

Undead 491

Chapter 491: Second Evolution! (2)

Contrary to everyone's expectations, no sea of mass destruction ensued from the heavy blow that landed right on Skullius!

All that followed was a brilliant light that consumed Skullius' figure and began to spit out arcs of Levin, super condensed Levin that made Yuyui shudder each time it streaked out, striking an object hundreds of meters away!

Its intensity was unrivalled.

The throngs of beautiful blue below the vibrant white mass etched a breath-taking experience to whoever saw it, the silent lightning continuing to craft the Fulgurant Bone Penetrator into something more profound.

The massive cloud above continued to hurl out Levin in a continuous stream, its appearance giving a fitting foreshadow as to what was possible when the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator was fully realised.

There were many reasons as to why Skullius didn't choose the Elder Sage of Penetration or the Archfiend Warlord.

Despite the allure of having a mastery in runes....

Despite the draw of having an above Legendary weapon and a Super skill, high stats as well as a new element, Skullius knew that with the Storm Veil Penetrator, he could attain the equivalent of all this in a matter of a month or two as long his avatar focused solely on raising his strength!

If he had two or more avatars, he would remain hidden in his storm cloud territory in the sky and have them do all the heavy lifting for him, which would be extremely convenient.

The best defence wasn't offense. It was avoiding the fight entirely!

Three and half months were good enough for Skullius to grow his strength significantly. Perhaps not quite enough to face Somanda, but he wouldn't be alone.

Ferex felt a little intimidated by the power his master was receiving.

This was only the second Tier.

All things constant, if he attained enough experience to jump into this Tier as well, he wouldn't be anywhere near as strong as his master currently.

This was why he was so desperate to grow.

He had urged Skullius to store the Great Flame Bringer's corpse and as he watched the show in front of him, he couldn't help but feel a sense of urgency.

Yuyui on the other hand was getting exposed to a feeling she hadn't really had before.

The desire for power.

With her will to fight awakened, she was also made to realise that she was extremely weak.

No skill.

Unutilised strength.

Weak resolve.

She was still in the baby stages of her transition and she knew.

The words of the Priest she had spoken to back then rang in her mind again.

'Your Direction will tremble and spill a dramatic change in your path when you sing a song from the heart. A song of great pain. A song of great happiness. A song of great triumph. It may be in this order, it may not, but the Deitess Listafelle will be with you.'

Her life was changing and she had to get accustomed to it.

Yuyui wagered that the first change, as said by the Priest, a song of great pain, was when she first met her master.

She had been singing a song about how immensely hungry she was then. A song of pain.

That had to be it!

By that logic, the next events that set off massive changes in her life would happen in such a way as well.

Great happiness?

Great triumph?

She could only earn these when she grew stronger than she currently was!

Watching the scene before her made her realise. It wasn't about the Inhumane Eye or the Eye of Dispersal which had closed soon after the battle with the Flame Bringer or any other Eye she would awaken.

It started with her making a bigger effort!

'I can do it, right? There's no turning back from this point after all. Maybe... I can learn to take care of myself just like mother and father wanted.' Yuyui thought.

The brilliant bolt of Levin that stormed down however made her eyes bulge out as she was forced to focus on her master's silhouette which started to show through the radiance!

A new Skullius sauntered out of the pillar of Levin which finally began to dissipate, his form causing a weird distortion to the air – wind rapidly beginning to rage around him as intense flashes showcased themselves proudly within this affected space.

A 1.8 meter tall skeleton emerged from the light, its stature looking as beefy as flesh... literally!

Dark bones nearly devoid of the blue hue they had before showed on this skeleton with a menacing pizzazz despite the reduction in height. Each of the new Penetrator's bones were thicker than those of a normal human being, four sharp spike-like ones protruding from its collar bone and around its neck to rise up to a height high enough to reach the new Penetrator's eyes.

A spark of ridiculously quick, radiant Levin shot from the tip of one of the spiked bones, then to the other and the other in a never ending cycle that illuminated the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator's skull face!

Four sockets still showed on this face but instead of the familiar blue flames within it, super bright white flames that were nigh impossible to look at for the likes of Yuyui blazed, the lime haired girl noticing in her squinting that one of these flames dwindled to form a text!

A text of bright white flame that flickered within the Penetrator's top right socket!

A text that she couldn't understand but dreaded as it made her buckle down unconsciously.

Over Skullius' head, a pristine white cloud followed his movement, its appearance looking as mundane and meaningless as ever. Yet it was anything but.

Aside from Skullius' bulky bones that seemed to insinuate heavier physical hits, hundreds of pure and condensed Levin bolts that shone so bright with their brief appearance over Skullius' body that his immediate surroundings became unclear, showed.

With their brief appearance, their blazing in the area around Skullius, a mini storm cloud would be formed only to disappear seconds later after proudly showing a burst of light within it. This occurred every second, the full figure of Skullius being hidden by a cluster of clouds for brief moments at a time.

PFFFFSSSS!

A sharp breath of mana shot from Skullius' mouth as the rush of power bore down on him madly!

[Congratulations, you have evolved into Tier 2, becoming an 'Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator']

[You have gained 25,000 Mana]

[You have gained 6000 Strength]

[You have gained 9000 Agility]

[You have gained 7500 Intelligence]

[You have gained 5500 Endurance]

[You have gained 10,000 Health]

[You have acquired 'Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator' exclusive skills]

[The skills 'Fulgurant Space Virulence', 'Fulgurant Virulence' and 'Iridescent Levin Tempest' from the Fulgurant Bone Penetrator have been absorbed into 'Vivid Firmament Canvas']

[All standard Null Lifeform skills have levelled up!]

"Woow... master..." Yuyui voiced as she watched the walking storm that was her master reach near her.

He looked... invincible.

For Skullius who stood wordlessly, merely appreciating his new look, the notifications had yet to stop coming.

[Congratulations! You have acquired a Veneration Art against all odds!]

[The unique authority rests in your... eye]

A Veneration Art!

Skullius had attained one!

Despite not knowing what exactly a Veneration art was, just by using [Evil Veneration] as a benchmark, it was easy to get excited about it.

The Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator revelled in this new sensation while also gazing up at the thick clouds above that began to dissipate.

"That and the battle minutes ago ought to have drawn attention. We should probably get going," Skullius said.

"Oh... that's... that's right..." Yuyui said with a quiver while lifting her self up.

Ferex's luminous sockets shone with agreement.

It was true.

The land around here had been damaged in quite the variety of flashy ways.

There would be probably someone arriving soon.

As Skullius considered this, another notification popped up, one that rocked his calm demeanour.

[The guidance field has recognised your growth]

[The Voice of Worlds has elevated the functions of the guidance field to Patronage Rank 1]

[The Guidance Code information packet has been received]

"Huh?" Skullius' sockets flickered for a brief moment, expressing how shocked Skullius was. "The guidance field has been elevated?"

The Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator immediately opened his status to see these new changes.

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[ Name : Skullius ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Level : 1 ]

[ Exp : ... ]

[ Core : White ]

[ Class : Vehement Bone Nullmancer ]

[ Race : Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator ]

[ Inv. Status : Doomed ×2, Cursed ]

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[ <Stats> ]

[ Strength : 6305 ]

[ Agility : 9310 ]

[ Intelligence : 7620 ]

[ Endurance : Infinite ]

[ Luck : Atrocious? ]

-----

[ Health : 10,700/10,700 ]

-----

[ Mana : 29,400/29,400 ]

-----

[ Null Life Essence : 12,000/12,000 ]

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[<Skills>]

[ Greater Mana Crafter | Lv.9 ]

[ Great Saint's Invigoration | Lv.4 ]

[ High Cosmetic Body | Lv.4 ]

[ Ungodly Passion of Debauchery | Lv.5 ]

[ Null Extraction ]



[ Unbound ]

[ Static Limbo ]

[ Kōten Machi | Lv.4 ]

[ Guard Light | Lv.7 ]

[ Compact Mana | Lv.24 ]

[ Wrath of the False god | Lv.1 ]

[ Serration Zone: Baneful Edge | Lv.1 ]

[ Flash Flicker | Lv.9 ]

[ Raw Impact | Lv.10 ]

[ Great Rush (I) | Lv.14 ]

[ Revered | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Combat Arts | Lv.5 ]

[ Basic Sword Mastery | Lv.2 ]

[<Class>]

[ Apostle Summon | Lv.3 ]

[ Apostle Armament | Lv.3 ]

[ Depths of Core | Lv.5 ]

[ Bringer of All | Lv.4 ]

[ Epiphany | Lv.2 ]

[ Defiant Raiment of Perversion | Lv.2 ]

[<Racial>]

[ Storm Rider | Lv.1 ]

[ Brisk Storm Avatar (Special) | Lv.1]

[ Levin Dominance: Veil Storm Lance | Lv.1]

[ Vivid Firmament Canvas (Special) | Lv.1 ]

[ Silent Revelation of the Bright King | Lv.1 ]

[ Ful Discharge | Lv.1 ]

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[<Attachments>]

...

[<Marked Spots>]

...

[<Counsel>]

...

...

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The Penetrator had grown and his status which showed a variety of new options that he immediately dug through was a perfect indication.

