

# Undead 551

## Chapter 551: Comments and Disappointment

"My arm! My arm! My fucking arm!" Kurtish screamed as he tried to pull his arm to his shoulder.

His face was pale and he constantly knocked against the platform with his remaining hand in anguish, his eyes bloodshot with a gleam of fury burning in them!

Kurtish slobbered and sniffled as he reached for his limb only to find a flaming foot stepping on his chestplate, pushing him away from his target.

The pompous man looked up and saw the brilliantly burning figure of Skullius.

His head had recovered back to what it used to be but from his chest to his right thigh, the flames caused by the bits of the explosion that caught him before he used all the mana he had stored to eject himself from the platform with his gravitation were still vibrant on his person.

A scowl was on his face.

After all that he had done, he hadn't managed to land a fatal hit on Kurtish with the slash he had put his <CURSED HEART> and soul into.

All that and he only took out an arm and an ear.

Ridiculous.

What's more, Skullius didn't think he could replicate his feat from just now instantly and worse yet... Urgh.

Honestly, he couldn't understand why Kurtish was sobbing and screaming over an arm. Sure it must hurt but not enough for him to lose his cool like this, right?

Was he that pampered?

Had he never experienced pain like this before?

Back to the things that annoyed Skullius the most however, the cry baby's armour seemed to have a healing effect which he was trying to trigger by attaching his lopped arm where it had been severed from.

'Hmmm.'

Skullius gazed with his white eyes at Kurtish and slashed hard with his sword at his neck!

A spherical barrier that looked like an orb of flowing blood immediately appeared, blocking Skullius' strike which shook the platform!

'As I thought. Even while in this state, his technique still responds,' the Hybrid Luman thought.

Unsurprisingly, Kurtish's mana was being filled back up through the effects of his armour which was undoubtedly Legendary.

As this occurred, a green coloured seal appeared over where Kurtish's arm had been severed, stopping the blood loss.

His seals were automatic too!

Immediately after, a large image zipped into existence, on its face a demeaning frown as it raised its fist to crush Skullius!

With Kurtish's mana slowly recovering, he could generate Perfect Aura again and his Incarnation immediately appeared!

Fortunately, Skullius had seen this coming.

He had seen this all coming before he had flashed high up to avoid the explosion that occurred after his strike. This why he was so upset that he didn't hit his mark correctly.

This armour that Kurtish had.

His technique.

They made him nigh impossible to beat for someone like Skullius who didn't have many high level skills he could use consistently.

On top of this, for the first time in a while, Skullius felt his mana reserves get close to a depletion. He had used everything he had to escape from explosion and to launch that deadly slash.

'This is beyond the current me,' Skullius thought as he closed his eyes and breathed out.

His Hybrid Luman form was at its limit.

He raised his hand.

"I surrender."

"..."

'This isn't worth it.'

Silence once again encompassed the whole stadium.

"Huh?! This was getting good!"

"Why did he quit?! I was starting to support this guy!"

"No! Don't give up, you bastard!"

"Woow! He's still on fire!"

Many comments flooded from the stands, most being about why Skullius was giving up and the support he had garnered.

His shocking comeback against this man who proclaimed to have won before the fight even started had gotten him an ample amount of cheer as the black horse but...

A flash of green light sparked around Kurtish who shivered with sweat dripping from his brow while a red one circled around Skullius.

"Hahaaa..." Kurtish laughed with a low tone of voice, his pale face beginning to gain back colour and snarky confidence as he looked at Skullius who didn't grace him with any comeback.

The two were teleported back to their seats where Skullius got rid of the flame, his VergeRider recovering to its full form when he injected mana into it.

'There's no need to try too hard in this thing,' Skullius said as he looked up at Guissepo.

This whole event had layers of mystery and definite hidden agendas.

Besides, according to Premium Age Royale regulations, the Preliminaries weren't the endgame. Even if he was serious about getting the Bryne Family into the EverSword House, he still had one more chance and frankly...

He didn't think his showcase was that bad.

The more he contemplated, Skullius actually smiled.

If there was one thing to celebrate...

'It seems I've just found a way to get past Incarnations...'

....

A distance from Skullius, Vali was smiling brightly while tapping her cheek with a consistent rhythm. She had gotten more enjoyment from this battle than she had thought.

'Hmmm. That caught me by surprise,' she thought as her interest grew in the contender with light auburn hair.

On the other side, miles from her, a certain Mage was still replaying this last match in his head.

'I didn't realise one could manipulate such a fickle concept as barriers to warp space like that. I should speak to the Arch-Mage about this,' he thought. 'Then again, my knowledge is seriously limited. Gravity isn't something one just wakes up with. My fellow contenders are not so weak, after all.'

Another stretch of distance from this man, the same contenders who had been speaking to each other before were analysing what they had seen. Despite the distance, it was easy to communicate if one used a special tool as that wasn't against the rules.

"I wasn't expecting that man to survive. It's a mystery how he is even alive. A treasure maybe?"

"I doubt it. You'd need a Legendary grade tool to try and get out of that one. Only one is allowed and I think that sword of his fits the grade."

"Hmmm. I imagine Kurtish will hunt him down after this. The Bryne Family is in the slumps right now isn't it?"

"It is. <Sigh>. In all honesty, the only ones bound to truly enjoy this event are the witnesses of lowest class. For anyone else, victory here is not a guarantee to keep your life outside."

The clamour over the last match did not die down easily.

Many were calling it the most exciting match of the day while others insisted that it was a tad bit of shy of earning that title, after all, Skullius had given up midway.

Regardless of the result though, up top, Rearren was pleased that the event was full of variety.

"What do you think?" he asked Rias.

The young man beside blinked with his uninterested eyes.

"I would much prefer to see the Royale begin."

Rearren chuckled.

"All in good time."

Chapter 552: It Worked!

"That was definitely a nice exchange you had there. I was almost disappointed when you gave up," Setkh said with a tilt of the head and nuanced smile.

"Really? Glad to hear it," Skullius said as he sat on the couch and took a breath.

Everyone else sat down on separate seats except for Yuyui who sat on Skullius' couch's armrest.

"I understand why you gave up though, all things considered. In all honesty landing a blow on someone a full Stage above you is an incredible feat on its own but... have you thought about investing in armour?"

I'm sure that special sword of yours is Legendary grade and it wouldn't do to bring another treasure of that level to the Royale but what you needed to continue fighting was replenishment of your energy, wasn't it?" Setkh asked.

He was only partly right.

'Hmph. Does everyone think Demion's Dance is a Legendary grade item? Whatever, that serves me well either way,' Skullius thought, not bothering to correct Setkh.

Indeed, the green sword was only a Unique grade item. What made it compete with Legendary grade items was its complementary skill, [Swindling Death's Dance] which brought out the full potential of the sword.

As for looking for an item to replenish his mana...

"For me, armour doesn't change much. It's especially useless when almost everyone I'm fighting in the Royale is a Stage above me and has some crazy technique. In that situation, Legendary grade won't do me much good. Even if I were to replenish my mana, in some cases that doesn't mean anything, just like with this fight," Skullius said.

