

At least the ones based on his current abilities.

"We can go right there and pick it up on our way to my residence," Tulnas said, making Skullius hesitant.

He nodded in the end as there was no other option, especially when dealing with such; his secondary benefactor.

"Right! I managed to procure a new set of sturdy armour that fits your stature, Festos," Silrat said as he shot from his seat and scanned Skullius from head to toe with his eyes. "Perhaps a fresh set of casual clothing is also in order."

Silrat walked out the door and returned after a few minutes.

He threw a spatial storage ring at Skullius, the Discount Human receiving it quickly and checking what was inside.

He smirked as he saw the contents.

"I assume it's to your liking," Silrat asked in a proud tone.

"Meh..." Skullius replied with a shrug.

A throbbing vein popped on Silrat's smiling face.

"It's actually pretty good," the Discount Human said with a refined, awkward smile that seemingly appeased the Head of the Association branch.

Skullius walked through the street with Tulnas, their destination being only a few dozen meters away.

The easy-on-eyes Discount Human donned a new shirt, white in colour with a thick and elastic fabric while below his waist was a slightly baggy pair of dark pants.

These were the clothes that had been gifted to him by Silrat, completing his overall young and energetic looking figure.

His auburn hair which he choose to let grow was rustling in the wind, his twinkling silver eyes being nothing short of gorgeous.

Skullius' appearance had taken Tulnas aback when he first barged into the room.

This wasn't what Skullius looked like days ago.

He could only vaguely make out that it really was him from recognising the colour of his hair, distinct face and through the verification given to him by an odd force that constantly nagged him.

"You've turned quite handsome over the last few days. Your body was that greedy for change?" Tulnas asked, striking up a conversation.

"I guess you could say that," Skullius replied awkwardly.

Tulnas emitted a short laugh.

Skullius turned to this man and posed a question of his own that had burned at his soul for the past ten minutes.

"What did you mean when you said something about me sharing the same cultural whatever with you? And that thing about cheeks?"

Tulnas smiled gracefully and slung his arm around Skullius' neck, drawing him closer.

"That was just to annoy those two idiots. However, I do wonder..." Tulnas said before turning serious. "Do you also appreciate women as much as I do?"

Skullius' didn't know how to respond.

Women?

So far, he could say with confidence that the women he had seen had not impressed him.

Save for Elita of course and perhaps Stylla.

It was right down the middle really.

"I don't have much experience with them and I don't see why you think of so highly."

Tulnas nodded sagely.

He needed to evaluate this man.

As they walked along the lively streets, a woman donning a tight fitting, red silk dress that slid over her beautiful porcelain skin smoothly and outlined her bombastic shape each time she took a step, came from in front of the two.

Her dazzlingly shiny dark hair that draped over her back like a cape drew quite the amount of attention and her upturned emerald green eyes causes a thrilling shock to any man that gazed into them... as well as causing a certain member of their body to stand at attention.

The woman walked gracefully as when she reached within close proximity of Tulnas and Skullius, her gaze focused on the muscular man and she winked with a seductive smile.

Tulnas gave a short nod of acknowledgement to the lady as she passed them, going on her way.

The Guild leader pulled Skullius' head to make him turn around and appreciate the woman's view from behind, as were most of the men in the street.

"Now tell me. What do you see?" Tulnas said as he ensured that Skullius' eyes were gazing at the woman's lower half which stood particularly out like a sore thumb.

"Hmmm..." Skullius hummed as he thought.

His eyes suddenly turned round with shock.

"That... that..." he stammered.

"Yes?" Tulnas said with a cheeky smile.

"It's... it's... she's got a...."

"Yes?"

"She has a blue core! I couldn't even sense it when she passed us! She must be very strong and-"

PAT!

A resounding slap interrupted Skullius' string of euros

Tulnas had face palmed.

He was extremely shocked that this was what the Discount Human would derive from this experience.

Then again.

It was his own fault for assuming so crudely.

This man was a Mage.

Unlike other Energy Formers, Mages were regarded highly and they too focused on their studies of the energies quite stringently to bolster their value and strength, culling most of their physical lusts in the process.

Tulnas looked at the confused Skullius.

This wasn't a man of culture.

"I agree..." he said as he shook his head.

"Agree with what?" asked Skullius as he tilted his head.

"Never mind, I wasn't talking to you."

Tulnas suddenly lost his spunk for the rest of the way to HammerDown Gruff's shop, initiating small bursts of conversations here and there that uncovered surface level information about Skullius.

The earlier disappointment weighed on him heavily, killing his social spirit.

Soon, the two arrived at a shop that was, as always, occupied with a long line of some distinguished and undistinguished personages who wished to order from HammerDown Gruff.

Tulnas led Skullius to the very front.

Some of the people in line wanted to object but after seeing Tulnas' face and smile, their attitudes turned upside down.

"Ohohoho! Young man, how have you been doing? It's been a while."

"Young Tulnas, you've been so scarce of late! Share a meal with me tomorrow."

"Hahaha! Our young hero, go on and get your order in. This much we can allow."

The classy and annoying voices of the rich, some of whom brought fancy chairs to sit on made Skullius cringe.

Still, he kept his mouth shut and when the two reached the entrance to the shop, Skullius came face to face with the apprentice that had wanted to throw him out last time.