There were multiple new functions displayed.

The Penetrator didn't know it yet, but these functions would introduce a gargantuan change to how he was going to be handling himself from here on out.

Skullius nodded with a chuckle as he looked through these functions, realising that there was a lot he had gained.

It was unclear whether the luck effect which had ended, replaced by the atrocious tag, had also spawned this, but Skullius could care less.

Seeing his intrigue through the blinding sockets that shot out white Levin, Yuyui apprehensively voiced...

"Master...?"

"Don't worry. Everything will be fine," Skullius said as he snapped his finger, activating two of his new Penetrator skills.

[Levin Dominance: Veil Storm Lance]!

[Storm Rider]!

Something akin to a blindingly bright javelin made out of pure, heavily condensed Levin that oozed a beautiful blue mist from it appeared with a suffocating pressure within the Penetrator's hand!

It was at least three meters long, its thin girth as sleek as bamboo shoot!

At the same time, a dark storm cloud manifested high above, moving in the direction that the Penetrator directed!

Skullius gestured for the nervous Yuyui and the excited Ferex to come closer, both doing as they were told.

Skullius held Yuyui from the waist while Ferex hung around his neck.

"Let's have some fun with this, first. There's too much to do," Skullius said as he flung the Veil Storm Lance towards the cloud in the sky, its lengthy mass stretching up to reach the height!

Something akin to a bright chain of Levin remained within Skullius' hand and as he yanked it, he and his subordinates were pulled towards the storm cloud at breakneck speed in the form of a streak of Levin!

Chapter 492: That's My Mule...

Guilds Association, Genhuis City.

"I'd say that went well," Alaris said with an exhausted breath. While he was a powerful combat expert at the Master Stage, having intense verbal back and forths with business minds was especially draining for him.

"I hope that's sarcasm," the sharply dressed man beside him said with a stern expression as the two along with a third individual exited the doors to an expansive conference room.

"Somehow I knew our opinions would differ," Alaris said.

Once a year, a general meeting would be held in the Association Branch to review the collective performance of the branch and to discuss directives issued out by the higher management.

There had been a heavy debate in this meeting, mostly concerning the decision from the higher ups about a morale boosting event that they wanted to hold for their mercenaries.

Most mercenaries wouldn't be participating in the Premium Age Royale and the decision to hold an event that paralleled the Royale for the free spirits managed by the Association was the biggest announcement so far. One that seemed more like a challenge.

"This certainly appeals better to your dilemma about joining the Premium Age Royale or not doesn't it? Or perhaps it's the opposite. Which would you prefer to commit to? The Association or your Family?" the sharply dressed, serious man probed.

Alaris gave it some thought. Not that he hadn't before but his decision right now was the one that would determine what route he took.

"I'm not looking to fight for a higher title. I have prestige, I have pride and none that is worth losing over a death game for more than I was destined to achieve," Alaris said with a proud smile.

"That's pretty self righteous..." the third individual among the three said.

It was a tall young man with a handsome face and tanned skin. The smirk he wore spelled confidence and a dash of haughtiness while the beautiful bow behind his back, with all its rare glory gave some insight into more of his style of life.

"Only established people like you can say something like that. I'd go for more any chance I get. The phrase 'biting off more than you can chew' was designed to keep simple idiots in line. Not sure why you would be afraid of rising further when you've been doing so all this time. How else can you grow if not by being greedy?"

Both Alaris and the sharply dressed man didn't entertain the man's enthusiasm. Since he was inducted into the exclusive circle, given the Rank 3 position for his prowess and potential combined, he had grown more and more ambitious.

The two couldn't help but feel the unjust nature of reality.

Giving someone like this more freedom and more resources was...

"Wrong..."

"What?" Alaris asked the sharply dressed man.

"Nothing. By the way, I heard that newcomer took three high level missions all at once. Was he that zealous or did you egg him on?"

"I did no such thing," Alaris defended himself. "He seemed to be... impatient."

"Most of them are. Has he returned?"

"I doubt it, but a mere blue Cluster and a bandit group wouldn't trouble someone like him."

"Really? You have that much confidence in him?" The sharply dressed man asked with a brow raised while the tall young man looked at Alaris with a frown.

To receive so much praise from Alaris... one had to be extraordinary.

But the newcomer of all people?!

The last to join the exclusive mercenary circle was said to be a Rank 4 and it was Alaris who gave that Rank. So why would he still hold him in high regard?

"It's not confidence. It's just the simple fact that he was holding out on us," Alaris said. "He was holding back, as if he was the one evaluating us. He even challenged me to a one and one but he still held out on me. I gave him a Rank befitting what he showed. I can't ascertain potential when the person in question doesn't show their full strength."

Holding out?

Who would hold out on Alaris?

The duo that the evaluator was walking with asked themselves this question, but with vastly different emotions on the matter.

As they all scaled down the stairs, a contemplative silence ensued.

"That's surprising. I thought it would take a considerable amount of effort to cause that much damage to someone like Stephine. If that is indeed the case then I should pay more attention to him," the sharply dressed man said, recalling the lanky armed evaluators wounds and his mind that was yet to get fully restored.

'Hmm. Right. They said he was Mage. Tsk. The bastard probably used a high level spell to spook Alaris and earn a spot here. Damn it!

He's stealing the spotlight without evening showing if he's worthy to join this side of the mercenary prestige. That's unfair!' the mercenary said with bitter jealousy.

The conversation about this newcomer carried on until the three reached the fifth floor of the Association.

"Well... speak of the devil," Alaris said with chuckle while gazing ahead.

In front of a serving desk, a young looking man with slicked back light auburn hair and a tough looking getup was handing in a large sack with a couple of heavy items inside it.

Behind him was a lime haired girl who kept looking at everything in wonder, a big smile etched on her face.

The woman behind the desk told Skullius to place the sack down on the ground where it was covered in a light and disappeared from sight.

"Oh..." Skullius voiced in a bit of surprise.

Rist, the woman behind the service glass counter smiled proudly.

"I almost forgot you aren't from here. In this branch we have a system that automatically matches the energy signatures from the corpses you bring and the readings we would have taken from

emerging Clusters beforehand. From the looks of it..." Rist paused while looking at something akin to a sheet on her desk, "...you only completed two out of the three missions you took?"

"Yes. The fire spitting socketholes from the Cluster and a bunch of giant ants that had made a forest their home. Annoying bunch," Skullius said, referencing the second mission which he had completed within two minutes on the way here.

Only one mission remained.

"Oh, that's alright. If you found some valuables on your missions, you're permitted to keep them. It's one of the perks of being an exclusive mercenary," Rist said with a reassuring cheer.

'I wasn't planning on handing them over regardless,' Skullius thought. 'Hmm. I should also get out of here before this non-sockethole gets too friendly. I almost forget there are a bunch of good ones here and there. Disgusting.'

There was a system in place to ensure that mercenaries returned the treasures they found within Clusters or in bandit hideouts.

Ensured was not the right word, but the system attempted to retain control on such.

An incentive was given per every item handed in, though this applied less to stronger experts who didn't care much for gold or even plasma coins, to which the Association couldn't do anything but use the power of the Capital Service to regulate usage of such powers within the city and their own outside the city.

So far, regardless of how many Legendary weapons were outside their clutches, their use were controlled.

That was the power of the Guild's Association in Genhuis City.

"Festos..." Alaris called to which Skullius turned, his white eyes focusing on the evaluator. He already knew the man and his company were there.

"Ah, Alaris," Skullius said before turning to the other man and nodding, pretending their arrival was a surprise.

The sharply dressed man reciprocated, his eyes judging Skullius by his demeanour and the fact that he seemed to be done with some of his missions.

"Are incentives in order after your missions?" the man asked Skullius.

"No. I'll come back for them later. I have some urgent matters right now," Skullius replied.

The exclusive mercenary next to the two almost boiled in rage as he was thoroughly ignored!

Worse yet, Alaris and the other man were conversing so casually with Skullius, as if they were acquaintances!

So what if he was a Mage?!

Really strong Mages wouldn't be trying to make a living as mercenaries!

This was...

This was....!

"So you're the newcomer," the tall man, pushed by jealousy and a false sense of superiority, said as he walked forward.

He reached Skullius and held his shoulder with his head raised, his eyes looking down at the Hybrid Luman.

"I'm Tomace, a Rank 3 mercenary," the young man said. "I see you're still green. How about having me be your mentor? Maybe in three... or four years you'll rise up to Rank 3 with my assistance. Sound good?" Tomace said while exuding a sharp presence to intimidate Skullius, his face turning to flash a smile at Yuyui who waved her hand in greeting innocently.

"Hello ther—" Tomace was about to speak to Yuyui when...

....!

BOOOOOM!

"Argh!" Tomace suddenly kneeled down on the ground while groaning in pain!

What the hell?!

His body had felt heavy all of a sudden and before he could react, his knees had sunken deep into the floor!

Tomace gritted his teeth while wondering what had happened.

He hadn't sensed anything.

He still couldn't sense anything.

But the words that were spoken from the young man before him made everything clear.

"That's my mule. Go find your own, sockethole."

Skullius spoke in a chilling voice while pushing Yuyui back, extending his left hand to Tomace's face and flicking his index finger at the man's forehead!