Silrat nodded.

He agreed with Setkh's analysis too.

It was already a miracle that Skullius was able to battle people in the Master Stage.

While general witnesses couldn't quite understand the significance, everyone who knew about strength in general was surprised by how Skillius held his own when he was an only an Advancement Stage expert, though, as Skullius had thought, they were under the impression that his Legendary grade tool was the one doing the heavy lifting.

Karrun gazed at Skullius thoughtfully, wondering if his words were the truth or lies spun to support his pride.

In any case, now that Skullius had failed, a part of him felt the weight of responsibility, more than anyone but Setkh realised.

"Perhaps things would have been different with the armour you're choosing to ignore. The whole reason you lost was because you missed, right? You could have fixed that easily," Karrun said with a slight smile.

Yuyui gave him the stink eye while Silrat coughed and defended Skullius.

"If Festos says he has no need for armour, so be it. In fact, having less flashy tools to assist him only helps his case as a weaker contender, in technical sense. Much like with how he broke that barrier," he said.

Skullius nodded before turning to Stylla who hadn't said a word all this time.

She had been facing the floor ever since they had reappeared in the residence, drowning in her own unknown thoughts.

"Stylla. What do you think?" he asked.

Stylla seemed to emerge from a heavy pool of darkness as she gazed at the man who asked her the question.

"There are two contenders in the Family. If one fails, we leave it to the other," she said with hollow look on her face.

"I see..." Skullius nodded.

How pragmatic.

Furthermore...

"I'll be heading home tomorrow to see father. Care to join me, Setkh?" she continued, changing the topic.

Setkh was surprised by this.

Stylla never asked her to do things with him. If she had to, it would probably be something extremely important or...

"You as well Festos. I think it will be a good opportunity for you to... meet the Family Head."

Stylla sounded exhausted midway during her sentence which made everyone a bit suspicious.

"Sure," Skullius responded.

The female redhead nodded and gave a short glance to Karrun before standing up.



"I'll be retiring to my room."

After she left, everyone in the lounge looked at each other, as if trying to read each other's faces.

What was up with her?

Did something happen?

Was she really passed off about Skullius losing?

Maybe.

Skullius was the first to stand afterwards, grabbing Yuyui by the shoulder and dragging her along.

"I have somewhere to be, so I'll take my leave," he said as he pulled Yuyui to his room, grabbed a few stuff and then disappeared out the door with her.

"Where are we going, Master?" the lime haired girl asked as she clung to Skullius.

"To the Temple. I need you for something. I didn't consider it before but I could benefit from having you around with this. Hmm, I phrased that wrong. In any case, I was naive..." Skullius replied.

Yes. He had been naive.

Sure, it was likely that the Purity would give him what he needed to rid himself of his FIENDISHY ABBHORENT LUCK... eventually. However, the main problem lied with whether or not they were willing to lend it to him for a night or so.

Unlike Tulnas who was charismatic and had cultivated a good relationship with the Purity, Skullius was sure that he was going to be asked to use whatever he was going to be given inside the Temple as obviously, he wasn't trusted.

That was a problem.

The only way for his body to accept whatever he was going to be given, provided that it possessed the blessing or powers from the Deities (obviously it would), was if he was in his Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator form which didn't have the Binds of Fukal restricting it.

The Binds of Fukal, the cross shaped tattoos on his Luman body, received when he took in the Insurgent Magnus powers were marks that resisted the Deities' powers.

The more Skullius had thought about them, the more he realised that these things were made to resist the powers of the Deities of Aigas specifically. The animosity between Fulgardt and the Deities must have been incredibly thick for him to do that.

"How good are you at lying?" Skullius asked Yuyui who looked at him and blinked a few times.

"Um... I've never been good at anything besides music and the likes but... I can try," she replied.

The two crossed a few meters, passing crowds over crowds under the two bright suns.

"I see. I'm going to need you to sound pretty convincing with something," the Luman said. "By the way, how's the guidance field?"

"Oh! It's really nice! I can tell everything about myself easily. I didn't even know I had some skills that I currently have! It makes everything easier to navigate! Thank you very much, Master!"

"Good. As long as it's working for you. Soon, we'll be changing how we move. I need to get both my forms much stronger much faster. I need the same for you."

Yuyui wanted to cheerfully say 'Yes, Master' but the words didn't come out. That was going to be difficult.

In any case, like she deigned, she would make it work but for now, she quickly changed the subject.

"So what I am supposed to lie about?"

Skullius turned to her. He could feel how the lime haired girl was clinging to him tightly.

The two looked each other in the eye. One of them at least. Yuyui's green bangs covered one of her eyes, the Inhuman Eye, while the other didn't look away from her Master.

"You're already playing the part. Sadly, to prevent any inconveniences, I won't be there with you. We'll use this chance to test out something but just to make sure, first you..." Skullius began expositing.

It was a simple plan really.

The Temple was usually busy in the afternoon. This was especially so after most people had vanished to the Premium Age Royale for a few hours.

Skullius was sure those obnoxious Priestesses would block his way and claim that the Grand Priest wasn't ready or whatever. That's where Yuyui came in.

A few minutes later, Yuyui walked up the steps with multitudes who were eager to enter the Temple. While belief was dwindling, there were still a lot of people who went to the Temples to hear the doctrine of the Deities.

Yuyui took deep breaths.

She saw the Priestesses at the doorway and wore a cute frown.

'So they are the ones...?' she thought before wiping away her unhappy face and wearing a big, smile riddled with apparent sadness.

Yuyui tore herself from the crowd and reached one of the Priestesses who turned to her and smiled kindly.

"Greetings to you, miss. How can I help you?" the Priestess said.

"Uhm... I was wondering if..." Yuyui said, her words coming to a halt while her heart began to pound madly.

If Skullius' theory turned out to not be true...

Seriously, melting right here would be...

'Just do it! Just do it!' Yuyui thought while sweating buckets.

"Yes?" the Priestess said.

"I was wondering if I could get help from my brother. His name is... Festos."

Yuyui immediately covered her face with her hands.

Nothing happened.

Oh?

Really?

The lime haired girl, now burning with a small flare of optimism, uncovered her face and looked left and right suspiciously.

'Good?' she thought.

The Priestess looked at her with worried eyes. Bewildered even.

"Uh... something wrong?" she asked with concern. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, I'm alright. I was just wondering if I could get HELP for Festos," Yuyui said before covering her face again, this time going as far as to duck down and envelop her head with her arms.

Still nothing!

"I really want him to get the HELP he deserves. Like, I really care for him and I want him to get HELP for his own safety and benefit. HE—"

"Alright! Alright, miss!" the Priestess said, beginning to sweat as she thought someone deranged had come but she didn't show it.

Yuyui looked left and right.

It worked! It worked!

Master was right!

If he was far away, UNCoddled didn't react!

Yuyui was overjoyed!

A self pitying tear even strolled down her face!

