

# Undead 41

## Chapter 41: Bolstering The Nullmancer's Offense (2)

If it wasn't for Skullius not having enough mana at the moment, he would have already committed to spamming the skill as he had nothing better to do.

His teeth clacked as he finally saw the boons of having the Vehement Bone Nullmancer as a class. The ability to extract skills from objects that held mana!

This detail went to convince Skullius that the description for the class back then was not a hoax. He could truly use Null Life Essence to enhance his connection to mana. It was pretty accurate.

Red Rage watched the Boneman silently.

His master doing a little dance - swaying his waist unattractively - made his socket lights blink furiously, as though he was trying to turn them off... along with the vision that came with them.

Skullius only sat down after a while as he inspected the staff again with his guidance field.

He noticed that it didn't have the skill [Mana Bolt] anymore!

"Interesting..."

He hurriedly picked up the short staff and began to spill his deep focus into it.

There was a clear distinction between this staff and the crooked magic staff.

The short magic staff did not expand his range for [Unbound]. As he willed, it was set alight with Null Life Essence as his mind was drawn to its inner mana workings.

Once more, Skullius saw mana networks that were slightly more complex than those of the crooked magic staff.

However, regardless of how they tangled and turned, the determined Skullius followed through, looking for all the passages made from mana as they were then filled up with Null Life Essence.

[You have mastered the skill 'Flame Shot' from the short staff. Your understanding of the compounds of the world and mana increases!]

"Yes!"

The Boneman immediately went to look at the skill in his panel.

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[Flame Shot | Lv.1]

Release a burst of highly condensed fire that explodes upon contact with the target.

Mana Requirements: 30 Mana Points

Cooldown: 10 seconds

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Another one!

"That's right!" Skullius exclaimed.

Since he didn't have mana at the moment, he decided to add something else that could improve these skills. Well, one of them.

He was going to use [Unbound]!

The skill, according to its description, could upgrade any stat, skill or weapon.

Skullius had initially wanted to save these points for Red Rage, but on top of his personal decision not to for the time being for obvious reasons - most closely related to burning jealousy - he simply didn't think the Bone Boar needed it as much as he did.

He needed an offensive move he could count on at the moment and didn't have the luxury to wait anymore. Besides, he could always gather more Null Life Essence after acquiring a powerful skill from this upgrade.

"I need an attack I can use for simple offense - better than I have now - and another for dealing a lot of damage. If I can get a better version of [Flame Shot], I will have some peace of mind. I can leave [Mana Bolt] as it is and continue to level it up."

This was Skullius' reasoning.

What he considered to be a problem when using [Unbound], was the fact that he might score an ability that required too much mana and therefore be unable to use it.

He aimed to use 1000 Null Life Essence Points for a [Permanent Random Upgrade] so the skill he got would forever be planted in him.

Thus, it had to count for something.

Using 1000 Null Life Essence Points presumably guaranteed that what he drew was not something weak at least.

Thankfully, there was still some time before he could use [Unbound] because of the cooldown, which gave him quite the bit of time to settle his mind on the matter.

The time sadly elapsed faster than Skullius had imagined.

"Well... with time I will be able to use it even if its cost is too high, right?" he rationalised concerning a worst case scenario that involved a high mana cost for the new skill.

Oh well.

[What would you like to Upgrade with Unbound?]

"Flame Shot," Skullius responded.

[1000 Null Life Essence Points expended for Permanent Random Upgrade]

[Random Upgrade decided!]

Skullius felt something being drained from him and then... something else began to be inserted into his core!

It had a burning sensation to it that he felt raging out, begging to be released!

The anticipation Skullius felt was unmatched!

He hoped that it wouldn't be something bad. He was practically begging in his mind.

[Random Upgrade Complete!]

[Your skill 'Flame Shot' has been upgraded to 'Bitter-Sweet Hell's Inferno']

"Uhhh...." Skullius tilted his head upon seeing the name.

What Inferno?

He then turned from the name and went on to check what this new skill could do, hope gripping his core.

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[Bitter-Sweet Hell's Inferno | Lv.1]

A horrendous flame that subjects the target to unimaginable torment through immense heat that delivers extreme pain and extreme pleasure interchangeably until nothing of them remains.

Mana Requirements: 150 Mana Points

Cooldown: 5 minutes

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"..."

The description of the skill left Skullius torn between the thought of whether this skill was actually powerful or not.

He waited for his mana to regenerate, hours passing before he saw it full up.

"Right!" Skullius said as he then prepared to test out his skills.

He decided to try [Mana Bolt] first.

He stretched out his bony hand, pointing it towards the other side of the gorge. He intended to appraise the damage capability by using the hard rock that formed a slope as the target.

With the activation of the skill, mana surged from Skullius' core, extending to his hand as he then called out...

"[Mana Bolt]."

A bright flash of light coalesced within his hand! It shone with a bright white light and condensed to fit in his palm!

Skullius looked in awe as the ball of light pulsed like a heart and he then commanded it to shoot forward!

The bolt of mana whizzed through the air and met the hard rock on the other side in a flash!

The rock was smashed apart as the [Mana Bolt] blew against it, rocks and dust rose from the destruction!

A crater the size of a human head appeared, being a bit deep as it showed the potency of the attack.

"Not bad. This is a bit stronger than when it was a skill in the staff."

Skullius still remembered how that one goblin mage had managed to damage him quite a bit with a single [Mana Bolt]. Now, it was stronger and had an added effect that he hoped to test out soon.

After evaluating the strength of this skill, Skullius decided it was time to test out the big one.

He stretched his hand and activated the skill, calling it out its name loudly for dramatic effect.

"Bitter-Sweet Hell's Inferno..." Skullius paused. "... that doesn't sound epic enough. I'll just call it Hell's Inferno for now. HELL'S INFERNO!"

Mana once again surged from his core, a vast amount of it gathering in his hand and then...

A purplish-orange glow sprang into existence with a large size and grandeur that eclipsed its caster's own!

It was like a star with the odd colour mix, issuing a great heat to the surroundings!

A ball was formed from this, being as large as Skullius' upper frame, tendrils of heat dancing at the edges.

"Oh... my..." Skullius was entranced.

Red Rage also looked on with interest.

Skullius debated on whether to actually fling this thing as he thought about the danger of attracting unwanted attention.

"I don't need to compare it with [Mana Bolt] anymore. Let's send it that way..."

Skullius decisively pointed the fireball further away within the gorge and released it!

Upon firing, the Boneman drew back a bit from the power of the skill, the [Hell's Inferno] flying with quick speed, heading for the rocky slope ten meters away!

BOOOOM!

The rock wall shook, a massive chunk of it being blown away!

Only a large crater with a significant portion of it hissing while layered in red remained. It was quite deep, smoke coming from it in thick billows.

Skullius looked on with unseen joy!

"This..."

He couldn't form a sentence. He disregarded this not being what the description about the skill said and relished in how much destruction it could cause.

Skullius looked at Red Rage who was enthralled by the skill as well.

"Well my bro, Red. It's settled what we are going to do until the light returns. We are going to level up our skills! 'There ain't no rest for the wicked,' they say. Wait, who says that?"

Skullius shook his head and dismissed the thought. Red Rage nodded, beginning to work on his skills, while Skullius decided to use the rest of his mana for spamming [Mana Bolt] before resting, waiting for it recover.

The night passed with flashes of white and purplish-orange faintly appearing from the gorge as the two went hard at the grind, bolstering their offense.

Chill, spam. Chill, spam. That was the plan.

Soon the sun rose, an existence that could be found in most worlds. It brought about light and caused the two Null Lifeforms to stop their spamming as even though they didn't know what the word 'tired' meant, they did know that the day time was an active playground for most creatures.

The results were great for Skullius, but even greater for Red Rage!

Chapter 42: A 'Deadly' Flame

[Mana Bolt] had levelled up by three, reaching level four.

[Bitter-Sweet Hell's Inferno] had levelled up by two, which was still good for Skullius. He had been interchanging the spamming of his skills with one full mana tank used for one skill at a time.

With [Hell's Inferno], he had been visualising what he had seen Vijak do when manipulating the fire. According to his own inference, Vijak had been manipulating a fire-related skill through Mana Manipulation which he believed the high-level goblins to be using. Unfortunately, Skullius hadn't been able to successfully manipulate the flame from his skill.

However, his [Basic Mana Manipulation] had levelled up twice from his attempts, which was a welcome boon.

There was skill on Skullius' guidance field that he always lamented at not being able to use. Or rather, he could use it, but it just wouldn't do anything.