WHAAAAAAM!

A dreadful force smacked Tomace's face and he screamed in pain as his torso arched back and smashed into the floor in a blur, his body left roiling in an unnatural position!

Rist's eyes bulged.

She hadn't seen much but a blur before Tomace was smashed into the floor!

Alaris and the sharply dressed man however looked unfazed.

Surprised but unfazed.

"I see your point now, Alaris," the sharply dressed man said.

Chapter 493: Undesired Interests

Governor's Residence, Genhuis City.

The Governor sat in his seat with his regular dignified posture and stance, but deep within, he was barking so loud his inner walls were a minute away from breaking apart.

What was with this one night?!

It was as if he was destined to be met with a replacement for the dilemma and trouble he thought he had evaded or thwarted with wit and grit over his tenure in this position!

First came Rearren EverSword in all his prideful schmack to boldly defend the hosting of this event of his which was riddled with ulterior motive.

And now...

"She is coming, sir..." a Capital Order Knight who stood at the door informed to which the Governor rose and silently cursed one last time under his breath.

"Those two clearly ran away and left me to deal with all this on my own didn't they? Tsk. Let's just get this over with!"

The doors to the spacious, well furnished room were opened and three figures entered with graceful steps, the Knight who opened the door bowing to them in respect.

Three fair ladies with long ears they were, two of them wearing veils as they walked on either side of the gorgeous lady who carried herself with a regality that far exceeded the Governor's own.

His was more or less standard considering his position, hammered into him from a somewhat young age.

However that which oozed from the lady with vibrant crimson gold coloured eyes and smooth skin as well as a slender body that had just enough curve and thick in the right spots, was natural, cultivated from the womb.

From blood.

"Governor, it is good to see you again," Darwel said with a sweet smile as she took a seat before the man before her could offer it.

A grimace flashed only for a split second over the face of the Governor.

Seriously?!

After the talks that the Royal Family had with this woman, a princess from the High Family of Opungale, the equivalent of royalty for the Sif, they hadn't bothered to keep her within the biggest and most luxurious city in Pelian.

They didn't even offer her an escort!

They didn't stop her from travelling around Pelian despite the dangers until she nested in Genhuis on her own!

Now it was his problem, and he had to entertain someone so esteemed!

"It's good to see you as well...Your Highness," the Governor said as he sat.

What manner of absurdity would be coming out of this now?

If those who didn't agree with the Royal Family's decision to ally with Opungale knew she was here and where exactly she was living, there would be trouble, especially with the state that the city was in!

"How may I help you, Your Highness?"

Darwel smiled and tilted her head, one of her legs resting on top of the other under her silver, off shoulder dress.

"I have a simple request, Governor. It has come to my attention that a grand event is about to be held. Something akin to a... tournament. I am quite fond of such arrangements. After seeing your kind flocking into the city, I thought I should inquire about it.

Thankfully it turned out to be something very interesting," Darwel said with a delighted expression.

No!

Please no!

The Governor while wearing a stern but impressionable visage was crying inside.

No way!

Please don't be...

"I would like to participate in this event as well."

She said it!

The Governor's face visibly turned dark.

He had hoped... but Direction didn't give him an ear.

It clearly had other plans.

"Your Highness... this isn't something I am able to organise. You see, this event is being hosted by one of the six Houses in the nation. I have no say in any of its rules nor do I have the administrative

authority to allow you to participate. Above this fact, the rules of this event have some very specific connotations that I am not sure..."

Darwel waved her hand.

"I'm aware that is the case. I wouldn't want to inconvenience you at all..."

The Governor wanted to breathe a sigh of relief but...

"But I'm sure someone of your authoritative stature can 'persuade' the... host of this event to squeeze me in, right? You ARE the Governor after all."

The Governor swallowed a lump of saliva while his eyes were shaded with a darkness that masked his emotion.

Of course he would be pushed like this!

Darwel probably knew that the Houses held authority over his own, their say only being overruled by the Royal Family's only.

In other words, she didn't give a flying fuck about the how or why!

She just wanted to participate!

"Since we're going to be allies, I reckon my inclusion will tie our knots of friendship even better," Darwel said while resting her chin over her slender hand.

Tch!

Sprinkling in a dash of reason!

How brutal!

The Governor sighed helplessly, his visage showing calm consideration, but deep inside...

'Damn you, Rearren!!!'

The doors to the Bryne Family Residence opened to reveal Skullius and Yuyui who walked over to the lounge, their images being presented to three figures who responded differently to their arrival.

Stylla expressed a relieved smile.

Setkh showed surprise and intrigue.

Silrat...

"You..." he growled while smiling menacingly.

"So this is the infamous Festos?" Setkh beat Silrat to the punch, rising to meet Skullius with a smile on his face while appraising the Hybrid Luman.

He had a nice figure. Handsome, sturdy and...

"Oh, you're blind?" Setkh asked dumbly while sauntering around Skullius and Yuyui who looked at the new faces with surprise.

Stylla and Setkh had an uncanny likeness that nearly... moved her.

"I assume you're the brother?" Skullius said while also sensing with his Koten over Setkh.

He couldn't say if Stylla and Setkh looked alike per se but their bodily energies were definitely similar.

"That I am. My sister seems to have strange tastes. As do I," Setkh said while chuckling and drawing much closer to Skullius than what everyone was comfortable with. "I've often heard that blind combatants can be very dangerous because they do not rely on the mundane sensitivity of the eye which is limited. Hmm. I believe it now!"

"Huh?" Stylla voiced in confusion. Festos' blindness wasn't something she bargained for!

It came with rebellious voucher which came with the man!

She didn't have strange tastes!

Skullius was also confused.

What did this guy believe in now?

Setkh gave a short laugh after seeming as if he had been carefully considering something.

"Sister. Perhaps I was speaking out of my ass earlier. For the good of the Family? Hahaha! What a joke. Rivalry is definitely the best way to ensure that we solve our problems, and our differences!

If we're really going to be competing, let's make it fun! I was wrong! I believe this candidate of yours has a good chance to shake things up! Karrun, show yourself," Setkh said as he then called for someone.

Stylla rolled her eyes.

There he went again!

Her brother had two main quirks in his personality - going back on his word and having some weird sexual tastes.

She expected this much out of him.

Yet...

From an empty seat within the lounge, a figure suddenly appeared, the colour on the couch looking to be peeled away dramatically as he was revealed, wearing a partially bashful and partially confident face!

...!

Silrat and Yuyui were shocked!

Had this guy been here all this time?!

Skullius was mildly surprised at this literal revelation.

He hadn't sensed this guy, even with his Kōten!

He hadn't applied [Greater Mana Crafter] to it because the skill had a heavy presence that could attract attention in the city but still...

This newly appeared figure looked at everyone with his large eyes before speaking in a small voice.

"Oh... I didn't scare anyone did I?"

Chapter 494: It Begins!

A bowl shaped haircut on vanilla coloured hair, big, downturned chartreuse coloured eyes, a rather thick button nose and thin lips – these made the unique face of the man named Karrun.

He had a short figure and his seated position while in the lounge with everyone stood on a thin line between confident and nervous.

"Oh... I didn't scare anyone did I?" Karrun asked while looking around.

"What the hell?! You've been here this entire time?!" Stylla barked to which Karrun nervously scratched his neck.

Stylla hadn't been shocked by the man's appearance.

She was more so annoyed.

Silrat breathed out a burst of frustration.

As someone who had a mild control complex that was slowly growing because of Skullius' wanton behaviour, having someone be present around him for an extensive period of time without him knowing was... infuriating.

"Don't take it too seriously, Stylla," Setkh said with a partially seductive voice, his eyes lazily resting on his furious sister. "We both have eccentric tastes, don't we? You know Karrun here is a bit shy and has a habit of hiding his presence to better fit in crowded places."

Karrun rose and stood beside Setkh, evidently unwilling to have an independent stance in this conversation.

He looked over to Skullius and Yuyui and smiled in a friendly manner.

"Hello. I'm Karrun. I guess we'll both be fighting for OUR Family," Karrun said as he extended his hand to Skullius for a handshake.

Yuyui wanted to reciprocate the friendliness Karrun was postulating but as she saw Skullius being unresponsive, she held herself.

An awkward silence ensued.

Karrun kept his hand erect in Skullius' direction but the Hybrid Luman remained still like a statue without any semblance of a shadow of potential movement to shake the man's hand at all.

Yuyui prayed for this poor soul in her heart. She had recently experienced the same with Ferex but the difference was, there was a happy ending to her story.

Karrun nervously took back his hand with a wide smile, the look in his eyes turning ice cold for a second as he asked himself...

'Did he figure out my intention? No, no one but Setkh knows this one...'

"Ooff. It looks like we're off to a rough start," Setkh said as he patted Karrun's shoulder. "I suppose this is a fitting introduction. Nothing more is needed. We'll retire for the night in preparation for tomorrow. I assume you have many things to catch up on anyway and would prefer us to leave wouldn't you?"

No response came to Setkh's question but it was obvious he was right.

'Tomorrow?' Skullius wondered.

What was tomorrow?

