

Undead 391

Chapter 391: An Attuned Body

[Name : Festos Dawn]

[Level : 10]

[Experience : 0/800,000; <Trial Pending>]

[Class : Insurgent Magnus]

[Race : Discount Human]

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

[Stats]

[Strength : 1895]

[Agility : 1775]

[Intelligence : 70]

[Endurance : 1815]

[Luck : Atrocious?]

[Health : 2175/2175]

[Mana : --- (1300)]

[Null Life Essence : 0/6000]

[Skills]

[Elevated Mana Manipulation | Lv.27]

[Great Saint's Invigoration | Lv.3]

[High Cosmetic Body | Lv.1]

[Revenant Flames of Ecstasy | Lv.12]

[Null Extraction]

[Guard Light | Lv.6]

[Mana Force | Lv.5]

[Flash Flicker | Lv.7]

[Raw Impact | Lv.5]

[Great Rush (I) | Lv.4]

[Revered | Lv.1]

[Basic Combat Arts | Lv.5]

[Swindling Death Dance (Incomplete)]

[<Class>]

[Advanced Evil Weaving | Lv.11]

[Advanced Evil Production | Lv.13]

[Basic Evil Invasion | Lv.2]

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

[Basic Light Production | Lv.4]

[Crude World Projection]

[Bead of Malevolence | Lv. 3]

[Perfect Night Domain | Lv. 4]

[<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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"My stats have really shot up. It's ridiculous," Skullius said as he looked over his status. With the exception of luck and intelligence, all his other stats were above a thousand, much of that credited to the Enriching gems, most of which he had absorbed being the purple red ones, finishing off what he could ever gain from them.

The rest was due to the Creed Sila had used but that hadn't merely translated to raw physical power.

Sila had sacrificed Skullius' previous mana core and all its future potential in exchange for equivalent physical attunement of the highest order.

This meant that Sila wanted all that power converted or rather adjusted into physical prowess.

It didn't merely correlate to Strength, Agility and Endurance getting a large increase, but a profound capacity for his body to utilise this new strength to the most efficient degree, his body adapting to this dual effect immediately!

Now as Skullius felt his muscles, he could feel this Discount Human body of his responding rather perfectly.

He had mostly been focused on its sensitivity before but now, as he shifted to its overall physical capability, he noticed that it was vastly more phenomenal than what he had before.

As for his senses, once again, he could discern shapes and overall, his surroundings through everything his skin came into contact with. It was even better when he had a specific target to zoom in on, as the sensation of the shape of the target would rush through his <RUSH BLOOD> and then be transmitted into his mind.

In every sense of the word, this was the perfect body!

To top all this off, if Skullius used [Elevated Mana Manipulation] he could be completely aware of everything around him on a basic level and on a physical level at all times!

'This is incredible! No wonder Sila's movements just seemed so refined!'

The way the old soul had moved while equipping his flesh could not be chalked up to his experience alone. How he reacted to attacks as well.

'Awareness...' Skullius thought as he recalled the lesson he had learnt from Oliviana. The key to adapting to attacks was increasing one's awareness!

...!

'OH!' Skullius had a thought. A rush! 'My mana manipulation already has a great range and if I couple that with my physical senses, I could create an area where it's impossible to get the jump on me! Hmm. Get the jump? That's a weird thing to say.

But that's expected!' Skullius thought as he got quite excited.

Instead of simply using this new sensitivity of his over vast ranges, wouldn't it be better to apply more focus on a specific zone around him effectively making sure that nothing went in or out without his knowing?!

Skullius immediately tried it out!

He reeled in his hundred meter natural sensory range, bringing it down to roughly 20 meters, the winds, the sounds and vibrations in it being his target!

The falling leaves and the swaying branches became perfectly clear to him as he strained his focus, every shift of the mud within the range as well as the barely existent vibrations it caused that ran under ground being made known to him.

Even though Skullius was yet to discover any semblance of life in this forest, everything that could move was subject to his senses.

Because [Elevated Mana Manipulation] was being used to pump him full of mana, Skullius didn't go all in when layering its effect over his already incredible senses.

He merely exerted his reach lightly, tracing through everything that possessed mana and taking in the motions.

Even with this much, it was perfect!

'It's easier now because there's not a lot of information to cycle through but I'll get the hang of it soon. I can have Ferex help me to learn and perfect it. Oliviana taught me that awareness is important as a combat skill, so I guess this is one way to build up to it,' Skullius thought. 'Still, I shouldn't forget about the wider range outside this one.'

I'll put 80% of my focus on the inner area and 20% everywhere else. Yes, that should work. Though, I'll probably need names for these two areas.'

In the spirit of having clear distinctions towards everything that Skullius was learning, the Discount Human started brainstorming for names.

He didn't aim for anything too complicated, but this did not appeal to his superior ability to name things... because it didn't exist.

At the end of a three minute stretch, Skullius decided to temporarily name these two zones of focus, the Inner Domain and the Outer Domain.

How creative!

Where these names were derived could not be more obvious.

The rest of Skullius' day was spent doing nonstop mana consumption and developing the two zones of focus.

During this long and draining schedule however, the Discount Human was forced to take breaks to feed as his body demanded that he take in food even if he still lacked the ability to taste it.

There was quite a lot of food which he had stocked up before leaving Inhone and quite a LOT of it still remained.

Passing the time by munching on tasteless items helped quite a bit when Skullius grew bored of doing the same thing over and over again but that was just about it.

By the time [High Cosmetic Body] timed out though, Skullius was confident that the Centre to his core was at least a quarter finished, the marker for this, the limit as he hypothesised, being that he felt a light constrain on his abdomen, like how a normal human would feel when a stomach-ache was announcing its arrival.

To Skullius, this meant he was probably going to finish the centre in the next two days or so, leaving the harder part for the next stretch.

With his skeletal body forming, Skullius exited the forest as he crossed the distance towards the mountains.

The hours he had spent in that one spot, and forest, weren't wasted.

His mind had been active, trying to figure out what else this disguised opportunity could hold and one could bet that 24 hours allowed Skullius to get an idea or two.

The Null Lifeform had been trying to figure out how to make a non-generic core that was different from the simplistic design that normal people had.

Sure the progress was flattering but he still needed to make a powerful core.

One with special capabilities.

One with unique attributes.

How so, one would ask?

Well...

The answer he had glimpsed, lay with the three high level concepts that nested at the peak of the stout mountain where Skullius had climbed before.

Between Distorted Gravity, Spatial Lightning and Stagnant Space, one of these had to become relevant to his Discount Human's mana core!

Somehow...

Chapter 392: Just A Spark

The storm that preceded the view of the floating staves was before Skullius once again as his sockets flared with a mix of thinly veiled excitement and apprehension.

The possibilities were what drove him but the dangers and or hazards of what he was about to try attempted to park him at the side.

Still, in the name of risks, he had to at least see what would happen.

As the compounded gravity within this space littered by shorter stone pillars bore down on him, [Epiphany]'s passive effect kicked in.

The effect essentially made sure that for every magical effect Skullius was subjected to, little sprinkles of information, the bare minimum knowledge on said effect would be transmitted into his mind.

This sounded incredibly powerful, but no, it wasn't.



Time as well as degree of exposure were two important factors that made the skill a patience generating phenomenon or simply an invitation to get oneself killed while trying to learn something.

So far, with Skullius' experiences, from being shot by the Spatial Lightning to being slammed by the Distorted Gravity and suffering short term detainment in Stagnant Space, he was yet to get an inkling of what any of these concepts were.

When it came to [Epiphany] though, it had an active effect that essentially cut off the worst components of this passive effect. By paying a certain amount of Null Life Essence, Skullius could attain knowledge on high level concepts.

The only problem currently was that even for the weakest concept on this stout mountain, the amount of Null Life Essence points was vast and for the Penetrator, even if he maxed out his reserves of Null Life Essence and added even those of his Apostles, it still wouldn't be enough.

His maximum capacity fell short.

But this didn't discourage the Penetrator.

Skullius inched his way through the vicious and chaotic mana that raided every pocket of this place, lightning smashing into the stone pillars to displace them into disfigured forms.

'I'm not sure if getting hit by that lightning is the best chance I have in speeding up the learning process but... to get that Stagnant Space concept needs me to willingly get zapped. This is definitely fleshed up,' Skullius thought.

It was extremely risky.