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[Null Life Aura | Lv.1]

An expansive influence of the user anchored on their chosen affinity. It bears a Serene, but potent effect on enemies and the user.

<Affinity : None>



-Effect-

None

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Apparently, he needed an affinity for this skill to work and he didn't know how to go about it.

This was the reason he had been unable to use it at all previously and the same was true for Red Rage.

Concerning the Apostle, most of his skills had levelled up very well which made Skullius grind his teeth while giving his Apostle a hateful thumbs up.

Naturally, Red Rage reciprocated with his own.

[Climb], [Basic Bow Mastery], [Flash Throw] and [Dash in Dust] had levelled up to 5 times while the rest were pretty much the same.

Furthermore, Red Rage had borrowed the steel sword and begun sword practice.

As a result, the Apostle had awakened [Basic Sword Mastery].

This particular absurdity didn't infuriate Skullius as much, as he considered that when Red Rage reached Tier 1, he would be more deserving of a physical-combat based class, thus he had given the sword to Red Rage for permanent use.

"Well, that's it for now. Let's go and find some prey."

Skullius thought to cross over to the other side of the gorge, but stopped.

"Why risk facing new, maybe stronger enemies? It would probably be safer to start searching from the goblin settlement and beyond. There should be weaker creatures, right? Besides, for now, I can only prey on the weak."

Having decided that, Skullius and Red Rage cautiously scaled the rocky slope where they had come from.

Where the goblins and orcs had faced off was a distance away, but it didn't hurt to be extra cautious.

The two climbed up and saw the familiar greens again. It almost felt like a lifetime ago when they had last been here.

Entering into the vast forestry, Skullius decided to activate [Basic Mana Manipulation] so that he wouldn't be caught off guard by any creatures within the vicinity.

Given the fact that the two had been running at full speed when they fled, walking back took quite a bit of time.

The two journeyed cautiously, with Red Rage already being hyped for some more killing as was the trend that he was currently going with since last night. Well, since he was summoned actually exact.

When it came to this world, Aigas, the rules pertaining to time were rather simple and similar to other worlds that existed, with little deviations.

A day was made up of 24 hours, a month, 30 days and a year, 450 days fitted within 15 months.

As mentioned before, the distinction between day and night was depicted by a bright yellow sun that was rising at this moment while in the night, no object would hang in the air to provide light. The bright blue sky produced a dull luminance with seasonal variations.

The Boneman and his Apostle saw something in the distance that grabbed their attention.

Two things, in fact.

For one, numerous orcs were carrying the dead bodies of other orcs as well as those of goblins.

Skullius recalled that this was the place where the battle occurred last night. It was painfully clear given the state of the ground.

The second thing was something he wouldn't have noticed from this distance if he wasn't paying attention.

A portion of the forest was black, a distance away. Trees, bushes and grass couldn't be seen through the spaces between the vegetation that was nearer to him.

'What happened there? That's the direction of the goblin settlement, right? How unlucky can they get?' Skullius thought.

As Skullius approached, he heard the conversations between the orcs.

"Can we eat these today? I'm starving," one orc said as it pointed at the dead body of a goblin.

"Shut up, you fool! You can't eat these, they have poison in their bodies!"

"Really, Gi'Gane? But still..."

Red Rage was about to shoot forward when Skullius immediately held him down.

"Stop! I'm taking the lead this time!" he growled as he walked forward, his image, wrapped in robes and with a staff in his hand being made known to the orcs who immediately became vigilant... then horrified!

"An undead! What is an undead doing here?!"

"Run! Run!"

"Grrr!"

Of the eight orcs there, half were trembling while others showed their aggression.

One orc in particular holding a crude axe, advanced towards Skullius who confidently looked at it.

Skullius checked the orc's status.

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[ Name : Nuu'Bu ]

[ Tier : 1 ]

[ Class : Warrior ]

[ Level : 4 ]

[ Race : Berserker Orc ]

[ Inv. Status : Starving; could eat a shoe ]

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[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 24 ]

[ Agility : 14 ]

[ Intelligence : 4 ]

[ Endurance : 35 ]

[ Luck : 4 ]

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[ Health : 50/50 ]

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[ Mana : 24/24 ]

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"This guy has very low Intelligence. Is that why he isn't afraid? What's wrong with him?" Skullius mumbled to himself.

"RAAAAAAR!"

The orc roared intimidatingly as it continued to advance slowly, its thick hands flexing with its axe.

"Don't try to act tough sockethole, I know you're dumb!" Skullius chortled, making the orcs flinch when it hit them that his taunt was said in their language!

Before they could exclaim and decide on anything else, Skullius' socket flames danced ferociously as he gathered up mana to cast a skill.

He raised his hand, a ball of purplish-orange flame blooming into existence as it illuminated everything around with its glow.

The orcs' jaws fell to the ground in shock and they froze, mortified!

That heat...!

It was staggering!

The orcs had already started to sweat before the fire touched them. Some were considering giving themselves up as docile pork already.

Nuu'Bu stopped his advance. He was sweating too. He began to fall back to his group.

Skullius relished in the enemy's fear and went on to throw over the ball of fire which flashed, covering the distance between him and the orcs in a little more than a breath!

It went on to devour Nuu'Bu and friends.

The fire roared with a deep thrum as it met the earth, a resounding boom rocking the ground and releasing a wave of heat and light!

The [Hell's Inferno] torched an area of approximately five meters, blowing apart trees and melting the ground!

Surprisingly, one of the orcs was flung off by the impact and blown away from certain death with only minor wounds.

The orc tumbled before making a quick effort to stand despite its hanging skin. It watched in horror as its mates were burnt to crisps...and then some!

To make matters worse, one of the stronger orcs didn't get charred to oblivion. Not immediately, at least. It screamed as it flailed its arms, spewing dark smoke!

Its body was on fire, the tongues of purplish flame licking it making it sound like a walking dish.

Then it happened!

The orc screeched in pain, hollering and howling with a blood-curdling screech!

"EEEEEEEEAAAAAAH!"

It moved erratically and then...

An immense wave of pleasure sprang within its body, fueling its will to live for several more moments so that it could continue to... enjoy it!

The orc saw its fellow who was looking at it in horror and extended its hand as it stumbled, making all kinds of unnecessary gestures that made even the air uncomfortable!

Its eyes rolled in ecstasy, its tongue sticking before it began to be consumed by the flame too!

"OOOOHH! AAAAW! Gi'Gane~" It said while releasing fumes. "...Come...closer...OOOOH! Come.. and...

let me..."

Skullius: "..."

Gi'Gane: "..."

Even to Skullius, that sounded wrong and he began to wish that this orc had been incinerated into dry pudge instantly like the others.

Thankfully, soon, the burning orc turned into ash, vanishing from the world, permanently!

"At least it packs some power. Can't say I'm disappointed," Skullius said while looking at the crater that was releasing a searing heat.

Chapter 43: Flesh It...

The [Hell's Inferno] made Skullius feel confident... for the most part.

He was happy he had a heavy hitting skill and he intended to keep upgrading it.

As a quick flash, Red Rage by his side saw an opening and darted forward while Skullius was mulling over the details concerning his skill!

The Boneman heard the sound of something falling to the ground and turned his head to find that the last orc had been decapitated.

Red Rage had swiped the steel sword in a clean lateral slash and beheaded the orc before it could react.

"The [Basic Sword Mastery] is being put to good use it seems."

From the looks of the equipment that the orcs had, which consisted of large stretcher-like objects made of wood with four protruding beams and rope, it seemed the orcs had just come to take away the bodies of their dead.

Skullius turned to the black stretch of land that was ahead.

He then looked behind him in the opposite direction and thought of the best course of action.

"I might as well take on the orcs now. Though..."

The Boneman hesitated because of the large boar he had seen yesterday which had been able to injure a Tier 2 goblin.

To be fair though, Tiers among different creatures were not exactly relative in strength. For instance, Tier 2 for an orc was different for a goblin, with the former being stronger if the same class was considered, all else remaining constant.

Still though, it didn't change the fact that Skullius was at risk as he was still at Tier 0.

"I'll just have to be smart about it. For now... let's check what happened there. I need to scout for what I can find in that direction anyway. Maybe there will be another settlement of beasts that I can hunt."

Skullius called to Red Rage who was salvaging the equipment from the orc that didn't get burnt in the [Hell's Inferno].



He found an axe which he looked proud to own now. Well it was only fair, after all, finders keepers, losers skewered violently.

The two cautiously but briskly went over to inspect the black patch. It only took a few minutes.

The ground was hard and brittle.

The only trees that still had a semblance of their former selves remaining, were the large ones.