Karrun and Setkh walked out of the lounge, disappearing upstairs as they left the group.

With them gone, the atmosphere turned lighter,.

Stylla slumped on the couch while Silrat was reenergized, his fury returning.

"What the hell took you so long this time?!"

"I apologise."

"Wh... I don't care! I need answers!" Silrat boomed.

Skullius walked over to Silrat and smiled while patting his shoulder.

"It's all going to be alright, dear friend," he said to Silrat's furious face's confusion which twitched a couple of times.

Silrat felt like he could have keel over just about now.

The Hybrid Luman turned to Stylla and asked, "What's happening tomorrow?"

Stylla sank further into her seat as she then answered without much delay.

"The Royale. It starts tomorrow. Officially at least. I don't know if that was the original timing or if some manner of luck just happened to waltz by for your sake... but apparently, participants have the first priority to this."

"I see," Skullius said.

'Luck, huh?'

He wiped his mind of unnecessary thoughts before asking again.

"You're not nervous at all about it?"

Stylla gave a short subdued laugh.

"I have many other things to worry about now," she said.

"Unfortunately for me, you remain my single worry," Silrat chipped in while removing Skullius' hand from his shoulder. "We have a lot of things to discuss."

"I know. I have things to discuss with you too, as I promised. This is probably the best time for that."

"Hmmm?" Silrat didn't quite follow.

"Ahem..." Skullius cleared his throat, a gesture that had infiltrated his mind from having absorbed many memories through [Basic Evil Sanction]. He turned to Stylla and then said, "...could we have a moment alone?"

The redhead was surprised at first but quickly rose from her seat.

She accepted that Skullius' relationship with Silrat would probably be stronger than her own with him for a while.

It was a given.

As far as she was concerned, they were only business partners for now. For good reason.

"Very well. You're part of the Family so feel free to be more direct. I'll also retire for the night," Stylla said before disappearing up the stairs.

Skullius and Yuyui sat down, the Hybrid Luman activating [Greater Mana Crafter] which changed the air within the room as mana formed a hazy, condensed cube.

Silrat looked around with narrowed eyes and breathed in.

The mana had suddenly turned thick, nearly becoming tangible, like water in the sea.

"What.. is this?"

"Insurance. What I'm about to tell you is very sensitive. If we are going to continue with a mutually beneficially relationship, you'll need to know more about me and my abilities."

"I... see..." Silrat paid attention.

Skullius was dreadfully serious right now and he could tell that what he was about to be told would revolutionise their entire relationship.

To be trusted with this information was a big deal too.

However...

"Before that..." Silrat said as he passed something to Skullius.

It was a green object, like a card with black texts in a spiral shape.

"You need to declare your participation with this seal. You can tell me everything after you have registered for the Royale. There's a time limit for participants. It's best not to miss it."

Skullius accepted the object, holding it in his hand.

This thing?

The moment he held it, a string of words emerged within his mind, stating and inquiring important details, mainly his consent first.

Next day.

The early morning was blissful and full of activity.

Under the vibrant suns in the sky, a bustle could be felt within the city. Literally, if one was in the midst of it.

There was overall a positive atmosphere but the enthusiasm demanded the attention of the Capital Service.

Hundreds of Knights had to ensure that there was order.

Unlike everyone else, those who were participating in the Premium Age Royale had been informed that the event was to begin today and they in turn notified their respective Families of that and other details.

For the general public however, all over the vast city, many had woken up to see hundreds of small stalls where friendly individuals calmly presented them with green cards that had dark text written over them in a spiral design.

Control Seals.

In order to qualify as a spectator, one had to have one of these and they were free of charge.

Thousands of people lined up before these stalls, the individuals that served them pulling out these cards one after another endlessly.

The more, the merrier.

Unlike with the participants, the issued Control Seals for spectators were to be given out freely and without limitation in time.

For the participants, as soon as the number of candidates declaring their position in the Royale was filled, there would be no room for anymore additions past the night of the day before.

That was the rule.

The orderly yet chaotic scene of these events were being overseen by two individuals perched on top of a tall building – one who sat down, the other standing aloof as he seemed to be filtering things in his 'sight'.

The one who sat wore a special silver armour with a three point star over the chestplate.

It was the Paladin Champion Ruhrees, the one stationed in Genhuis City to assist the Capital Service.

The other was a man who wore a monocle that covered his left eye, a powerful light hidden behind the glass.

A seriousness could be felt from him as he was truly suspicious of this... event.

It was his duty as City guardian.

A duty that someone else from another distant city had.

Unbreakable.

"It's beginning," Ruhrees said with a languid expression. "What do you think?"

"What do I think? It's too early to tell. I escaped having to chat with the Governor over his numerous troubles as a result of this event yet... I've found nothing suspicious," the man with monocle said. "That's demeaning."

"The old geezers in the towers found nothing?"

"Some declare so, some dismissed me and some refused to tell. They aren't obligated to tell me anything, after all."

"Some guardian you are."

The man with monocle sighed with the click of his tongue.

"One of them did say something interesting though..."

"Hmmm?"

"Apparently, the venue for this event was POSSIBLY set wherever it is... to hide from my Daylight Dominion."

"I see. That's not enough to prove anything though. It's at least enough for us to keep a keen eye. Either way, we'll just have to split up and see if there really is much to concern ourselves with here."

The man with the monocle paused for a bit before nodding.

Down below, a man was literally shaking in excitement as it was finally his turn to receive a Control Seal.

Everyone who had gotten away scurried away as they waited by friends and family, zoning out for a few moments before they came to with even more excitement up their gullet.

"Focus on the spiral on the seal for a couple of seconds and give the information required," the man behind the stall instructed while giving out another Seal.

The man next in line happily received the green card and walked away to a safe corner.

He took a deep breath, calming himself and did as the stall keeper had said.

First came words that sprang in his mind, asking for consent and then...

Almost instantaneously, rules and regulations for the event swarmed in...!

Chapter 495: Rules and Regulation

OVERARCHING REGULATIONS

OBJECTIVE-

The goal of this event can be summed up in three simple points:

To seek talent that can be groomed under the EverSword Household.

To remedy the growing conflict between established legal and non-legal powers that have clumped up into scattered organisations.

To showcase the various styles of combat born within Pelian and to inspire aspiring combatants who are indecisive over which discipline to pursue.

CLASSIFICATIONS-

During the course of the PAR, participants will be identified as **CONTENDERS** while spectators will be identified as **WITNESSES**.

STIPULATIONS FOR CONTENDERS-

A liberty has been afforded by the EverSword House for the convenience of involved parties. An aspiring group can become a Family by registering with the Organisational Authority Registrar in any of the prominent cities in Pelian.

Indecent or criminal backgrounds will not be considered during this procedure or the event, however said established Families must be at least 45 days old by the time the PAR begins.

Any aspiring CONTENDER can sign with a Family of their choosing to formally become a member in order to participate in the event.

All Families are allowed a maximum of 20 CONTENDERS who will participate in the event.

Once a CONTENDER declares their participation, withdrawal is forbidden. If said CONTENDER is insistent, a window for withdrawal will be opened but with fitting consequences.

REWARDS-

The EverSword House will setup three Circles of conscription; the Outer, the Inner and the Chosen. Performance within the Royale by Family representative, CONTENDERS, will determine if a Family is worthy of being conscripted into any of the three and their varying degrees of benefits.

THE CONTROL SEAL-

The Control Seal is a mechanism designed to first and foremost inform and ensure the individual attached to it understands the risks of participating and spectating.

With notable differences for CONTENDERS and WITNESSES, the message, 'A BRUTAL GAME OF MIGHT, DEATH AND CHANCE IS ABOUT TO BEGIN, THE ROYAL PRIZE OF WHICH BECKONS FORTUNE, RECOGNITION AND POWER. YOUR SOUL, BODY AND MIND WILL BE PUT TO GRAVE RISK IN THIS EVENT, AN INEVITABILITY IN THE GRAND SCHEME.

IF YOU DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE REGARDLESS, PLEASE DECLARE YOUR NAME INTO THE CONTROL SEAL,' will appear, requesting consent.

Upon getting consent, the CONTROL SEAL will qualify an individual as a CONTENDER or a WITNESS.

The Control Seal will attach itself to an individual right before the first official collective transportation to the Venue and begin executing its secondary functions which are as:

To transport the CONTENDER or WITNESS to and from the venue of the event.

To ensure that CONTENDERS and WITNESSES remain unharmed within the atmosphere of the venue i.e. mind, body and soul, outside the Rules of Engagement.

To protect WITNESSES from the effects of high level battles.

To give visual aid for WITNESSES during the high octane and speedy battles to take place.

To source out basic information about CONTENDERS.

To provide established degree of information on the CONTENDERS to the WITNESSES.

To monitor whether or not CONTENDERS and WITNESSES have adhered to ALL the stipulations and regulations.

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ESTABLISHED RULES AND STATISTICS

TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTENDERS-

A total of 71 Families have registered for the event.

A total of 234 CONTENDERS will be participating in the event.

INTRINSIC EVENT SETUP-

The first portion of the event will consist of the PRELIMINARY ROUNDS; 1V1 battles that will take place in two batches.