Ferex walked beside Skullius in his larger form while wrestling the gravity, the excuse for his size being how he wished to protect his master. The light within his sockets fondly showed his determination towards this goal.

With the spells he had attained from the Innate Holder wielded by Kotaman, he was sure he had augmented his arsenal quite a bit for that very purpose.

After proceeding for a few meters, Skullius' body suddenly dropped and pounded into the ground, half of its bony entirety digging deep into mana-reinforced dirt!

...!

The Distorted Gravity!

Strangely, at the exact same time that Skullius sank deep, one of the pillars near him, its cold, grey and fractured mass sitting firmly on the bald ground suddenly shot up at a speed that made it look like a metallic blur!

BOOOM!

The sound of its movement was akin to thunder as rings of gusty air exploded from its launch!

Skullius' four sockets flared!

'This...!' Skullius' mind was immediately thawed of the surprise from falling into the dirt, his thoughts lighting with intrigue.

The density of the mana increased once again, which was why the effects of the concept was so much more pronounced but...

'Ohhhh.... the mana here... it's different. It's not pure...' Skullius thought as [Elevated Mana Manipulation] was used, his mind churning to discern a great many things.

His exterior control of mana was tested as the erratic and rebellious waves of mana around him smashed into him while others slipped his grasp with the skill.

This shit was hard!

It was like trying to contain a burst of steam with a steel spoon for hours!

The mana-focused grasp of Skullius was challenged once again as it wasn't merely the problem of trying to capture and discern the mana but also distinguishing which stream held the properties he was looking for.

The property and form that induced Distorted Gravity!

To make his job a whole lot harder, a spark ignited in the air, along with a milky flash of light and then...

BZZZZZZZT!

Six thick bolts of lightning erupted in six different of directions with aggressive heat and power, one of these directions that they attacked just happening to be where the Penetrator was struggling to heavy lift himself out of the ground!

'Damn it!'

Even before Skullius saw the lightning that gushed towards him, his profound mana sensing had already told him that this was different from the bolt that had attacked him before which simply transported him to Stagnant Space before slicing him in half!

This one had furiously destructive spatial energies on top of completely horrendous raw power that would probably blast him to pieces before anything else!

This power that caused the air to look as if it was reverently parting and displacing around the lightning!

The beam of blinding light produced in the process also...!

BOOOOM!

An eruption of force along with a powerful reverberation ran through the ground with a deafening noise that sublimely told of extreme damage numbers even though the ground was deceptively more or less intact!

The light died down as heavy tufts of mana billowed around the scene.

The ground barely showed any semblance of damage, not just in this spot but also in those where the other five bolts had struck.

The ground was profoundly reinforced by mana to such a degree!

At the scene where Skullius had been however, an unexpected scene occurred.

The figure of the Penetrator unharmed emerged, his sockets fiercely roaring with flame as he looked entirely confused on what had happened.

A moment later...

THUD!

The large figure of Ferex appeared out of nowhere, slamming onto the ground on his feet but with a disfigured and profoundly charred body!

Its mass above the skeletal structure that was made of Unliving Thread could barely be seen and most parts of its body seemed to be... misaligned, disjointed or... switched.

Ferex's head was attached to his rear instead, with his frontal body lacking a coordinating limb!

Over the dark matter that was burnt Unliving Thread on his body, glowing patches of heat along with an expansive blue array that flickered with mana for a few seconds before disappearing could be seen!

"Bro!" Skullius exclaimed as he used every bit of his strength to dig himself out of the ground and hunch his way towards the Apostle, emotion tugging at his bones.

Skullius was lost for words.

Ferex had undoubtedly acted before he could to shield him from the damage!

The result was ultimately...

Skullius rustled his hands over the Apostle, seeing the light in its socket luminously glow fervently.

Ferex was mostly alright.

Skullius slumped in relief.

The creature before him then opened its maw wide and devoured a light that immediately induced rejuvenation over its mass, bringing it back to its normal state in a few breaths!

'Lively' Unliving Thread covered the Apostle once more as it then reduced its size, evidently avoiding the gravitational consequences of a larger bulk.

Ferex seemed enthusiastic as he manifested ears, swaying them this way and that in unison while gazing at Skullius with... happy emotion.

"Bro, why are you excited? You almost died! Or I guess got erased. But still! I could have lost you!" Skullius said as he staggered and stood.

Ferex maintained his enthusiasm however and stood on his hind legs, from his mouth a tongue of Unliving Thread emerging with a rather lengthy mass.

One of his front legs rested on Skullius' shoulders for a... pat.

"Is this encouragement?" Skullius said as he shook his head.

This bastard was trying to reassure him despite what had just happened!

"Fine. I wasn't planning on giving up anyway. Thanks for covering my mistake. I should have used this first."

[Silent Revelation of the Bright King] was cast as a thick storm cloud along with sparks of Silentburn Levin that constantly revolved around Skullius emerged.

"This should help for the next five minutes while you recover your cooldown," Skullius said while trudging on.

Ferex followed also, in the Apostle's mind an evaluation of the sole reason he was still nullalive right now occurring in his mind to determine how best to apply it.

Reinforcement Magic.

The two pushed on, Skullius only being able to cover a meter per every fifteen minutes as the force bearing down on him was immense including the mana sifting through the air which continued to grow profoundly thick.

The ride wasn't smooth as in the next hour, Skullius was struck by two thick bolts that he and Ferex had tried to react to but ultimately ended up getting blast by and suffering atrocious damage.

Luckily, [Silent Revelation of the Bright King] had saved him after it went on cooldown and had to be cycled with Ferex's [Lanterns of the Pure].

The constant risk was phenomenally dangerous, but with Skullius sensing through the mana continuously as he tried to learn its pattern along with him trying to withstand the gravity, a reward for the effort soon showed.

A teensy bit of a reward.

Skullius had advanced quite the bit of distance over four hours, unable to continue on ahead where bolts of lightning his body's size raged while the weight on his body made it impossible for him to move.

With the mana now obscuring the view quite a bit while also gaining a slightly corrosive effect, Skullius finally felt it.

Just a spark of knowledge.

Of information.

Just enough to achieve a tiny bit of his goal.

Chapter 393: Progression On All Fronts!

In Skullius' mind, a bit of information that wasn't there prior, one that wasn't gathered from his restlessness in using [Elevated Mana Manipulation] to a more refined level which resulted in its increased levelling speed, spawned in his mind.

Shockingly, this information wasn't about what he thought would be the most likely candidate, Spatial Lightning, which had intimately kissed him to near oblivion a couple of times.

Instead, it was about Distorted Gravity.

What appeared wasn't its origin or the intricacies behind what it was or the exact conditions that spawned it.

It was merely a slightly hazy pattern, like a mix between a terribly played field of tetris with innumerable holes and a jigsaw puzzle.... in another distant reality of course.

It seemed random to Skullius at first but then...

'Hmmm.... The mana here keeps getting fiercer and more concentrated but for the most part, I can recognise that there are patterns... though I can't tell which is which. Could this belong to...'

Like that... Skullius and his mind had matched a portion of the pattern to one that seemed to belong to Distorted Gravity.

How could Skullius tell?

While [Elevated Mana Manipulation] on its own clearly wasn't enough to allow him to blitz through this like a genius, it did allow Skullius to recognise two things.

The form mana took as well as its arrangement.

For instance, mana could be pure which seemed to have specific connotations and effects attached to it, or it could be muddled with certain 'spices' that allowed it to produce different effects when it followed a certain flow.

In the current situation, whenever the weight bearing down on Skullius increased, he noted that a certain flow increased along with it around him but with the endless sparks of lightning that were everywhere, he hadn't been able to distinguish if the high level concepts in this place shared this flow and their form or if they were just so complicatedly woven that it was hard to tell.

It was annoying.

This was why trying to distinguish which flow and form of mana was which became such a painfully intricate process that required Skullius digging into the foundation of the mana itself.

Ah...

Such a thing had regurgitated the memory of Skullius having to draw bits of mana from the mana gems mined in Deadmanland, the origin story for this now evolved skill of his.

Such growth.

Such continued relevance.

It was too profound!

Having reached this stage, Skullius while being washed by the mana on his bones steadily digested this bit of information.

'Alright. Now at least I can trace the mana for Distorted Gravity. Argh... this only gets more complicated from here...'

With the storm cloud above and Ferex fervently waiting to intercept any lightning bolts, Skullius let all his worries about the potential harm fade away as he wholly focused on tracing the flow and form of the mana that induced Distorted Gravity.