Their remains were merely black trunks that had the leaves burnt off, leaving a lifeless husk that reminded Skullius of the vegetation from Deadmanland.

'What really caused this?'

The two's movements made crisp sounds on the earth, ash staining their bony feet.

Skullius sensed the remaining embers of mana that had been expelled. It was a faintly hot remnant that tickled his core.

'This couldn't have been a skill, right?'

As the two went deeper, Skullius started to get anxious.

Something was terribly wrong. The further he walked, the more the feeling of foreboding grew worse.

After walking a few more steps, he stopped, and Red Rage did the same.

His socket flames burnt fiercely, depicting the unease he felt.

He had sensed something he hadn't encountered before until now.

A thick blanket of mana was gushing in to surround him from the opposite direction!

"Let's turn back, Red bro," Skullius said nervously before beginning to backpedal.

Unfortunately for him, the blanket of mana followed and Skullius found that even when he leapt backwards, the mana didn't leave him alone.

'Is this like [Mana Sense] or [Basic Mana Manipulation]?'

He stopped and shook.

Since it was like this, he activated [Basic Mana Manipulation], his mana stretching to cover a large distance until it picked up something that made Skullius' knees give out!

He sensed a figure in his range, but that wasn't what shocked him the most!

The thing within this figure was what made Skullius stumble and feel an overbearing reaction in his core!

A blue mana core!

That's right!

A light blue core that released very dense mana!

Skullius' core reacted on its own, almost as if showing respect to the superior might it sensed through his [Basic Mana Manipulation]!

Skullius looked ahead and caught a trace of what it was that was releasing this power; [Basic Mana Manipulation] didn't give the details he needed.

There, sitting down and leaning against a charred tree trunk was a...

"Human...!" Skullius exclaimed.

At that moment, his previous instincts as an undead told him exactly what this creature was and the first thing he thought to do... was to run!

VOW's countless warnings rang in his mind and Skullius didn't intend to ignore them.

'Young undead. If you haven't realised it, you're in a different world. This world is full of living beings. STRONG, living beings... Particularly, the humans...' VOW had said.

Skullius dashed and hid behind one of the tree trunks, and Red Rage followed suit, concealing himself behind another which was two meters away.

The expanse of mana around the area followed him everywhere so he decided to hide and think of a plan.

He was afraid of being seen as he knew the instant reaction of all living creatures when they saw him.

He wondered if this guy already knew what he was. There didn't seem to be any movement or commotion, so Skullius thought about whether or not he was in the clear.

He waited a few seconds and peeked from behind the trunk, getting a better view from the angle he chose.

What he saw was a wounded creature that hung its head.

Blood and scratches were what he could see from this distance.

'He's injured? Is he dead or alive?' Skullius wondered.

Suddenly, the human lifted his head and looked in Skullius' direction with one eye that released a scary glint!

Skullius hid his figure again. If he had a heart, it would have been beating like a drum right now.

He looked to the trunk behind him where Red Rage was hiding.

Even this overzealous Apostle was not keen on fighting that monster.

"I know... you're there... Come out... Or I'll kill you...bleurgh!"

A boisterous voice that was filled with mana reached Skullius and Red Rage, making them tremble.

'He knows! But wait! This must mean he doesn't know that I'm a... But still... if I come out like this he'll know and kill me!'

Skullius' mind churned.

This guy was definitely critically wounded judging by the way he spoke. His words implied that his intent was to scare him into revealing himself. Well, Skullius hoped that was the case.

'That's equally bad though! I don't doubt that he can kill me even from that distance.'

"Hey! Come out here! If you don't.. Urgh...! I will blow everything around here to bits!" the man growled.

Skullius shook and almost stumbled.

By Somanda's cruel whim! He believed every word!

Blow this whole area to bits?!

As Skullius contemplated whether he should just prostrate himself and attempt to bullshit his way out of this - as he had done with Azila - the image of the human being stuck in his mind, he immediately got an idea.

A human image!

Of course!

'Ah... I have that... Should I use it?'

Using that skill had its demerits.

Skullius shook his skull and cast away all worries and hesitation, immediately casting the skill that could potentially save his Null Life.

['Flesh It Like You Mean It' has been activated!]

Mana surged and covered the entirety of Skullius' skeletal body under the robes and armour.

For a moment, Skullius forgot that he was in a perilous situation as a strange sensation overtook him!

Strange bubbles of flesh started growing on his bones, releasing wet and crunchy sounds!

They had bobbing red veins and they began to stretch and cover Skullius' body from skull to the phalanges (toes, apparently)!

Quickly, his earlier frame vanished, replaced by something else entirely!

[Cosmetic flesh successfully constructed. Alteration complete!]

[Configuring Status...]

[Status Configuration Complete!]

[Inserting New Status]

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[ Name : None ]

[ Level : 1 ]

[ Class : None ]

[ Race : Discount Human ]

[ Inv. Status : Still doomed ×2 ]

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[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 10 ]

[Agility : 10 ]

[ Intelligence : 5 ]

[ Endurance : 10 ]

[ Luck : Atrocious? ]

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[ Health : 30/30 ]

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[ Mana : 20/20 ]

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[ Skills ]

[ Basic Mana Manipulation | Lv. 4 ]

[ Flesh It Like You Mean It | Lv. 1 ]

[ Bitter-Sweet Hell's Inferno | Lv. 3 ]

[ Artless Dodger | Lv. 1 ]

[ Mana Bolt | Lv. 4 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Greater Communication | Lv. 2 ]

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[ Affinities ]

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Chapter 44: Cash In!

[ Supreme Skill ]

[ Flesh It Like You Mean It | Lv. 1 ]

-A complementary skill to the Lifeless Evolution Package-

The user is able to gain a flesh body that is masked from most types of detection magic. While it does compromise the user's racial abilities, it offers much more in exchange. The greater the level, the more realistic the body.

Mana Requirements: None.

Duration: 24 hours.

Cooldown: 3 hours.

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Skullius remained silent for a moment as he looked at the new status screen.

[Congratulations, you have cast 'Flesh It Like You Mean It' for the first time!]

[You will temporarily enjoy the perks of being 'human' and with an increase in your level, many more benefits will be unlocked. This is a complementary package to 'Lifeless Evolution' offered by Serenity for your convenience!]

[Please note that additional sensations are currently disabled from your new body]

Skullius trembled as he looked at himself. The sensation from his vision was different and his bones were coated with flesh and warm ivory coloured skin.

Under his robes, a standard body which was neither fat nor thin, muscular or otherwise, replaced his foggy grey skeletal frame.

His height was reduced to roughly one and a half meters, which made Skullius feel uncomfortable.

He might as well be a midget.

His face... well, that was where all the magic was at.



The blankest face imaginable highlighted his head.

There were no distinctive features.

Standard looking grey eyes, a nose and a mouth were the only things visible, making him look like a solid, undetailed drawing.

Short, light auburn hair could be seen on his head, completing the look of an overly generic human being.

"This..." Skullius stammered as he looked at his hands.

[Apostle 'Red Rage' ha—

BOOM!

The trunk Skullius was hiding behind was shattered by a powerful force of mana!

Skullius took a few steps back, almost falling at the sudden explosion.

The hairs on his skin rose, being somewhat sensitive to the mana, but his bones were what reacted the worst.

Torn between the shock of his new body and the attack that came from beyond, Skullius froze.

On the other hand, Eobald who had just now cast a wisp of his mana after sensing a peculiar activation of energy from Skullius' direction, was dumbfounded when he saw his figure.

"You!"

Eobald's voice travelled to Skullius with a burst of mana within it and shook him out of his reverie.

Skullius promptly looked at Eobald, quivering.

"Come here...!"

Skullius began walking over to Eobald obediently. The closer he got, the more he sensed the powerful mana he exuded.

Soon, he was merely two meters before the man who coughed up blood and glared at him, his eyes shining dangerously.

"Even in my current state... I can notice something fishy when I feel it... What are you..?!" Eobald growled with a face full of suspicion.

Skullius hesitated, gulping saliva for the first time.

There was a gnawing feeling hammering at his mind as if something was triggered with this transformation of his.

He looked at his guidance field status - which was still flickering before him - and saw his race. He reserved his comments and responded to Eobald with ample fear that made his chest rise and fall.

"I'm... I'm a ... I'm a Dis— I'm a human... Just like you..." Skullius answered nervously.

His response didn't sound unnatural at all.

Eobald's eyes did not leave Skullius' face. There was confusion and apprehension.

"What's wrong with your face? You look... strange."

Skullius didn't know how to answer to that. What was he supposed to say in response?

