

## Undead 531

### Chapter 531: The Other Threat

A few hours after the attack on Evic, the city knew a terrifying level of peace and security, one that was so profound that it cheered up the majority despite the tragedy that had nearly reaped a lot of lives just now.

Why was this?

Well, a man had appeared who could heal seemingly heal all forms of sickness and injury, his calibre of skill in healing even outclassing the Purity Healers who had been working tirelessly for the past weeks.

Since four hours ago, he had suddenly appeared where all the injured were being gathered within the city after the forced teleportation which he judged to have been caused by the grey cube he had seen in the hands of Brown and Black.

The properties of that tool made it clear that it was a Legendary grade item that allowed the user to teleport anywhere they wished and to take whoever they desired along with them over a vast range – though it had limits of usage and conditions of use.

Of course Skullius had the exact details.

Skullius had been using [Great Saint's Invigoration] which had leapt past its former stats as [Luminous Healing]. Because of Black's little stunt to throw the Contract Knights and Purity Knights into disarray, many had been injured or affected in many other ways because of the spatial shift.

This was what Skullius was tending to.

[Great Saint's Invigoration] levelled up quite well from dealing with variations of injuries and also sickness that the Healers stationed here hadn't been able to cure.

Only a few had been spared to come to Evic with the rest being Priests with great knowledge on healing with potions and herbs. Then again, high grade potions were extremely costly and thus even the Purity couldn't empty their vaults for one city. Economically, it would not bode well for them.

'Hmmm? Already at level 11,' Skullius thought as he gazed at his healing skill's level on the guidance field for a brief moment.

He had been using it quite extensively ever since he got it. Sila had used it when fighting Bek. He had used when fighting Bassbion. 'Using' didn't even capture the abuse this skill had suffered.

From the information packet, the Guidance Code, which he had received, more detail about the mechanism in place for skills and their progression with the guidance field had been revealed.

The guidance field allowed its user to rapidly cultivate skills and greatly enhanced how fast they progressed by taking advantage of the general rule that with repetition, a skill could be forged and it could be refined grandly with the same process.

This was why skills like [Greater Mana Crafter] were born as the guidance field also took into account how far one's knowledge on a subject had grown and added it on when the skill evolved to possibly have the user skip a few levels if what they understood exceeded what the skill currently offered.

Additionally, what constituted as a skill was a complex application that the user was unable to achieve without hardwork. Everything Skullius accomplished, as long it was born from him spending time crafting it with a series of layers of inspiration and complex thinking, it would be classified as a skill.

When Skullius understood this, he felt like he had crossed a certain threshold of knowledge. His advantage in this world was ridiculous.

"You might want to take a break. These people are close to seeing you as a Deity in human flesh," Oliviana who had been with Skullius throughout the entire three to four hour healing session doing her part to assist those who merely needed superficial care, said. "You can't deal with them the same way you did the guys up top."

"You're right," Skullius said as he stood. "I heard there's some victims of some previous attack on the city stuck in strange states, that no amount of healing can help them? What's that all about?"

"Yes. I'll show you to them later."

Skullius nodded.

Since the Luman had conducted some healing in Harifrast Town before, he had a little experience with how to serve people for free while being as amicable as he could be.

The long stretches of people who had been laid on small beds within dozens of tents were dealt with pretty quickly, save for a few whom Skullius could ignore as he took his 'break'.

The two left the tents with Oliviana telling those who were concerned that Skullius needed to rest.

A short distance after the tents, as the duo turned a corner, they saw the tall and stout figure of Anara giving orders to his Purity Knights.

The Paladin Champion turned to meet his gaze with theirs and a complicated expression showed on his face.

He seemed to struggle with himself for a few short breaths before walking to meet Skullius and Oliviana.

"Sir Festos. I have heard from the Healers and Priests how you have an astounding skill in healing. I was beyond shocked and frankly... very happy to hear that you have already dealt with more than two thirds of those in need for comfort," Anara said with a look of appreciation.

Skullius merely nodded to this, awarding the Champion no further route to continue this conversation on the topic.

Anara then glanced at Oliviana who decided to save him the trouble.

"Festos, perhaps YOU could help us with something else that has been happening more frequently as of late," she said while raising her brow to Anara who quickly picked up on what she meant.

The Paladin Champion had already seared Skullius' strength as overwhelming in his mind but to find that he branched into healing as well was too much.

Not only was this man a monster in combat but he was also good at support type skills. If this revelation did not wrestle with his sentiment that Skullius had even more to show then...

"Yes, sir Festos. While the threat of bandits raiding the city certainly is great, there is something else that has been slowly causing more panic. Could you please see if you can help with it?" Anara implored.

'Another threat?' Skullius thought.

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Anara uncovered a cloth over a small chair within a small storage room.

His face depicted an uncomfortable grimace as he looked at what was revealed.

"We found this a few days ago after putting all our men on patrol. Honestly, we think the enemy deliberately left it out for us to find, but none of us have any clue what it is."

Perhaps Skullius knew about this.

Hope drove him to turn to look at Skullius' face for any reaction.

He found one.

Skullius looked at the object that had been hidden with suspicion.

This again?

He never would have thought he would encounter this again. Or rather, he had forgotten about it.

Oliviana recognised that Skullius must have seen this from the look on his face but she, just like Anara gave Skullius his time.

In the meantime, Anara exposted on the other details concerning this thing.

What was it?

It was a white doll.

This doll with a completely blank face and four, ball joined limbs.

Traces of mana could vaguely be felt by everyone else but Skullius... he picked up on the extremely complicated rune work that was imbedded inside and outside of the doll.

"Tens of the wounded in the camps we had set before suddenly started disappearing. The same happened to those whom we thought were close to death for several reasons. One day, we found this doll in a corner where four civilians registered as having fatal injuries were put to bed. Tsk. We couldn't find any traces of them," Anara said as he turned to Skullius.

"If there is anything you know, please feel free to tell us. Anything at all."

Skullius' visage turned from having hints of recognition to becoming stone cold.

After a few moments of silence, he finally spoke with harsh breath leaving his nostrils .

"I'll inform you when I have solid information about it," he said.

At the same time, he opened up a bubble in his soul, his gaze suddenly flaring with darkness.

'Sila. Take a look at this,' he said deep within himself. 'It's about time you tell me who these people are.'

Chapter 532: Keepers of Aigas

The Tower General felt a call from far away.

He hadn't been summoned to feel the same sensations as Skullius in quite some time which caused him to feel nothing but sluggishness. The force of Skullius' soul around his jolted him awake as his voice called out once again.

'Sila, wake up. Look through my eyes and tell me what that is and who it belongs to,' Skullius said, reiterating his order.

'Tomato finger...' Sila's voice came.

He finally saw something other than darkness after a while but what registered in his sight wasn't something he expected.

'I see.'

'When you took over my body back then, I remember you rushing in the direction of one of the people who owned these. I'm sure remember it. You must have some idea, right?' Skullius asked.

Sila remained silent for a while as if he was configuring his sanity.

'Yes. Yes I do. But tomato finger... I advise you to leave them be. It was only a gamble that I chanced on at that time. Things would have been different if I was identified as a threat.'

'I don't care about that. Who said anything about going after them? I just want to know who they are. Does their existence really date back to your days?' Skullius asked.

If Sila knew them, then they must have been from millennia ago.

Sila paused as many memories gushed through his mind, making him remember this group of individuals and how they changed the course of history.

How they revealed a hidden card birthed in secret.

'Yes. Yes they do.'

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Millenia ago, a certain group of men and women arose with an unpopular belief about the Deities that challenged what the Purity had established.

The Unnamed Keepers.

They believed there was no value in the self, or more aptly, that the only value one had as an individual was being a decoration that did not sully its hands with complex thought and action.

They believed cultivating one's own strength so as to fight against others with the aim to shed blood was a taboo. It was only permissible against blasphemers, people who contended against what they believed.

Using your own hands for acts, especially those against what the Giants taught?

Blasphemous!

In this way, they appreciated the Giants whom they believed came to settle in Feinheath and Opungale in order to prevent conflict. If they governed the world with their extensive knowledge and connection to the will of the Deities, they would make the world a better place.

That is what they believed.

As the Second Grand War burst into full force, the culling of many happening with the flames of conflict against one man and his ideals, a possible path to win the war against the fearsome foe was introduced.

The Unnamed Keepers approached the leadership of the Purity and proposed a peculiar plan. The friction between the two religious factions had lessened because of a common enemy, thus a civilised interaction was made possible.

The Keepers asked many questions.

Why should they be the ones to face the evil of Fulgardt?

Why should they be the ones to tackle a threat when the Deities were all around them?

Why not offer sacrifices who would become vessels for the Deities to inhabit?

Surely then, Fulgardt would be no challenge.

What was one man against the gods?

At first, the Purity disagreed but as the war continued to turn less into a fight and more into a slaughter for the men on their side, they agreed.

To this, the Unnamed Keepers gave six pills to the Purity and had them select candidates to feed these pills.

There was no guarantee that they would work. At worst they would not harm the one who consumed them and at best, if the user was favoured in some way by the Deities or was just flat out lucky, it would work.

There were three conditions however.

First, the pill had to be consumed three days before the user made a conscious effort to establish a connection to the Deities.

Second, Creeds had to be used to lengthen the duration and strength of the vessel while it held the consciousness of a Deity, though a terrible downside followed the vessel and their bloodline.

Paladin Champions were the best candidates for this as in terms of having the favour of the Deities, they were undoubtedly the most receptive. The Purity kept their strongest Champions in reserve however, just in case.

As if the Deities were proudly announcing that the path taken was the right one, the Paladin Champion Logma succeeded in having a portion of a Deity descend into his body.

The result caused a tremor throughout Aigas.



A fleet led by the strong forces under Fulgardt's Chosen was eradicated without a single trace of them left behind.

The gods in human flesh.

This was unheard of.

The thought drove many to repent as through Logma, it was said a portion of the goddess Listafelle descended and fought off legions under Fulgardt's Chosen.

It was a marvel.

In this time, many wondered.

Were the Unnamed Keepers the true recipients of the will of the Deities?

How did they craft a means to allow the Deities to descend?

Was the Purity merely a decoration?

Who knew?

Two more Paladin Champions followed in this grand plan, their bodies being able to house the consciousnesses of Deities. Within them, it was said Listafelle imparted more of herself, inhabiting three vessels in total.

Sila remembered the cheers he shared with his mates in these days within the Grimm Tower where they were stationed to defend the areas around it.

For a whole week, they did not have to fight constant waves of enemies like before.

The enemy was forced to retreat!

It was reassuring.

The tides of the war slowly shifted and so did belief.

The voice of the Deitess was mighty yet loving.

Caring.

Gentle.

She spoke gently with the people in the cities of Pelian, converting them to faith in her, Suzamete and Quintess.

She healed.

She loved.

She gave comfort.

She answered questions.

It was bliss.

Unfortunately, this bliss did not last.