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Below, in the depths of the water within the world atop the Elimparidis Stone Staff, way beyond the organised bulbous living quarters that had belonged to the Bulk Terrors, a certain figure could be seen practically buried in the dark waters that touched upon the very floor of the ocean.

It was a golden figure.

One with a lengthy cape, the rising flakes which it produced providing a very dim lighting that barely managed to illuminate the hundreds of eggs that were arranged before him.

The darkness of the waters was an effect of mana being so highly concentrated that it added to the darkness resulting from the depth, preventing light from escaping. Normal light at least.

If a regular human was to be placed within these waters, they would not be able to move a muscle.

Heck, even if an average individual in the Foundation Stage were to be placed here, they would be locked in place from the sheer density possessed by these waters!

The profound effect of mana was uncontested.

The golden figure seated here was obviously Red Rage.

He had requested Skullius to not kill the eggs left behind by the Bulk Terrors that time and now, he had moved every single one which he had found here.

Unlike what Skullius thought, this wasn't the Apostle reacting the flaw he had which restricted him from killing innocents. In fact, his killing of Cluster beasts could be considered a violent act against the guiltless as the creatures within Clusters could be argued to be 'innocent'. But that was not the kind of strict criteria the flaw he had used.

Killing unborn creatures himself would be a violation of what that however, and yet that wasn't Red Rage's purpose in keeping the little things alive.

From the Pelvis-Boar-Man's chest, the 'U' and 'T' shaped symbol lit up with a bright light then unleashed a vibrant beam of energy over the eggs!

Each egg which was touched by the light attained a faint glow, becoming a partially luminous lantern for a few seconds.

The light only vanished after a full five second run, the eggs losing the glossy shine thereafter as they returned to normal.

This wasn't the first time that Red Rage had done this over the past few days.

This was actually the 102nd time!

Red Rage used every opportunity to beam up the eggs with a skill he had once attempted to use on Tomin during the expedition to solve the mass Cluster incident.

The skill [Foolmaker].

It didn't go by this name anymore though, as with continued use, it had evolved even as it was merely part of a larger skill.

Red Rage looked over the eggs with care before nodding his head.

He rose from his seated position and shifted his focus to a facet of his no-nonsense training.

The Apostle was determined to make the most out of the retreat he had requested from Skullius.

This time spent away from his master must be paid off with extremely promising results. This was his sentiment.

The harshly thick mana around him was drawn in droves, its mass and concentration causing Red Rage to buckle down but ultimately withstand it.

"I... can...take it!" a manly voice leaked out of Red Rage.

He was determined!

The amount of progress he had made so far was already shocking but that was not enough.

He could feel his master's efforts even from the distance.

He was doing his best and so should he, using everything at his disposal.

As the first Apostle, he had to remain relevant!

Yes.

He had to.

As the Pelvis-Boar-Man nurtured his resolve, a slight crack was heard from one of the eggs!

The gaze of the Null Lifeform immediately turned, his focus shifting once more!

It was beginning!

The birth of his little beauties was beginning!

And just like him, this first one just had to have significance!

"Wait for me O, Emissary of neither Death nor Life. When I, your prodigy returns to your side, I will come bearing the strength of a thousand Null Badubs!"

Chapter 394: Winging It

Knowledge.

Such a thing was precious in any setting that anyone could imagine, whether it be business, pleasure, combat or an amalgamation of all three.

Knowledge was a commonality as far as the separate communities of beasts and humans were concerned, though beasts as they were groomed to learn that brutal reality of life earlier and with a robust touch of cruelty.

Knowledge wasn't readily afforded to them. They had to fight for it to unlock the chance to ascend into something higher and better than their previous meagre existence.

It was all about moving forward.

Skullius had learnt this in the same way from the Tremur Forest, though in a harshly unlucky setup where his numb mind had to be forced to awaken. Unconsciously, the way the goblins he had met struggling for life against each other, their power being borne against him, had gotten Skullius through the earlier processes of jolting his mentality for what was to come.

Lucky or unlucky enough, he had pushed through but regardless of what caused him to pull forward, one could NEVER discount the fact that Skullius himself worked hard to get here.

If he didn't act, struggling to remain intact, he would have lost his two states of existence.

Perhaps it was a perk of knowing where you'd go after dying... again that motivated him.

With weeks having passed after his struggle in the Tremur, as a Discount Human his Direction swinging him in the hands of strong human beings, Skullius had been forced to grow once more and taste another degree of growth in a frustrating sense.

Add that to his latest experience and one would find a Skullius who was slowly approaching a permanent state of mental rigidity.

A firm mindset.

....

"Fuuuu...." Skullius breathed out... consciously. "It's finally done."

Yes. It was done.

The Centre to the new mana core was done.

As a ridiculously condensed point of pure mana twice the size of a pinhead within Skullius' body, it was eerily powerful.

Skullius had hypothesised on account of how he felt a strain in his abdomen, the layer of his body overlapping the core, that there was a limit to how much the initial size of a core could be.

He had been right.

A day and a half since he began his rigorous routine of absorbing pure mana from the forest and exposing himself to danger on the stout mountain with a mix of Distorted Gravity, Spatial Lightning and Stagnant Space, he felt that he couldn't grow his Centre any larger than it was already.

This to him meant that he had reached the limit, officially marking that it was time to move on to the Refinery.

During the aforementioned time period, Skullius had thought about this concept.

Why there was a limit and how cores were formed in humans and beasts.

How did they gather pure mana when they were young?

From his first time seeing a collection of normal humans with cores in Namu, to now, this spawned a great deal of curiosity for him.

A brief exit into the real world had lead Skullius to feel with his growing [Elevated Mana Manipulation] that the air possessed different types of mana.

With what he had been learning and experiencing in the past few days, he could easily distinguish the various types of mana that roamed in the different places he roamed.

This led him to believe that asides from Energy Formers and high tier Class Branchers, the majority of combatants probably didn't know the finer intricacies of the energies around them. Unless they studied aggressively, they wouldn't know just how many components were in the air they breathed.

Mana was naturally friendly to living things, with the opposite arguably being true as well. The result was essentially that mana naturally flowed into humans and beasts to compound different effects.

One common method that mana invaded humans through was air, which, as Skullius had discovered contained pure mana as well. It depended on where one was at the time but generally plant life gathered and cleansed mana into pure mana just as it did when it took in air to expel a substance that humans needed for life.

Essentially, places with great quantities of vegetation bore the greatest reserves of pure mana.

Over the course of a normal human's growth, pure mana would steadily continue to build within them until it formed a Centre, then the rest of the core with time.

The limit, as Skullius hypothesised, likely had to do with their own growth and for Skullius, this became a weird thing to think about as he thought he should have been able to construct a larger Centre given how he was stronger and all.

Perhaps, much like the average human growing their first core, he was treated as being a new born. As if the natural first limit of everyone else was the norm for him to begin at as well.

"Hmm... there should still be ways around it, right?" Skullius said as he stood in mud.

With the Centre done, Skullius understood the mechanism with which an entire core followed.

The Centre composed of the small point in the middle with an encirclement of not-as-condensed pure mana around it, anchored into the body and created a firm reaction with Skullius' soul!

It wasn't exactly a turbulent sensation but Skullius had felt it briefly.

A link was formed when the Centre had been finished, leading him to believe that the mana core was a dangerous thing to lose under normal circumstances.

'I see now. Whatever the Creed thing was, it safely sacrificed the mana core in order to not kill me instantly...' Skullius thought. 'The Centre is linked to my soul and body, huh? That's actually terrifying.'

Skullius shivered before making sure that everything was alright with his Centre. He now had to move on to the next step.

SPLSH.

Skullius sat down in the cool mud.

'I honestly don't know how to tackle this one. The Refinery isn't what I thought at first. It's an area where I have to carve out a way in which my mana moves and what kind of properties it will get. The problem is, I have to do it quickly, otherwise...'

After the Centre was done, Skullius discovered that while it was stable, capable of existing on its own, he had to keep mana from softly flowing from the damn thing.

It wasn't some strange leakage.

No.

It was the Centre fulfilling its purpose.

Producing mana to feed into the Refinery.

The intricacies of this were still not exactly clear to Skullius but he was at least glad it wasn't some kind of defect.

Now, he had to act quick otherwise the mana would naturally start forming a generic Refinery!

'Gah... The other problem lies in the fact that even after more than a day, I still can't perfectly replicate the mana that causes Distorted Gravity.'