'I really didn't want to die today..' she thought, thanking her lucky stars.

Hippee!!!

With that out of the way now, she put on her game face and clenched her fist secretly. It was time give the performance of a lifetime!

As an artist!

As a loyal companion slash servant!

As an aspirant of whimsical experiences!

The fire within burned bright as she rose and balled out all like there was no tomorrow!

Chapter 553: Yuyui's Conviction (1)

"<Hic>, <Hic>... I know what he did was wrong but... he did what he could to redeem himself! Even I... even I see it in his eyes... the guilt...

the pain... please! Please save help me save him!"

The Priestesses looked at each other with mixed emotions. The girl who was curled up into a ball while pulling on the robes of one of them here..

They couldn't decide what to do with her.

One of them tried to comfort the poor girl.

The story sounded convincing but even while these women were trained to be kind and gentle, they weren't fools. If it was that easy to pull at their heart strings, they'd be losing Temple resources every other day which was why there was a strict selection for their occupation.

Emotional bias couldn't be included when the Purity's treasures were the object of focus.

"There, there sister..." one of the Priestesses said as she lifted up Yuyui who had tears gushing out of her eyes endlessly.

The lime haired girl sniffled excessively and on her expression, there was a genuine showing of grief and desperation that gave a 99% level of authenticity.

"Sister... we have heard your pleas," another of the Priestesses said. "I can tell you this. My impression of your brother has changed a bit from your story. If having you taken by the cultists and them locking you up for that long was another way they chose to make your brother suffer then... indeed, he has suffered a great deal.

And yes, the lengths he went to rescue you from that dark place...it... it warrants forgiveness at least."

The Priestess couldn't help but believe this story a bit more as she recited it, trying to make Yuyui feel better.

The story that this lime haired girl had been told to tell by Skullius was just a watered down version of her real story in the Temple of Unlusted Tears but pitted with add-ons of Evenfall Cultists as her captors, their objective being to punish Skullius for leaving his 'job' – bringing them innocents to sacrifice.

This was easy for Yuyui to sell.

Gathering up heaps of self-pity from this to make herself cry was child's play.

Just thinking about the century and more that she spent eating a whole tree and drinking a whole lake made her ball out realistically.

From there, Yuyui just had to retell a more heroic tale of how her 'brother' came to rescue her, getting mortally wounded as he battled against the evil cultists for her sake.

This seemed to work ever so slightly.

"Will you... <sniff>... help me then? The curse upon him can claim him at any time. Despite how strong he is... he won't last much longer," Yuyui asked.

"He's even bedridden at this moment."

The final nail to the coffin was to encourage urgency.

Yuyui had told the Priestesses that Skullius' curse would claim him soon and if he died from it, then she would be all sappy... which was correct.

"Fine," another one of the Priestesses with a strict demeanour said. "The Grand Priest will be the one to decide your brother's fate, however. All we can do is allow you an audience with him."

Yuyui sniffled once more.

"Alright," she said as she sat on the chair.

The Priestesses had taken Yuyui to a separate room when she had begun crying. It was one of the many small spaces in the Temple designated for unexpected situations with congregants or for personal encounters with anyone from the Temple.

"It may take you some time though. The Grand Priest is busy right now and may only attend to you at nightfall. Are you still willing to wait?" another of the three Priestesses with Yuyui asked with an unsure gaze.

"I am willing."

That was easy.

Skullius could only use whatever item she was given here at night anyway.

With that, the Priestesses offered Yuyui some food and refreshments before leaving. They told her that she was free to go out and explore the areas close to this room but she was forbidden from going anywhere else without being escorted.

Yuyui nodded.

She didn't plan to go out anyway. Anything that could jeopardise the mission was immensely undesirable.

When she was left alone, she wiped away her tears and puckered her lips.

"I hope this works," she said before, with mild difficulty, she opened her status in the guidance field.

Unlike Skullius who had VOW to show him the ropes, Yuyui and Kenno didn't have such a luxury. Skullius knew they'd figure it out eventually though. It wasn't that hard. You pretty much just had to see the guidance field as part of you to manipulate it effortlessly. Considering it as a separate entity would only cause you problems.

Yuyui looked at her stats and contemplated.



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Name : Yuyui Yuyui Yuyui ]

[ Level : 6 ]

[ EXP : 200/200 ; <Task Pending> ]

[ Class : Pinnacle Occuluthon ]

[ Race : Human ]

[ Inv. Status : Mildly Nervous ]

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[ Stats ]

[ STRENGTH (I) : 210 ]

[ AGILITY (I) : 135 ]

[ INTELLIGENCE (I) : 267 ]

[ ENDURANCE (I) : 156 ]

[ LUCK : 44 ]

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[ HEALTH : --- ]

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[ MANA (I) : 366/366 ]

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[ Skills ]

[ Ballading | Lv.124 ]

[ Greater Voice | Lv.98 ]

[ Broken Mind (Special) | Lv. 40 ]

[ Greatest Soft Tune | Lv. 150 ]

[ Greatest Music Tool Art | Lv. 11 ]

[<Class>]

[ Body configuration (Special) | Lv.4 ]

[ Inhumane Eye ]

[ Eye of Dispersal ]

[<Oddities>]

[ Inhumane Eye ]

[ Eye of Dispersal ]

[<Affinities>]

[ None ]

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Seeing this felt surreal.

Everything she currently had was well presented before her sight clearly, removing the need to keep fussing about it and having to guess.

What was most concerning for Yuyui however, was her Task.

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EXP : 200/200

Sixth Task : Sing a life-changing ballad

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"I don't have a problem with singing but... how am I going to get stronger if all my tasks don't have anything to do with what I need right now?" Yuyui asked herself.

Her love for music and the arts had not waned one bit even after centuries but now with her new class and her resolve to fight with her master, she felt conflicted.

She had expected her Tasks to change, becoming more suited to what she needed to become a true Pinnacle Occuluthon but they remained the same.

What did this mean?

Was she really destined to be a simple bard Skullius kept on his adventure, doing menial tasks and whatnot with the occasional need for her special eyes?

How would she grow then?

She just couldn't see it.

She didn't want Skullius to know this either.

She said it was fine but she hadn't been making progress with Bassbion at all.

All she did day in, day out was to get smacked around by the Spirit Guardian who refused to train her.

She would always say the same thing.

'If you want me to train you, take just one of my hits without flying off like a shooting star, you poser!'

Sigh.

'At least if I can accomplish this silly job...' Yuyui thought as she looked out the window.

From the distance she saw children playing in a sparsely populated street.

The freedom, the smiles, the innocence.

She had been like that once.

She had sought only the brighter things in life, yet sadly...

'I still can't remember it well. Should I have Ferex... look into my soul?' she thought.

She seemed to be the only one concerned with her past as Skullius didn't seem too interested in it, which wasn't a problem of course.

'Yea. I think I should.'

Yuyui leaned against the window.

This room was on the second floor which made the view quite exquisite. For a simple person like Yuyui, killing time by watching happy little faces playing all day was bliss and before she knew it several hours passed with her not shifting much from her position.