Eobald felt his instincts point at something awry here.

Because of his weakened state, however, he couldn't think straight. He had spent the night bleeding out while enduring the agony of the poison.

He hadn't been even be able to properly sense what was in the range of his mana sense. It was only after he felt the strange weaving of energy that he forced himself to seriously investigate.

Yet, he was slowly losing the luxury of finding out what was amiss.

Well, now that he thought about it, did it matter?

"What's a Foundation Stager like you doing here anyway? You're weaker than any adventurer I've seen in my life. How did you survive in this forest?" Eobald asked suspiciously.

Skullius began to sweat; this particular upgrade didn't help though.

It was strange indeed, especially when he saw his own stats. No one would simply believe that he was KOing all the powerful creatures he came across.

"Luck... I guess," Skullius replied, wholly doubting his own words.

Eobald frowned, not buying the excuse one bit.

Unfortunately...

His body jerked as he coughed up blood.

'Dammit! I just caused myself more damage.' Eobald thought. 'I have no other choice. I wanted a miracle, here it is. Might as well use it. At least...

HE should buy it, right? If I at least try...'

"Listen closely."

Eobald pulled out a silver object. It was circular and it fit within the palm of his hands. Circular rings could be seen on its surface, with texts inscribed that were incomprehensible.

He motioned for Skullius to come closer. The Discount Human did so.

Eobald handed the silver object to Skullius and muttered something while holding his hand.

Skullius felt a faint trace of mana flow into the circular object that he held and then into his body before it clutched onto something deep within him!

['???' has been bound to you]

'What?'

Eobald took in deep breaths as he once again felt that with each excessive use of his mana, his body sustained more damage.

"This is a Key... to a certain labyrinth where a special legacy is being kept. My enemies want this Key, but I have bound it to you. If they kill you, it will be destroyed. Run away as far as you can before they find you and keep the Key safe. Do not let them have it!

Do you understand?"

Skullius slowly nodded after hearing Eobald's words.

Eobald nodded and pulled out more stuff; a short scroll and a crest. He also took his sword and gave it to Skullius.

"The scroll can be used to teleport to several locations - known cities. As for that crest..." Eobald paused and pointed at the crest that was shaped like a very thin red hand,"...Once you appear in any of the cities the scroll takes you, someone must come to receive you, if not, hold out that crest. Hand whoever has the same crest these objects."

Blood began dripping from Eobald's eyes, his skin beginning to turn into a nasty shade of purplish red.

"As for the sword, keep it. I hope you use it well."

Skullius was overwhelmed by all this information.

It was a lot to take in for a skeleton who had spent centuries in the mines of Deadmanland.

He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

"I'm counting on you..." Eobald said with a light smile that somehow told of freedom, regret and fear. "Now... please do me a favour. I'd rather perish by the hands of a fellow human than those of a... beast...ugh... May the strength that leaves my body, serve you well."

A solemn smile bloomed on Skullius' face immediately.

He unsheathed the sword he had been given and drew closer to Eobald.

He wore a humble expression and tenderly handled Eobald's shoulder, looking him in the eye with a dignified nod of his head.

"I thought you'd never ask. It would be my honour," he said with the purest voice he could muster.

TCH!

The mirror-like sword of Eobald penetrated his heart.

The gasped and choked, life fleeing from his body. Then he was no more.

Skullius grinned. For a moment, he forgot all that Eobald had said!

'Atrocious luck, who?'

[You have killed a Higher level existence, LV15 Human. You have gained experience]

[Calculating Exp...]

[250,000 Exp awarded]

[Would you like to appoint Exp to 'Null Lifeform (Boneman) or 'Discount Human'?]

Chapter 45: El Solo LoBro

[Your prey emits the Essence of Null Life. Would you like to extract it? Remaining time 58 seconds]

Skullius gazed at the notifications he had gotten in awe. The sheer amount of experience he received alone made him leap for joy, and he did a clack of his teeth that he was used to.

It didn't feel the same for some reason.

"That's a lot of experience!" Skullius exclaimed.

Since the monstrous human was now dead, he could behave however he wanted.

When he saw the notification about the Null Life Essence, he reflexively stretched out his hand to accept, a stream of energy flowing into his body.

"Oh..."

A surprising thing occurred. It wasn't the first time he had noticed this, but it became apparent in this instance.

The value he received was different. This time he was able to identify how much he had gotten as there was but a single target.

75 Null Life Essence Points!

That's how much he had received from a single human being!

"Is it not about size then? Hmmm... this is getting more interesting... and confusing."

A bubbling excitement wrapped around Skullius nevertheless and he threw all that Eobald had told him to the back of his mind for the time being, focusing on the next notification.

[Would you like to appoint Exp to 'Null Lifeform (Boneman)' or 'Discount Human'?]

"I can choose? Well...?"

Skullius looked at his status once again and seeing the dismal numbers brought down his enthusiasm by several notches.

Aside from him being terribly weak, he saw that his racial advantages were gone as well as his class skills. The only exception was [Null Extraction] which was rather convenient for him.

"I was warned by the skill, I guess. I only have [Null Extraction] to count on now."

Skills he acquired from extraction and action were still there, but he couldn't even use them because of his low amount of mana.

"Bro, even in this disguise I'm still doomed?! My luck is still atrocious too! And I don't even have a name?! Flesh this! I'll level up my original form," Skullius said with a huge frown on his face.

[Are you sure you want to appoint Exp to 'Null Lifeform (Boneman)'?]

"Without a doubt!"

Skullius felt a surge of mana wrap around his body and then disappear into his core.

"Huh? That's it?"

['Null Lifeform (Boneman)' has reached LV8!]

"Yes!"

Skullius wore a triumphant grin as he then went to look at the corpse of Eobald.

"This skill really saved me, otherwise I really would have died. I doubt there is any tale I could have told that would have saved me from that situation."

Surely, when recalling what had just happened right after he transformed, he imagined the worst would have come to pass had he still been a skeleton with blue flames in his sockets.

"Alright! I don't need this anymore. Cancel the skill [Flesh It Like You Mean It]."

[Skill cancellation failed. The skill will remain active for the stipulated duration. Time remaining - 24:58:16]

"Wait, what? Come again!"

[Skill cancellation failed. The skill will remain active for the stipulated duration. Time remaining – 24:58:14]

"No! You're kidding! I- I can't cancel the skill?! But... Wait! I have to stay like this for 24 hours?!"

No! Please no!" Skullius yelled in disbelief almost kneeling down to beg.

He couldn't believe it.

Or rather he couldn't afford to believe it!

How was he supposed to survive like this when he had barely been scraping by up until now?!

"Red bro!" Skullius thought before he turned to where Red Rage had been hiding.



As he looked, he saw the skeletal body of his Apostle... lying on the ground limp!

Skullius rushed over and knelt beside the short Bone Boar.

The lights within the sockets of the Apostle were no more. He merely laid on the ground lifelessly.

Deathlessly.

"What... what happened?!" Skullius asked a question that he dreaded the answer to.

[Apostle' Red Rage has been laid to rest by Serenity]

[Apostle 'Red Rage' does not have the means to sustain himself while his 'Vehement Bone Nullmancer' is in hibernation. Higher Tier required]

"Put to rest? He's not...gone?"

Skullius fell to the ground, feeling exceedingly relieved. At the very least it didn't seem like Red Rage had perished.

Since he was no longer a Nullmancer, Red Rage was disabled. He only wished that things would go back to normal when the duration of [Flesh It Like You Mean it] was up.

But would that happen? Would he survive long enough?

Skullius gazed at Red Rage with a forlorn look. He suddenly felt alone. When he came to this world, he had always had VOW bro to interact with.

When VOW bro left, Red Rage had been by his side. Even though it was merely a single night and a few hours, he cherished his Apostle.

It was at times like these that Skullius wondered why he and the other Moronic Undead were so different. The Death Knights and above did not show emotion at all while all the undead below that could feel camaraderie, jealousy, anger, among other emotions.

Was it some kind of sick joke that Somanda relished in or was it for their convenience?

Skullius took in a deep breath, the feeling being weird as he sensed that within him, there wasn't actually that much 'stuff'.

It was like someone had put a cover with no substance over a skeletal body. If someone experienced were to poke him or cut him open, they wouldn't find much in the way of organs at all.

His body merely mimicked human activity, but he didn't have lungs or a heart. There was the sound, but no actual organ.

It was all fabricated by magic in such a way that magical detection of a specific level wouldn't be able to see anything wrong, but physical analysis might make the multitudes hold their bibles.

"This feels... vaguely familiar..." Skullius mumbled.

He looked at Red Rage's body and nodded.