With each stretch of time Skullius had spent exposed to the high level concept, he had managed to get bits of knowledge on Distorted Gravity. Vaguely significant bits.

Much of it was small hints at the pattern of the mana that created the concept.

The 'spices' in the mana that gave it its effect were not something that Skullius' core could produce. Even if he pulled the Gravitational mana into his unfinished core, besides from being useful for his skills, it didn't generate anything extraordinary and eventually faded.

Skullius couldn't replicate it.

The flow was the easier part.

It was like watching water run through a complex canal.

Such a thing Skullius could imitate with at least 70% accuracy.

For the mana's texture, Skullius wasn't sure.

Perhaps this was something Mages were very good at.

'Well, I can't wait any longer. If I just create a normal core in the end, what was the point of all this?' Skullius thought with a frustrated frown. 'Dammit! If that's the case, then I'll just try to copy the mana strand by strand! I probably won't succeed in creating the same thing but... at least it will be different somehow right?

Maybe I could get a less effective version of the mana that causes Distorted Gravity. Or maybe something different...'

The Refinery essentially governed the type of mana one would be producing. After pure mana streamed from the Centre it was Refined into a individual's signature form, its texture and feel along with what attributes it could potentially gain being governed here along with how it flowed.



Though this explanation would then cause one to ask if Skullius had been cheating by learning elemental skills from simply extracting all th- yes! Yes he was!

After having felt that mana for so long, he couldn't forget how it felt when he grasped it with his [Elevated Mana Manipulation].

Its feel.

Its texture.

Having experienced handling mana for many years, Skullius was at least adept at that much.

Like how a master forger could recognise mineral components with a touch.

Skullius was far from being a master, but his fond relationship with mana allowed him to be just a teensy bit gifted.

#### Chapter 395: The Long Awaited Chat (1)

Skullius couldn't go to the stout mountain at this time as he would be obliterated by the conditions there. For that, he needed his Penetrator form which he couldn't use if he wanted to forge his new core.

But that was not important as the Discount Human had already begun to weave the mana softly flowing out the Centre.

This was a tremendously arduous process that required Skullius' entire focus.

The mana he weaved, the edges, crevices and bumps he created to mimic how Gravitational mana behaved was rough at best.

What he was creating now was like a template for all the coming mana which would surround the Centre in a circular coat and act like a copier that churned the mana expelled from the Centre into a knock-off that Skullius put his heart and soul into.

He finely etched his focus and skill that he progressed at a such a horrendously slow that effectively made a snail's stroll on the ground look like super speed in comparison.

Perhaps that was a bit of an exaggeration but the idea was understandable enough.

[Elevated Mana Manipulation] levelled up quite a lot during the hours that Skullius buried himself in the focus, his brow actually beginning to leak sweat (still water) as he focused. His soul constantly pulsed as he fine tuned this mechanism that would ensure that his mana would transform into... whatever this he whenever going to create was, whenever it streamed from the Centre.

This skill was an anomaly that most wouldn't recognise.

If one were to recall, [Elevated Mana Manipulation] had evolved from the skill [Mana Sense], which had been the only skill Skullius had which had had the tag, 'Permission to evolve' when he first came to Aigas.

Back then when he gave the go ahead, it had transformed into [Basic Mana Manipulation] which seemed like quite the leap from merely being able to sense mana.

The reason this culminated as such was because Skullius' proficiency at feeling mana had advanced to him being able to draw it from the mana gems in Deadmanland but for the skill to grow further and actually show his competence in handling mana, Skullius had to grow out of his limiter.

His race, the Moronic Undead.

After that, Skullius' thousand years of experience had been taken into account, evolving the skill to [Basic Mana Manipulation].

Now, it was uncontested that this skill was definitely a reflection of the beauty of the path he had taken, casting away what the other Moronic Undead religiously followed. His efforts weren't wasted.

The hard work that followed, with Skullius feeling even his body burning and his soul churning, would be something that the Discount Human and Penetrator would look to in pride, UNTAMED pride, using it to move on as he forged a path ahead.

Skullius employed [Mana Force] which had also been levelling up crazily to compound the mana that slowly streamed from his Centre to the limit, as he then shaped it.

The mix of [Mana Force] and [Elevated Mana Manipulation] created the perfect mix of skill that Skullius required for his task yet the result after thirteen hours was a whopping 2% completion rate!

The progression was firmly cut off by [High Cosmetic Body] timing out, which led to the Penetrator appearing.

Fortunately, when Skullius used the skill again, he would continue from where he left off as continuity was assured each time he switched between bodies.

"Ah... That was intense," Skullius said as he stood. "I wonder how long it will take for me to finish. I really need to get that core before the Premium Age Royale otherwise Silrat won't let me hear the end of it."

Skullius began his walk out of the forest, his mind deep set in thought when he suddenly injected mana into his spatial storage ring.

Like a whip, the Chains of Damnation swished through the air to rapidly wrap around his body!

"I had almost forgotten about you, bro," Skullius said as he patted the chain which wriggled, clearly happy to be out again.

Since the Aegis of Damnation had been split into two diagonal halves, Skullius had salvaged the Chains as he figured they would be a pretty great weapon to use.

As the Penetrator, they were hard for him to wield because the moment he did, he'd have to use them to pierce and stab which was ridiculous. Thus, the chains normally acted on their own when he was in his Penetrator form.

Skullius thought they would be a better fit for his Discount Human though.

Speaking of dark chains, Skullius recalled the time during Sila's take over when the bastard had used an [Evil Darkness] to link the Lord-Slayer and Demion's Dance.

Did Sila not think to use the Chains of Damnation or was it that he thought the chains would reject him.

Unlike a body, the chains were pretty sentient after all.

And as far as that subject was concerned...

"Hmmm... Maybe it's time I talked to the sockethole," Skullius said.

He had confirmed that he had full control of Sila's soul before so there was no harm in having a conversation especially now when he made sure to focus his all on the task.

Skullius slowly left a window for the piece of soul trapped in his own and spoke.

"Hey sockethole..."

"..."

"There's something we need to talk about."

Silence.

Skullius had begun to wonder whether Sila was sulking or something but then...

'What do you want, tomato flinger?' a hoarse and sullen voice echoed within the Penetrator's mind.

'Hmmm? Is this really Sila? He sounds... different,' Skullius thought.

"So you are in there?" the Penetrator said as he made doubly sure that there wasn't anything wrong. "I'll get straight to the point. You and I don't like being in this situation and we clearly can't trust each other. So, instead of focusing on how badly we want to get rid of each other, how about you tell me where that place you said could grant me a blue core is, so that I get stronger, faster."

'...'

Sila did not give a reply. At least not immediately.

Skullius waited.

As strange as it might sound, after the initial rage, and with him finding out that he could reverse his core situation, Skullius had actually come to reflect on how terrible of an experience this was for Sila.

He could kind of relate, after all.

When considering that he had also brought some of that latest disaster upon himself by taking up Bek's deal, he knew there was only so much he could say to rightfully justify himself.

'Hmph. After all that, you expect me to help you?' Sila said with a scoff.

"It's not like you're innocent either. Besides, helping me is helping yourself too. Now that you know about me I'm sure you've seen that I wasn't lying about anything we agreed to back then. If I get strong enough, I could bring your wife back and even get you a body."

The previous agreement with Sila and Skullius had involved the latter taking advantage of Sila's fondness over this person called a wife, lead to a sealed deal.

On Sila's part, now that he had seen through Skullius' memories, he knew the extent of power that the Insurgent Magnus possessed, but bringing back the dead was merely a possibility at best.

'... You say so as if it is some kind of leverage. I have eaten my fair share of a dark reality. Perhaps I should perish and meet my wife on the other side instead.'

'The heck!'

Skullius was once again shocked by Sila's new demeanour. He was no longer loud and rambling every damn second.

However, he wasn't willing to give up just yet.

"You're just going to give up when you lived such a terrible life? Didn't you get defeated before and get locked up for many years? I know how that feels. At least now I do. I have been given a chance at making myself... someone, anyone other than another skeleton's minion.

If I can understand that, why can't you when you've spent ten times the amount of time living in even worse conditions?" Skullius said with an uncharacteristic tone and energy.

Yes. For what seemed like the first time, Skullius was encouraging someone.

Sila felt these words.

He would have argued against them but... he knew Skullius' story now and he certainly couldn't believe that he was being lectured by a former undead right now.