Kek.

Chapter 240: One Heck of A Sword (1)

HammerDown's apprentice looked the same as when Skullius had last seen him.

The baggy eyes as well as the dark and dirty gloves he wore made Skullius scoff.

This man looked like he could keel over and die anytime.

He was busy serving a customer, taking their order for what kind of item they wanted crafted by the shop at this moment, seemingly oblivious to the twos' presence.

When he finally turned and saw Tulnas with Skullius in tow standing at the front, his immediate reaction was to sigh in exasperation, anticipating having to go over the rules about line cutting again, but the moment he saw Tulnas, his eyes bulged and for a time, he completely forgot that he was serving another customer!

Tulnas hurriedly raised his hand to stop the young man from fanboying over him as he felt like he had already wasted enough time with this.

"Hello. We have come to make a collection for this young man. Can you call Gruff for us?" he said, his words suggesting that he was asking while his tone heavily implied that he wasn't.

The young apprentice stammered. He didn't even look at Skullius nor consider what Tulnas had said about this being an item for the Discount Human.

His fingers went every which way until he finally rushed into the shop.

The customer whose service had been cut short didn't complain as he saw a distinguished figure higher than himself.

He merely smiled at Tulnas and Skullius before drawing back a distance, giving them their space in a mute fashion.

'Ah. I wish people could treat me like that. It would be really fun to have all of them respect me on sight,' Skullius thought, admiring the authority that Tulnas enjoyed.

From the looks of it, the man had worked hard for it given that he could exchange words with Terian and Damilla without worrying about the potential consequences.

Soon, a tall man with a portly belly appeared, his eyes actually honing in on Skullius first as they squinted and then onto Tulnas.

He stretched out his hand to the muscular man far behind him in height, to which Tulnas happily obliged.

"It's been a while, Gruff," said Tulnas.

"It indeed has. You seem to improve each time we meet. I hope there's results to come out of this constant growth," Gruff said as he chuckled.

"You have no idea," said Tulnas as his relaxed smile grew wider.

The burly blacksmith couldn't help but smile. He was the one to make the armour of each and every individual in the Harem Guild, from the finest and even to the less than impressive items.

His philosophy on giving the best of his equipment to those that could afford it had proven him right with this young man who used his creations to rise from the dirt.

HammerDown then turned to Skullius, moving his gaze up and down as he took in the Discount Human's figure.

He had a strange expression on his face as he saw Skullius.

"If not for the fact that you left such a deep impression on me, I might have not recognised who you were. Hmm. Given your behaviour last time, I'm guessing you don't intend on engaging much in pleasantries?" said HammerDown with a strict tone.

"It's fine either way," Skullius said.

At this moment, Tulnas realised something about Skullius as he took note of his expression during his exchange with the blacksmith.

HammerDown shook his head and turned to his apprentice who was beginning to put the dots together with a dumbfounded expression.

"Wait... Master, is he that man from—"

"Yes. Now go get the sword," HammerDown cut off the young man with a succinct answer and an instruction.

The apprentice slowly backed away, his eyes not leaving Skullius for a good five seconds and then he then rushed to collect the sword.

HammerDown coughed a bit, clearing his throat before throwing down a small rock-like object with a dark lustre on the ground.

The moment it hit the hard crust, a barrier appeared, obscuring the visual of the three men inside it from the outside as well as any audio emitted from within.

Grumbles of disappointment echoed from the lined up crowd.

'Oh, that's pretty handy,' Skullius thought as he saw that he could clearly see everything outside, despite there looking to be a slightly hazy, murky sphere around them.

"Because of the large payment you issued last time, I let your late collection slide and even added a worthy sheath for your blade to fully cover the value of the cores you left. Your sword is an absurdly beautiful and powerful piece and that brought with it some challenges," the tall man said as he folded his arms.

Skullius frowned.

What did this mean?

"The sword used runecraft for certain portions of its craft, making it impossible for a simple blacksmith like me to realign and energise such intricate parts. There were also some rather old etchings I couldn't identify to full restore the sword's special effects. The one who made this was a master with knowledge beyond my own and such is the result. That much I can admit and acknowledge."

Tulnas merely nodded while getting really curious about the sword that Skullius had handed over.

Skullius however was getting nervous. Was the sword he hoped to boost him up considerably going to turn out to be trash instead?

The figure of the apprentice appeared, rushing near the barrier where HammerDown waved his hand, a hole large enough for the young man to pass through appearing.

The apprentice walked in with a dark, shiny sheath that looked to be made of hardwood, slightly curved in its shape with the polished, golden hilt of the sword showing while hiding its blade.

The apprentice handed the sword to Skullius who gulped unconsciously and wiped the spotless sheath with his hand.

"Well? Let's see this sword," Tulnas urged.

Skullius nodded before grabbing the hilt which seemed to have been adjusted, additional friction added to make gripping the sword easier.

He pulled on the hilt, a green sheen oozing out as it was all around a curved blade with a single edge sharpened to perfection.

Vague markings could be seen on the blade as it glistened while it no longer looked ancient but produced a vibrant aura that screamed of youthfulness instead.

The blade hissed as it slid from the sheath and full came out for all to see.

Tulnas whistled.

This was one heck of a sword visually.

And when it came to power... it was moreso.