Soon, the door opened and a Priestess walked in.

Yuyui hurriedly rushed up to her and eagerly awaited what the verdict was for her performance.

The Priestess looked deep in her eyes and...

"Sadly, the Grand Priest is quite busy and will not be able to tend to you today. Please let me escort you out."

...!

It was as if something in Yuyui shattered.

The Grand Priest was too busy?

Bullshit!

All he had to do was give them what they needed and they would return it promptly!

If that was hard they could just send someone with them, right?

That was Yuyui's reasoning.

Then why...?!

"Please..." Yuyui begged, this time, a hunching dread filling her heart. It was real and genuine for the current time.

"I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do. You can come again tomorrow and attempt to wait," the Priestess said as she motioned for Yuyui to follow her back outside.

The lime haired girl huffed and clenched her fist.

This wasn't right.

She got the feeling that even if she came tomorrow, things wouldn't change.

No wonder Skullius had said eventually. He knew these people probably wanted him to suffer but... they didn't get it!

This wasn't the time!

Yuyui nearly buckled.

If she failed at this.

At something like this...

No!

Yuyui suddenly dashed out of the room!

"Hey, miss!" the Priestess she had just left behind called as she followed after her but could in no way compete with Yuyui who had a headstart and a vibrant blue core!

Because Yuyui had seen the way she and those Priestesses had come – going around the Temple and entering it from a door to the right that led to the rooms away from the main hall – Yuyui easily found her way.

She dashed into the hall where many people were getting up from their seats on the benches and moving out, her eyes zipping this way and that.

Surely, if everyone was just now leaving, the Grand Priest must still be close!

Yuyui rushed up to a young man who was getting ready to leave and hurriedly asked.

"Excuse me, where did the Grand Priest go? He was the one addressing everyone, right?"

The young man turned to Yuyui curiously.

"Who else would speak to us? Haha. You weren't here for the service, were you? Maybe you're new to the faith. It's actually a pleasure to meet—"

"Please stop!" Yuyui said while withholding 'bad words' from leaking from her mouth and wearing an awkward smile. "Where did he go?"

The young man jerked back a little from her exclamation before pointing in the direction of a doorway beyond a well decorated stage. Yuyui saw and immediately rushed to it but...

"Stop right there! Meell, stop that woman! She's after the Grand Priest!" the Priestess from before yelled, attracting the attention of the Priest she had just called and many of her peers.

The eyes of the followers, Priest and Priestess alike were ignited with a dangerous glint as they all turned to Yuyui, their bodies thereafter speeding towards her!

"Ah!" Yuyui yelped.

That was scary!

Were these the same people who had been showing kindness earlier?

Really?

The lime haired girl sped faster, nearing the door before any of her pursuers were even a five meter distance close to her!

She was so close.

Maybe if she could talk some sense into the Grand Priest, he would listen.

Surely he must feel some level of pity if she put her heart into this!

Soft words won hard hearts after all.

Yuyui stretched her hand.

She was just a meter and some away from the doorknob to the place she needed to get to.

She was just a little bit shy when...

A glowing rope whipped towards her from a distance and wrapped around her wrist before pulling her back!

"Argh!"

Another one swam through the air quickly and with a crisp slap tightened around her leg and jerked her back, causing the poor girl to slam hard on the floor!

Yuyui gnashed her teeth!

An astonishing energy was imbued into this rope!



Wait!

It wasn't even a rope to begin with!

It was Divine energy, Primus energy tangled up to form a rope!

The Priests were using the Divine energy provided by their class to construct ropes that bound Yuyui!

Unfortunately for them, this girl was stubborn!

Her fighting spirit had been awakened a while ago and it kept growing!

From Yuyui's forehead, a dark eye with an ice blue iris emerged, only for a brief moment.

As it did, its gaze fell on ropes binding her and...

SNAP!

They all broke off from her before disappearing into spots of light that wrestled against space!

...!

"No way!"

"What the hell?!"

"How...?!"

The moment the ropes disappeared, Yuyui rose, turned to the group that had caught up and was weaving more of the Primus energy into different form for another method to restrain her and...

A dagger appeared in her hands and she pointed it at her neck with a determined gaze, a fire burning in her eyes.

...!

The Priests and Priestesses immediately stopped, their intent to capture the girl momentarily halted.

"If you don't let me see the Grand Priest, I'll kill myself right now!" Yuyui said as she went on to plunge the tip of the blade in her neck!

Chapter 554: Yuyui's Conviction (2)

The situation had escalated way too quickly.

Many of the Priestesses and Priests present didn't even understand the situation properly. All they knew was that someone identified a threat heading for the Grand Priest and they all ran.

Of course, the Priestess who had shouted those words earlier hadn't been trying to inject Yuyui with the crime of wanting to harm the Grand Priest because she knew the context. This was her way of making everyone move to stop Yuyui no questions asked.

Regardless of the semantics involved with how she said it or how her peers responded, this was where they were now.

What made the situation even worse was that there were a few congregants within the Temple at this moment, all of them bewildered by the current events.

Was this a terrorist attack or something?

None could afford them answers though. A few of the Temple personnel near them hurried to direct them outside.

Drip. Drip.

Blood flowed from Yuyui's neck as she panted, desperate to get her point across.

She looked at each one of the Priests and Priestesses surrounding her from a short distance, some of whom showed fright while some who understood Yuyui's story a little better felt guilt and pity.

"Why?!" Yuyui said. "Why would you deny me....my brother this chance?"

There was no answer.

Even though the story she knew was a lie weaved up by Skullius to not get the Grand Priest and others killed by UNCoddled, Yuyui started to meld this story with some of her own conflict without realising it.

"Aren't you people supposed to who people like me and my brother can turn to? Why... why does it feel like you're no different from THEM?! Why?!"

The people around Yuyui couldn't tell who 'them' were but parts of them were struck nonetheless.

Yuyui further plunged the dagger she held into her neck. This was the same dagger Skullius had gifted to her yesterday. Stylla had given her a storage ring for convenience the other day and she had stashed her new weapon in it, never imagining that she would end up using it on herself.

"Miss, please stop! You'll die!" a Priestess called with desperation while taking an anxious step.

"Now you care?!" Yuyui barked.

Slowly, just like back when she was with Skullius in the eatery, her flaring emotions, her eagerness to complete this mission to help her master, something she felt she owed... caused her to remember how she felt on the day.

Only partially.

The day when she and her parents were fleeing from their home.

The day when evil men ravaged the town.

The day when hope seemed so close, only she survived in the end.

She felt it vividly now.

She understood her role. She had even listened to the doctrine of the Deities, following what the Priest had said when he gave her Direction. She had been cheerful and optimistic and so were her parents but...

It was clear now.

"There's no such thing as fairness or right reward is there?" Yuyui said hollowly.

Killing herself once was not an issue but the people surrounding her didn't know. All she had to do was pressure them but now, she was losing the mission a bit.

Her memories, triggered by emotion were rushing back.