Each CONTENDER is mandated to have at least two chances in the PRELIMINARY, thus two rounds of these battles will take place with those who lose in the first round eligible to try again in the second round provided they do not die.

A total of SEVEN matches will be held within a single day, followed by a TWO day break for both CONTENDERS AND WITNESSES in order to keep activity outside the venue stable.

The purpose of the PRELIMINARIES is to allow weaker CONTENDERS a chance to showcase their capabilities in order to potentially get selected for even the lowest class of conscription. The evaluation of potential will be handled by selected personnel from the EverSword House.

The main event, the Royale, will be held after the two PRELIMINARY ROUNDS, those that remain being left to battle it out according to the rules that will be updated at that time and further explained by the GAME MASTER.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT-

Within the arena for the PRELIMINARY ROUNDS:

Fatalities are acceptable and a KILL is counted as a win.

Surrender is also acceptable and will not discount a CONTENDER for the next PRELIMINARY ROUND.

Each match has a time limit of one hour which upon being exceeded will prompt a draw.

In the case of a draw, both CONTENDERS will be disqualified from the event but with compensatory CONSEQUENCES.

If CONTENDERS have any queries or complaints, they may take them up with the GAME MASTER.

RULES ON TOOLS AND ARTEFACTS-

Each CONTENDER is allowed only ONE LEGENDARY grade tool or weapon and nothing beyond that in grade or quantity.

Each CONTENDER is allowed only THREE UNIQUE grade tools or weapons and nothing beyond that in quantity and below in quality.

Outside of high level personnel, no WITNESS is allowed to carry an artefact of LEGENDARY grade or higher.

If any of the above are not adhered to, the CONTROL SEAL will be prompted to confiscate all the individual's possessions on top of the compensatory CONSEQUENCES designated in the rules.

VENUE-

A variety of convenient facilities will be offered within the venue for the basic and advanced needs of all CONTENDERS and WITNESSES.

The services offered will have assured quality and top notch performance, catering to the maximum number of individuals carried within.

Exit and entry will be dictated and managed by the Control Seals as well as the GAME MASTER, with wanton movements beyond boundaries dubbed intolerable.

Chapter 496: Venue (1)

From the brightness usually afforded by the great city of Genhuis, the many, many enthusiastic civilians who had decided to go and watch the Premium Age Royale suddenly appeared in a dimmer space.

Strangely, they were already seated.

Comfortable seats with a bouncy plush to them were under their bottoms while above, a blue, sunless sky could be seen, devoid of clouds.

In this space, thick swaths of mana, like blankets could lightly be felt but they did not harm the witnesses.

They were all well protected.

Millions of rows of seats stacked up in rows that rose high while pushing forward as they formed a curve towards the central space in this oval structure!

Millions!

This was...

A ginormous stadium!

All the civilians who had received their Control Seals from the stalls found themselves here after hours of waiting for most of the others to be served!

"What? Where are we?!"

"Wait! Is this the venue?!"

"What's with the sky? There's no sun."

"Are... are we in danger?! Where are the Knights?!"

"Hey, everyone relax! The rules said these things are supposed to keep us safe... right?"

Amidst the clamour, fear, anxiety and trepidation, one of the many said with sweat dripping from his head.

Indeed, the rules that had been funnelled into their minds did say this.

The man pulled on the sleeve to his right arm and found...

A tattoo.

A dark tattoo of text in a spiralling fashion that was printed on his arm!

The rules also specified this.

Right when they were all transported to this venue, the Control Seals etched themselves onto their bodies and began functioning!

"Woow.... Now that I look at this place. It doesn't feel like any place in Pelian..." an old woman remarked as she looked at the sky, the only natural thing she could see.

The rising arrangement towered over a massive distance high up and no matter how someone looked, they couldn't see what was beyond.

After a certain point, only a few seats with a more lavish design could be seen at the highest point, but even they had behind and above them, an extended wall that covered everything outside.

These lavish seats were empty as those whom they were meant for had not yet arrived.

The same was true for the two rows of seats below them, that seemed to also be reserved for high standing personnel.

Contrasting this high position, at the very bottom of the stacked rows of seats, a beautiful tent of sparkling gold and silver was erected, following the oval shape of this arrangement, the seats here also being different when compared to those offered to the general public.

They were also unoccupied, as with the seats at the very top, with harsh distances placed between them.

A great stretch of purple, well mowed grass extended from this tent, beyond a smooth light blue glass that could be said to be a barrier against whatever was ahead.

As for what was ahead, an expansive square-shaped platform that spanned for roughly nine kilometres was at the centre of focus.

It had a solid white colour with its build looking extremely thick and sturdy, raised about a hundred meters above ground, small orbs of mana fizzing from its surface in a gorgeous show.

A silvery barrier that danced lightly, looking to be as thin as a fly's wings surrounded it, making everyone marvel. The two complemented each other divinely!

This was where the battles would be held!

The Preliminaries, as mentioned in the intrinsic setup!

CREEEEEEEEEEE!

High above, a large shadow was cast over this ginormous stadium, a massive dark bird, its likeness akin to a black feathered pelican, flapped its wings as it looked down with a furious glint in its eyes!

Several of these massive birds flew down from seemingly nowhere, bearing down their atrocious natural might that caused everything to tremble with an electric shiver on the everything!

Everything but this stadium!

"Arrrrrghhhh...wait," one woman had begun to scream when she saw the massive birds but realised...

No sound reached her ear from the giant birds that angrily screeched from high up!

No vibration.

No suppression by mana.

Not even a change in the fluctuations of the wind.

Nothing.

If they didn't see these birds, it would almost be like they didn't exist.

Something disallowed these birds from simply flying down.

"Incredible. It really is safe here. Haha... wait, wait, wait...!"

"I think I know where we are...!"

"It couldn't be....!"

The collective thoughts of millions manifested as a thunderclap, a realisation dawning on everyone here!

They were... in a Cluster?!

A Cluster was the venue of the event?!

As if to answer the lingering doubt within the hearts and minds of the witnesses here, a thrum rumbled from underneath, along with the unsettling clanging of massive chains.

Unlike the screeches and scrawls of the giant birds that had left, these low vibrations and faint sounds rung.

Something powerful was emitting a defeated and pained grumble that made everyone shiver, just the might of it groans bypassing the soundproof rune system applied on the stadium!

The sounds of chains that came along with this seemed to have the same level of power behind it!

Those that had been curious over what was outside the stadium suddenly had second thoughts.

It was best not to know.

The crowd began to settle, some growing a bit more comfortable in the seats.

What was there to worry about?

The whole arrangement allowed for there to be at least a meter's worth of space between seats from the front, back and sides therefore the atmosphere was not stuffy. In fact, a cool sensation destroyed the conventional heat that would normally be expected from having such a lot of people in one place.

Columns of large free space could be seen between every five thousand seats, these being spaces for people to walk through. Additionally, in these spaces, floating doors stood mysteriously in mid-air, their colour a bright silver.

The information fed to the masses alluded to this as well.

These doors led to the restrooms which were designed to be convenient and sufficient for the millions and potentially more.

Above that...

Millions of flashes of silver light appeared right before everyone seated – a small table manifesting with a tray of food and drink on it.

Various assortments of dishes, from quality roasted and stewed meats, fresh bread, salads and freshly cut fruit, the collective aroma which should have been chaotic actually meshing very well.

A hot beverage as well as a cold one were offered in large sealed flasks to complement the buffet and everyone couldn't help but marvel!

This...!

"Dear Listafelle! All this...!"

"Did we come here to drink and eat?!"

"I could get used to this!"

"Hahahaha! I'm so glad I came! Though I wish a couple of sexy ladies were serving us. <Sigh>. That would have made this perfect."

"Tell me about it. I'd like an interlude that jiggles from time to time. I haven't been getting any action recently."

"I feel your pain brother. Nothing beats having to—"

"SHUT UP YOU DEGENERATES!!"

The anxiety which had slowly been cooling off was brought down another notch as some took a swig of the beverages while others dug into the food.

Utter bliss.

To construct such a massive stadium...

To ensure that millions could be catered for without compromising quality...

This was the power of a House.

The EverSword House!

As time slowly ticked by, the WITNESSES chatting and eagerly anticipating the proceedings leading up to the beginning of the event, more bright flashes of silver light sprang forth from high above, on the seats at the very top of the arrangement.

Several individuals appeared with this silver light.

Over the five seats of the topmost row, three figures, two of which had a striking semblance, sat.

One was a man with a fierce gaze, his dark hair complementing his hazel coloured eyes perfectly. He donned a thick cloak with fine, silver colouring and golden fringes.

He looked over the masses with pride and nodded mysteriously.

To his left sat a shapely woman with a smile on her face, admiring the filled up stadium on all angles. Despite her emotions on everything else, she was proud of what was accomplished by her husband.

She had to.

She moved her hand to hold the dark haired man's own which rested on the armrest and gripped it tight.

"This is it, Rearren," she said in a low voice, to which the man beside her, responded with another nod of his head.

"Indeed," Rearren said as he turned to his right. "Direction is in our favour. Don't you think so too, Rias?"

The third of three figures was a young man with dark hair like his father's but with streaks of blue at the fringes of his bangs. His honey coloured eyes that remained focused on the millions of witnesses here, with some space left to spare where the seats were concerned, held a cold, unfeeling energy about them.