Eight days had passed since the descent of the Deitess when the vessels began to break, the portions of Listafelle beginning to sift out of the Champions.

The revered figures of the Champions broke as they couldn't take the power beyond Divinity.

This brought about panic!

If the Deitess left... then the forces of Fulgardt which were seemingly endless, would ravage the lands again!

But that was not what followed.

All three vessels of Listafelle went to speak to King Edricus ruled Pelian.

The King bowed when he saw the figures of the Deitess.

The vessels harbouring her did not say a word.

They merely pointed at a man who had stood beside the King protectively as always that day.

The Royal Knight hailed as the strongest combatant – by the Royan household – that Pelian had.

Rayn.

He was a man whom King Edricus had picked up from the hidden pits of Pelian.

He was a man the King never allowed to leave his side much less the Palace.

When he had first found him, he had called him the Prodigious Saint.

He was extremely talented, with a body endowed with ferocious power and potential since birth.

His birth mother unknown.

His father was unknown.

No one knew where he hailed from.

His tale began with a lone maiden that had been trying to hide him and his peculiarity away in the uninhabited lands to the North of Pelian but Direction disallowed her from keeping the child away.

She was found by Capital Mages who discovered them in the woodlands and found how... odd this child was when they were looking for secluded areas to meditate.

They restrained the child and took him to the city of Agmold where he finally drew enough attention for the King to take notice of him.

Yes.

The peculiar child born with two hearts and two blazing flames of Aura engulfing them within this chest.

From his body leaked the power of a Master Stage experts when he was merely five years old and without any training whatsoever.

He had not even been made to consult with the Deities yet and was yet to forge a mana core but his body...

His body reeked of abnormal might.

To those who knew of him in the Royal Palace, they treated him with respect as he grew to be named the Head of the Royal Knights, the King's guard.

With the power and status he had, he was still kept secret to everyone... but the Deities knew.

Thus they pointed to him, announcing that he was the one.

He was to be the greatest solution to the Second War.

His birth was not a random.

True, more vessels were needed to aid against Fulgardt's forces but none were found so far that could handle more than a few days of bearing the weight of power and none could handle a fragment of the most powerful Deity of all, Quintess.

This man however, he was capable of containing the will of Quintess and without losing his consciousness too!

A true anomaly.

The King's wish was shredded.

The Knight he kept to himself now belonged to Aigas as a Champion who wielded power beyond Divinity.

His BODY, his SOUL...

They were forever transformed when the will of Quintess descended with a rumble, etching this event in COMMON history.

Chapter 533: Mr Know-It-All

The tale gave Skullius much to think about.

So that's who these people were?

Fanatics who believed that involving themselves in any conflict with their own bodies was a taboo. Even cultivating their own strength seemed to something they saw as unnecessary.

They were a few things that Skullius didn't understand with this but he let it go for now.

'Is that why they use these dolls to do their work for them?' Skullius wondered.

If that was the case, then they were extreme.

They were said to follow the teachings of the Giants religiously too, but to Skullius it seemed like these people saw Giants as unblemished messengers of the Deities who were exempt from the mortal norms they placed on others.

'So I suppose how they crafted a pill that allowed one to become a host to a Deity was their major contribution, and what Sila mainly remembers them by,' Skullius scoffed.

Apparently, no one had met these people face to face as they only sent dolls as their messengers. Dolls that could take on the likeness of whomever they wanted.

Hmm.

Why were they collecting the sick and injured then? What was the relevance of that?

Even Sila didn't know. This was new territory.

One thing became clear at the end of the tale though.

Skullius unfurled the All Eater Scroll and checked its description again.

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[All Eater Scroll]

<Legendary>

A scroll created by an ancient group of mages who thought of cultivating their own magic to be a taboo towards their favoured Deity, Suzamete. They chose to master inscription of the highest order, in their years managing to create a sequence of runes that could store any form of attack at the Incandescent Stage and below.

-Special Effect-

Stored attacks are kept in Stagnant Space and released at the user's discretion at 10 times the power and speed with a 10% chance to incorporate any of the user's attributes and traits over said attack at the moment of release.

<Currently stored attacks - 1/2>

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Mages, huh?

'This must be them then,' Skullius thought, 'They believe in Suzamete? That's strange. The guidance field identified them as Mages too. How does that even make sense?'

When Skullius had first seen this description, he would have never guessed that he would cross paths with these people's trail multiple times.

Hmm, this was all great insight, especially when the Hybrid Luman considered everything about this man, Rayn.

Someone like this existed?

He probably played a huge role in putting down Fulgardt back then but... Fulgardt eventually reached Divinity.

How did that battle turn out?

"Questions, questions, questions..." Skullius said as he breathed out a sigh.

All this information wouldn't help anyone fight against these guys, unfortunately. It only made it more apparent that it was nigh impossible to fight these people.

In fact, Skullius became more inclined to distance himself from anything to do with these people altogether. If even he guidance field described these guys as being chummy with a Deity, they probably were. Also, if they were serious about not getting their hands dirty, but had all these crazy artefacts to use for themselves, they must be masters of runecraft and alchemy... somehow.

How that was possible without a core and skill pertaining to the relevant Classes and all was anyone's guess.

'Yeah. It's best to leave this alone,' Skullius thought. 'It probably didn't end well for Bek when he kept pursuing them too.'

The Hybrid Luman remembered his last moments in the Bookworm Cluster when he was trapped in his Projected Form. He had seen a glimpse of Bek sinking into the colourful hellscape of the unfinished Cluster in his chase for that individual with the cart.

No.

This had nothing to do with him.

He wouldn't want to die a cat's death.

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An hour later, Skullius, along with Bull, Cast, Oliviana and the rest of the remaining Contract Knights rode horses out of the City as the Hybrid Luman's plan to attack the bandits' base was heeded.

Since he was clearly capable of handling what they couldn't, everyone didn't argue.

Anara and his Purity Knights remained in Evic just in case another attack landed on the city but the crux of why they remained was that Skullius had said a large group wasn't necessary for what followed, despite everyone's suspicions.

All of a sudden, this new arrival was taking over everything, becoming the talk of the City while claiming that he knew things which he couldn't possibly know, like the exact location of these bandits which the Contract Knights had struggled to find over the past few days.

It was weird and suspicious.



Bull and Cast still held onto their position that Skullius was probably not as bad as he said but they too felt that his sudden knowledge gain needed a little more explanation.

"Sir Festos, I understand that you have your own secrets and means to procure information but can you at least tell us what to expect?" Cast asked with concern.

Skullius, jiggled by the gallop of the horse under him hummed before deciding that it wouldn't be a problem to tell them what he knew. He was going to anyway but since these people were impatient...

"Sure. I heard you already know where these guys are so I'll spare you that detail. I killed off quite a large chunk of their entire band than you realise. They wanted to finish this raid as quickly as possible, so they send more than half of their forces.

This was their confident, sure-fire play in order to strike, get what they wanted and leave before stronger reinforcements intervened and as you can imagine, they would have been successful," Skullius explained.

The scenery around the small group swiftly changed as they rode out, going from lush, tall green to runner grasses withered with a yellow tint.

Hills emerged from the once flat ground and in the distance, a couple of mountains could be seen stacked close to each other.

"They have been monitoring you since they arrived nine days ago and they didn't setup camp until they were sure you wouldn't call for more combatants because of your win streak. That first attempt days ago was to probe for any additional forces you had on hand.

Unfortunately for you, them using a few dozen of their numbers to attack you made you think they couldn't possibly have an army of a few hundred."

"Thus you only thought to reinforce your defences and surveillance while calling for help from neighbouring cities."

The hell?

At this point Bull couldn't help don a deep frown.

This all made sense.

It made perfect sense.

These bandits were pretty smart.

The problem though was...

"How on earth would you know all this?" Bull asked.

Even Oliviana who trusted Skullius was quite curious. Only someone from within this band would know how they thought and strategized.

So unless Skullius was secretly part of a rival gang, had suffered many attacks by this band to know how they acted or had been a member previously...

"I extracted this information from Brown," Skullius said succinctly.

It was the truth.

He had extracted the darkness within Brown, which told him of every deed attached to it that the man had ever conducted.

This wasn't something these three with Skullius and their mates had seen clearly as it had been a very brief interaction after Skullius had somehow defeated twenty nine Masters in less than the blink of an eye.

Bull and Cast felt conflicted once more.

Skullius' response sounded genuine and of course, he seemed to want to keep his means of 'extracting information' hidden.

That was acceptable.

"I'm sure you're also aware of the fact that there is a barrier around these bandits' hideout?" the Hybrid Luman asked.

"Yes. I've seen it before when I came here to scout out the activities around their base. The barrier rejects anything that tries to enter, living or otherwise," Oliviana said.

She and her fellow Knights had cautiously tried many different ways to enter but they had all failed.

"Right. Have you thought about why they chose somewhere with a lot of vegetation?" Skullius asked while turning to Oliviana. "The high ground is definitely good for setting up camp but with the geographical setup of this end of the region, it could become a trap when powerful and numerous enemies attack."

"That's true. Why then?" she asked.

The grasses, shrubs and trees turned more dull in their colouration but their distribution was still quite close set. Besides from areas around where the group passed, populated with towns and villages, the vegetation persisted over here with exotic plants growing all around.

The more rich plant life could be found within the mountains however, but the locals tended not to venture too far from their settlements unless where they were going was closer to the Carpet Keep or accessible to Capital Service patrols and checkpoints.

Was there a significance to the vegetation for the bandits then?

"The barrier around their base is supported by Shamans. They are using the surrounding plant life to strengthen it," Skullius said.

...!

It struck Bull, Cast and Oliviana right then!

Of course!

All this while, they had been thinking that it was probably the effect of some Legendary grade artefact but as it turns out, they subconsciously ruled out the possibility of the bandits having Shamans on their side, as would most people when looking at bandits such as these.

Shamans were an Energy Former class with the ability to manipulate natural forces. They had a high affinity with the elements as well as plants and could draw energy from them to strengthen themselves.

Above this, they also had the inherent feature of being able to pass down abilities between related Shamans or those with close links to one another.

For those deceased, their wills and powers could carry on within their descendants or loved ones, manifesting as hazy images around them whenever whatever they left was used.

As a result, it was a popular belief that below Mages, Shamans were the next best thing as their potential was ridiculous.

"So all we have to do is somehow kill these Shamans and the barrier will be dispelled?" Cast asked Skullius, going along with his bottomless well of knowledge.

"No. That will be difficult. I have a better plan in mind," Skullius said before he shared the entire plethora of schemes, habits and secrets of this band of thieves.

They were a very well-prepared, cautious group.

They had tools for seemingly any circumstance.

Tools against Diviners.

Artefacts to briefly counter the sudden arrival of an enemy with overwhelming might.

They even had a tool capable of mass transporting them all to a new location.

That grey cube.

Granted, all these artefacts were procured successfully because of the shrewdness of their leader. The person they called the boss.