He took the steel sword from Red Rage and began to dig up a hole.

It was just enough for the short Apostle to fit in.

He carried Red Rage's body and laid it gently into the hole.

He then heaved the axe Red Rage had procured from the orc earlier and laid it on top of the Apostle along with the steel sword and other weapons that Red Rage liked to use.

"Wouldn't want something to happen to your body while you rest. I'll come back for you, bro. You can count on it," Skullius said.

He then went on to cover the hole and gave it a nice pat.

When he was done, he recalled something that VOW bro had said.

[True strength is forged when one is alone and resolute, after all...]

## Chapter 46: Complication

Skullius stood up and started getting a better feel for his body. There wasn't that much of a unique sensation within his flesh, except perhaps, the mana within.

That was only natural. He wasn't really human.

Even Eobald had called out his strange face.

Now that he had the time, Skullius grabbed Eobald's sword that had a reflective surface and looked at himself. The image he saw was quite standard. He compared it to Eobald's face and somewhat understood what the man had been talking about.

"Flesh me..."

Thinking about how he now had flesh himself, he began to consider changing the phrase 'Flesh you' to something else. After all, the irony in it didn't sit well with him now.

Skullius scrutinised the sword in his hand, taking in all its detail: the cracks on its surface which was branded with unique runes; the steel and rubber hilt which had the beautiful design of diamond patterns.

It was beautiful.

Skullius looked at its stats from the guidance field and his brows shot up.

~~~

[Baleful Gale Reaper]

<Rare>

A dangerous blade that produces gusts of malevolent wind attacks to shred apart its enemies.

-Damage-

200-250

-Durability-

64/120

-Special Effects-

- Increase movement and attack speed by 10%

---

[Skill: Gale Call]

Any amount of mana inserted into the sword causes bursts of concentrated wind attacks to wrap around the sword with the upper limit being determined by how much mana the runes on the sword can take.

~~~

"Oh... now this is a weapon!" Skullius exclaimed. This sword reminded him of the weapons that he often saw on the waists or backs of Somanda's Death Knights.

The damage it could do alone was incredible.

When taking damage, several factors applied. For instance, if one had 40 Health and received an attack from a sword that deals 100 damage, that did not necessarily mean that death was guaranteed.

Physical constitution in the form of endurance, supplements and body armour played a role into how much damage an opponent would actually receive.

Speaking of body armour, Skullius looked at his shabby clothes; the robe plus several layers of leather armour.

"I can't count on these anymore. I never did anyway..."

He took them off while thanking his negative lucky stars that somehow he wasn't missing an arm like his original body.

To be fair, his entire structure had been altered. He was sure that his internal skeletal structure wasn't the same as his lustrous foggy grey one.

He promptly stripped the corpse of Eobald of almost all the clothing and appraised it first.

There was a dark robe with green patterns that trailed along the edges. The robe covered the front and back but not the sides, it's material being thicker than the leather armour that Skullius had been wearing.

There was steel armour underneath that complemented the robes as a set; they were attached together.

Even though it was cracked, bloodied and dented, it still felt tough. It was only now that Skullius realised that the only reason he had been able to overcome the armour and kill Eobald, was because he had used a Rare grade sword.

He went on to check the stats of the armour.

~~~

[Firm Regalia]

<Rare>

An elite set of defensive attire.

-Defence-

220

-Durability-

43/100

-Special Effects-

- Increase movement and attack speed by 8%
- Reflects 10% elemental damage received by wearer
- Blocks 8% physical damage

~~~

Skullius immediately wore the Firm Regalia. He immediately safe under its cover.

It looked a bit too big for him as he was shorter and less bulkier than Eobald, but he wasn't picky nor concerned about fit.

After Skullius was done fitting himself into the armour, he sheathed the Baleful Gale Reaper and took out the three objects he had been given.

The Key, the scroll and the crest.

After appraising, the Key didn't show anything apart from the [???], and the crest also bore no information.

Curious.

The scroll however..

~~~

[Arcane Teleportation Scroll: Scorch]

<Rare>

An offensive and supportive item used to cross vast distances through <Stagnant Space> in a matter of seconds while simultaneously dealing fire damage to opponents.

Multiple coordinates are etched into the enchantment, allowing for one to transport themselves to any of the locations or near them depending on the amount of mana used.

Enchantments may become inactive if the user is too far away from the etched locations.

[Eofel – 300 Mana Points]

[Dihjhal – 500 Mana Points]

[Benegogue – 450 Mana Points]

~~~

"I see. I can't use it at the moment. Enough wasting time. This guy said that some people were looking for this Key thing. If they can track it, then I'll be in trouble. Where can I run off to?

I even have a Doom Factor to deal with too!"

Skullius hadn't even thought about the purpose of this Key that he had been told. What he was more concerned about was that if these enemies were as strong as Eobald...

The Discount Human sighed as he felt how hopeless his situation was. However, he didn't have the luxury to dally.

He just had to be extra cautious. A miracle that granted him three levels had happened once. Maybe it would happen again.

Besides, he had strong equipment now. He still had the crooked magic staff by him as even though it didn't have the skill [Mana Bolt] anymore, he could still use it to extend his range for [Null Extraction].

Thinking of his original plan to raid the orcs after this... he decided to quit that thread and focus on what was ahead. It was the better option.

The image of the Dead End Apocalypse Boar did not give him much confidence. He was still weak and no amount of equipment could change that when he was facing against something truly strong.

Skullius took one last look at the grave he had dug for Red Rage and darted forward at full speed.

He keenly watched his surroundings as he went ahead, running parallel to the ravine that made several turns and narrowed down.

After a few minutes of running, Skullius felt a heavy sensation burden him and he began to pant!

"What's... going... on?" Skullius asked himself.

He pulled up his status panel and saw the problem. He didn't have infinite endurance anymore!

He gnashed his teeth and frowned.

"No wonder we have a phrase for this!"

He slowed down and began jogging at a moderate pace. This somewhat alleviated the exhaustion.



He descended down some steep slopes and hid behind trees anytime he could to reduce his visibility while anticipating the worst.

The cautious movements he had to do all this time became boring as he never encountered any beasts after 45 minutes of travel.

This either spelled that there was a settlement of monsters nearby or that there were just no monsters here. Unfortunately, neither was a good sign.

"Red bro go and.... Oh... right," Skullius face palmed and sighed.

He was alone.

All alone.

If he wanted to do reconnaissance, he would have to do it on his own. And so he did.

His main priority right now was to deal with the Doom Factor. He had to reach Tier 1 somehow, otherwise pursuing enemies or not, he would be screwed.

Perhaps if he levelled up his human form, he would be able to deal with the Doom Factor!

VOW bro had said it was a matter of sustaining himself with mana right?

Twenty more minutes passed with Skullius moving quietly among the trees which become more spaced, with less traces of bushes and grasses ahead.

Then...

He finally saw something.

A pack of wolves were running by. There were six of them with black fur, all eerily tall (1.7 meters on average) and with burly frames. They had blood red eyes and as they passed, coming from the

right and going in the same direction that Skullius had been going, the Discount Human noticed that they had blood on their paws and mouths.

They were coming from a hunt.

The wolf at the forefront was particularly intimidating, being slight taller than the others while the red in its eyes emitted a faint light.

'That's probably a fight that I don't want to start,' Skullius thought as his imaginary heart began to pound while sweat dripped from his fake face.

Unfortunately for him, he had missed an important detail that was very essential post his transformation into a Discount Human.

The wolf that led the pack suddenly stopped and raised its snout. It started sniffing, taking in deep whiffs of the air as its head turned, eventually stopping in Skullius' direction.

...!

Its eyes glared at where Skullius was hiding!

It found prey.

Skullius was a presence-less Boneman no more.

Chapter 47: Do You Dare?

When Skullius saw that he had been spotted, he immediately decided to get ready for a bitter fight. He was getting accustomed to the sporadic jolts of danger that came when he least expected it.

Another hour, another trial.

He had to somehow survive this.

He wondered how he had been spotted despite picking a good hiding spot, but that did not matter anymore.

He dropped his staff and wielded the Baleful Gale Reaper.

This didn't reassure him much, unfortunately.

The statuses of the creatures that began to advance towards him under the command of their leading wolf - who remained behind - were...

~~~

[ Name : None ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Class : None ]

[ Level : 5 ]

[ Race : Blackclaw Darewolf ]

[ Inv. Status : Considering seasoning options ]

-----

[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 35 ]

[ Agility : 47 ]

[ Intelligence : 35 ]

[ Endurance : 40 ]

[ Luck : 3 ]

-----

[ Health : 150/150 ]

-----

[ Mana : 70/70 ]

-----

~~~~~

(A/N: Not to be confused with Dire wolves).