"Yes father, I believe so as well," Rias said while clasping his hands together, one of which had a dark bandage around it from the shoulder to his fingers.

Chapter 497: Venue (2)

Following the appearance of these three esteemed figures, on the row below theirs where ten seats could be spotted, multiple individuals with high standing spawned.

The Governor's son, two of his daughters, a burly man with a wild visage, his arms crossed over his expansive chest, three figures donning exquisite Mage robes and Ruhrees who leaned forward in his seat.

"Hmm... incredible," the Paladin Champion remarked as he took in the scenes below and above.

Such wealth...

On the last row, where twenty seats could be spotted, other well-respected persons were present – several dignified men with crests belonging to highly regarded Families, several Guilds Association officials, including the evaluator Alaris and a few others.

Below, under the massive tent that obscured the view of who sat in that very last row, several flashes of silver light appeared as well, the 234 Contenders having appeared.

Large spaces existed between them under the tent and as they sat, most of them marvelled at the stadium and the crowds above.

Phenomenal!

Among them, Skullius could be seen adorned in his VergeRider which took the usual form – a dark blue jacket with black leather bracers and dark fitting pants.

His senses spread wide in an attempt to take in the full surroundings but that was insufficient.

As a result, he switched to using Crude Vision, his eyes becoming ignited with a darkness.

The view became clear.

"Damn..."

This place was big.

The concentration of mana was ridiculous but it didn't bear down on him as he thought, not that he minded.

Skullius ran his fingers over his arm, feeling the imprint of the Control Seal on it.

Right, this was Seal's doing.

The rules and regulations had been very clear.

He turned to the individuals on his sides but didn't get a chance to fully take it all in as a booming voice interrupted him.

It came from high up.

Rearren had stood up.

"Welcome all!"

With these words, the noise died down and everyone paid attention, most attempting to turn behind them so that they could see who was speaking.

However, for everyone's convenience, three hundred gigantic rectangular screens made of a clear glass materialised at the very centre of this stadium, accommodating the pre-established apportionments of all the viewers from top to bottom.

Over these screens, the face of Rearren showed, making the crowds sigh in relief.

Everything seemed well thought out!

"My name is Rearren EverSword. I'm sure most do not know who I am, at least you did not until now and for good reason," Rearren said, garnering many cheers and applause from the crowd.

So this was the host!

Rearren gestured for the two at his sides to stand.

Rias to his right and the woman to his left rose up and he went on to introduce them.

"This is my only son, Rias EverSword and this, is my wife, Millisa EverSword. We are part of a long line of bastions of strength for Pelian, much like the other five Houses. However, you do not know us because we mainly keep to ourselves. We only respond when needed. We are satisfied with being trump cards in the shadows. No.

We were."

"That changes from today. The Royal Family chose to expand the reach of Pelian and its people to places overseas, allying itself with the Sif. This is a powerful decision in the long run that will cause a wave of diversity over our nation. Truly. Yet before that, I and my House wish to see Pelian groom herself from the inside."

The crowds maintained silence as Rearren's speech continued.

They already knew the objectives of the Premium Age Royale but hearing it from the horse's mouth was much more invigorating and possibly, more convincing.

"We, as the bastions of Pelian dating back tens of millennia are responsible for being too comfortable, letting this nation remain stagnant and failing to teach and groom with what has been passed down to us. It is our very nature. Greed. Sadly that doesn't change a simple fact. A fact that you and I share. We lack.

We lack passion! We lack drive! Our blood has turned cold! It no longer hisses with the fire of challenge! Be it for combatants, for non-combatants! We have grown stale, getting comfortable in the long years inactivity!"

"We writhe in conflict with one another instead of teaching ourselves how to sharpen our skills! Those who desire to fight, to their fists! Those who desire to build, with their bricks! But even still, any profession can grow boring without something to look forward to at end of the day!"

"Do you not yearn for it, excitement of this kind?! Exchanging blows! Trading feet! Showcasing what Pelian has groomed in a marvellous setup so it can be enhanced! This is it! A break from normalcy!"

A cure for the cancer you all know! To forge a powerful nation and to strip ourselves of misguided collusions! This is it! You were born to witness it! However you benefit from it!"

Slowly, a wave of excitement began to permeate through the millions.

Yes.

It had been boring.

Yes.

It had been growing stale.

People needed something to look forward to.

Something to go and watch that also had a grander purpose in mind.

It would be great if the wandering bandits were taken care of.

It would be great if many got inspiration from watching the fights here, though the concern of fatalities being permissible was palpable.

Still... one couldn't help but anticipate.

"I do not know what this event will spurn. Success, failure, excitement, sorrow, fear... But at the end of it all, at very least, ensure that you can say this to yourself or your loved one at home..."

Rearren paused.

"....'I had a great FUCKING time!'"

"YEEEEEEAAAAAAAAHHH!"

The crowds cheered!

Many stood as they applauded, feeling a rush!

Rearren knew how to rile up the crowds.

They didn't want to have the objective of the PAR reiterated and explained in a political fashion. They wanted the more explosive and informal exposition that tickled their primal fancy!

They had been given what they wanted!

Indeed, this was better than they imagined!

Ruhrees scoffed.

As did the Governor's son.

'No wonder the Royal Family agreed to let him host this thing,' he thought.

"Now, allow me to hand over the mantle to the one who will be taking the reins to this event. The Game Master!" Rearren said.

Suddenly, the screens that aided everyone visually vanished and on the central platform, the square-shaped arena, a silver light flashed, a tall man appearing.

Despite the vast distance, the many witnesses found their eyes zooming in on this man and getting a clear, defined picture of everything on and around him.

The Control Seal was at work again!

Multi-coloured spheres of light burst from this man, flashing in different directions as they rose up before exploding in a beautiful light show of jubilee!

Music began to play, the type that made the heart race!

This man had dual coloured hair, part of it black and the other purple.

He wore a grin as he raised his head and spread his arms wide while being bathed in the residue of the colourful explosions – sparks of light that rained over the platform.

UUUUOOOOOH!

Everyone was pumped!

This Game Master sure was flashy!

The man opened his mouth and spoke.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Contenders and Witnesses! The most glorious event to occur in the past millennia is about to begin, a highlight to be remembered in the coming generations! Let me hear you scream in EXTRAVAGANCE!"

"YEAAAAAAAAAAH!!"

....!

Chapter 498: Game Master!

...!

Skullius almost stood up in shock!

He quickly held himself back as that simple move if noticed could have dire consequences.

This man...

That voice!

That face!

It was... him!

The man from that cavern where he and the Harem Guild battled the Evenfall cultists!

'I thought he was captured! Did he escape?!' Skullius thought in confusion. Silrat hadn't told him of this.

It probably slipped his mind because at the time that it happened, the Galemonger had laid waste to the city right after with its Bulk Terrors!

Following that, he had witnessed the consequences of providing wanton assistance to Skullius without mutual benefit in real time, which rattled him even further.

Following that came arranging the agreement with Stylla and after that, Skullius had departed from them, claiming he would meet them in Genhuis City.

So yes, that had slipped Silrat's mind.

Speaking of the former Branch Head.

He was seated in the rows just below the topmost three which were reserved for witnesses with direct ties to the Families, alongside Stylla, Setkh, Yuyui and Daggs.

The expression on his face was also ugly!

What had been an event that he had deemed insignificant now that he had moved to Genhuis City and had greater concerns, had turned grave once again!

Silrat squeezed the armrest with both his hands.

'Damn it! What's the meaning of this?! Does this entire event have the Evenfall behind it then? And potentially the Green Neolists too?!' Silrat thought in anguish.

After Tulnas had returned from the mission, he had pretty much confirmed for everyone that the two groups were in cahoots.

Given that logic...

'Should I have Stylla and Setkh withdraw? No, the rules forbid it. Festos and Karrun will likely be killed. No doubt that's the.. consequence, or maybe something worse!' Silrat brought his hands to his mouth as he breathed nervously into them, his mind churning.

Skullius on the other hand, replayed everything to do with this man while his mind also spun.

Back then, a masked man had shown up in the cave to save the cultists that remained.

No. That was secondary.

He was lead there by the crest that Skullius had in his possession, the one he had been given by Eobald in the Tremur Forest.

After that, Somanda suddenly showed up and killed off the masked man before pursuing him.

'This goes deeper then. If I mess around, I might end up getting involved with Somanda again. I still don't know how all these guys are related after all,' Skullius thought while scratching his chin.

He slowly calmed down.

He needed to cool off.

Once again, he paid attention to his Control Seal.

Now, his thoughts concerning this thing changed for the worse. Perhaps what the rules said wasn't the thick of it.

Maybe his very thoughts and intent was being monitored.

In the worse case scenario, the minds behind this event already had contingencies against someone like him who knew a bit about them!

'Me and Silrat need to have another talk it seems,' Skullius thought with a heavy sigh.

The man whom the witnesses and some Contenders applauded for remained with a cheery grin, his eyes darting to and fro as colourful explosions rang out in the sky in a beautiful shower!