He was quite a dangerous man.

Skullius fed all this information to the group before they finally arrived at the foot of a large mountain that blocked the sun which was hanging low on the canvas above.

Amidst the trees, rocks and shrubbery growing over the surface of the mountain, a barely visible barrier could be seen rising to cover the entire face of this geographical feature all the way to its behind.

It completely sealed off the mountain.

The faces of the team here to deal with the bandit once and for all did not show worry and concern though as a very elaborate plan had been weaved and disseminated by the individual who was leading them.

"Alright. Just follow the plan as it is," Skullius said as he pulled out the Simmering Cloud from his spatial storage.

Chapter 534: Against The Boss! (1)

"Boss, they are here. The Shamans sensed a small group outside the barrier and we spotted them at the foot of the mountain," Black said with a hard face.

His voice nearly echoed in the large, luxurious tent that had a beautiful overhead light, a neat desk and chair as well as two beds.

A man decked in a polished true sapphire armour – its pauldrons with the designs of fierce wolves, the same exquisite craftwork present on the chest plates and knee guards – was sitting on the chair as he seemed to be reading through a book, his lowered face depicting how completely unconcerned he was by anything happening around him.

"Is that man you mentioned among them?" this man asked as he raised his head, revealing gun metal blue eyes and a pointed nose under his spiky, black hair.

"He has to be. There is no way those Knights would attack our base without him," the last of the twins said with an intense determination.

"Very well then. We've overstayed our welcome in the region. His arrival means there might be more reinforcements on his level arriving soon whether we manage to defeat him or not," the boss said as he reluctantly stood.

The armour he pulled apart bits of dust in the air and hissed a threatening feel of energy around him.

Black gulped.

This armour was the reason his boss was so successful and well respected even outside their band.

This armour was a beyond Legendary grade artefact and its effects fit his position as a boss.

While Black felt anxious while in his leader's presence, he also felt reassured now that the man with the blue armour seemed to want to move things along himself.

"Take the Forced Displacer and take two thirds of our remaining men with you for an ambush. Make sure the Shamans are well hidden to keep the barrier up. Once you have those rats cornered I'll kill that man you spoke of," the boss said to which Black nodded eagerly.

BOOOOM!

Suddenly...

Unexpectedly...

A shocking force caused the entire mountain to rumble, the vibration dying out as it reached the top!

"What?!" Black shot out of the tent to find the trees and rocks quivering, the force of the impact just now dying down.

The boss followed after him with a sharp look in his eyes.

Roughly 95 bandits were settled in their own tents around the boss' and all of them quit what they had been doing to focus on this phenomenon.

Right then, someone came rushing in from beyond the clustered shelters and reached the boss, giving an urgent report.

"Boss! Boss! They are attacking the barrier! One of the Shamans sustained some damage from the shock! What should we do?!"

What?

The band was confused.

Someone was attacking the barrier with enough force to harm the Shamans who set it up?!

But... that would mean whoever this enemy was packed enough of a punch to overwhelm the total energy from all the natural forces, plants and elements that the Shamans were drawing from to power the barrier!

Was someone of that level really here?!

Some of the bandits brandished their blades while others turned to the boss, truly afraid of what was next.

To their relief, their boss was unfazed.

'I thought whoever this person was would opt to attack the Shamans with Mind Casting means since the barrier cannot effectively block mental energy. Their method is... unexpected,' he thought as he turned to Black.

"Proceed as I said," he ordered to which Black nodded and called for most of the bandits here to come with him.

Soon, Black handled the Forced Displacer and inserted mana according to the relevant conditions – this item charged mana according to the distance you intended to travel. It took lesser mana to travel to somewhere you had been before while holding the cube but the cost would still be exponential if the distance was large.

If the user wanted to teleport with another individual, they also had to add more mana, though it was the same rate of charge for similarly sized entities, with the dead or difficult to identify targets barred from the effect.

Black breathed out from his nostrils.

Aura surged from his body and his muscles stiffened.

Being a Master Stage expert allowed for one to use their Aura multiple times a day if they could generate enough, unlike for Advancement Stage experts who were limited to using Full Body Aura once a day because their bodies were learning to reach the production of Perfect Aura which was flexible.

With his Incarnation close to being formed, Black psyched up his fellow bandits before teleporting with them to the foot of the mountain.

As soon as he appeared, he and his men felt...

"Urgh!" Black grunted as he almost stumbled.

What was this?!

A blue vapour covered them, obscuring their vision and senses.

No. That was an understatement.

The moment he came into contact with the vapour, his mind immediately began to feel sluggish, his body weak and something deep within him felt like it was weighed on by enormous blocks of steel!

"What... is this...?" he muttered as he staggered and reinforced his Aura around himself.



To his surprise, most of the men he came with were lying on the ground convulsing while the rest were barely holding on their consciousness.

The only reason Black was fairing so well was because he had a Genuine Incarnation and by extension more robust Aura that defended him.

"Damn it! They got us! It's the thing that man used before..." Black mumbled. His vision blurred.

Frankly, the blue all around him disoriented him even more as there was barely any distinction of direction whenever he turned his head.

But, from this same blue, a figuring adorned an edgy outfit with chains wrapping around his waist emerged.

He took slow, confident steps that gave the enemy a deep sense of unease and when he kept getting devoured by the vapour, further hiding his full figure from complete view, Black lost it!

"It's him!" he yelled while clenching his teeth.

His weakening body churned out resolve and he forced his clarity back, conjuring his Genuine Incarnation which manifested as a large black dragonfly with stripes of purple!

"Die!" Black screamed as his Incarnation then rapid fired shots of condensed Aura!

The loud noise and the unseen destruction that followed caused the men behind him to ignite their Auras as well and battle the fierce weakness they felt as they charged, somehow assuming that there was only one enemy!

Sadly, Black's target wasn't slow.

In fact, the man didn't even see him dodge the Aura projectiles as when a breath passed, he was already before Black, flinging a right hook that the bandit sloppily defended against with his Aura!

...!

Black's heart shrieked.

He dreaded to be hit with that heavy punch again, especially to the face!

He didn't know if he could take it, especially now that he could barely maintain solid thought!

A terrified howl escaped his mouth as the punch connected and he was sent flying backwards!

Black rolled a distance away within the blue... but found to his surprise that... this didn't hurt as much as he thought.

His men that followed him up swarmed the man in the dark outfit but a silver Aura burned from him with staggering intensity and the luminosity of a star, forging an armour over his body that defended him!

Then with ridiculous, calculated movements, the man dispatched his men with a large, silver tower shield that appeared in his hand!

"Wait... That's..." Black said as he struggled to focus.

This wasn't right.

What was going on?!

His confusion was broken apart as suddenly, from the blue vapour, figures dashed towards him and his men from all around them!

"This...!" Black growled.

They had been tricked!

With their minds clouded by the blue vapour, it was hard to think properly and now...

As he saw the man in the black dashing left and right with a silver armour over him that did his previous fashion, he grunted in rage!

That wasn't...!

\*

The boss in his true sapphire armour looked down on the battlefield clouded with the blue with his arms folded.

He stood at the edge of a slope on the mountain where the barrier could be seen, vaguely.

Past it, the defeat of his men was taking place in a rather pathetic fashion but he didn't pay that any mind right now.

A few dozen meters behind him, a feminine figure wearing what could only be described as a shawl of roses and orchids could be spotted seating cross legged on the ground.

Her eyes were closed as she took in deep breaths every now and then while swiping away the remnants of blood on her nose.

Around her were five men who were guarding and monitoring her condition to ensure she wasn't being attacked or suffering another backlash of energy from the attack on the barrier.

'Curious,' the boss thought.

There was some excellent level of timing to this.

Black and his men were being taken out spectacularly.

'Where is he?' the boss wondered.

Where was the man who made the barrier quiver?

The boss was ready to counter any unexpectedly ridiculous techniques after taking into account the information that Black gave.

Whoever it was, since they were unable to wipe out Black along with Brown, they couldn't be an Honoured Level Capital Service combatant or a high level Mage.

In that case, he could take them out instantly as long as they showed themsel—

A bright flash of light from below, within the cloud of vapour that obstructed his view, interrupted the boss' thought.

It shone brighter than all the flashes of clashing energy within the all encompassing blue and shortly after it, shot up towards the barrier with a staggering intensity!

'There!' the boss growled within as his body blazed with a radiant, pristine white Aura and blasted from his position, seamlessly passed through the barrier, crossing paths with the impressive pillar of condensed mana aiming for the barrier and sinking into the vapour!

Unlike with the other Masters, the boss wasn't affected by the vapour in the least!

His figure left glaring after images as he stretched out his gauntlet covered hand and grabbed the individual who had shot the burst of mana just now!

This individual wore casual clothing, surprisingly, and this casual clothing was the first to be affected by the effects of his armour!

Yet...

This victim, this man he was holding by the shoulder didn't seem fazed by the tragedy striking his flesh at all.

Instead, an insidious grin etched itself on his face as he gazed at his foe with blank eyes, skewed into crescents by his unsightly expression of joy!

....!

The boss frowned.

What was this fool happy about?

Did he not realise he was about to die?

Did he think he would live for another three seconds before being erased from existence?

Overconfident idiot.

However...

To answer the series of unspoken questions within the boss' head, his victim revealed something in his hand.

Something that made the boss' spine shiver.

An unfaithful grey cube that could fit in the palm.

Chapter 535: Against The Boss! (2)

35 minutes ago...

"We'll switch identities for this one," Skullius said while removing his VergeRider gear which he usually just layered over a simple shirt and pants. He then handed it over to Cast who wasn't sure how to feel about this.

"If we're just exchanging clothing, how does that—"

"I know. This isn't going to be a conventional fight. Like I said, they have a little more than a 100 more men on their side and when we arrive at their hiding spot, they'll undoubtedly attack us with their full force when they see our meagre numbers," Skullius said, cutting off Cast's concerns.

"I see," Bull said while looking into the distance. Right now, they were far away from the bandits' base, hidden under the cover of several trees as they strategized, with a few of the Contract Knights keeping a lookout. "How do you know they won't attack with all their numbers?"

"Because I'm here. That man who escaped, Black, he won't send everyone to die. He knows what I'm capable of. Worst case, the boss will come out with the group, but that's one of the things that I'm counting on. Just not in that sequence."

"As soon as we arrive, I'll have the Simmering Cloud at the ready and use it when they appear," Skullius said as he showed the bottle in his hands. "However many they choose to attack with, they will all be affected negatively with this tool while you guys will get exponential boosts to your powers."

Skullius then turned to Cast who held the VergeRider in his hands.

"Black is a man who didn't fear death as long as his brother was alive. Now, that's different. He'll definitely want revenge though and when he appears, I want you to show yourself to him. While in a state of weakness, he's bound to panic. Land a few hits and steal the grey cube he will have on his person. I'll need it shortly after."

"This... How will you know when they will appear? I mean, if we mess up the timing..."