"What is all the noise about?" the door behind Yuyui opened to reveal an aged man adorned in layers of lavish white robes.

Yuyui hurriedly turned, her one eye eternally unveiled behind bangs gazing at the Grand Priest.

The old man looked at Yuyui's wound.

He shook his head.

"I assume you're the lady I heard was crying her eyes out?" he said before drawing Primus from his body, casually gathering it in his right hand and extending it in Yuyui's direction.

Yuyui's wound was quickly healed up with the pristine energy flowing to her!

"Come. Let us talk," the old man said.

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The Grand Priest and Yuyui sat down on opposite ends of a beautiful, black hardwood table plagued with documents and books.

The old man gazed at Yuyui without turning his attention and Yuyui did the same.

"Tell me truth. What is the real reason you are so adamant?" he asked with a stern but calm voice that demanded the truth without inducing fear.

"It's just as I said. I need it for my brother," Yuyui said while puckering her lips.

She was serious about this.

The Grand Priest leaned against his chair and locked his fingers. The story had been told to him in detail by the Priestesses so he knew the full picture.

"I do not fully believe your 'brother's' tale. I do believe he is cursed, perhaps by some truly evil bit of treachery but I doubted his tale from the start. Strangely, I think he expected me to. Without a doubt he has done things he's not proud of still, correct?"

Yuyui only breathed without answering immediately. The adrenaline was only just now dying down.

Things that Skullius' regretted? That was a funny thought.

She didn't think he had those.

That aside, it seemed the Grand Priest had seen through the lie but he still assumed Skullius was man who had done some evil that he wished to rid himself of but only after he got cursed for it.

That was reasonable assessment.

One that didn't make Skullius look any better.

But Yuyui wouldn't buckle.

"Please. I only want help for my brother. Whatever you think doesn't matter to me. Since you know there is a curse..." she said.

"Why did he not come himself? Indeed, regardless of the great merit and prowess that I was told he possesses by the Knights in Evic, we still do not serve him immediately as he desires but... shouldn't he express the urgency himself?"

Yuyui was ticked off. She had already told these people why.

"This is your way of making him atone?" she asked with a heavy breath.

"Yes. Sometimes it is up to us to pass judgement, no? The Deities can be too benevolent. It is why the Orders are created, the Higher Order Priest elected with a treasure containing a Divine Blessing. It is so that we can pass judgement in the Deities stead," the Grand Priest said with sharp glint in his eyes.

Yuyui's emotions flared again.

This man...!

To speak so casually about judgement and all...!

"You feel free to judge others for their wrongs but you... you don't see it fit to atone for all the lives you fail to save?" Yuyui leaked a tear from her eye. "Do you also find the will to judge those who died because you couldn't save them? What are you teaching then?"

The Grand Priest's eyes grew sharper.

"To humour such questions would be to test my rank among those who truly deserve to speak for the Deities. Nothing does not have its purpose in the world. Hmm perhaps that's not the correct way to say it. I believe the world is fair enough when it grants purpose, life and death. You are alive and perhaps that's the fairness of the world. You need to accept it as it is."

Yuyui grew silent.

So that's how it was.

This man didn't want to help Skullius. At least not until he thought even judgement was passed.

"If your brother has the strength to save an entire city, he should burden himself with MORE of the work of the Deities for a time and earn a reward enough to cure him. That's all there is to it."

The lime haired girl nearly exploded with rage but she controlled herself.

She could have sworn this was the most emotion she had felt in a very a long time and it wasn't worth it.

It seemed that she was doomed to fail. There was no convincing this man with mere words.

Unlike the Priestesses, he wasn't susceptible to sap.

This plunged all of Yuyui's efforts since she arrived down the toilet and she could only stand up and walk away feeling the scorning stench of defeat.

This was really it?

What if... what if failing this mission cost Skullius a great deal?

What if failing this mission forever proved that Bassbion was right? Was her resolve fickle?

Did failing this mission mean... she accepted...?

Yuyui stood, her eyes burning with fury. Controlled fury.

Maybe what she needed was to get out of her comfort zone.

Skullius never mentioned that she should press on but she was willing to go the extra mile.

"If you're contemplating killing yourself, you're welcome to do so. I only healed you earlier because i couldn't have a discussion with you while your neck was leaking. Suicide is never rewarded," the Grand Priest said before turning his attention away from Yuyui and looking at the documents on his desk.

The lime haired girl took a deep breath, her gaze shakily looking straight at the old man.

She was deciding on something.

She couldn't let this go.

The still misty memories in her head and the emotions that came along with them pushed and pull at her.

Before she knew it, her dagger, her Legendary grade dagger appeared in her hand.

Her mana flared with this action as she made a decision.

The old man looked up.

"You intend to kill me now? Over a clash in ideals. How barbaric," he said, dismissing her entirely.

Yuyui took a step closer, her heart pounding. She was torn but she didn't stop.

She kicked the Priest's desk aside and pointed her dagger at him.

"I also forgot to mention," she said while grinding her teeth and forcing herself to say things she would have never said before. "I also have an evil curse."

"Hmmm?" the Grand Priest hummed while languidly gazing at Yuyui. What was this desperate attempt?



Then...

...!

The old man was jolted by surprise, Divine energy pouring out of his body as he saw...on Yuyui's forehead, a dark eye with a ice blue iris emerging from the folds of her skin!

"You...!"

The Grand Priest was about to incapacitate Yuyui using the Divine energy swarming out of his body when the third eye looking straight at him worked its magic!

All the energy that Priest had summoned around him... suddenly vanished!

NO!

More aptly, it was dispersed!

...!

"Fiend! You also...!" the Grand Priest yelled in bewilderment.

Yuyui leapt towards him, her heart pounding madly as still... her body struggled to accept that she was doing this.

What was she even doing?

'Take it out! Take it out! Take it out!' she shrieked in her mind as several morale alarm bells rang loudly, trying to discourage her from this.

But it was her only option!

Surely, the Grand Priest scurried as she expected, his hands rapidly searching around his body only to pull out a certain brass coloured necklace seemingly from under his robes!

He attempted to wear this item!

Yuyui's eyes constricted!

That must be it!

Wait! There was a better way to judge it!

She tackled the Priest, grabbed his arm and pulled it away from his body. She then grabbed the necklace in the man's hand and with her guidance field, she appraised it, finding that...

...!

Yes! Yes! Yes!

This was it!

She did it!

"Argh! You think you'll get away with this?! Haris! Meel! HELP ME!" the Priest yelled much to Yuyui's fears.

She rolled, pinned the Priest down and tried to get away when...

She stopped.

This old man knew her face and her powers.

It wouldn't even take a day. No, perhaps hours for him to find where she lived. Her master too!

Yuyui knew this situation was already messed up!

She had acted purely out of emotion and desperation, probably creating problems in the process for Skullius but... she needed it to mean something in the end!

She couldn't fight for Skullius properly but this...

She gazed at the Priest who drew away from her, while calling for his Priests and Priestesses. As he scraped against the floor he reached into his robe, mana flowing into something.