#### Chapter 396: The Long Awaited Chat (2)

A subject that hadn't been explored was how Sila felt about Skullius after literally experiencing all that the Discount Human had ever went through. Leaving his soul without a will had caused Sila to essentially have access to the information about him and his powers in its entirety, which had been a terrifying thing to think about for Skullius.

The way Sila saw Skullius had changed back when he first took it all in but he had been facing a powerful opponent, thus couldn't stop and settle his thoughts.

The aged piece of soul was quite shocked by the revelations.

The fact that Skullius was formerly an undead, even part of tragic group of skeletons that roamed Deadmanland and worked for a powerful Lich was definitely not what he was expecting.

While Skullius had tried to explain it, there was a significant difference between the insane Sila from just after his awakening to the Sila now, who had consumed a portion of Skullius' soul in order to nourish his own, granting him both a mostly grounded mind and restoring part of his strength.

It was tragic to be honest.

The constant stream of danger.

The curses.

The powerful being chasing after Skullius along with the mystery of the Null Lifeform's previous life.

All this was sympathy inducing, but the last of aforementioned was the part that touched Sila quite the most.

This man...

Even from the glimpses that Skullius had unlocked through painful means, Sila could feel the tragedy of humanity from this undead...no from this former undead.

He pitied him.

However, this didn't make him turn into some 'sapling' that would devote himself to helping Skullius and completely abandon his own objectives. Frankly, while Sila's intent had been to help Skullius grow as they agreed, he wasn't concerned with assisting the bastard in becoming a refined, transcendent combatant.

He had wanted to make sure that Skullius would grow the powers of Fulgardt to a sufficient degree before the Null Lifeform reached the Incandescent Stage.

That could at least ensure that he wouldn't have the strength to purge him.

And now, as they were having a soul to soul...

'Mere words. They are cheap, tomato flinger. There was a man who was good with words back in my day. He was a powerful warrior with so much charisma that I fondly believed that he could sway the sun to take a day off if he could give it one of his speeches. I admired him. I confided in him.

I heeded his words, believing with every fibre of my being when he bolstered us with confidence. Yet, when one of the Chosen of Fulgardt came, he died a pathetic death,' Sila said with a grumble that traced back to the past.

Skullius paused for a bit.

Indeed, words were cheap but what else could he do other than try to convince him as such.

Speaking with Sila about this place he had mentioned before, was something that had risen to the top of his list during the past days' events.

It was fuelled by how the Discount thought to manage his time. He had been given six days to finish up his business before heading to Genhuis City. He had something else to do in the big city other than to participate in the Premium Age Royale after all .

The Potential Aptitude evaluation.

Taking this into consideration along with the growth of his core, Skullius thought that Sila's method may do him some good. Perhaps he could finish creating his core faster if it had other effects above bolstering the core colour.

"Look, like I said it before, focusing on how much we have to get rid of each other isn't beneficial to us at all. I'll admit, taking up Bek's offer was wrong. After considering it, we probably can't safely be separated through normal means anyway. Your soul is patching up damage that I received in the past so just hacking you away would flesh me over. My previous assumptions were wrong.

As for you, well..." Skullius said thinking to use another card he had up his sleeve.

While Sila said he was fine with dying, Skullius didn't buy it. He just to appeal to the bastard some more.

"I'm sure you know Null Life is different from Undeath. It's a possible path that we can use. Besides... maybe you've given up on your wife, but don't you want to at least inhabit your original body one more time?"

'...'



A barely noticeable grunt leaked out of Sila.

That's right.

Sila came to a realisation.

This bastard had the key to the Labyrinth of the Yoke with the freedom to return whenever he wished!

And with the power of Null Life...

'I see...' Sila said. 'You are appealing to the old warmonger inside of me, is it? Make no mistake, tomato flinger. What I said before, that was from rage. While I am a war driven soul, there is no longer any of my enemies to fight. It is better to resign to peace now and meet with the woman I love on the other side.

The Tunatsche be damned! I served the Deities enough to earn a spot in their graces.'

"That's true, bro. But... have you ever considered that some of your allies might still be alive. Just like you were captured, what if some of your friends were also bound in the Labyrinth as we speak? Maybe you can't focus on the dead but what about those who are alive?"

...!

This...!

Sila's soul trembled.

That's right!

His comrades!

What if... what if they were alive and bound like he was?!

The old soul felt a burst of guilt!

Over the course of thousands years, his memory was vivid when it came to certain special moments in his life but when considering the larger picture, much of it was murky.

Was he the only survivor of the battle at the Grim Tower?!

Perhaps but also... perhaps not!

He couldn't be sure!

The history from this Era was muddled with many details that he had read from Skullius' mind being false!

Maybe he had thought about his allies during his captivity but after slowing descending into madness before...

"Wouldn't you managing to escape only to kill yourself, leaving them bound for eternity, be a sign of weakness as a... Tower General?" Skullius added spice to the injury while his sockets flared.

Silence pervaded.

The Penetrator was very much aware of the powerful bond of camaraderie. According to Somanda, he literally thrived on it to fill up the missing piece of his soul back in Deadmanland so he knew how powerful it was especially when someone was like a ring leader.

The Penetrator had thought about his gang. Bonet, Mono Socket, Fractures and the others.

He had imagined going back to save them in little bouts of time over the past weeks and while the first time he had arrived in Aigas had seen him almost give up on himself, he had come to realise that he had more to do than he thought.

He intended to save his bone comrades!

When he eventually went over to battle Somanda, he was going to redeem them!

This determination that fuelled him must also fuel the aged soul... was Skullius' thoughts.

Definitely.

After a short period of silence, Sila grumbled but he was evidently set aflame.

'Tomato flinger...' he said, once more feeling the frustration of being won over. 'If we're doing this... I'm taking the whole benefit, my wife included!'

"Of course bro," Skullius said with a hint of smugness. Once again, words won the war for him and he couldn't help but wonder...

'What was I in my past life?'

\*\*\*

Somewhere between the boundaries.

Revia's eyes shot wide open as she watched a scene that made everything she had known and believed, become insignificant.

Her existence and the doctrine she had been funnelled with...

Was it a lie or simply a colossal misunderstanding?

"This is it. Don't be afraid. They don't bite," the man beside her, Actuass, highlighted with a green and black hue from what seemed like a portal before them, said.

Chapter 397: The Deeper Secrets They Never Tell

Before the two was a massive space that stretched for what could be thousands of miles, with the most outstanding feature about this place being the large tombstones that were erected all over.

They were made of one of three colours; pitch black, dark green or a dull grey.

Beneath the large tombstones was a rocky ground where not a single piece of vegetation grew. It was dry, with pebbles and barren dirt, a dusty wind blowing over everything.

High above, the sky was a shade of blue that didn't induce any form of familiarity with the sky from Aigas at all, giving off an otherworldly sense.

Amidst all of this gloom, what truly stole the show, were the entities that stood before the tombstones.

Pale figures with transparent properties, their bodies having to human shape could be seen. Asides from their faces which were very detailed even in this form, the rest of their bodies were simplistic caricatures that only showed their shape vividly, determining whether they were male or female, the rest of being obscure.

Each one of the thousands that could be seen stood at attention while hugging their bodies with their arms like sarcophagi, their heads hung low.

This was the standard posture, with not even a sliver of movement.

That said, the overall image given, especially when one factored in how silent this place was, save for the howling wind, was terribly frightening.

"This is the Outworld Attic. A place that retains the souls of members of our order," Actuass said as he took steps forward, his hand motioning for Revia to follow.

The young lady looked at the scene before her with a pale face, half doubting what she saw.

As she did, something within her strained her eyes and she found these two parts of her feeling strange as they remained glued to these figures that hugged themselves in front of the tombstones.

"These are... souls?" Revia asked with a shallow voice, her breathing hastening.

"Yes," Actuass said as he looked over to the tombstones. "Fascinating isn't it? When the human being is stripped bare, this is what remains. Glowing bulbs chock full of information. You sense a variety of things from them, don't you?"

Revia slowly nodded.

To her, around these souls, vaguely discernible scenes began playing out, each different from the other.

On top of this, her ears picked up whispers that she couldn't entirely make out.

Was it the souls? Were they speaking?

"What do you think happens when a person dies? Where do they go?" Actuass asked her. He stopped walking and turned to Revia whose eyes immediately met his.