"I'm very sensitive to energies and I've felt that spatial effect on my skin before. I'll get the timing right. Besides, the range of Simmering Cloud is larger than you think."

Bull, Cast and Oliviana took deep breaths. It was hard to merely go along with this plan. Skullius sounded sure but... they had every reason to doubt.

"You won't even break a sweat with this fight if you swarm them immediately. Besides, even if something goes wrong, I can kill them without a problem. If not, the one I need to be paying attention to is the boss, so I'll expect you to do your part effectively."

\*\*\*

The present.

Before the boss could recover from the momentary surprise, he and the man with light auburn hair had already vanished from the foot of the mountain and appeared atop a different one.

Thick trees and multiple rocky areas contended against each other, debating on which look was better for the mountain, baldness or a full head of green.

As soon as they appeared, Skullius pulled himself away, separating himself from the boss' clutch.

When he was ten meters away, he took a breath and looked at his shoulder which emitted a low hiss, a dreadful effect having attached itself to his flesh following the gauntlet to the true sapphire armour that had touched it.

His shirt, skin and flesh were... disintegrating or rather fragmenting.

Miniscule spots of Skullius' toned skin and flesh in the form of dust like particles sifted up into the air but this effect died down when Skullius' collarbone had begun to show, his shoulder looking like it had been eaten off by hundreds of little mice that took individual bites.

'Just as you'd expect,' Skullius thought.

He activated [Great Saint's Invigoration] which healed him right up without a problem.

"So, you're the one Black mentioned. Haha, I'll say, you're not what I expected. Besides from a mild sense of intelligence... I would say your best selling point is your terrifying level of precision and timing. Are you a part time Diviner?" the boss said with a small smile.

Skullius gave a laugh.

"That's funny. I wish I was. Instead of precision I just think myself as being able to read predictable, generic moves by socketholes like you and Black easily, Kenno," he shot at his opponent with a mocking glint in his eye.

The boss retracted his smile and wore a poker face.

A moment later he wore a broad smile and laughed as he face palmed.

"It's been a while since I've heard my own name. Not even Black and Brown used it to address me," the boss, no, Kenno, said. "You have information about us. That's unexpected. Were you sent by a local Family or something? You sure as hell aren't from the Capital Service."

As Kenno said this, his pristine white Aura resurged, softly wrapping over his body before...

BOOOOM!

It crackled and blasted out with a shrill noise and fierce zeal, shattering the trees and rocks all around the two without even touching them!

Skullius felt as if he was facing against a hurricane as Kenno before him took a strange stance – both his hands presented before his torso in a cupping gesture.

The Hybrid Luman stored the Forced Displacer in his ring and ripped off the remnants of the eaten shirt off his body as over him, mana burst like a flood with a frightful desire to dominate!

It created a layer of protection that extended a meter and half away from Skullius' skin while refusing to be beaten in a contest of destructiveness!

"I'm not telling," Skullius belatedly replied to Kenno who gave a knowing smile.

"Well, I'll tell you this beforehand. There is no honour among thieves. Whatever I do to you and your corpse... it isn't personal."

...!

By the time Kenno's words reached the Hybrid Luman's ear, a fist forged behind a gauntlet was already storming from his side while causing the air to screech madly!

...!

Skullius' face hardened as unfortunately, it was far too late to dodge and all he could do was prepare [Great Saint's Invigoration].



The moment the punch connected, the mana around Skullius' body halted the blow for a split second before giving in – letting it sink through to his body – and Skullius' torso was first borne into before his flesh, skin and bone disintegrated in an instant!

Unfortunately, the force of the blow wasn't discounted. Skullius' fragmenting body shot out like a shooting star to the side, knocked hard against a large smooth dwala that blew up instantly, ricocheted against it somehow with a bounce as well as a spin and then hit the hard ground where it causing an enormous explosion!

'Heavy...!' Kenno first thought as he watched half of Skullius' torso get eaten away before a second could pass, nothing but dust showing on him as he smacked on the sorry dirt. 'Hmmm. He used his mana to stop himself from getting blown away far with the force of my punch.'

Quick thinking. But what would keeping close to Kenno do?

The only thing the man in the true sapphire armour admired so far about his opponent was his mana, which was heavy. It almost guarded against his hit.

He shot towards his enemy with a quick jab at the ready to obliterate Skullius' head which remained atop a rapidly disappearing spine!

Suddenly, the beaten up Skullius' mana flared amidst the storm of power that surged from this first sequence of events, rapidly surging into the Luman's right hand which wasn't taken out by this strange disintegrating effect!

His figure shot ahead to meet Kenno fearlessly!

The Hybrid Luman formed a fist and with his mana taking away nearly all the weight from his punch, it blurred as it sped ridiculously to Kenno's face before gaining the full 30,000 tonnes right before it touched him!

Kenno saw the mana covered punch coming with all its immensity and guarded with one of his arms and his Aura.

'This is what Black mentioned!' he thought.

However...

The mana around Skullius' fist vanished and only a heavy fist remained, connecting to Kenno's guard!

BOOOOOOM!

An earth-shattering explosion rocked the ground and demolished the half the top of the mountain with crazy turbulence, the figure of Kenno skidding across the crumbling ground as from his armour, a light ringing noise called.

'Impressive. No wonder Black was shaken,' Kenno thought with narrowed eyes. 'It's all about manipulating his weight, huh? With that, it's no surprise why he's so strong despite only being an Advancement Stage expert.'

One thing bothered him though.

Skullius had aimed for his head just now. Was that just Skullius thinking rationally or did he truly know his weakness because of this unexplained knowledge he seemed to have.

On the other hand, Skullius wasn't surprised that his full power attack did nothing to Kenno. He had had a vague idea from Brown's memories. But now, since the armour was right in front of him...

~~~

[SinSky Shatterer]

<Pseudo-Mythical>

An armour forged by a dear friend to an ancient Family that sought a powerful inheritance to be used in trying times. They preferred simple means to erase enemies from existence without complexities, thus the armour with the ability to grant incredible might and wipe out anything to dust.

-Defence-

170,000

-Durability-

123,567/300,000

-Special Effect-

- Breaks down anything unguarded by a similarly ranked treasure or technique.

- +120% mastery of all techniques and unique abilities

- +44,000 to Defence

- +42,400 to Agility with Absolute Conversion

- +32,000 to Strength with Absolute Conversion

--

[Skill: Dust Maker]

An area of effect application of the primary Special Effect of the armour. It breaks down everything within a 450 meter radius with carry over effects that can extend up to twice the distance. No limit to usage.

-

[Skill: Heartless Breakdown]

Multiply the potency of the Special Effect of the armour by focusing it on one target. The result is capable of erasing treasures and techniques with weaker defence compared to the armour. No limit to usage.

~~~

A Pseudo-Mythical treasure.

Mythical was a level above Legendary.

This was the territory of tools and treasures illegal for public use without 'licenses' because of how extremely dangerous anything above Legendary was.

But of course, a bandit would have something like this.

Something ways above Legendary despite not being quite at the Mythical level either.

That was a problem.

Just the mere stat gain by this armour was ridiculous, not to mention the fact that the two absolutely freakish skills the armour had did not have a limit on usage!

Heck, they didn't even rely on the user's mana!

'Damn,' Skullius thought.

Tens of thousands worth of stats with Absolute conversion was definitely enough to outclass him. No wonder his full weight punch didn't do jack. 40,000 in defence was... overkill.

Still, the Hybrid Luman grinned.

He was feeling his <CURSED BLOOD> and <CURSED HEART> excitedly pumping again.

Even as half his body was practically destroyed, he chuckled. Fortunately, it seemed that creating distance from Kenno would neutralise the effect of the disintegration if he wasn't actively using a skill.

[Great Saint's Invigoration] healed him again easily.

"Handy ability you have there," Kenno said. "It won't work next time I land a hit though."

Skullius jerked in laughter.

"I won't have to use it again," he responded as a thin film of [Evil Darkness] began to appear around his body...

Chapter 536: Against The Boss! (3)

'Hmmm?' Kenno narrowed his eyes.

What was that darkness around Skullius?

WHOOSH!

There wasn't any time for questions though on Kenno's part, as Skullius immediately went on the offensive this time!

The Hybrid Luman's figure turned into an outstretched blur, the gravitational effects churned from Skullius' core allowing him to eject himself from one spot and onto another at an appalling speed!

Even Kenno lost track of Skullius for a brief fraction of a breath but with the SinSky Shatterer, he activated the skill [Dust Maker], a vacuum-like space covering half of the entire mountain in an instant and...

The rocks.

The trees and grass.

The ground.

All felt like they had been baptised by a corrosive energy, an unbinding pull that sought to return everything to the most primitive and insignificant forms!

The effect was like the descent of a Divine!

Even Skullius' breath was taken away!

Within a blink of an eye, everything turned to dust that rose up as the air was then rapidly sucked back in, returning to fill up the space and carrying with it all this matter that was akin bits of sand!

Such a terrifying ability!

Half the entire mountain – its entire height close to 1460 meters – had been destroyed, its top cone erased to create a semi flat surface that Kenno fell down to while bits of multi-coloured matter swirled around him!

Sadly, Kenno didn't look at all happy.

'How on earth is he still alive?' he wondered with his sharp eyes facing in a certain direction.

Surely, the Hybrid Luman descended from the height they had once stood and landed on the new ground a distance from Kenno who furrowed his brows a little.

The boss of the band of bandits currently being dealt with started to have different thoughts about Skullius. He had wanted to kill him before but now... he was getting curious about him. About his background and about why he had teleported him away.

'Was it to keep the Knights safe? If so then he truly did know about my armour and me beforehand,' Kenno thought.

This wasn't much of a surprise but it was strange nevertheless.

There was a reason why he was respected and feared. It was merely because he was strong. That he was.

Unless someone kept a distance from him, their lives were within his hands!

However, what made Kenno dangerous was his mentality and values.

This treasure was something he had lucked out on when he joined a raid on a Family's estate in a southern region. Since he was the one who found it, he stubbornly refused to give it up to the one who led the raid that day.

'There is no honour among thieves.'

Kenno had believed this statement religiously. He respected those who accepted that reality as well. Dying in this line of work, getting double crossed, betrayed and all. He accepted those possibilities and shunned those who were surprised when it happened.

With this belief of his came an acceptance to change but an embrace of caution. He kept much about him under wraps.

Beyond that, this belief of his extended to him knowing his limits. He wouldn't hesitate to negotiate if there was a chance he'd die against a monstrous opponent. It wasn't fear. It was the basic instinct to live on when such a deal could be brokered.

"You're a lot more of a troublesome opponent than I imagined," Kenno said to Skullius, but the latter didn't reply.

'The film of darkness around him. Even the effect of my armour isn't working on it,' Kenno thought.

WHOOSH!

...!

The man in the true sapphire armour suddenly saw Skullius disappear from the spot he was standing just now.

He guarded as his eyes turned to and fro.