...!

Yuyui noticed this.

From the depths of her fragmenting moral compass, a sudden urge rose like vomit and in the next moment she found herself on top of the old man, pushing her dagger down towards his chest!

A dangerous murderous intent spilled from her as she stabbed!

Then she paused.

Her hands trembled.

'What am I doing?! Since when do I...? I can't. I can't. I can't!' Yuyui struggled, sweat dripping from brow along with tears. 'Am I really about...

kill someone?'

She was torn and this time, she couldn't just cross this boundary.

The Grand Priest scoffed at her.

"You're surprised by how much man can lose their sense of direction in seconds? Ha! Hesitating, killing me, sparing me... all of it don't matter anymore. You've sealed your own fate already," he said. "I do not fear death.

I only fear being meeting it at the hands of evil. But you... you are nothing but a corrupted soul donning death's robes...'

Yuyui sucked in a pained breath!

Dhu! Dhu! Dhu!

Footsteps approached from the distance. From a floor below this room.

The Temple personnel were coming!

Soon, she would be caught.

Yuyui huffed. Her indecision's noose burning away slowly.

Her eyes opened with a fierce fire full of burning guilt, understanding and conflict.

But...

The Grand Priest was right.

"You... you're right," she said in a low voice, both her hands now gripping the dagger shakily yet firmly as she fought against morality.

She had already messed up.

Now all that was left was...

PCH!

\*

The doors to the Grand Priest's office were forced open as a group of white robed men and women stormed in!

"Grand Priest!" a Priestess shrieked as she raced towards the corpse of the old man with a look of terror in her eyes.

The others also followed after her save for one young Priest who caught a glimpse of something from the corner of his eye.

There, in the corner, atop a patch of charred floor.

There... the body of a woman, a familiar woman, aged as it was with the same clothes she had on before, with a rusting dagger in hand could be seen.

Chapter 555: Rights and Wrongs

"Hahahahahahaha!"

He laughed.

"This is not how I expected Direction to twist and turn, circling back to its definition from millennia ago."

He mused.

"How do tides manage to find each other and race back through traces of their origin, as if seeking the very fires of beginning? Is this how all things are designed?"

He thought.

"No matter. I have been given enough reason and time to watch it unfold."

He went back to visualising the very nature of the world with strumming in his hand.

A distance from him, a boisterous laughter, much like his echoed, mirroring the reality that was still times away from being realised as incomprehensible irony.

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"Hahahahahahaha!" Skullius chuckled while shaking his head. At some point he even covered his face with his hand as genuinely, he found this funny and had not seen it coming at all.

Before him, the figure of Yuyui with a teary, confused and slightly angry face could be seen. She was kneeling before him, having just recently passed a brass coloured necklace with a sparkling silver jewel in the shape of a three point star to her master on the patch of snow before him – an action she paid for with the horrendous melting of her flesh.

She had just recounted everything that happened before she left Genhuis City in a desperate run to bring all she had stolen to Skullius.

She had expected rebuke.

She had expected Skullius to not excuse whatever returns she had brought as in return, she had probably wrought the wrath of the Purity onto them.

She had knelt immediately before him in this secluded, snowy plane where only snow covered rocks and a few sickly, cold trees were all the beauty that could be seen for miles, with the rest being blameless white, acknowledging that while she served her own ego somewhat, she had screwed up.

Yet, to all her serious confession and all, Skullius had burst into laughter.

It had been thirty seconds now and he didn't look like he was going to stop anytime soon.

Sure, to Yuyui it was a bit refreshing to see Skullius show something other than a maniacal chuckle or a smirk or smile but...

"Master... I don't think... this is funny..." she said in a small voice. "Please... say something."

Skullius stopped laughing.

He smiled and sat down on a snow covered rock.

The cold wind blew on the two for a minute or so as silence dug in.

Yuyui grew even more nervous. She sneaked a glance at Skullius and found him gazing into the distance expressionlessly.

"You know, from the time before we met and back, I was always getting into trouble. I lacked knowledge, I was desperate to meet certain...deadlines and I didn't make the most informed decisions half the time. Somehow it worked out. I grew and managed to solve some situations while other times, things just seemed to go my way. Still, it was rough.

All I had were people who had to be cold when dealing with me otherwise they would die and even now, as we grow to care for each other somewhat, we are still distant," Skullius said.

He turned away from the distant white and looked at Yuyui.

"You're right. You brought along quite the huge obstacle for us."

Yuyui shrunk.

"But you know what? I accept it. I have no right to judge your actions. In fact, I can't. Because I understand them and I act the same all the time. Ever since that day, I gained UNDERSTANDING of many things, including myself.

You only mentioned what you did as wrong but..." Skullius said as he drew closer to the kneeling Yuyui.

"You grew, didn't you?"

Yuyui puckered her lips in surprise.

"Wh-What do you mean?" she asked, unsure of what Skullius was talking about. "Does killing someone really make you grow?"

Skullius shook his head.

"No. Maybe. I'm the worst person to ask that question. Even though I was human once, I've never had trouble taking lives. That won't change even if I get to understand who I am. What I mean is, you pushed yourself towards a goal you wouldn't have achieved with your previous mind-set.

A part of your constrained mind changed. The kill was but one of the results you got after you were cornered."

Was that so?

The lime haired girl thought to her frustration back there.

She really had wanted to accomplish her mission so desperately that she resorted to utilisations of her abilities that she wouldn't have considered if she stayed in her shell.

Bargaining a chance to see the Grand Priest with her life and leaving a dead body of hers as a way to throw off the Priests by even a little bit...

These were things she thought about in the heat of the moment while debating her impression of the Purity.

Was Skullius right? Did she grow?

When she reached this point, Yuyui was jolted into remembering something important. She quickly pulled out from her pocket a small pouch.

It was beige in colour and made with a leathery fabric.

It had a steel clip that could be used to attach it to practically anything and on its top end was an open spot from which its content could be drawn.



"I also took this from the Grand Priest's robes. I think this is where the other special items are," Yuyui said as she handed the pouch to Skullius.

Once more she paid for it.

'One more for the road, huh?' Skullius thought.

He took the item and observed it while Yuyui respawned.

A spark flashed from Skullius' body and clashed with the pouch which then showed complex rune work on its surface that exuded a bright energy!

Skullius let go of the item, letting it fall down on the snow.

"Hmm. There's some kind of seal on it that made the Binds of Fukal on my body react. If it's a storage item then it might not be easy to claim it," Skullius analysed as his eyes blazed darkly, appraising the item.

~~~

[Brilliant Dent]

<Mythical>

A special storage pouch that can carry the weight of multiple continents while preserving the life of anything that is kept within it. The Dent can duplicate concepts observed by the user within its space, allowing them freedom in manipulating them as well.

-Special Effects-

- +50% to all stats for all inhabitants

- +90% energy regeneration for all inhabitants

- Can easily erect safety mechanisms the user desires
- Remains hidden until used or called by user
- Devours whole anything the user desires, but cannot guarantee permanent enclosure for special cases
- Filters energies

~~~

A genuine Mythical grade tool!