"Uh... those judged to be evil and disobedient to the Direction of the Deities are cast into the dark space of Tunatsche while those judged to be good and obedient are taken to the safety of the Deity who gave them Direction...?" Revia replied, unsure of the answer herself.

"Hmmm. I did not expect you to have such a standard answer for one who barely believed in the Purity's cause. But then, I suppose you are that young."

Actuass suddenly pointed below them, the dry ground under the two's feet starting to rumble as dirt and rock began to dig themselves in, creating a depression that kept going deep down!

At first Revia was alarmed but she found that even when the ground sank in, her feet remained stable, standing over an unseen platform that kept her and Actuass stable.

Soon, the ground receded to form a hole that showed an unexpected scene!

Revia was once again shocked by what she saw.

A great distance below her, there was...

"What...what is that?" Revia asked as she couldn't even begin to wrap her mind around it.

It was something akin to ginormous star with constantly rippling edges like an audio spectrum!

It was so vast that Revia could not even determine where it ended with its strangely coloured mass.

Yet, this wasn't even the thick of it as her eyes were drawn in, itching as they drew her attention to things that were moving over this massive mass.

Odd creatures.

Their bodies were like those of souls but different as the variety of their shapes and colour was immense.

"Spirits," Actuass answered simply. "They are like souls but we'll get to that later."

"What you see down there is a plane of existence outside Aigas, like this one. That, is just one layer of nine, each larger than the last going by descent. Your organisation, the Purity knows of it, along with the Six Houses. Isn't that interesting? Much like any other place thought to be a myth or entirely unknown, it has many names but the generally used one is Yormuness."

The term Yormuness was derived from a dominant dialect in Maqi, the term itself meaning 'forgotten apparitions'.

"This is where one goes when one dies," Actuass said with a glint in his eye.

...!

Revia stared at the revealed space below her with quick breaths.

This was it?

This was where one went?

But... there were these Spirits too. How did this work?

Was it a place for atonement or a place for relief?

Why were they able to casually see it if it was something so sacred?

All these questions bounced inside Revia's head yet she couldn't find the right question to ask. While she had been arrogant and unresponsive to Actuass' words before. Now, she felt like she needed them to appeal to her sanity.

"Your father was a Spirit Warden, much like you, though since he wasn't as powerful as you turned out to be, I imagine his powers were lacklustre. You might meet him on our way," Actuass said.

...!

Revia immediately turned her head to the masked man while trembling.

"On... our way?"

"Yes of course."

The former Paladin Champion backed away in fright as she couldn't bring herself to do it. This madness had already driven away the little faith she had in the Purity.

Now she was supposed to go down there?

Actuass ignored her frightened gesture and went on to spout details that Revia didn't quite understand but would soon link together in the next few days.

"The Second Grand War, a tragedy that funnelled millions of souls into the Yormuness was a grand event that I unfortunately missed. But, I did come to learn quite the intriguing information. Do you know how the Chosen Four of Fulgardt were defeated, save for one at least?"

Revia obviously wasn't going to answer as she simply looked at Actuass as if he was a madman.

"They were so powerful that three volunteer experts above the Incandescent Stage, ones from the Purity, bound the souls of these three to theirs with the use of a powerful artefact. They were then killed, effectively leaving Fulgardt without his loyal companions."

Actuass lifted his head up and looked at Revia who drew further back.

"I'm interested in this piece of history. Come. you'll learn to hone your Warden abilities well while we move through the Yormuness and even that requires your powers. <Sigh>. This and all the inside information I have fed you since a few days ago should fulfill my Creed. We both win at the end of the day."

...!

While Revia didn't understand much else of what Actuass actually intended, when she heard the last bit of what the masked man said, she turned even more pale.

With all that she now knew about Creeds...

'That's why he's been telling me all this important stuff?! He's—'

Before Revia could finish her thought, a mass of greenish black flame bound her as well as Actuass, the two speeding through the opening below them...

Chapter 398: Final Destination (1)

Blaiken.

The town was also a snow and ice covered settlement with quite the large number of people within it much like Harifrast.

The general activity with the high of the gloomy sun behind the cold, was as one would expect, the clothing and textile businesses doing well along with eateries that fumed with delectable scents that gathered crowds.

So many of these were sprinkled in every commercial corner, gathering small groups of people, local and otherwise.



The smell of fish pointed out what was most unique about this town; the sale of fish, a particular type of fish.

The Deadneck Oartail.

While it certainly was unbelievable that a town in such a cold place could be well known for exquisite fish, the trade and sale of the scaly mass was factually the best business that Blaiken had.

North of the town was a large, crescent shaped lake, almost triple the size of the town, which was quite strangely unfrozen, the waters within as calm as the flaccidness of the male third leg.

The reason for the unusual phenomenon was naturally the Deadneck Oartails that dwelled within.

They were large, five meter long fish, their heads that arched down at a peculiar angle giving the impression that they had broken necks (of course they don't technically have necks). Their greenish white scales spotted dark marks, with their ends featuring broad tails, like the ends of oars, hence their name.

Skullius was crouching beside the lake in his Discount Human form.

He donned a new jacket, much thicker and furrier than the last one along with hairy pants that wrapped around his fit body nicely.

Around the pair of pants was a dark chain that wound multiple times around his waist, giving Skullius a rather edgy look.

"Interesting. These things are actually expelling mana containing a mild heat from their bodies with some incredible levels of control," Skullius said.

While he couldn't see the fish in the lake, his senses told him a great deal.

The light movements of the water spawned by the wind ran through the ground also, the swimming of the fish creating vibrations that helped him make out their shape.

The mana they produced was also tingling on Skullius' skin, making him quite aware of their presence even without the use of [Elevated Mana Manipulation].

At this moment however, he was using the skill while applying it to the twenty some meter Inner Domain of his where everything was reflected to him perfectly.

"This was a nice detour, I guess. I should probably get going," Skullius said.

Sila had finally relented, divulging the location of the Sacred Forest where the place he had promised could be found.

Upon getting the directions, Skullius inquired from strangers where this place was.

Given how he couldn't understand anyone anymore, Sila who was familiar with the region, having lived in it before, had to chip in, assisting Skullius with forming simple sentences in the native dialects that people would understand.

This didn't always work though, as the language had vastly evolved over tens of millennia and in some cases, UNCoddled had slushied the hell out of people Skullius asked as he hadn't expressed his questions with the right intent and wording to not garner sympathetic help.

What usually followed when he asked successfully however, was people giving him a weird look, borderline hostile which was great for obvious reasons but bad because for some strange reason that Skullius hadn't learnt yet, it gave bad face to seek this place.

Still, he had won the battle to attain the right directions, making a stop here as it was in the direction of his destination.

Skullius had immediately set off after [High Cosmetic Body]'s cooldown ended, his journey leading him to this town where he bought some clothes (pointing at what he needed from stalls), this time quite a bit of them as he wanted to have spares for emergencies.

While in town, he had felt the presence of mana from the lake and decided to investigate.

At the moment, Skullius held the Elimparidis Stone Staff as even now, he couldn't afford to let the Centre to his core keep randomly sending mana off into the Refinery for a simplistic flow.

On the way here by paid carriage, he had been extremely focused as he continued weaving mana with [Mana Force] and [Elevated Mana Manipulation], his pace in creating the coil around his Centre increasing by a bit as he got used to it.

It seemed to Skullius that this task was so difficult because he lacked some kind of stimulus. Something to jolt his body to awaken and make it readily accelerate his capabilities. After all, this process wasn't exactly complicated once he got a hand of it, it was just so slow.

If only he could use [HYPED] as he wished, he bet it would be faster as it had done wonders for Sila but that was impossible. He couldn't just get himself extremely hyped about something.

'Hmm? Who are these guys?' Skullius thought as he felt horses approach him from the distance.

Four men rode these horses, their sleek armour which had a purple design with a golden insignia at the chest place clanking as the beasts they rode galloped to reach Skullius in the next few moments.

"You there. What are you doing here?" one of the men said with a furious look.

Skullius naturally couldn't understand a word of the man saying. He rose and stared blankly at the man with his white eyes, his focus going to the men's cores which had different shades of blue, their body brimming with power that Skullius was unintimidated by.

"Speak! Didn't you hear what he asked?" another of the four men bellowed while reining in the horse that neighed and strutted under him. "Even if you are not a local, attempting to fish during the day and with the sanctioned quota reached no less, is a punishable offence, whether you knew it or not!"