Before him, small glass platforms began to appear in a floating staircase arrangement as the music died down, the man, Guissepo, climbing them to reach a great height.

As the clamour began to die down, he bowed and continued to speak.

"My blessed, extravagant audience. It is good to have you all here. I hope your minds, bodies and very souls will paying extravagant attention to the unique arrangement we have setup for you for the coming months. It may seem like an extravagantly long time but I assure you, it will all pass in a heartbeat."

"Sadly, I must also mention that today, is but a formality and an exhibition to get the extravagant rules and regulations across, as well as to get you all accustomed to this arrangement. We only have a single match prepared for your enjoyment at this time."

Disapproval and concern rung from all around Guissepo but he retained his smile.

"Come now. There is no need rush. Those who relish in extravagance have to show patience as a virtue, haha," Guissepo said, his voice ringing out wildly.

"Before any of that however, allow me to elaborate a bit more about the event and the venue."

The Game Master's carefree and affable smile drove the masses to quit their reverse hurrah. It wasn't all that bad after all.

Having an exhibition should be fun. These were usually designed to hype up the main events.

"As I am sure many of you clever minds have extravagantly deduced, this is a Cluster. A purple Cluster."

Skullius frowned.

A purple Cluster?

In order, Clusters went from white, blue, purple and black; some mixtures existed in between but going on the colour coding, purple would be atrociously dangerous.

The scale of the world within the Cluster along with the monsters it harboured...

Skullius compared the Cluster Generals he faced from Jackpot, to Guddhar the Sage Monkey to the Galemonger then to the Grand Flame Bringer...

None of these should hold a candle to what a purple Cluster had to offer!

So this was where they were?

No wonder the mana here was so absurdly thick. The civilian witnesses would definitely need protection from such an environment.

"It is indeed surprising for you extravagant lot isn't it? Yet, that pales in comparison to the might of the host. To ensure that the Cluster remains extravagantly stable, the Cluster General has been bested and imprisoned instead of being killed, so you need not fear. Most of the powerful monsters here have all been taken care of as well. Haha! And all this, is the work of one extravagant young man.

The young master of the EverSword Household. Rias EverSword!"

The glass screens appeared once again to show the indifferent face of the young man who sat next to his father and mother.

...!

Him?!

This time, most of the Contenders were led to furrow their brows.

That was... absurd!

This... boy didn't look a day older than sixteen or perhaps seventeen!

Skullius was also gobsmacked but kept his surprise under the cover of flesh.

'Seriously?'

If that were true...

Guissepo cleared his throat to get everyone's attention again.

"All that said, I hope you can get a bit more assurance as to your safety. Beyond that, following the Preliminary Rounds, the extravagant main event, the Battle Royale, featuring those who remain will begin will begin. You wouldn't want to miss it! The location will not be something as extravagantly boring as this stadium, but another prepared region in this extravagantly large Cluster!

The rules will be exciting and the finale will be exquisite. Yet it is too soon for that. Let us celebrate the current set of events!"

"Let the exhibition match begin!"

The glass stairs that Guissepo sat on moulded into a singular flat piece that he sat on which floated higher into the air.

On the white platform beneath, two silver lights flashed, revealing two Contenders who faced off against each other with unveiled enthusiasm – one, a slim but busty woman with long pure diamond coloured hair, the other, a slim man with short, cinnamon coloured hair.

The eyes of the witnesses vividly sucked in every feature of these Contenders, the adrenaline within every one of them literally boiling!

At the same time, floating text appeared above the two Contenders in the eyes of everyone gazing at them, showing select details about them...

Chapter 499: Exhibition

Name : Ijjit Ecna Stonof

Stage : Second Phase Master

Core : Blue

Family : Stonof

-

Name : Occa Ben Ekkel

Stage : Second Phase Master

Core : Blue

Family : Ekkel

All witnesses and contenders saw the floating text above the two on the platform and gained a better understanding of how the Control Seal worked.

Name, Stage, Core and Family name...

These were the details the Control Seal showed.

Ijgit was the woman with the expansive bust while Occa was the man.

The two stared at each other, their visages displaying different attitudes towards the battle they were about to engage in.

Both wore simple clothing, with Ijgit donning a confident smile while Occa bore a serious face as he got into stance.

The crowds were hyped!

The distance between the two opponent was no less than four hundred meters and from the platform to every witness watching, the distance was greater, yet it seemed like their eyes were bolstered by an unseen force that allowed them to see with astonishing clarity!

To common folk, this was amazing.

To those who were already strong enough to see all this though, it wasn't enough to garner surprise. The text was very informative though, which was much appreciated.

A detail to be noted was how the two Contenders both had middle names. These in actuality, were their original last names, with the surnames at the end being the names of the Families they were signed into.

This notation was meant to ensure that there was a clear distinction between original Family members and otherwise just for the sake of it.

Exposing this didn't make much of a difference to the overall game after all.

For Skullius who had his sockets burning with a thick darkness as he saw all shapes in a mix of grey, white and black, the same applied.

He could also see the text but...

'Something is not right here...' he thought.

His extensive senses and [Greater Mana Crafter] helped him catch traces of something peculiar about these two combatants that leaked partially.

Something was forcibly subdued within their bodies.

Something sinister.

Something familiar.

An energy that he had felt before.

On top of this, the two's presences had a distinct similarity to those of the Energy Formers he had met!

High above, someone else felt most of what Skullius felt.

'Hmmm. I'm rarely off when it comes to sensing something like this...' Ruhrees thought while leaning forward, his armour clanging lightly with his movement.

These two individuals.

Their presence...

Something about them...

He couldn't quite put a finger on it but he had an obvious theory.

For now, he would keep it to himself however.

It was not worth it to run around spouting baseless accusation after all, especially not when he was who he was. Besides, if it was as he thought, the old geezers in the towers would have said something... probably.

The boisterous cheer from the crowd suddenly exploded as Ijgit made the first move, her figure darting forward while layered with bright mana!

The platform below her enhanced the light of her footsteps ridiculous for dramatic effect and she rose over Occa with a fierce dropkick, the shrieking air around her also blared in the spectators' eyes!

Occa released a great amount of his mana and smothered it over his hands which guarded above his head to cushion himself from the blow!

The impact birthed by this one exchange shot outwards ravenously and smacked against the thin, rising around the platform which blinked!

Skullius instantly narrowed his eyes as he noticed something interesting.

The harsh mana which raged from the two's clash was barred from leaving the area within the barrier but bits of it that wouldn't even hurt a child were let out to spray outwards over the stadium like a breeze!

This was all to enhance the experience!

'It's still a competition where you can kill. This match is probably meant to mask the hundreds that will die here later,' Skullius thought while scratching his chin.

Ijgit rapidly moved away from Occa before rushing towards him again and throwing three significant blows that were packed with atrocious force!

Occa easily weaved and swiped the attacks away before rising up and launching an ugly kick at Ijgit's neck!

The woman ducked down and swept down right when Occa was descending but the man gathered the majority of his mana into his feet to reinforce them, preventing himself from getting knocked down!

Unfortunately, while he was successful in avoiding getting knocked down, he was temporarily left unable to react to Ijgit's next move which employed quick thinking and flexibility. The woman chest bobbed as she pulled in legs and pushed her feet at Occa's chest which was largely unguarded by mana!

BOOOOM!

The man was blasted several dozens of meters back before, with a hard face, he rolled and hurriedly stood only to see Ijgit blitzing her way towards him and flinging tens of punches!

An crazy physical exchange began and the regular witnesses roared in excitement, some standing as they whistled, no doubt supporting Ijgit – many of them were from the degenerate community!

Ordinary men, women and children could follow the rapid movements and the finer details of the fight they would have been unable to perceive otherwise, which pumped up many to a much greater degree.

To the Contenders and the witnesses seated at the top however, this was nothing.

It was a show that could only excite the normal people.

At least this current point.

After several minutes of back forth, Ijgit and Occa created some distance between them again, their mana bubbling.

They both exhaled hot air, the sound of this amplified by the stadium to cause another burst of excitement. Something was coming!

These two were about to get serious!

From Ijgit, a storm of cobalt blue, neon energy rose from her body, lighting up a huge portion of the stadium!

It seemed the thin barrier around the platform also amplified the various intense colours that manifested within it, a low level feature but enticing to the audience nonetheless as it made Ijgit using her Genuine Incarnation a treat to watch!

Occa did the same, a bright white light bursting up from him too with a similar level of radiance and power to Ijgit's!

Above the man, something formed.

The Aura he expelled from his body moulded itself into something intricate.

It formed large pillar!

One could call it a pole that was about twice the size of full grown man, at the ends of its pristine white cylindrical shape two black caps with sparkling white patterns!

The pillar moved and fell right beside Occa who hold its surface while his eyes refused to leave Ijgit.

The woman smiled as above her, what formed with the perfect Aura was...

A large feminine figure!

The details were not as clear cut, but they weren't meant to be.

The outline of blue woman with features just like Ijgit's appeared, her size being thrice that of the original and with a minimalist design of feminine combat armour over her!

Aside from a pair of radiant white eyes, a nose and a simplistic mouth, nothing too surprising could be seen on her face, but her outlined figure held a deep sense of authority and power that didn't need demonstration!