Since Kenno's SinSky Shatterer, Skullius hadn't seen anything on this level and this was the real deal.

What it offered was ridiculous!

Skullius couldn't put his full focus on it for now though as he saw Yuyui start to panic.

Seeing Skullius' Binds reacting against the pouch, made her wonder if this had been for nothing then.

If stealing this made things worse for them but without apparent benefit then...?

Skullius felt Yuyui's heart start to beat fast and realised what the girl was worried about.

"Relax, alright?" he said with a sigh and decided to explain certain things from the top. "First of all, of all, your little trick of he behind your dead body will probably cause them to rack their brains for a bit but of course, they must have a Diviner or something to identify what really happened. Second, I never intended for you to live with me forever anyway, since a few days ago at least.

You don't have to go back to the city anymore,"

...!

"No. No! No! Master...I...!"

"I said relax. I don't mean it in the way you're thinking. And concerning this pouch, have you tried using your Eye of Dispersal to get rid of the rune work?" Skullius asked.

Yuyui stopped trying to appeal to her Master about being sent away and focused on his question.

She hadn't really thought about it since leaving the city. So far, she had used her eye of techniques, and energies but not seals or runes. Frankly, she might have thought to use the eye if she was still in the heat of the moment earlier.

Now, she focused and with greater difficulty than she had been expressing before, the Eye of Dispersal emerged on her forehead!

'Hmmm. Can only use her powers efficiently when she's worked up? It's common to awaken in desperate situations, I suppose. That's why staying cooped up the city will do her no good,' Skullius thought.

This was his opinion.

When the dark eye on Yuyui's forehead appeared, it focused on the pouch, its iris and pupil constricting.

Blood started to leak from the eye while on the pouch, a throng of sparks shot out as the rune work that was usually invisible was ignited, showing itself with a bright golden glow!

For a few seconds, there was a clash as the rune work on the pouch spit out more and more sparks, resisting to be dispersed without a fight.

Soon, however, Yuyui collapsed, almost completely spent just from brief period of conflict but so did the rune work.

The lime haired girl kept her eye on the pouch as this stuff was different from energy where one look could compromise it. She had to keep her eye open otherwise the rune work would persist.

"Master... it's done," Yuyui said, exhausted.

Skullius nodded and quickly inserted his mana into the pouch. If what he assumed was correct, then the rune work disallowed anyone who wasn't a Grand Priest or at least at that level from forming a bond with the pouch while also protecting it in more ways than one.

With the runes out of the way, Skullius could do that safely.

The moment he succeeded, Skullius immediately drew everything that was in the pouch.

A sheen of gold painted the surroundings as a stack of roughly 80 high value items showed themselves!

Chapter 556: Vanquish The Abhorrent Luck!

Skullius had hit the motherlode.

He didn't even need to appraise the items that were stacked and scattered on the ground as the rich Primus energy stored within them all instead of the signature of mana he was used to sensing from most items told him a great detail.

It seemed rune work of a different order was applied to these items, imbedded deep within them to grant blessings and other effects close to that.

Though all these items didn't scale up to the genuine Mythical grade, Skullius was pleased nonetheless. There were Legendary, Legendary+ and a single Pseudo-Mythical grade treasure among these!

This was essentially a mini treasury!

Armour, thick Priestly robes, swords, spears, orbs, among many other things could be identified from the pile and Skullius couldn't help but grin. This seemed like it was meant to equip personnel from the Temple if need arose.

"Well, I guess we got capital for our operation now," Skullius said with a smile.

Instead of going through the pile right now, Skullius stored everything in his own ring, the pouch included.

Right now, it was time to deal with an urgent matter.

"You did really well, Yuyui. I'm proud of you," Skullius said much to the tired Yuyui's partly unconvinced nod.

"Look. I don't have set plans for this setback but I've learned to always be ready for trouble. We'll deal with this together, alright?" Skullius said as offered her his hand which she reluctantly took and nodded.

"Alright, Master," she said.

"Good. Now..." Skullius said, his gaze landing on the necklace that Yuyui had taken from the Priest's hand which was on the ground.

He hesitated to touch it before [High Cosmetic Body] timed out as that might cause the Binds of Fukal to react again.

"I assume that old piece of flesh was going to try and burn you up with the concentrated divine energy that's stored in this thing. He must have been convinced you were really cursed. This thing is more suited for wiping out such things."

With appraisal, Skullius had also identified the name and effects of the ring. It was called the Grace of Sky Lady's Hand.

It was also a Mythical grade tool with a single purpose – to store an astronomical amount of purified Divine energy that could erase a target completely. As ambiguous as that was for a statement, a rather terrifying note was added on the guidance field.

Apparently, the current capacity of energy within the necklace was enough to burn away the entirety of Pelian and Maqi combined within seconds, provided no protection was added!

That was ridiculous.

A release of energy of that level was something not even a peak Incandescent Stage expert, even if they were an Arch-Mage could perform!

This reassured Skullius though. This artefact was undoubtedly stronger than the one Tulnas used which Skullius guessed had also been a Mythical or a bit shy of it since his guidance field then couldn't identify its grade.

Patronage Rank constraints had been limiting him grandly.

Following this, Skullius decided to kill time by scouting the area to ensure that there would be no surprises. He had picked and searched around this spot earlier but... one couldn't be too sure.

After a relatively short wait in the cold, Skullius' human form vanished only to be replaced by the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, draped in his [Defiant Raiment of Perversion], ancient dark tattered robes made of Null Life Essence that swam grandly in the air.

The dark storm clouds constantly appeared around the Penetrator, striking bolts of the most condensed form of Levin about, causing a genuine brilliance so pristine that it almost brightened this dark night to the league of day, the same flash of excessive light present in the four sockets of the Penetrator that were difficult to gaze at even for Yuyui.

The sharp-ended protrusions that stemmed from his collar bone and all around to his back, rising up like a protective cage for his head made the Penetrator immensely terrifying, as did the sole white cloud above his head, but there was no one to appreciate it except the lime haired girl.

"Let's get this over with," Skullius said as he picked up the necklace.

With [Epiphany] active, bolstering his [Greater Mana Crafter]'s capacity to pick up on the presence of other energies besides mana, its weakness, Skullius felt the vibrant energy stored in the gem on this necklace, the Grace of the Sky Lady's Hand.

It was truly massive.

'I guess something like this is not supposed to be bound to anyone if its Purity property,' Skullius thought. A Mythical grade treasure like this couldn't belong to one person if it served in an organisation like the Purity.

Without wasting anymore time, Skullius wore the necklace.

The moment he did, a vast well of power bore down on him like a raging, turbulent hurricane that wanted to sweep him away!

A golden light shone from the object and engulfed Skullius within, as if sensing that it was he who needed to be bathed by it and cleansed!

Skullius made a conscious effort to control the clouds that naturally spawned around him and had them spill the Levin they held out in all directions, anchoring him to the ground in case he really was swept away by this huge surge of power that made the snow fly up as if affected by storm!