These were the average stats of the five Darewolves, excluding the big one.

"Their stats don't seem that high... what's going on? They don't even have classes?" Skullius raised a brow at this discovery. He wielded the sword and watched the Darewolves spread out with their keen red eyes locking onto him.

The way they moved was so organised that it was disorienting.

Classes among beasts were a strange subject, unlike how it was for humans who were essentially destined to have one.

Basically, beasts that were too different from humans - appearance-wise - could not get classes. Classes merely extended to the beasts for reasons related to the history of Aigas, but the beasts that walked on four legs were shunned from obtaining these.

However, this did not mean that they were at a disadvantage by default, because they were blessed with their own means to grow stronger.

Mutations.

There were two types of mutations.

Natural mutations and unnatural mutations that happened when an external party induced a reaction.

An example of an unnatural mutation was the Dead End Apocalypse Boar which was created by the orcs.

The current enemies had weapons of their own born from similar circumstances.

The Darewolves growled and pounced at Skullius.

The five of them attacked from all around, their eyes glowing brightly.

The wolves' large, sharp teeth protruded from their mouths, their ravenous desire for flesh portrayed by the saliva that leaked out!

As they drew closer to a vigilant Skullius, the Discount Human suddenly felt an overbearing presence that tried to push him into the ground along with a dark red energy that began to circle around him!

[You are under the effect of the collective skill 'Do you dare', simultaneously cast by the Darewolves and their Alpha]

[If you dare to resist, you will be released from the restraining force of the skill, but the Darewolves will get all their stats increased by 30%]

[If you do not dare to resist, the restraining force of the skill will be amplified and you will be rendered immobile]

"Bro! What kind of ridiculous skill is this?!" Skullius barked as he felt the force of the skill [Do you dare] increase!

If he didn't move, daring not to resist, the wolves would simply kill him. If he moved against the force, daring to resist, the wolves would get a buff... and then kill him!

This skill was born from an unnatural mutation that the wolves had gone through. They were once called the Blackclaw wolves, but changed after they had gotten into a rough battle with another pack of wolves called the Warweavers. The battle had been tough, but they had won in the end, feasting on the bodies of their fallen foes.

Given the fact that these wolves were also close to the bottom of the barrel in the entire Tremur Forest, they had to prey on themselves. They also had the natural instinct to devour each other from the moment they were spawned, as it pushed them towards getting mutations and strengthening themselves.

Skullius was dumbfounded.

His hold over the Baleful Gale Reaper tightened as he barely had time to consider nor any choice worth considering as a matter of fact!

He dared to resist.

The red energy that had been coiling around him vanished as soon as he showed signs of resistance, and the Darewolves became covered in it instead!

They looked even more terrifying as the swirls seeped through their bodies and their power increased!

Skullius recalled all he had been learning from the constant fighting last night. The thing he did first, was to run up ahead and dive, rolling on the ground!

Due to the stack of speed boosts from his gear, he had been able to move quickly.

Some of the wolves who had pounced on him missed as they had been moving at full speed, while Skullius himself smashed against the one that had been in front of him!

As if it had expected him to do make a move, the wolf immediately pinned Skullius down with its large paws and brought its snout to his face to devour his head in one bite!

Skullius gritted his teeth and inserted a little mana into the Baleful Gale Reaper in his hand, plunging it towards the chest of the ravenous wolf atop him!

The mirror-like sword released a hum as the runes on its surface glowed lightly, bursts of shrieking wind roiling around it!

As soon as it touched the Darewolf, the creature whimpered as its fur was the first to be shredded, followed by its skin!

FWOOSH!

The wolf zipped off, distancing itself from Skullius!

The Discount Human was left gaping in awe at the speed.

He quickly stood and faced the wolves. They became vigilant after they saw one of their own retreating.

'They really are intelligent!' Skullius exclaimed as he narrowed his eyes. 'I guess that intelligence doesn't extend to them naming themselves or being able to speak.'

The intelligence stat wasn't the best reflection of how technically intelligent any creature was in general. It encompassed too many other factors such as connection to mana, wisdom, knowledge.

Intelligence itself was relative. Skullius couldn't deny that the wolves were smart, but there was a level of crucial functionality that they undoubtedly didn't have despite having 30 points in the Intelligence stat.

Skullius peeked behind him where the larger figure of the Alpha Darewolf was languidly sitting while watching the fight.

'Can't really complain about that. If that guy were to join the fray, I would have another Doom Factor up my pelvis. Nevertheless, flesh you, kind sir! Wait! Argh, I need to change that!'

The Darewolves began circling around him again, the red energy still roiling around their bodies.

'I wish I was allowed to keep [Static Limbo]! This is an unfair fight!'

Right then, one of the Darewolves suddenly burst forward from behind Skullius, growling loudly!

Skullius turned while raising his sword to block but then...

FWOOSH!

Another Darewolf rushed towards him right after he turned, also menacingly growling to grab his attention!

Skullius was torn between the two wolves as they brought to his mind a staggering level of confusion that made his face turn unsightly.

In the heat of the moment, Skullius made the decision to dash backwards, hoping that the speed boosts offered by his gear would help him pull something off!

The first wolf to pounce on him smacked him with its paw, pounding on his body that had almost been able to get away while the other opened its maw and bit on Skullius' shoulder!

Skullius felt the sharp teeth of the Darewolf... fail to pass through the protection of the Firm Regalia!

This shouldn't have surprised Skullius, but in a battle against stronger opponents, he was always led to believe that he was screwed from the beginning, forgetting his obvious advantages.

The Darewolf tried to apply more pressure but failed to do any damage.

Skullius decisively extended his hand and touched the Darewolf's throat.



A flash of bright light emanated from his hand as it pressed against the beast and then...

[Mana Bolt].

Skullius used his 20 points of mana to use the only offensive skill he had at his disposal at the moment.

The Darewolf felt a tremor in its throat as the burst of light released a sharp, slap-like sound!

The Darewolf drew back, staggering while the red swirls around its body began to shudder and dampen!

Skullius leapt away, expecting a follow up from the other wolves, but as he vigilantly looked around, he saw something shocking!

The other Darewolves began fumbling on their growls and stumbling on their paws as well!

The red energy that seeped from their bodies began to shudder and shake as well and as if that wasn't enough of a good enough surprise, the Alpha Darewolf was also in the same boat!

It glared at Skullius as it struggled to even stand from its sitting position, its teeth quivering in rage.

"What's going on? I only hit one of them, right?" Skullius muttered confusedly.

Why were all of them reacting the same way?

Skullius' mind spun.

What was the answer?

His mind seemed to feel cloudy, as if his processing strength was clogged by something. If he had been in his Boneman form, he would have already picked up on the answer.

"Oh well. Free kills for me."

Skullius grinned as he looked at the Exp waiting to be reaped before him.

Chapter 48: Rescue?

Skullius leisurely walked over to the first wolf that was growling and staggering. He raised his Baleful Gale Reaper and brought it down on the head of the creature which trembled as it snarled in fear!

TCH!

It was to be expected, but the sword did not slice through the Darewolf's head all the way. It merely stopped at the level where the eyes were, blood leaking as the body of the creature quivered.

"Gah! I'm too weak! Even with a sword this strong, I can't fully slice its head apart," Skullius said.

He pulled out the sword and the Darewolf fell to the ground, dead.

[You have killed (II) LV5 Blackclaw Darewolf. 250 Exp awarded]

[Your prey emits the Essence of Null Life. Would you like to extract it? Remaining time 58 seconds]

"That seems like too small of an amount. These things are strong, you know," Skullius remarked as he extracted the Null Life Essence from the Darewolf he had killed.

From a single Darewolf, he managed to get a full 40 points!

Not sweating the small stuff, Skullius hurriedly went on to the next Darewolf that started whimpering. In response, Skullius wore a big, malicious grin and held up the Baleful Gale Reaper.

This time he pierced with the sword instead, finding it to be a lot easier.

"You know what they say, 'If you can't slice them, penetrate them.'"

Skullius moved to the next Darewolf, killing it in the same way. Then the next and the next.

Even though he wasn't quite clear on how these wolves were stunned, that didn't mean he would let go of the chance.

The cause of what happened to the poor creatures was of course, their own skill [Do you dare].

It was a skill that required the Darewolves to bring together their reserves of mana, connecting themselves to build a large pool to support the skill.

While it was a powerful skill, if one were to mess with the mana connection, something like them being injured internally or dying was very possible.