This wasn't movement. No way.

It was...

BOOOOM!

Skullius appeared right before Kenno with his fist already an inch from the man's face, a terrible weight attached to it!

Kenno frowned and dodged to the side but not before a sizable chunk of his cheek was scraped off but the Luman's darkness covered fist!

If not for the immense Agility and Defence offered by his armour, he was sad to say...

'Just now! That wasn't his raw speed! That was...!'

Several shadowy blurs of Skullius' one hand launching a series of horrendously fast punches to Kenno's face brought alarm to the armoured man who dodged them all with extreme caution, as a tornado burst from the two's raw movement!

"Stay still, you sockethole!" Skullius yelled with an ecstatic grin, in his other hand which wasn't on the offensive against Kenno grasping tight on the image of a grey cube.

Kenno noticed this.

Of course!

Skullius was trying to catch him off guard by using the Forced Displacer's teleportation effects!

This was incredibly efficient as it was apparent that the strange darkness around Skullius was immune to the effects of his armour!

Of course it was.



For as long as Skullius could remember, or rather, since he attained the B rank in his affinity with [Evil Darkness], it had never been subject to complete erasure.

At most, it would be dispersed by powerful attacks that pulled away its shape like when the Devouring Lantern Alpha Wolf (Ferex) had tore his [Perfect Night Domain] apart with a beam of energy or when Bassbion had broken apart its shape to get to him!

Completely destroying [Evil Darkness], especially if he was consciously weaving it like right now, was something Skullius had yet to see and it seemed even a Pseudo-Mythical treasure couldn't do that!

That was why...

WHOOSH!

Skullius freely blasted his way towards Kenno who rushed up to meet him!

Skullius still had half the mana he had taken from 127 Advancement Stage bandits from earlier and right now, he used some of it, disseminating it into the surroundings. As it appeared, he used [Mana Force] to form condensed orbs in front of him, where Kenno was inevitably going to appear and...

Explosions of mana rocked the space while producing a blinding light that Skullius took advantage of and lunged at Kenno whom he could sense easily with a vicious kick!

"That won't work!" the man roared as from within the bright flash of light, he clapped his hands with ALL his might before Skullius' kick could reach him.

A crisp clack shot out, rupturing Skullius' ears with their loud noise and intense vibration that blew the Luman away at rapid speed!

Kenno wasn't done.

He bolted ahead at a speed that left a flaming white trail and delivered forty-three ghastly blows onto Skullius, all with immense precision and all causing a layer of the mountain to crumble as they landed.

Kenno had used the other skill of his armour, [Heartless Breakdown] to aim all the armour's effect onto one target but this didn't work still. Only the force of his blows reached Skullius.

'Ha. It's tough. It just keeps reforming,' Kenno thought.

But he wasn't done.

On Skullius' body that had forty-some caves on its bare skinned mass, he launched an inverted palm strike that pulsed with destructive white Aura that propelled Skullius further away!

Kenno followed and caught up, the area around him fragmenting and howling with terrible winds as he heaved his foot and blasted Skullius hard with a deadly upward kick was launched him sky high!

"Like I said. It isn't personal," Kenno muttered from the ground while watching his opponent's figure leave a trail of white as it soared up.

The hits he had delivered weren't simple blows.

They were part of his standard technique as a non-Family member which he called Unforgiving Sequence.

The effects for when a full sequence of blows was delivered was the complete shutdown of the nerves in the body. Kenno would keep injecting his mana and Aura into the his victim's body with each hit until it was done.

In cases of people such as Skullius, the power behind the blows would likely kill them before the effects of his technique could even register.

That was fine though.

He had intended to kill Skullius from the beginning but had changed his mind later on. He had things he wanted to know but now, it was likely that he was dead.

"I'll just use his corpse to break the wills of those Knights. That ought to make things easier," Kenno thought.

The trail of white still streaming higher into the sky went on and on and...

"You are way too strong with that armour on, man."

...!

Kenno turned behind him to find... the bloody, shirtless figure of Skullius.

His face darkened quite a bit.

'What is the meaning of this?' he thought as his white Aura flared defensively.

Skullius breathed out as he looked up to the height he had just teleported from with the Forced Displacer just now.

"Those were some blows there. And funnily, you're not even using your Incarnation to give yourself a further boost with the armour. Haha. I can't tell if you're underestimating me or pitying me," Skullius said as he stored back the Forced Displacer into his storage ring.

Kenno was no longer in the mood for useless chatter. This man...

Even if he had some kind of means to heal, there was no way he could ignore his Technique which was amplified by the armour!

"How in the world are you still standing?" he asked in a serious voice.

Skullius raised his brow.

"I already told you. I'm not telling," Skullius said while wearing a big smile and looking like he was lost in the beauty of the demolished ground.

He then raised his hands up to his chest and gazed at Kenno with his blank eyes.

"You're smart. Observant. Cautious. Earlier you clapped your hands to injure my ears after surmising that I rely on my hearing since I can't see. That was good. Maybe you would have won if that wasn't wrong," Skullius said to which Kenno did not render a response.

"I like the way you think and with that in mind, I have an offer."

"..."

"Become my subordinate and I'll help you grow faster. I'll give all the treasures you could ever ask for and in the near future, I'll have you see another world beyond this one."

Kenno paused and tilted his head.

Huh?

A long-ish pause ensued.

"I don't even know whether or not to take you seriously," Kenno said while shaking his head in disbelief.

Grow faster? Look who was talking. An Advancement Stage expert who was probably three decades old.

Riches? Kenno was slowly acquiring all he could ever want and he was satisfied.

See another world? What did that even mean?

"Sorry. I don't have a habit of submitting to people I can kill if I try hard enough," Kenno said with a chilling murderous intent as finally, his Genuine Incarnation started to emerge.

Screw getting information from this guy! His hubris was annoying!

He was going to go all out and see if truly, this guy couldn't be killed.

Skullius grinned as he locked his already raised hands together.

"I do appear pretty weak, don't I?" he said as he also went all out with an ability he had learned recently.

FWOOOOO!

A pristine light overtook the sun's luminance.

It was gorgeous, mesmerising and incredibly authoritative as with its appearance, Kenno lost his breath for a few moments!

'What is this?!' he thought while taking a step back.

Something...

Something was beginning to form behind Skullius.

No, that wasn't it.

It was as if it grew from the ground and rose up.

Up and up.

Up and up and up.

A giant pillar of blinding light whose actual detail became clear the more one looked at it!

Kenno's eyes bulged!

This...!

It was...a tree?

Its thirty meter wide trunk was made of a bundle of thick, golden white bones that had an archaic look to them – cracks, sleek curves and sturdiness solidified through time!

This vertical bundle rose for sixty meters before it became hidden by a mass of skulls!

Luminous skulls double the size of those found on the average human could be spotted, the gaps of their mouths opened eerily wide while all their singular sockets showed a small spot of light!

Hundreds of them spun around the rising bundle and above them and with a wider arc above this bottom layer were skulls four times the size of a human's numbering in the thousands, two sockets imbedded on their faces while within their mouths, white mist was constantly being exhaled!

The top most layer of this 'tree's' canopy featured tens of thousands of skulls six times the size of normal human ones with four sockets, their mouths also wide open to release white mist. On top of each of these, small branches grew, at their ends, large leaves with a darker than night colour growing from them to freely announce the peak of this tree!

WOOO...

This tree was Skullius' Precept of Light.

No.

The Precept of Just Light – the Preeminent Attegoth!

The shocking luminosity from this structure almost crippled Kenno's will as he wondered how something that looked so vile could have such a holy brilliance. A pristine mist softly flowing

around it gave it a sacred feel, but its owner, the man before it with an arrogant grin as he gazed at his opponent...

'Who is this man?!' Kenno fully summoned his Genuinely Incarnation, a dozen card-like objects with a radiant luminance and soft, sky blue checkered design appearing around him.

"Just so you know, Kenno..." Skullius said, garnering his opponent's attention.

"This wasn't personal."

At that moment, the Preeminent Attegoth shook, an enormous amount of mana blasting out of Skullius as another skill was used, one he hadn't used in a very long time.

No.

This skill was abused.

[Bead of Malevolence].

What appeared wasn't one or even a hundred of these orbs of [Evil Darkness] like how Skullius had used it before however.

A total of five hundred thousand [Beads of Malevolence] appeared all around Skullius and Kenno, all of them with a golden white symbol of half a skull on them!

--

[Author's Note]

It really has been long since Skullius used it.

[Bead of Malevolence | Lv.3]

A high performance orb created by compressing Evil Darkness and sustaining it in a spherical shape. Its primary use is for high speed attacks and its integrity cannot be broken by means that do not scale up to its quality and strength.

Mana Requirements: 350 Mana Points

Duration: Five minutes.