These men did not belong to the Capital Service.

They were Monitoring Officers for the Family that owned this part of the lands.

The Faras Family.

As stated before, Families had the privilege of owning Territory within the nation and governing it as they saw fit.

Blaiken was one such example.

Because the town made quite the bit of money by selling the Deadneck Oartails, the Faras Family had hurriedly stepped in to ensure that the fishes were not dined on to extinction.

Rather, they started breeding projects inside and outside Blaiken while also putting a limit on how much fish could be taken from the lake at the given time.

Skullius tilted his head, finding his inability to understand these guys quite interesting as well as their fury which he could feel without even sensing the contours of their faces contort.

Their mana and the air around them as well as a more natural energy that flowed from them told him much of this.

'Are they upset because of that thing you said you heard those guys say?' Skullius asked Sila internally. 'That can't be true, right? Is that really why no one is here?' he thought.

'Probably so,' Sila replied.

While in the town, Skullius, and Sila by extension, had overhead with his sharpened senses that the locals believed the Deitess Listafelle to inhabit the fish from the lake once a day until the night, blessing the fish. Before then, no one was supposed to even attempt to touch the fish.

Thus fishing was only done in the night-time.

Apparently the local temple priests confirmed this and proliferated the belief.

'Well, flesh that...' Skullius thought.

"Let's take this fool away! He's obviously looking down us," another of the men drew his sword as he edged his horse forward.

Skullius shook his head before his figure turned into a blur.

He shot past the men with brisk motion that prevented the four of them from even catching a glimpse of his figure at all!

Just like that, the three were left gaping as they couldn't even find a trace of the Discount Human in the white of snow around.

\*

...

Skullius sighed as he looked below, his <HEART> beginning to beat at a quick pace.

He was a vast distance away from Blaiken at this time as after making his escape, he had taken to the journey for his last destination with sturdy steps while weaving the ridiculously intricate 'coding' for the Refinery around his core's Centre.

The sun was setting now, and while it had also been part of Skullius' strategy (travelling at a slower speed to drag out time) so that he would at least have his Penetrator form to count on, he couldn't have guessed that he would be having second thoughts about this whole thing.

This was because of the scene he was looking down to right now.

He had reached the place that Sila had talked about but instead of excitement, much of what he felt was apprehension.

'Well... it's definitely different from the Tremur. In fact, it looks more like a Sacred Forest in comparison that place,' Skullius thought while gathering courage.

Chapter 399: Final Destination (2)

Skullius' blank eyes looked down and then to his right.

Strangely, while he couldn't see, he was just too used to his sight that even though he was just sensing his surroundings, his eyes would follow in the direction he was focusing his senses.

With the Outer Domain of his sense, Skullius felt the landscape through the wind, his body moving to the right in order to expand his view and fully take it all in.

It was a pity for him though as he couldn't appreciate the visuals which were rather exquisite.

From where he stood now, the edge of snow covered lands with more trees and grasses than he had expected, the land abruptly dipped, creating a cliff which actually had a steady, angled downslope instead of sharp one, going on for a vast distance of several miles.

This was merely the width of where Skullius was facing directly.

Before this slope, the cliff went on for quite a distance in both directions, up to almost a two hundred miles, before the land arched and circled back to Skullius' right.

On the curve, the land sloped once again, but formed what seemed like a trough that accommodated a flowing river that streamed from miles away and spilled the water from the cliff, like a waterfall.

No.

This part wasn't actually accurate.

Instead of painting the picture of flowing water in the minds of everyone who was curious about this, it was better to say this was a river of fog, with blocks of ice within it as one actually couldn't see the water even when it fell off the cliff!

Only a mass of cloudy white spilled into the area of recession after the cliff, which was a tremendously thick forest!

Much of it was obscure, as this fog which emitted ferocious waves of pure mana, by some form of unrecognisable theory of flow, blew to cover much of the hundreds of miles worth of resilient flora that maintained its colour within, along with the beasts hidden inside.

Ice variants of trees could be seen at some points with other sections of this forest genuinely making it seem like the land persisted before the inevitable dump into the massive body of water that lay beyond this forest when this fog covered area of recession came to an abrupt halt.

This was the Sacred Forest Urja, another one of the pillars of stability as even now with people's faith in the Deities dwindling, it was still believed to cast a stable veil that disallowed Clusters from forming over vast distances.

Evidence of this truth was enough for most people to stay away, with those that approached being looked upon with disdain.

"So uh... you said the place we're looking for is like the Labyrinth of the Yoke? A place where a legacy is being kept, right?" Skullius asked as he sat down. He wasn't going down there until the night fully came, restoring his sturdier form.

'It is a place where a legacy was left behind yes but it's not nearly as complicated as the Labyrinth of the Yoke or many others structures like it. I can still remember that a key isn't needed,' Sila replied.

"Oh. That's good. But hey didn't you say something about this thing that can help me being lake or river or something? I feel and hear a big body of water down there. Are they related somehow?"

'Yes, but that's merely the starting point,' Sila replied with a gruff tone. It didn't feel normal to have a conversation like this with Skullius, while disseminating information no less. He was used to exchanging pieces of hate.

But well, the old soul was capable of embodying the saying, 'It is what it is.'

"I see. What should I expect it?"

Sila did not reply immediately.

His thoughts churned as memories he was fond of, the few that were still clear to him resurfaced, linking to the place he and Skullius were about to venture into.

'Hmmm... Thousands of years ago, many cults were formed and morality took a dive, what with Fulgardt slaughtering those that believed in the Deities. This forced many people to turn from faith, the continent changing into a chaotic hub of immorality. You could say one of the more prominent

believes that certainly grew stronger from the chaos was misogyny. Hmph. That's actually a more tame word.

It was certainly more like a devilish lust, spearheaded by depraved men who believed that since the world was turning so cruel, there was no need to uphold certain moral standards.'

'Women had not been as involved in combat these days. Few undertook the mantles of power in combat form. The majority of those that chose to even step on battlefields were those with classes that gave their more natural abilities shine, making life easier, like hospitality and care.'

'Thus healers and priestesses were the more standard classes that women took. Many took advantage of this and raided temples and villages, capturing and violating women as they pleased. The practice was not followed upon by authorities as obviously they had much to deal with.'

Skullius scratched his chin as he listened.

By that logic then, people like Stylla, Elita, Damilla, the girls from the Harem Guild as well as even Denille were rare in those days.

This was a strange concept to Skullius.

'With the prevailing loss of morality, a shift was spawned in the form of a cult that rose in this time, led by twelve powerful women who decided to fight against the immorality, particularly the injustice against women,' Sila continued, his words seeming to have a lot of emotional investment in this story. 'They called themselves the Order of the Trodden Rose.'

"Oh. That sounds like a cool group," Skullius said while nodding his head.

'If only,' Sila said. 'What started with the intent of righteous belief, quickly turned to become an atrocity of my age. From saving enslaved women who were used as toys, the Order of the Trodden Rose turned to brutally massacring all men they came across, and not in the enticing way.'

Grown men and young boys were stripped down, flayed and flamed where it really hurts and then hung on poles thereafter, as the Healers within the Order kept them alive for a standard of three hours before killing them. Powerful male experts were never seen again as they seemed to serve a grander purpose.'



'This Order repeated the same thing with every village, town and small city they passed, sending a message, as they said. Many quickly realised that Fulgardt's influence was causing even those thought to be righteous to turn immoral, getting lost when they had created a way forward themselves. People shunned this Order, including the women of the age, experts from all over Pelian hunting them down.'

"Brutal..." Skullius said with a grimace. However, he was more concerned about how he was about to enter a place made by this group of women, which seemed so... "You said you've been here before right?"

'...Yes,' Sila said with a slightly cracked tone. 'Multiple times.'

"Oh. Then you must remember everything in that place, right?"

'Not everything, tomato flinger. My memory is full of holes. I'm not my full self after all. For the sake of survival I'll mention the bitter parts when we arrive to their locations.'

Skullius had expected better but having Sila cooperate was definitely more than he could already ask for right now.

Unfortunately, the backstory he had gotten wasn't nearly enough to kill much time as he then started to focus on forging more of the Refinery.

At this point, he was a little more than 3,5% done, Skullius seeing astounding results at least when it came to how the pure mana from his Centre reacted to being led along, told how to flow by what he had completed of the Refinery so far.

His pace was increasing, which was good, but after a little less than 30 minutes, it was time to get back on track with the matter at hand as [High Cosmetic Body] timed out.