Skullius' mana bolt which was capable of disrupting mana had managed to interrupt the perfect connection that the Darewolves had, which caused the currently occurring phenomenon.

When Skullius killed the fourth Darewolf, a notification popped in his view.

[You have killed (II) LV5 Blackclaw Darewolf. 250 Exp awarded]

[You have completed one of the qualifications to level up. Please complete the Second Task to move on to the next level]

"What? Second Task?" Skullius asked himself with a brow raised, pausing his previous quick killing spree.

But suddely, the Discount Human felt a powerful force knock against his chest!

He flew and rolled on the ground, his sword flying as he hadn't at all expected the shocking attack!

The Darewolf that he had been about to kill next was suddenly free and it growled hatefully as it pierced him with a burning gaze!

It shot forward, making its increased level of malice incredibly apparent.

Skullius was still caught up in the shock.

This wolf had broken out of its staggered state?

While he didn't expect it to last forever, he didn't think he had been too slow in killing these wolves.

'Gah! If only I hadn't been distracted by that notification!' Skullius grumbled and faced his enemy.

He noticed that the Darewolf was no longer exuding the red energy which amplified its stats by 30%.

It was back to normal, but that didn't reassure Skullius at all as he was still at a disadvantage!

He had used up his mana with the cast of [Mana Bolt] which had saved his current life and now his sword out of reach.

To make matters worse, the larger Blackclaw Alpha was getting up as well, promising to rip him to shreds with its eyes that foretold exactly how that would go down.

The other Darewolf pounced, and Skullius focused on its movement as it leapt to take a large bite out of him!

Instead of waiting to be pressed against the ground and torn apart, Skullius rushed towards the Darewolf, aiming to clutch it by the leg so that it would fall to the ground instead.

However...

SLASH!

Skullius saw blood flying everywhere, staining his face and armour as it rained.... no, more like poured outward, as though from a geyser!

He wore a blank look.

He couldn't tell what happened in the fraction of a moment where he and the Darewolf had been about to clash.

THUD!

The Darewolf's head had fell to the ground, blood still spraying from its severed neck.

Skullius was about to shout expletives when a sword appeared at his neck!

It touched his skin and Skullius vividly felt the power that was running through its blade.

"Don't move."

Two words were spoken to him by the figure of a man who had appeared out of nowhere.

...!

What truly scared the Boneman out of Skullius though, was a sensation that pricked against his core!

The man with the sword had a blue mana core!

Skullius also felt another one from a short distance to his right.

There was a woman with red hair and brown eyes who locked her gaze onto him, but he didn't dare turn his head to her.

There was another.

From his front, Skullius saw two figures emerging from a distance. Their appearance made the Alpha Darewolf take a few steps to the side even as it continued to snarl.

The two men paid it no mind as they approached Skullius who was currently frozen.

One of them was a bulky man with a large shield behind his back. He had spiky leather black hair and a thick armour that made him look quite intimidating.

The other man however, was even more frightening. He donned a stern expression, his sugar grey eyes gleaming with mana. He had combed back havana brown hair that glistened like polished steel, and his blue core seemed to overpower the presence of those of his mates.

Skullius unconsciously looked at this man whose gaze never left him.

The Darewolf shivered, its eyes following the slow and steady movements of the man with brown hair. It continued to growl with its mouth open, as if saying 'I'm here too, you know?'

It looked to be trying to decide whether to attack or not, the hesitation it felt brought about by obvious reasons.

Before the Alpha Darewolf could decide though, a thin streak of white lightning shot out of the brown-haired man's finger and darted towards it!

It flew into the creature's mouth and in the next moment, the Darewolf inflated like a fleshy balloon while emitting bright lights from its orifices and exploded into chunks of burnt flesh with a loud bang!

Skullius gulped with a dumbfounded look on his face.

The man with brown hair stood before Skullius and spoke.

"Greetings. I believe you and I have a lot to talk about."

Chapter 49: There's More To The Story

The cold blade that rested below Skullius' chin, touching his neck, did not do him any favours where boosted confidence was concerned.

Skullius took in the appearance of the man who stood in front of him as well the one with the bulky appearance and wondered how he would get out of this one.

Even though he felt that his mind was less active and sharp than it was in his Boneman form, he wasn't stupid.

There was no way this was a coincidence.

These were definitely the enemies he had been warned about by Eobald.

"Can you understand me?" the man who had spoken asked.

"Uhm...yes," replied Skullius to which the man nodded to his companion whose sword was on Skullius' neck.

The young man withdrew his sword and stepped back while the woman who had been at the side with a bow on her back, stood by Skullius' other side with her arms folded.

"Hey, you're only at the Foundation Stage, at the lowest level no less. How did someone like you even enter this forest and survive this long? And what's with that face?" the woman blasted Skullius with questions that he would have to fabricate the answers to.

"How weak he appears is quite suspicious. Is he hiding his level or something, Reon?" the burly man said while squinting his eyes, directing his question at the man who had slain the Darewolf with his sword.

"Not likely. He's just an ordinary Foundation Stage expert. I'd assume that at least. He cleared some of these Darewolves which is quite the feat, unless he has some hidden skill or something," the young man whose name was Reon said.

"Yeah, right! He's probably just ridiculously lucky, " flared the red haired woman.

Skullius wore a bitter smile with an imaginary tear running down the side of his face.

That inference...

Again...

The redhead then moved up and gripped Skullius by the throat, a surge of mana building up in her body. Her hand squeezed at Skullius, making him feel slightly uncomfortable as he didn't have much sensation in his Discount Human form, but being treated like this did spark a flame of annoyance.

"Where is that bastard? He gave you the Key, didn't he?" the woman asked threateningly.

"Ease up, Denille. You'll kill him," the burly man said with a frown.

"Back off, Irlen! That bastard cost us a lot of time... and... and... he had us cross all that distance to find this shitface substitute," Denille roared before facing Skullius again. "Now tell me.

Where is he?"

Skullius deliberated on what exactly to tell them.

According to Eobald, they needed the Key but they couldn't kill him as that would destroy the Key.

So perhaps there really was nothing he could hide.

"He's dead," Skullius replied to which Denille ground her teeth while the others wore slightly sullen looks, except the man with the brown hair.

"How did he die? Suicide? A higher tiered beast? You should know since you found him, right?" Denille asked, her expression turning softer and torn.

Skullius saw the emotion in the woman's eyes. She clearly cared for Eobald in some way and so did the others. There was something more to all this even though it seemed like they hated him as well.

However, Skullius being the sockethole that he was, decided to gracefully spite these powerful beings, especially the woman before him who acted like his existence meant nothing.



They couldn't kill him if they wanted to Key, right?

"I killed him," Skullius said with a half sorry, half I-don't-give-a-flying-flesh sneer.

BOOM!

Skullius' figure was spontaneously smashed into the ground and it caved in as a wave of mana blazed from Denille's figure!

Skullius felt his body break down in some form, but there was little sensation and no pain. He only lamented the health that he lost which was quite a lot.

Denille wore an unsightly expression. She was trembling with rage.

"You wha-!"

"That's enough," the man with the brown hair said with a sigh.

Denille immediately backed off with a grumble and a sharp to the man. He, on the other hand, walked over to Skullius in the pit he laid in, battered, and crouched down.

"Did Eobald grant you ownership of the Key? Given how you are wearing his armour, I could be lead to think that you merely robbed his corpse. If you have the Key, show me. If it's destroyed, you'll die here," the man said nonchalantly.

The look in the man's eyes caused Skullius body and core to shudder. This wasn't a man he'd like to play games with.

He reached into his robe shakily and pulled out the Key which was still intact.

The man with brown hair handled the Key and inspected it. He sighed once more and stored it on his person.

"It seems you get to live. We'll need you for getting to a labyrinth where something important is being kept. You'll be following us from here on out. If you try to do anything... adverse, to our goals, we'll make you wish you were dead. It'll be better if you cooperate."

'I'm already dead, bro. Well, kind of, but no trouble from me,' Skullius thought while nodding in response outwardly.

"Good. Reon, look for Eobald's body and bring it here. It should be easy for you now, right?"

Reon nodded before his eyes ignited with the light of mana for a few seconds and in the next instance, he headed to where Skullius had been coming from.

Seeing that no one was willing to drag him out of the pit that he had been dug into, Skullius crawled out on his own.

He met gazes with Denille who looked at him with staggering disdain.

At first, Skullius was intimidated but then, his eyes wandered around the body of the woman which was quite appealing under the slender brown and red armour that was a mash of steel and tough leather.