Cooldown: None

~~~

Chapter 537: Absolute Control!

The primary use of [Just Light], the basic principle that it offered to its user, was the aspect of CONTROL. It was indeed a broad word to use but it was fitting.

How so?

Well...

Kenno gaped at the scene before him.

Suddenly, after the ground was shaken by an enormous amount of mana literally exploding out of his opponent, seemingly insurmountable dark orbs spawned all around him!

They stood in mid-air without as much as a small shift in their movement, a minimalistic design of half a skull over their non-reflective faces!

'I can get used to using mana from a blue core to power normal skills. The effect is ridiculously fun!' Skullius thought, his excitement growing.

Then, he attacked.

...!



Kenno ground his teeth!

A sudden burst of noise assaulted his ears without warning!

No!

It wasn't just his ears!

This noise affected the air which shook.

It affected the ground which tumbled.

It affected the ambient mana which shifted continuously.

This noise...!

It was as if millions of gigantic flies were zipping all around him and for a few moments Kenno roared in pain as he clutched his sound holes!

Blood leaked from them as they failed to register anything but this atrocious, strangely rhythmic acoustic that was in fact, the sound of the hundreds of thousands of [Beads of Malevolence zipping around the great open space!

This movement of theirs...

It was fast. Too fast.

Five hundred thousand orbs that had blocked the sunlight with just their appearance had suddenly vanished, becoming imperceptible to the eyes of even someone like Kenno if he didn't apply his full focus, along with the boost from the Genuine Incarnation he had just summoned.

'What kind of attack is thi—'

WHAAAAM!

Kenno spewed saliva from his mouth with thick, bulbous veins pressing on the skin of his temples!

He was suddenly launched far with by unreasonable force that upon knocking into him, instantly spawned a massive, spherical crater where he had stood!

A [Bead of Malevolence] had knocked the wind out of Kenno who crashed against the ground before he felt another black orb smite mightily right under his arm, a terrible shockwave making him spin in a different direction from the force.

'BUUAARGGH!' Kenno felt the disorientation from two conflicting forces ring across his entire body, messing with his navigational juices!

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Hundreds of [Beads of Malevolence] busted against the SinSky Shatterer with an atrocious force, a nasty ringing flowing through the steel and reaching Kenno's flesh!

'Wait! It's... it's the weight! He must be applying the weight to every one of these things!' Kenno thought as another orb the size of his fist smacked against his shoulder, the air crackling as if smitten by lightning from the crisp impact that caused another ring to the SinSky Shatterer!

Kenno was right!

The grinning Hybrid Luman that he was now two hundred meters away from was applying the weight of his mana to each and every one of the orbs as he had surmised, lightening them up for high speed travel before making them abnormally heavy right at the moment of impact!

The Pseudo-Mythical armour held but this didn't matter.

A moment later, all five hundred thousand beads stormed against Kenno who kept getting launched this way and that after every hit, his only option being to guard his head with his arms as well as his Aura otherwise he would be killed instantly!

For a good thirty seconds, thunderous noises rang out for miles as one man was assaulted by fast moving balls with weight ranging from ten thousand to thirty thousand, all moving in a calculated sequence and all of them hitting their marks perfectly!

Skullius was delighted by the discovery that while he was limited to applying 30,000 tonnes on himself, he could apply it individually to the [Beads of Malevolence] though it cost a huge amount of his mana!

Who cared?!

This was fun!

'This isn't good! Even if my armour is strong, its durability will be chipped away at this rate! The special effect isn't working either! By the time it disperses these things, they would have already hit!' Kenno thought with his eyes bloodshot and blood leaking out of his mouth from having his organs shocked constantly.

'I can't deal with these things, but if I can kill their user...!'

Kenno was abused a few thousand times before he gritted his teeth and expelled his Aura at max, having it coat him excessively. This allowed the hits he took to at least be a little less than half as efficient as before which gave him a chance to breathe.

He couldn't output his Aura like this for long though.

He had to make it count!

Kenno cupped both his hands and manifested six white cards with gorgeous blue etchings over their surfaces above his open palms. He then took a deep breath and blew at these cards.

With flaming trails of white that rivalled the [Beads of Malevolence] in speed, the six cards zoomed through the air and...

SWISH!

Skullius' arm came flying off, the Hybrid Luman having been struck by an attack so fast that he couldn't see it at all!

The distance this card had crossed was more than 700 meters and even then, it had flashed by before Skullius could tell his arm was severed, its razor sharp edge allowing it to seamlessly penetrate into the ground afterwards!

Terrifying.

Absolutely terrifying!

The range and speed of Kenno's Object type Incarnation was serious.

Simple but deadly!

But... what of the other cards?

What had happened to them?

...!

Kenno was appalled, his eyes opening wide.

What was he looking at right now?! What did this mean?!

Right before Skullius was a curved green blade with a golden handle, its form slowly spinning in mid-air without a wielder!

Fragments of white Aura were dispersing under the dark red halo around the blade's edge from its previous motion to defend its master, but now it stopped moving and floated at a slight angle ready to defend again!

On the blade, half a skull could be seen with a faint golden white halo covering the entire weapon.

The sword had blocked the other Incarnations!

Only one had managed to slip through!

What was going on?!

If Skullius couldn't even see the Incarnations, how could he defend?!

"Hehehe. Confusing isn't it, sockethole?" Skullius mocked Kenno from the distance.

PFFFFS!

The Precept of Light behind Skullius, the Preeminent Attegoth, was something he had created a little more than a day ago with the help of the [Wing of the Just] which allowed him to more easily manipulate [Just Light].

'Attegoth' was a word from an dialect he had learned some time ago, meaning 'Sacred height' or 'Holy rise' in some contexts.

With the prefix Preeminent attached to Attegoth, Skullius had effectively named the Precept, 'the most significant sacred height.'

He took inspiration from the 'life' he had lived longest – bones and all – and had forged a tree made entirely out bones and skulls as his Precept of Light. This was the design he felt a connection to and it worked wonders.

The Precept had a shocking amount of features but he couldn't access them yet with his low affinity with [Just Light].

But barring the complexities, what was the Precept of Light? No, rather what did it do?

Unlike [Evil Darkness], to fully master [Just Light], one need a central command centre, so to speak. A grand connection that refined its master's will and execute it with a hundred times efficiency.

As Fulgardt's texts had said, [Just Light] was for CONTROL, thus Skullius could literally control anything that was touched by his [Just Light]... eventually.

For instance, after summoning the thousands of [Beads of Malevolence], he expressed his will to the Preeminent Attegoth.

'Have the [Beads of Malevolence] attack Kenno relentlessly.'

This order had been refined by the Preeminent Attegoth, allowing Skullius to not have the chore of controlling the orbs individually as the Precept could perform it far better than he could!

Indeed, this was amazing!

Skullius at the moment had free control of non-living objects without much of a limitation but when it came to living, sentient creatures, the effect was hard to pin, especially when they had high level means of protection. Even with the current basic Precept though, he could temporarily paralyse weaker, unguarded individuals. But just that though and nothing more, for a limited amount of time.

'Time is running out. I better finish this guy off before the Precept runs out of mana,' Skullius thought as he healed himself, grabbed [Demion's Dance] hanging in the air and shot towards Kenno!

The man in the true sapphire armour grunted as he was bashed downwards by orbs three times his size, his body flying like a comet down to land on the ground while smaller orbs continued to bombard him!

'Not yet! I'm not done yet!' Kenno growled internally as he activated [Dust Maker], deleting the ground him and causing some of the orbs to disperse into masses of darkness before they reach him!

Most of them still crashed into him as he thought, but for this brief moment that he was freed from the onslaught, he dashed madly towards Skullius, dozens of cards storming from his position with white trails towards his enemy!

The unbelievably fast cards tore apart flesh without even being seen clearly by who they violated, including their owner who followed after them, charging up his Aura into his fist to deliver one decisive blow to Skullius' head!

Whatever he was.

Whatever he could do.

Skullius would die with one blow to his brains!

'No man can't be kille—'

SHIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!

An unfamiliar noise rang out.

It was the air being sliced apart.

The sunlight was temporarily voided by a dreadful blackish-red hue that came with a chilling bloodlust, as if a curse had been given free reign over the space for a split second.

A cruel, straight, sharp line, a splicer across the world detailed from the edge of a green sword that was wielded by the image of a certain Hybrid Luman who had his muscles outlined perfectly as he slashed diagonally, his eyes white and his face painted with a dark mask of brutality as he delivered this blow, showed.

Kenno could have sworn his Genuine Incarnation had completely eviscerated Skullius just now.

Yet he was standing.

Yet he was releasing a deadly attack that flashed past him in a breath and cleaved the crust of Aigas horrendously for ten miles, digging a ten meter wide, nigh eternally deep trench that split the mountains beyond this one without a care.

"Ughhh..." Kenno choked.

He couldn't think.

He couldn't move.

What still had the strength to inch down though, was the diagonally split half of his head which slid and then fell down to the ground, followed by his entire body.

Chapter 538: No More!

"Phew. That sure took more time I thought. I even exhausted the reserves of mana I had stored completely," a distant voice said. "That thing takes too much mana."

'Hmm?'

"Tsk. Where am I going to find more sources of mana again? Ah, I do have that one mission remaining. What was it again? The Belvion Union. It's pretty far from here though.

I'd probably be dragged back to the Premium Age Royale's venue while on my way there."

What was this?

Someone was mumbling to themselves.

'This voice. It's familiar. What's... what's going on?'

"Whatever. I won't be using the Precept for the Royale anyway."

'Is this...?'

He tried to stand.

All he was seeing was darkness.

His eyes were closed.

Right. He just had to open them.



And he did.

The sting of sunlight to his eyeballs made him grunt as he quickly blocked it with his hand.

"Ah, you're finally awake. Hmmm. That line sounds familiar."

Kenno opened his eyes to find a shirtless Skullius gazing down at him.

"Took you long enough," the Hybrid Luman said.

At first Kenno's mind had yet to have him recall what had happened before this moment, but the instant it did, his eyes bulged as the first thing he did was flash away from Skullius and feel his own face!

Nothing.

His face was fine. His head was fine.

Wasn't it cleaved in half?

He could have sworn...

A look of intense confusion appeared on Kenno's face.

What was this?

'Didn't I die? How am I alive?' Kenno thought.

"Hey, you sockethole. Look at me. I'm the one who killed you. Sort of. And I'm the one who brought you back. That should answer your question right?" Skullius responded to the questions Kenno was probably struggling with right now, Demion's Dance hung over his shoulder.

When Kenno saw the green blade, his body literally shivered, making his nerves more keen and receptive to everything he was experiencing.

Indeed.

Skullius had healed him up.

"How... Why did you do it?" Kenno asked with unveiled suspicion.

"You should be asking how much it cost me to bring you back. The answer is 100 Plasma coins. This!" Skullius said while wiggling a small bottle that still had residue of a purple liquid within it.

A Super potion!

Skullius had used his one Super potion to save Kenno before he fully kicked the big one!

Kenno's eyes widened.

What the hell?!

He alternated his gaze between Skullius and the bottle while wondering if Skullius even knew the value of this potion!

This potion could heal the soul and an eviscerated that should, by all accounts be considered a corpse!

Furthermore, the effect lasted for 24 hours, making it hard to kill the individual in that time frame as they would continuously heal!

Kenno shook his head and scoffed.

"So I'm guessing you spared me because you want me to join your cause just like you asked me before?"

"Look who is quick on the uptake. I like that. You're right. I want you for a little project of mine. The benefits I said before are real and will still stand. All you have to do is accept a few conditions," Skullius said with a smile.

"And what, pray tell are these conditions? I have all I want already. I'm satisfied with the path I'm taking."