Skullius had already removed his clothes, his tall form sparking with Levin as he rose from the mild dredges of snow he had sat on.

With his sight restored, Skullius appreciated the view before him in greater detail before nodding his head.

"Ferex. Do the thing," Skullius said, his second Apostle appearing in its miniaturised form around his neck and instantly forming a large, dark blue hooded cloak that almost seemed ethereal. It covered Skullius nicely, obscuring his bony appearance to the feet.

"Thanks bro," Skullius said. "Be sure to have your hide at the ready for emergencies."

Skullius had learned from the Tremur that his appearance didn't grant him any favours with beasts or living things in general, so he decided to hide it.

Sure the four socket flames of his still flared menacingly out of the hood, but who would immediately think of him as an undead? No one, right?

Right?!

With such preparations, Skullius walked forward, his feet shuffling through the snow (dead give away) as he penetrated the foggy welcoming.

His sights honed on what was ahead, and frankly, it wasn't anything unexpected.

Trees stood half frozen, with their colours of brown and green persisting even in this treacherous cold that Skullius was glad wasn't a detriment to him.

Urja was a lot darker from the inside, but it didn't prevent his progression as he wished to hurriedly reach his destination.

Apparently, when he reached the waters at the end, that was when it would truly begin.

Within the heavily humid atmosphere with a mix of pure mana, Skullius' [Elevated Mana Manipulation] which he was keeping active as a habit now caught something.

...!

SHF! SHF!

Deceptively light sounds echoed while a large mana signature registered in Skullius' sense with his descent down the slope.

From a distance, he saw a hulking mass trudge through the snow casually before it too turned towards him.

Chapter 400: Reverent Lights Grace A Future Goat!

As with the goblins and Vine Prowlers, Sacred Forests held many areas where beasts spawned, as the Grinning Jester Fox had alluded to.

Usually these spawning areas were best for the beasts that grew within them, having friendly conditions that aided in accelerating their growth.

"That's one ugly sockethole," Skullius said as his socket flames flared.

The beast that gazed at him from the sloped distance was a large humanoid creature with a pale face full of pimples, bumps and boils, a thick nose and massive eyes coloured with a hollow black.

It was bald but with greyish silver fur growing from its hunched back all the way to its ankles where exaggeratedly large, hideous feet finished the rest of an ugly tale.

Its body was muscular under the fur, with chunks of ice growing on its shoulders and chest in a weird manner but it didn't seem bothered by it, only a little weighed down as evidenced by the hunch.

The beast lugged a thick, bloody club that settled over the ice on its shoulder, the complete scene being capable of terrifying a normal human out of their mind.

'It couldn't have sensed my presence. Is it my socket flames? Ah... living a double life really makes me forget that I can fix that,' Skullius said before prompting his fierce socket flames to turn into light blue spots within his dark sockets.

This was the equivalent of squinting for the Penetrator.

Unfortunately, the damage was already done as the hulking creature before him turned its body and started to walk over to him with its three meter tall mass.

With his guidance field, Skullius ascertained the name of this creature as well as its strength.

It was called a Burdened Ice Troll and it was a Tier 4 beast, though with only a white core, albeit a very bright one.

The Troll wore a ferocious look before opening its wide mouth that had jagged teeth oozing with dark, putrid saliva and calling in a loud noise that sounded like a cross between cow's moo and the roar of a lion!

...!

Almost immediately, Skullius felt his [Elevated Mana Manipulation] tug at him, alerting him of sixteen figures whose mana cores throbbed in his sense from a large distance and...

Wait!

Skullius came to a screeching halt with his immediate thoughts.

'Wait! Wait! Wait!'

What he had sensed just now didn't wait for him to think about the anomaly he was currently experiencing though, as soon, sixteen Ice Trolls rushed from the cover of trees and circled around him, some hiding and some openly showing themselves with arrogance.

As all this happened, Skullius wasn't actually focused on the beasts as he grasped his chin between his fingers.

Strange...

Seeing the enemy not showing a reaction, the first Troll to identify Skullius dashed towards him with fury painted over its ugly mug, its figure crossing the distance in a breath as it then made a light leap, club overhead and swung down with all its might!

The air roared as the club descended, a testament to the creature's raw strength!

Yet...

"I'm thinking about something right now, dammit!" Skullius said with annoyance as his hand sparked with Silentburn Levin, a bolt of the silent destruction storming upwards to meet the club which was ripped to shreds instantly!

...!

Skullius' socket flames flashed with an intense fire, evidently an expression of how the Penetrator just internally said 'Flesh It!'.

His hand flashed over to touch the shocked Troll's chest and a skill that Skullius had never used (on page) was activated.

~~~

[Fulgurous Virulence <Currently empowered by 'Epiphany'> | Lv.3]

Infect a target with a condensed infestation of Silentburn Levin, causing an implosion from the inside. This attack deals 80% Serenity Damage.

-Caution-

Limited effects on stronger opponents or reinforced physiques and constructs.

Mana Requirements: 800 Mana Points

Duration: ---

Cooldown: 3 minutes

~~~

The skill was currently being empowered by [Epiphany], causing its usually 30% Serenity Damage to skyrocket to 80%!

Sparks flew from Skullius' hand and a vibrant line was traced over the skin of the Troll as shockingly, after a certain checkpoint over its skin that the line ran over, a large white blot of Levin would swell, growing brighter and brighter with time!

Before the span of two breaths could even arrive, forty of these had appeared on the body of the Troll which screamed in pain before...

BOOOMZZZTT!

It imploded into compressed burnt chunks that lit up with sparks of Levin before falling to the ground with a hiss!

Experience was funnelled into Skullius, but he wasn't focused on it as he was more intrigued by what he had discovered, the effect of [Epiphany] on [Elevated Mana Manipulation]!

The other trolls were shocked by the instantaneous death of one of their own by strange means they couldn't understand, their eyeballs bulging at the harsh reality!

This same reality seemed to tell of fortune for Skullius instead however.

'This is crazy! With [Epiphany] on, I can sense more than just mana and the colour of cores!' Skullius thought.

Just now, when the now dead Troll had called its fellow beasts, Skullius felt the loud thrum of mana from the cores of these sixteen other creatures from the varying distances they were, even if they were outside his effective range!

Their emotion and reaction, as well as how they funnelled mana into their bodies through their mana pathways, the reactions of their flesh as a result, the direction they would come from based on the flow of their mana...!

All of this was told to Skullius just from [Elevated Mana Manipulation]!

What was even crazier was that if Skullius focused enough, he could practically see the inner workings of the cores of the Trolls, their Centre, their generic Refinery and the Shell... all of it, in addition to feeling a very faint connection of this core to their very existence!

This... was ridiculous!

'I didn't think the boost to the skill would be this much. Though I guess that my understanding of mana cores and mana in general now helps me use [Elevated Mana Manipulation] more effectively,' Skullius thought.

The Trolls around him growled as they gathered courage and pounced on him all at once!

Their bodies flared with icy chill, some even exuding a frosty air as they seemed to have ice-related abilities!

Frankly, each one of these Trolls had physical stats that were way higher than those of Skullius, at least in terms of endurance and strength as Skullius could augment his agility with Levin to at least not be too far behind.

However, this did not matter as Skullius had the upper hand in skills.

And now, it terms of skill...

The Penetrator raised his hand, a thick coil of mana rushing around it as he imbued 100% of his focus on what he was about to pull!

"Die, you ugly mugly socketholes," Skullius said with a chilling voice and...

...!

...!

RAAAAAAAAAAARRR!

The collective pained roar of the Trolls echoed throughout the space as they halted mid attack, their eyes wide open in shock and tremendous agony!

Every single one of them felt it!

A sturdy grasp on their mana cores!

No.

A cruel hold that choked their mana cores!

Then....

VWOOOOOOOSH!

The mana within their cores started to flood out with reckless fury through their mana pathways with atrociously high output that didn't match the size of these channels!

As a result, the Trolls growled horribly, bitterly, as their pathways ruptured and in turn their bodies, as the light of mana flared from their orifices with a cruel brightness!

The collection of three openings on the faces of the sixteen Trolls, all lit up like white lanterns illuminated the image of the cloaked Fulgurant Bone Penetrator in an unintentionally majestic reverence, the Nullmancer foreshadowed to conquer all kingdoms relishing in his power and in the death of the enemies not worthy of even landing a blow on him...