The quiver behind Denille's back made her look like a certain princess with a passion for archery, while her athletic figure covered by sandy toned, spotless skin was quite riveting.

Skullius felt nothing of the appeal, however, as he didn't have the genitals to back it up.

What caught his attention was a distinctive feature on this woman that drew on a memory than had already begun to surface in his mind since yesterday.

Two mounds sat upon the woman's chest. There was something profound and sacred about them that was trying to leak from his mind and preach to the rest of his body about the grand revelation that was contained within them, but it failed to come through.

'Is this a female...?' Skullius questioned.

The man in brown hair tore him out of his thoughts as he questioned.

"Did Eobald tell you anything about his plans? What did he tell you to do with the Key?"

"Uh... he just told me to run away with it," Skullius responded.

"I see," the man said as he stroked his chin. "That bastard was probably hoping you'd be found by the other Green Neolists. I can't believe he would side with the undead like this."

Skullius instantly turned to the man with a perturbed gaze.

"What? With undead?" he asked.

The man with brown hair scoffed.

"I suppose to failed to mention that, did he?" He said. "Did you think you stumbled upon a hero of righteousness who was trying to protect an important relic from thieves? That man you met is one of the fiends that want to aid the undead in taking over this world."

...!

## Chapter 50: Tasks and Legacy

The group rushed forward within the Tremur Forest. The man with the brown hair was the one in the lead while the rest followed. He seemed to be trying to navigate to the so-called labyrinth where the inheritance was buried.

After Reon had brought the corpse of Eobald, Skullius had gotten malicious gazes from everyone as he had simply looted the body and left it naked while leaning against a tree.

'Well, flesh common courtesy!' Skullius would have said if he understood what that was.

He himself didn't care at all, but the growing animosity towards him was the thing that concerned him the most.

The four had buried Eobald, Skullius noting that the relationship with these people was quite complicated.

His moment of trying to gain more information about this group that was colluding with the undead had been brought to a pause by the mourning ceremony, and he figured that extracting information from the brooding bunch would be even harder now.

Skullius had been stripped of the scroll and the crest, but the man with brown hair allowed him to keep the gear as he would need it.

Skullius also didn't forget to pick up the crooked magic staff, insisting that it held sentimental value more than anything else.

As they travelled, Skullius constantly felt the piercing gaze of Denille who looked like she would eat him up at any moment, which made him choose to find another candidate to try and find out more of the information from.

After almost an hour of travel, the scenery changing from sparse vegetation to the thick and tall trees that were far more lush than the ones Skullius had seen until now, the Discount Human decided finally chanced.

He turned to Reon who was at his side and probed to see if the guy would answer at all.

"So, you said I was at the Foundation Stage. What does that mean?"

Skullius had tried to see the statuses of these guys with the guidance field but all he had gotten was a...

[Target is too high levelled. Unable to view status]

Therefore, he had decided to try the tradition way of gathering information.

Reon turned to him with a pair of indifferent, lazy eyes and responded as blandly as possible.

"You're a level 1 and you don't know what the Foundation Stage is? Didn't you complete the First Task to be able to get to the first level of the Foundation Stage?"

"Uh..." Skullius stammered.

"This shitface must think we're fools! No one can just up and qualify for a Stage without finishing the First Task? Are you playing dumb?" Denille chipped in.

"I truly have no idea what you're talking about," Skullius said innocently, which did nothing to garner the sympathy of the people around him as his strange face, moulded into a pitiable version of itself.... just made things worse.

Reon's eye flashed as he appraised Skullius. Skullius had noticed that Reon had a special ability that allowed him to see things that others couldn't, which is why everyone counted on him to find things that would otherwise be impossible to find.

For instance, he had found Eobald's body without much added information. He hadn't even asked Skullius anything.

"Hmm... I see. You're really strange. I can't tell if you've accomplished your First Task or not," Reon said, a tone of disbelief identifiable in his voice. "Well, the Foundation Stage is a level of power that all humanoid creatures pass through. You build a powerful foundation for yourself before proceeding with anything else."

"Why are you even telling him all this? We're going to kill him in the end anyway," remarked Denille as she gave Skullius a nasty look.

Yes.

This was something that Skullius had been told by the man with the havana brown hair before they had set off.

The excuse was that he had seen them and knew what they were doing so he had to die, which Skullius merely sighed to at the thought of. There were too many things that wanted to see him dead and he was getting tired of it. He could already feel the clock for Doom Factor 1 clicking which was his biggest concern.

He had some hours left which were being eaten up by this side quest which frustrated him to no end.

Reon looked at Skullius, not seeing a single fluctuation on his odd face even after hearing that they would kill him after he had outlived his usefulness.

'Why is this guy so confident? Does he have an ace up his sleeve after all? Hmm.. I'll keep a close eye. Unlike Irlen who is too loyal to Benzard, I don't mind killing this bastard and giving up on the inheritance altogether. I'm sure Denille feels the same way,' Reon thought.

"Indulge him. As a final courtesy," said the man with the brown hair, whose name was Benzard.

Skullius nodded, deciding to ask away.

"So what are these... Tasks?" he asked.

"<Sigh>.Tasks are a requirement that humanoid creatures like us have to go through with each level. Levels aren't all about gathering cumulative mana from fallen foes. They are about comprehending power in its purest form as we grow."

"It's different from how beasts do it," Benzard chimed in. "Beasts increase their level in a primal manner. Ravenous and straightforward. It's only after a beast reaches the fourth tier that it truly begins to become a threat, but for us, it begins with the first level. The First Task. One must get acknowledged by one of the four deities that created Aigas.

If one succeeds, then they can begin rising in power, starting with the Foundation Stage."

Skullius nodded his head.

This would was built by four deities? That seemed like an awfully long story which Skullius wasn't interested in at the moment.

He decided to steer the conversation to somewhere his interest was more concentrated.

"You guys already seem really strong. Why do you need that inheritance thing?"

The burly man, Irlen, guffawed while Reon shook his head at Skullius' question. Denille grumbled hatefully but Benzard answered Skullius' question without much hesitation.

"To you perhaps we're strong, but we're barely out of the Foundation Stage ourselves. Eobald was the one who had advanced a significant portion into the next stage. The Advancement Stage."

"As for the inheritance, it's the legacy of a man who lived thousands of years ago. He was known as Fulgardt the Immoral. He lived life with a self imposed code. He had no loyalties, no alliances, no friends. Whoever could lead him to his goal was a companion even if it was evil incarnate."

"With his lifetime of distrust and self indulgence without attachment, he forged himself a power that rivalled the ordained of the four deities. A Class called the Insurgent Magnus. The power of purity and evil in balance, I heard it called."

Skullius was entranced by the story.

'Fulgardt, huh? Sounds like a sockethole to me. So these guys want that class to do what exactly?'

Benzard continued with his explanation, answering Skullius' question in the process.

"We want this power so that we can have a chance in case the Green Neolists actually succeed in bringing forward the undead into our world in their full force even though that has been hard to do since ancient times. However, Eobald sought the same thing. The evil that can be tamed by the Insurgent Magnus. That power could be what they need to allow the undead to pass through."

Skullius nodded.

So that's how it was. A power that could harness both purity and evil. An odd mix. These Green Neolists wanted it for their own twisted goals while Benzard wanted it to protect the world?

That didn't really seem sincere.

This bunch didn't seem like the righteous kind, especially the red haired annoyance that buzzed beside Skullius.

"They just want that power for themselves, don't they?"

"That's the gist," Benzard said before he looked back at his companions. "With that clarified, let me make it clear that we all agreed on this. I expect you all to assist me till the end."

Irlen nodded obediently while Reon didn't give a physical response. Denille gnashed her teeth and grunted.

"Good. We have some company ahead. We're going back into the deeper part of the forest so watch yourself," Benzard said as he stopped and drew his sword.

All around, spots of the sunlight that managed to squeeze through the cover of the canopy of the massive trees decorated the green covered ground.

The lights also decorated the large figure of an intimidating viper that coiled before them on long, standing tufts of grass.

It was as thick as a fully grown baobab tree, its scales a shiny brand of navy blue.

Its red eyes scanned the five figures before it while its forked tongue slipped from its mouth occasionally, a terrible hiss shunting out.

It moved elegantly, a deep wave of mana being expelled from its body, and washing over everything like a torrential water body hurrying to a fall.

The surroundings grew silent.

Benzard and his were calm while Skullius was trembling from the sheer density of mana he felt from the foe!

Why were these guys so fleshing confident?!



Were they feeling the same thing he was?!

Unlike them, Skullius had actually seen the viper's status, and it was a huge leap from the fodder he had met until now!

It was...