"I see. Well it's nothing much. I'm not looking for treasures as much as you are, I'm sure. Not to the extent that I'd try to intercept relief provided to victims of terrorism at least. All I want is to create a large network that is efficient at gathering information and recruits powerful individuals to my side.

There's a grand goal at the end of it, but you'll know what it is when you accept," Skullius said. "Someone not involved with the law in the traditional sense like you should serve me well. I know there's an entire system hidden out there for... criminals and I was going to try to infiltrate on my own with a couple of your fools that I spared but you would do a better job than me.

To that end, I expect you be my subordinate."

"Riiigght. And this goes with your proposal about making me stronger somehow?"

"That's right."

Kenno paused.

Another one with ambition.

Was this the real reason why Skullius had separated them from the rest? So that he wouldn't be seen negotiating with a bandit?

Hmph. Funny.

"I'll have to decline," Kenno said without giving it much thought.

Skullius grinned.

"I'm afraid you don't really have a choice here. I'm asking just to appeal to your lack of loyalty to none but yourself. You can either agree now and save yourself from a terribly unpleasant time or buy yourself the reverse of that," the Hybrid Luman gave a cheerful threat.

Kenno gazed blankly at Skullius.

He looked at his chest plates to find a lengthy diagonal scar half an inch deep into it.

While Skullius' attack earlier had split his head, it had been unable to split his armour.

Whatever the sword he used could do, he could defend against its attacks with the SinSky Shatterer now that he knew about it.

Mana surged from Kenno dangerously as his eyes oozed of bloodlust.

"You just healed me and brought me back to my peak. My body is brimming with power. All my reserves are full and I feel new and young right now. This will go on for a full day. That said, what makes you think I don't have a choice in this matter?" Kenno said with chilling voice.

Naturally he expected Skullius to have some kind of fail safe but so far, he felt nothing wrong.

That giant tree of skulls and bone was gone and if he recalled correctly, Skullius had been mumbling about how he didn't have any mana left. To an Advancement Stage expert that was definitely a detriment!

However, Skullius had a Super potion on hand, maybe he had other crazy tools on his person but they would all be made meaningless if he attacked Skullius right now and blasted his head apart.

There was a three meter distance between the two and he could close it in a heartbeat.

'He just might be some pampered swine from a rich Family after all!' Kenno thought as he set to lunge at Skullius.

Snap!

BOOOOOOOOOM!

...!

"ARGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHH!" Kenno screamed at the top of his lungs as suddenly, his body had gotten extraordinarily heavy, on top of this a vicious pull drawing him to the hard ground underneath!

His back was flat against toes!

He hadn't been able to adjust his position before he slammed down to the ground!

But... but this weight!

Even though Kenno's body was at the Second Phase of the Master Stage, he had felt several bones fracture and bend as he collapsed under a ridiculous weight, torn muscles leaking blood everywhere!

What was going on?!

How many times would he have to ask himself this question today?!

His bloodshot eyes looked to Skullius who was pointing at him with a chilling look in his white eyes, mana softly sifting around his index finger.

"URGH... W..Wha...!"

"You're a bigger idiot than I thought," Skullius said as he walked over to Kenno's body that was shockingly still sinking into the ground from the immense weight, as if pulled on by quicksand.

The Hybrid Luman then pointed the edge of his sword at Kenno's head, the man's face showing different shades of horror, and thrust.

The edge of the blade slowly inched its way into the man's skull.

Slowly.

Meticulously.

Kenno screamed!

"For someone who doesn't favour honour, your ego is pretty huge. Then again, I wouldn't just submit to someone that easily either."

.....

Kenno woke up.

He started panting, his heart racing wildly but for a few moments he didn't know why.

"What... happened..." he thought out loud.

Something terrible was happening but he couldn't tell what.

That was until he saw a bored face above him, a green blade peeking from the side within Kenno's vignette view.

...!

"You..!"

"Wrong answer."

PTCH!

.....

Once again...

Kenno opened his eyes but this time, his brain instantly flooded him with what he needed to know.

The effects of the Super potion declined with time but his healed brain was getting used to the routine that had happened for way too long now!

"No! No more!" Kenno screamed as he looked at the figure of Skullius whose face was currently being blasted by the orange light of sunset.

"Hmmm?" Skullius hummed.

Kenno took in deep breaths.

His mind couldn't afford to think over what was making him so heavy anymore.

After feeling the green blade sink into his skull too many times, he was done trying to think of an immediate escape.

He had thought perhaps it was a treasure. Or maybe a technique. But no. Wouldn't Skullius would have used those in their heated fight?

Then again, now that he was in this position, it became clear that the Hybrid Luman could have killed him instantly earlier if he had aimed one of those orbs at his head when he first manifested them.

He probably wanted him alive all along and just didn't use his heavy hitters to bait him into a hopeless fight!

That had to be it!

He had been too blind to see the truth!

Sadly, it wasn't true at all.

The two's fight had been rough on Skullius. The Hybrid Luman would have lost if he hadn't mastered his Precept. That much he acknowledged.

Even now, it was Skullius who was standing on thin ice.

He kept poking at Kenno's brains for a reason. He had to make sure the man didn't use his quick wit to find out the simple trick he was using.

Skullius had slipped ten thousand miniature [Beads of Malevolence] into Kenno's body when he was unconscious. He couldn't control them all well without the Precept of Light like before, but he could just make them all incredibly heavy, piling on tonnes of weight from within Kenno!

That said, if his victim activated his Genuine Incarnation, his Perfect Aura, this effect would instantly disappear and with his mana rapidly getting depleted, he would be in trouble.

That was why he had to mess up Kenno's thoughts and make him think he was using something else.

"Wait! Wait... let's talk about this..." Kenno said.

He wasn't willing to continue this.

There was a proposal for benefits right?

At the very least, he could find some way to escape after gathering information from Skullius.

For now, he could bend the knee.

He had to or soon, he would become a brain dead idiot!

"I'll do it! I'll serve as whatever the hell you want," Kenno said desperately, putting on a defeated face.



Skullius smiled.

"It's about time. You were putting me in a rough spot here, hahaha. A few more hours and you would see the uglier side of me. Literally," he joked (not joking) as he crouched down to Kenno's level with a bit of urgency, his hand touching the man's forehead.

'Huh?' Kenno thought.

"Let's do this then."

It didn't seem like Kenno knew what was about to him. It was apparent that he hadn't truly accepted defeat yet.

He would soon enough.

Skullius reached within himself.

'Sila, help me form a Tie of Exchange with this guy. I'm kind of in a hurry so get it done quick,' he said to the piece of soul within him who grumbled a little as he was brought to do his captor's bidding without benefit once again.

The same process he had done with Yuyui bloomed right now as while being fed Skullius' terms which he was going to have the anxious Kenno agree to, he forged the contract.

When Skullius had confirmed that a link had been established between him and his latest victim, he did something else to Kenno and the guidance field acknowledged it.

[You have chosen 'Kenno Cattlas' as an <Attachment>. Are you sure you want to proceed with this action?]

"Absolutely," Skullius confirmed.

[Processing...]

[Guidance field generation in process...]

[Patronage Rank 0 benefits loading...]

[Process will be completed in 00:00:05:59]

Chapter 539: Cold Goodbye

Black took several choking breaths as he laid on the ground.

What a defeat he had suffered.

Till the very end, he hadn't been able to do anything against his enemies who curb stomped him and his team to oblivion without breaking a sweat.

The only thing that made this loss easier to swallow was that he would now be able to meet his brother who had a headstart to whatever awaited in the afterlife hours ago.

There, he wouldn't have to fear death again.

...

"Phew...I can't believe this actually worked. I really didn't break a sweat," Cast said with the silver armour on his body, his Incarnation, growing faint before disappearing.

"Surprisingly..." Bull also remarked as his Incarnation, a Living type in the form of a bulky, muscular warrior with spiked fists also vanished.

Oliviana plopped to the ground.

She hadn't used her Full Body Aura as the fight wasn't really over. They had only taken out a fraction of the remnants of the bandits still hidden in the mountain behind the barrier.

Thus she needed to keep all her trump cards in reserves.

"I know it's still early to ask but will Sir Festos be alright against the supposed boss of these bandits? Given the fact that he suddenly vanished, I can only assume he found some way to either lure out the leader of this bastards or something else while we were finishing off this crew," Cast said as he kicked one of the corpses and gazed at Oliviana for an answer.

The short stack was the one most familiar with Skullius. It was no secret given how the two talked and seemed to know each other on a deeper level.

"I have no clue. Just like you, I didn't see anything at all. Maybe he found a way to pass through the barrier and is fighting in the mountain as we speak," Oliviana said with a shrug.

"Wouldn't we be able to hear noise from the fighting if that were the case?" Bull asked while cleaning the blood from his armour.

"Maybe he drew the enemy away with the Forced whatever. That artefact."

"Maybe."

It was really inconvenient to know nothing about what was going on following the mysterious disappearance of the crutch of the group.

Bull had been left with the Simmering Cloud in his grasp to use in case something happened after Skullius left, but the anxiety was still palpable. Everyone here was prepared for a bitter fight but... Skullius was the one who initiated this operation.

Legendary grade artefacts and below didn't have the feature of binding – ownership where an artefact would not be usable by anyone other than the individual it was bound to – thus they could be shared like this.

Whoopee!

Mystical grade treasures and above however, were different.

Several hours passed with no activity coming from the mountain or from anywhere else, which garnered confusion and worry as the group began to think that something had gone wrong.

Did Sir Festos perhaps lose?

Gulp.

Perhaps.

But then why were the bandits not attacking?

They knew they were waiting over here.

These conflicting thoughts filled up the idle minds of the Contract Knights for a while before...

"Hey."

Everyone suddenly turned to find the person they were waiting for walking towards them from the distance.

He didn't have anything to cover him on his torso which was bloody and his pants were tattered and torn hideously.

"Sir Festos!" Bull, Cast and some of the Knights around them collectively exclaimed.

Oliviana merely sighed in relief.

Thank goodness.

"Looks like everything went well on your end," Skullius said.

"Urgh... you look terrible!" Cast said as he removed the VergeRider which he wore over his usual casual getup and returned it to Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman donned his outfit, the Chains of Damnation responding to him well with a wriggle, something they hadn't done with Cast.

"Are you injured? We brought potions with us!" a random Contract Knight asked as he scrambled to pull out two normal potions from spatial storage ring.

'Poor soul,' Skullius thought with pity.

It seemed that achieving a victory against this band of bandits that had caused quite a solid degree of fright within the hearts of these Knights had caused them to respect Skullius a lot, some of them trying to earn favour with the Hybrid Luman.

Skullius didn't mind, but if this guy really wanted to show him some love, he needed much more than a normal potion.

Speaking of potions, a part of Skullius was pained.

He had lost his one and only Super potion for the month to an investment. Its effects were the only ones that could heal the fatal wound he had dealt his opponent, sadly.

His [Great Saint's Invigoration] definitely couldn't have done such a thing and he had used up Demion's Dance's once a day use of [Irisa You Whore] to instantly recover from Kenno's flurry of superfast Incarnations that had eviscerated his body, thus it had been his only option.

To him who could see a detailed layer of his plans, it felt worth it as he could easily recover the lost potion next month but it still felt like a loss.

Skullius shook himself from these thoughts as he had already done what needed to be done. He had cleared one of his objectives.

"No thanks," he said to the fanboying Knight and then gave a shocking report. "I killed the boss and everyone in the mountain. I also took care of their bodies and cleared the traces. They are not your problem anymore."

...!

"WHAT?!"

The Knights exclaimed.

Seriously?

Sir Festos had just gone and killed everyone?!

But... but...