It oozed from this Genuine Incarnation, tainting the surroundings with sprinkles of blue dust!

The Genuine Incarnation descended to float serenely behind Ijjit, the blue hair on its head rustling about beautiful!

UUUUUUOOOOOOH!

Excitement was palpable all around.

How would this battle unfold?

Skullius and every other contender looked at this development with keen eyes.

The Hybrid Luman accessed the knowledge he had gained from one of the bandits he had thought, one who had been somewhat capable.

Apparently, the Master Stage different immensely from the Advancement Stage.

While the Advancement Stage had 10 levels, the Master Stage had 20 each ten that made it up being a different phase.

Those in the first phase could not be compared to those in the second, as the latter had two major advantages.

One of these was the ability to forge their Genuine Incarnation into either a Living type Incarnation or an Object type Incarnation – the Living type Incarnations were able to borrow the characteristics of their user, including technique, unique ability or blessing, bolstering them and using them incredibly well offensively.

The Object type Incarnations doubled down on defense, enhancing Genuine Incarnations' ability to counteract mana and basic Aura attacks to an extremely high degree!

Naturally, both types of Incarnations were still capable of attack and defence but their areas of speciality were well... more specialised.

All that said, as Skullius saw the Incarnations, it was obvious which was what.

In fact, he was forced to remember Bek who had Genuine Incarnations that formed rings around his rapiers, their solid form proof that he was probably not in the second phase yet.

As many expected Ijgit was the first to show the intent to attack with her Incarnation while Occa raised his large pillar defensively before him while his body glowed with excess Aura!

The masses were expectant but even with this, all the Contenders knew this wasn't going to be an exciting match. It would pretty much end with a generic show of bland power...

Chapter 500: Entitled Brat

The Living type Incarnation that belonged to none other than Ijgit rose fiercely, its hair rustling serenely in the windless atmosphere as it shot towards Occa.

The cautious man narrowed his eyes and twirled the Object type Incarnation in his grasp, pushing it ahead of him to block the fierce punch that stormed from the valiant, large and luminous outline of a voluptuous woman!

After a crisp impact, Occa drew back, creating more distance between himself and Ijgit but the busty woman dashed towards him, her Incarnation following along.

As the chase began, it was abruptly cut off by Occa making a sharp turn and suddenly swinging his pole behind him, which prompted Ijgit to make the split second decision to defend. As she did, Occa followed up with a series of thrusts with his blunt ended pole, all of which were expertly blocked by Ijgit's Incarnation.

The witnesses cheered but the Contenders got bored quickly.

In general, Living type Incarnations, because they employed intricate characteristics of living things and the abilities of their user, especially for more advanced Master Stage experts, were limited in their range. They could not go too far away from their Masters, else they would lose their forms and special offensive effects.

The idea behind them was to mimic the flexibility of life and techniques and that was hard to do when the user was projecting their Aura far from themselves.

Object type Incarnations were easier to maintain at a distance because they incorporated the basics of Genuine Incarnations in general and were less flexible, thus their usability at varying ranges.

Ijgit had been chasing around Occa because of the limitation of her Incarnation which put her at a disadvantage when it was Occa's turn to attack.

This was where the boring part came.

Both of these combatants were not doing anything special with their Incarnations.

Ijgit's Incarnation didn't do anything other than punch hard and Occa didn't do anything other than swing his pole. No special effects were applied.

No techniques.

No blessings.

Nothing.

The Contenders began to wonder whether these two were even actually participating at all. It was possible that they were just putting on a show but... something was not right about it.

None other than Skullius and Ruhrees could pick up on this.

As most of the Contenders would expect, a dragged out battle of fists and blocks ensued for a little less than twenty minutes with flash and bouncy fan service before Occa decisively raised his hand.

"I give up."

He surrendered.

Apparently, Ijgit's unrelenting attacks despite his ability to dodge and defend was too much for him.

In the eyes of everyone present, a blinking red light started to flash around Occa while a blue one swirled around Ijgit, naming them loser and winner respectively.

This needed no explanation to anyone who saw and the witnesses cheered, having enjoyed this exhibition that displayed a glimpse of what they were in for.

The figures of Occa who sighed disappointedly and Ijgit who had begun to rile up the crowds by bouncing up and down while cheering vanished, transported away by the same silver light that had brought them here.

Guissepo, who had been floating up, descended onto the white platform once again which remained without a scratch after the battle.

He wore a grin as he addressed the crowds that applauded, the cheer coming from every direction.

"Indeed! That was a rather extravagantly...tame show of power but it will do for the day!" he said as the noise died down.

"Go out there and invite as many as you can to join. To come and enjoy this extravagant showcase of talent and power which will go on for months! Surely, one other might want to indulge in it and sit next to you, overlooking the extravagant experts of Pelian!"

The crowd concurred.

Even now, there were many, many seats left for more witnesses to sit on.

In fact, the stadium could be expanded to accommodate more people if needed.

The gaze of Guissepo shifted from the heights where most of the cheer came from and settled on the individuals sitting with distances between them in the tent.

His eyes showed a glint of excitement and intrigue, though most of that was not reciprocated by the Contenders.

It didn't matter to him either way.

"For our Contenders, Master Rearren EverSword has prepared an informal, introductory gathering that will be held tonight. Introductions and understandings are of extravagant importance. The establishment of these will be necessary before the beginning of the real battles tomorrow. Feel free to come and dine," Guissepo informed.

'A gathering, huh? Not suspicious at all,' Skullius narrowed his eyes.

It didn't seem like Guissepo had noticed or even recognised him but he remained vigilant still.

A gathering, or rather, a party, seemed pretty normal but Skullius couldn't help but attach every bit of his suspicion about this Game Master to everything else he said or implied.

Rearren EverSword's gaze fell on Guissepo with a knowing glint and the man finally announced...

"Let us gather once again when the real, extravagant flame begins to burn..."

Guissepo bowed and with the force of his will as the Game Master, he dismissed everyone.

Millions of silver light tore through the space for fractions of a second, leaving the seats in the stadium empty.

A silence bore down on the expansive, city like stadium.

It all surrounded the man left on the platform, bowing as he wore a subdued smile.

A burst of calm breath was expelled from his nostrils as he sat down and relaxedly looked up.

The visions he had seen through the eye of the Galemonger back then constantly flashed in his head. He yearned for what he had seen to finally come true.

This was the beginning of it and he couldn't be more proud.

Who knew someone like him would be seen fit to take the reins to a millenia old belief that had been thwarted consistently, taking it hundreds of steps closer to its goal.

Certainly not him.

VWOOOSH!

Suddenly, an explosion of bright orange flame burst a distance from Guissepo, the light being amplified by the thin barrier around the platform.

Guissepo turned to it while maintaining his jovial mood.

Three figures walked out from the rapidly disappearing luminescence of the fire, reaching the Evenfall cultist seconds later.

Fulina and Cyne stood on both sides of Actuass who wore his usual getup, their eyes locking onto Guissepo with barely veiled hostility.

"Any trouble with your role?" the masked man said in a hollow voice, the glint of hazel from his eyes piercing towards Guissepo's visage.

"Recruiting men and women deemed outlaws in Pelian for the extravagant strength they wield took longer than I thought. Other than that, everything is extravagantly marvellous."

"That is not what I meant but very well," Actuass said as he looked around, the synched thrum of distant massive chains and a guttural roar echoing at this moment. "I'm sure I do not need to reiterate the stipulations of the Creeds we are under."

Guissepo rested his cheek on his hand as he shifted his sitting position.

"Yes, yes, roles and all. I am not to leave this place until the very end of the Royale. I know. As the anchor for Master Boron's Primus, it's only extravagantly natural but..." Guissepo paused. "...If I may ask. You so simply agreed to be a part of this, yet I do not see how this benefits you.

Even with all I was shown, I still have no clue. What is your extravagant goal? Do you simply wish to perish alongside everyone who opposes Master Boron's extravagant release during that inevitable day? When this lengthy event ends, our alliance will expire after all. We may as well be enemies then."

Fulina and Cyne turned to Actuass.

It was true.

Back then, when Guissepo killed the former leader of the Evenfall, Actuass had agreed to the cultist's plan without much hesitation.

This puzzled them, but they trusted the masked man's judgement, though, this had to do with a literal god who seemingly showed Guissepo the right path to take for his release which involved Actuass himself.

After a brief silence, a less than astute answer followed Guissepo's question.

"You grew up in a normal household, one that feared the Deities, thankful for the littlest of good to grace them, if I recall."

Guissepo narrowed his eyes.

The two had had a brief conversation about their ideals in which Guissepo had mentioned his background but Actuass had barely shared anything about himself.

Where was this going?

"Sadly, I cannot relate to your grievances about how you were treated by society and perhaps even the Deities themselves. However you felt everyone else lived while you suffered, is foreign to me. I never lacked anything since I was born. I was spoiled, brash and greedy. You could say... I was an ungrateful devil."

Guissepo scoffed.

"Maybe I'm still the same even now." Actuass said with a distant voice before his keen eyes bore down on Guissepo with a crazy light.

"When your god eventually erupts from under the world, I will greedily ride off his chaotic vengeance like the entitled brat I am."