"The Forced Displacer was pretty handy. Plus, the boss had an armour that allowed him to pass through the barrier as he pleased. I borrowed it," Skullius lied.

The SinSky Shatterer was bound to Kenno. This was one of the reasons why he wanted to recruit him.

For the Contract Knights, choosing to doubt Skullius or rather expressing that doubt would be... shameful.

By all accounts given the passage of time, Skullius' capability as well as the Forced Displacer that was in his hands, its ability to teleport him anywhere within its massive range being extremely useful, it wasn't too unbelievable that Skullius had done what he said.

But...

"Why is the barrier still there then? Shouldn't it have disappeared when you killed the Shamans?" Bull asked with hints of suspicion.

Skullius sighed exasperatedly and with a wave of his hand, nine severed heads flew out of his spatial storage ring!

"I had a feeling there'd be doubt, so there. And as I said before, the Shamans draw energy from nature to power their barriers. Until the supply dies, the barrier will remain. It will grow weaker until it vanishes which may take some time.

You are free to wait until then to confirm with your own eyes but once again, as I said, I got rid of the traces," Skullius explained with an annoyed click of his tongue and an outstretched hand that demanded Simmering Cloud back from Bull.

The Knights looked at the severed heads.

It... really seemed like it was all over.

Some of them smiled with shining eyes while others gave nods to Skullius.

They were inclined to believe.

Bull also nodded.

Skullius' mission here was to look for a chance at redemption. Or least a semblance of it. Surely he wouldn't be lying.

'I guess he's not going to mention any treasures and coin he may have found in the bandits' pockets. Let's leave it. I'd be asking too much anyway,' Bull thought.

Whatever spoils Skullius secretly stashed were rightfully his.

"If you're satisfied, I have a request. When you go back to Evic, tell Anara to keep his word. I'm sure I've contributed enough to get what I need," Skullius said, his gaze leaning more to Oliviana whom he believed he could trust.

Oliviana tilted her head.

"You're not coming with us?" she asked.

"I can't. I'll have to set off for Genhuis City immediately," he said much to everyone's surprise.

Olivia paused for a few moments. She had hoped they would get a chance to chat a little on the way back but this was probably for the best. If she kept getting all friendly with Skullius, she might end up slipping up and getting killed by Skullius' curse.

She was already walking on a fine line already and this request of Skullius' was also dangerous but thankfully he phrased it well enough.

This was something he earned.

It would be a disservice to him if no one emphasised his hard work.

He would do it himself but time was running out and Anara had some means to communicate with the Grand Priest anyway, so instead of wasting time with a trip to Evic, it was better to leave.

Oliviana nodded to Skullius before her short figure walked up to him and punched him lightly on the chest.

"I'll see you around then."

"Sure," Skullius said before patting Oliviana on the shoulder with a three second long blank gaze as a goodbye.

He didn't have much to say to this woman.

His figure then vanished before the crew.

The group grew silent for a few moments before Cast face palmed, realising something.

"Argh! He forgot about those bastards he spared. Didn't he say he wanted to take them back with him?" Cast asked.

"Maybe he didn't care too much about them after all."



\*\*\*

Evic.

Twenty nine Masters were imprisoned within a large cell, special chains binding their hands, necks and legs.

The chains couldn't completely cut off their powers. Such things were difficult to procure for Master Stage and stronger combatants. Only high tier Legendary items and above could do such thing and having items like that for nearly 30 Masters was not something a Champion of Anara's rank could be given clearance for.

Even the neighbouring cities didn't have things like that in high supply. They were full devout men and women, not warriors.

The effects of these specific chains however was to weaken their target's ability to think, with a minimal sense of physical weakness imposed.

They would feel sluggish and be unable to partake in complex thoughts and to add to this, the Priests and Healers had contorted weakening potions that were force fed to this prisoners.

The chain's effect varied depending on how strong a Master was and because of this, multiple Knights were guarding this cell, monitoring the movements inside.

Suddenly...

The five guards stationed here had their bodies fragment into dust-like particles, the speed at which they had been attacked leaving no room for them to make a sound!

A gauntlet covered hand touched the array reinforced bars to the cell and broke them down, a man in a true sapphire coloured armour walking into the solitary space.

"B...boss...?" one of the bandits chained to the wall said in a weak voice, his eyes barely able to stay open.

Kenno gave his men a prolonged look.

Blink. Blink.

So annoying.

Tsk.

He couldn't believe how far that bastard had thought this through. As he had said, he had spared all his stronger men and now, they were unfortunately going to be working for their enemy.

All because Skullius didn't want Kenno to start from scratch in this 'project'!

That was what Kenno thought but the reality was a bit different.

A complicated look etched itself on the armoured man's face.

Kenno touched his chestplate with a grumble.

He was bound now. He felt it. Something was planted in his soul.

Blink. Blink.

'Damn. And I thought I was meticulous,' he thought as he walked up to the bandit who had called to him and destroyed the chains holding him.

Shortly after, the man stood, his senses returning bit by bit.

"Boss! You really came to save us!" the man said enthusiastically. "Did you bring everyone for another raid?"

Kenno scowled and ignored the man's question.

Blink. Blink.

These were more annoying than this ignorant man's words right now.

Kenno freed the others before issuing an order.

"We're leaving," he said as he held the Forced Displacer which Skullius had allowed him to keep for this very purpose. Transporting his group away.

Everyone else on the mountain had been spared to serve as the starter group, save for nine who were sacrificed for... reasons.

'Damn it.'

This wasn't what Kenno expected. There was no backing out and he had so much to do!

Blink, blink!

Even now, he couldn't believe the blinking notification prompts that had yet to vanish from his sight, confirming his five kills outside the cell...

Chapter 540: Final Push

Revia sucked in a deep breath. For the past few days, she had been a hollow shell that only stared at the walls, a particular series of events repeating over and over again in her mind.

She couldn't help but wonder what her role was in life.

Sure, she hadn't believed in the doctrine of the Deities or whatever ever since she was inducted. Even as she grew to receive a Divine Blessing, she didn't see the process as anything to prove how true the teachings she had heard her were but could only derive from it the fact that seemingly anyone could be chosen to hold a Blessing, even if they didn't believe.

That said, what now?

She had completed... no, she had been used to set the stage for a horrendous atrocity only a few months away.

That had been why she was spared by Actuass.

She was no longer needed.

That was what she thought.

Revia clutched her hair and for a moment, she lost it.

She shook vigorously and screamed at the top of her lungs while stomping the floor as hard as she could!

Curse this stupid undying body!

Curse this damned life!

Curse her father!

Curse.... Elita who didn't come to her rescue.

Revia shook.

She broke down into a mess of tears.

It wasn't fair to blame Elita. Even if she somehow found her, there was no way she could help but... for someone as young as Revia, added onto her current situation, throwing a tantrum like this was only natural.

"Would you mind keeping it down? You're not the only one living in this house, you know?"

Revia slowly turned her head to the open door and breathed out several anguished bursts of air.

"It's been a few days. I'd hoped you would have calmed down by now."

The person standing by the door was Fulina.

She held a tray with food on it and walked with it into the room, setting it on a table beside the bed where Revia was seated.

After setting the food down, she turned to leave but stopped when she had reached the door.

"You know, regardless of what you do, you're one of us now," Fulina said with a sigh.

"I'm NOTHING like you!" Revia shot at Fulina with a ferocity in her eyes that bubbled all the way to her hands that trembled as she balled them to fists.

"Right..." Fulina said with a series of ridiculing nods as she twisted her lips and leaned against the wall.

"If you're nothing like us, then what are you? A victim? Someone whom fate has done wrong? What is a Spirit Warden anyway? Do you even know that much about yourself? I'd gladly switch places with you if I could."

This set Revia off.

"What did you just say?"

"You heard exactly what I just said. From the first day you arrived with Actuass, I could see that fragile look in your eyes. You pitied yourself, practically screaming out that you were a victim not given a choice in life. I know a fair amount about you. You had an abusive father, the one whom you got your Warden powers from.

He enslaved your entire family to doing what he desired without even realising it. Right? Your mother and brother died of the same tragic disease and you were about to commit suicide when it all came crashing down on you. Hmph. What a tame life," Fulina said.

Huff, huff!

Revia trembled with fury all the more.

"How... do you know that?!"

Fulina shrugged.

"Necromancy is a very useful tool," she replied nonchalantly.

...!

Revia was beginning to foam from the mouth.

"Anyway, there is nowhere else you belong in this world except with us. I'm sure the Purity teaches you that we are villains. It's true. We are. But that doesn't do us justice. We are an opposing side in this unfair world.

You should know more than most that we don't all have reasons to be thankful about ourselves right?"

"Fuck you..." Revia said with a harsh emphasis.

Fulina gave a pitying smile.

"You once told Actuass that he was grooming his own killer. What a joke. You're breaking yourself day by day and you won't even accept reality. Maybe you were just a measly pawn in the end."

Revia couldn't take it anymore.

She suddenly growled and lunged at Fulina!

This bitch!

Acting like she knew everything about her!

Acting like she was some kind of enlightened being who had somehow seen the very workings of reality!

She just had to give her one solid punch!

And she did.

However...

It wasn't as she had expected.

Her body had suddenly surged with immense power, everything seeming to stop as if she was suddenly all alone... only she being the one moving, breaking apart the still air, shattering through the calm space...

This sensation...

Her fist dug into Fulina's face, breaking up the bone and boring into it as if it was made of clay!

This speed...

Even though she had a purple core...

Even though she was at the Master Stage...

There was no way Fulina, who was at a similar level of strength, couldn't have dodged her when she was this mentality fatigued.

Then this speed she showed... it was way beyond what she was capable of without her lost Divine Blessing meaning...

Wait.

Divine Blessing...?

BOOOOM!

As soon as Revia stopped, Fulina head exploded and her body slumped to the ground.

The former Paladin Champion huffed.

This power.

How was this possible?

"It's about time."

Revia shot her head to the side in surprise as she heard the voice of the same person she had just bashed with her fist into just now.

Fulina was standing outside the room, in the exact same stance she had been in when she was pummelled just now!

Wait.

Revia turned to the body slumped to the side.

It had the same face and body structure but... it started to leak out wisps of a dark, purple energy!

It wasn't Fulina!



Revia turned to the real version of the individual she had been talking to, her eyes still burning with the desire to beat her down. A certain degree of confidence was now noticeable in her eyes now.

Just now, she was starting to realise why she had regained her speed!

This was exactly as Actuass had said.

Her Divine Blessing, <Hearts of Clarity>, was gone but Blessings didn't reside in the soul. They resided in the body. However, the soul which was a storage for information both old and new, could replicate details about the body with time.

This process would usually be very long for complex things like Divine Blessings, sometimes even being impossible, but Revia's soul wasn't normal. As a Spirit Warden, she was unique!

"I hope you let go of that hypocrisy of yours now. For someone with as much reason to want to burn the world as anyone else, you sure can lie to yourself. You still have the same powers regardless of which side you're on. Only this time, you can't die. Even Direction doesn't care what you do," Fulina said as she turned, slowly walking down the wide hallway.

"Come, let's formally introduce you to the group."

Revia wore a complicated look on her face.

This was it...

Deep within her, the return of her speed brought about a certain amount of joy back to her.

Besides being a prodigy and having Elita by her side, she had had her speed which she was confident in.

Fulina words pinched her.

The crutch that perhaps she was born to make a difference while on the good side with her ridiculous powers was cracked.

Truly...

Maybe...

No one cared from which side she fought.

This slight push back to her normal state of mind, made her take a step to follow Fulina...