"Here we go!" Skullius called as his bright socket flames flared manically.

Yuyui leapt away to safety and watched the spectacle with wide eyes from afar.

This was it.

She was praying inside for what she had done to find meaning. So far, it seemed like it was worth it but... the final test was yet to begin!

Before the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, a series of guidance field messages appeared.

[An absurd amount of Divine energy has been detected]

[The graces of a Deity in the form of cleansing power embrace your form]

[The fierce power around you that transcends Divinity has detected a number of curses and impending plagues within you]

[Doom Factor 1 – can be purged]

[Doom Factor 2 – cannot be purged]

[UNCoddled – can be purged]

[<Unidentified> - can be purged]

[Compromised luck – can be purged]

[Processing...]

[The Divine energy around is only capable of removing three of the curses and plagues within you]

[The choice is yours]

Skullius was stunned.

Three?! Three of his curses could be removed?!

For real?

"Hahahahahahahahahahaha!" a burst of laughter leaked from the widest gap on his skull as this... this was truly astounding!

"This is too good to be true!" he called.

Last time he was in a scenario like this, he only had one chance to get rid of the curses that he had!

But now, he could get rid of the biggest problems he had!



The Grace of Sky Lady's Hand seemingly had more energy and was made with more quality than the item Tulnas had used!

'Doom Factor 2 still cannot be purged. I wish that wasn't the case but I expected that much. It's probably because nomatter how much energy is used, the artefact can't breach another world to retrieve my soul. What were they called again, Rules? As Serenity put it?' Skullius thought with a sigh of mana from his mouth.

It was a sad thing but Skullius got his mind back to thinking about what mattered.

There were two new curses to appear. Rather than new, perhaps it was safe to say that the guidance field or the item he was currently using could detect them as such.

The one termed <Unidentified> was the one Skullius wanted to get rid off immediately!

A quick check into its additional information had allowed him to not mistake it for the one termed as Compromised luck as this was simply his already existing atrocious luck.

As he had surmised, even though it was yet to affect him, the FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT LUCK would still register as latching onto him!

Success!

"Let's get rid of it!" Skullius said as he immediately selected it as the first to be purged.

[You can chosen <Unidentified> as your first target to be purged]

[An appropriate amount of Divine energy has been consumed to purge <Unidentified>]

[Processing...]

Skullius would have wanted to hold his breath if he could as he was hoping this would work.

A part of him was pessimistic as usual but with good reason.

The image of the Remnant Child of Polarity kept popping up in his mind, along with the description of its properties ever since he planned out how to get rid the FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT LUCK.

The way it was described was menacing.

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[Chubby Remnant Child of Polarity]

<Unique>

A living consumable that grants EXTREME, STUPENDOUSLY DESIRABLE LUCK in one instance, in exchange for another instance of FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT LUCK.

-Caution-

Remnant Child must be chewed and consumed whole for maximum effect.

-Caution-

Remnant Child must be consumed within an hour upon summoning, otherwise it will perish and disappear. The effect after consumption also exists within the same hour.

-Caution-

The instance of FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT LUCK will claim the user at an opportune time.

~~~

Right there.

That last bit of caution.

That was what had made Skullius a bit pessimistic.

What exactly did '...at an opportune time' mean?

This feeling of dread kept punching at Skullius when instead of a confirmation, a time period for completion or something like that didn't appear after he had selected <Unidentified> to be purged. He still only saw...

[Processing...]

A second passed.

A minute passed.

The Penetrator's sockets burned fiercely.

"Come on!" he said angrily!

Do it already!

Purge it before this opportune time arrives!

Five minutes passed.

Seven minutes.

The image of the Remnant Child kept flashing in Skullius' eyes. That ugly face that he had chewed up without remorse against Yuyui's will...

When Skullius started to dig deep into his memory, he remembered Serenity's words about this as well.

'...I'm surprised you would choose to risk gaining much more in the way of horrible luck in exchange for a single instance of good luck though,' she had said.

Was there a deeper meaning in those words?

When Skullius was about to explore more of this thought, hoping to find something to sooth his pessimism...

[An unexpected scenario intrudes...]

"You're kidding me!" Skullius shouted with his socket flames flaring bright.

What the hell was that supposed to mean?

Wait!

The Penetrator pulled up his status. Maybe...just maybe...

Like that time when he was so glad that he had gotten STUPENDOUSLY DESIRABLE LUCK after checking the SILENT change in his status...

"Get the flesh out of here!" Skullius shouted while gazing heatedly at his luck stat!

~~~

[Luck : FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT]

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No way!

Skullius had been waiting for the Divine energy to be used to purge this thing when... when...

His luck had changed already before the Divine energy could purge it?!

When had this happened?!

Right before?!

Right!

Of course.

Skullius instantly began to understand.

He was under the wrong impression.

"This was... the opportune time...? Right before I purged it?" he thought in realisation.

So this meant that, nomatter what he tried to get rid of the coming of the FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT luck, it would always spawn right before it was destroyed!

In short, the FIENDISHLY ABBHORRENT LUCK couldn't be stopped from hitting its mark?!

Skullius shook his head.

This wasn't the time to feel down about this!

Fine! It had happened!

What was this unexpected scenario, then?

What was his bad luck moment going to be?!

[An unexpected scenario intrudes...]

[The being known as Arch-Lich Somanda has transcended into DIVINITY]

[The being once known as Arch-Lich Somanda has become Transcendent of Undeath, High Lich Somanda]

[A reaction is detected...]

[UNCoddled evolves...]

[Compromised luck evolves...]

[Doom Factor 1 evolves...]

[Doom Factor 2 evolves...]

[The remnants of nourishment to your soul by a Mythical grade treasure are erased...]

Chapter 557: Standoff and Protection!

Silrat entered the Guilds Association building with a skip in his step. There were many things he wanted to look into following his investigation of the what the plan with the Premium Age Royale was.

He was hoping he could take advantage of the Association's information sources once again as they were rather accurate and efficient, at the exclusive level at least.

As he walked through the foyer, he suddenly stopped.

Something within him started to burn.

"Hmm," at first he murmured.

"Ngghhh!" then he grunted.

Something hidden deep within him was reacting viciously to an external influence he couldn't understand!

"What's going... on?!" Silrat cried.

In the next instant, he madly screamed without care as the agonising pain of his soul getting ruptured was too much to bear, a piece of it bursting out of his body violently and flying off into the distance!

\*\*\*

"Boss, what we doing? You haven't told us anything in detail since that day. For us to suddenly be returning to the Union..."

Kenno sighed in annoyance.

"We'll be meeting a new benefactor soon. Before that, we need to finish all our pending matters there. Loot and all. Will that suffice as an answer, Udo?" Kenno said while turning to the man who had just asked the very question he had grown to loathe.

The man, Udo, reluctantly nodded but was still largely unconvinced.

He opened his mouth to speak again when...

"Argh... what the bloody hell?!" Kenno grunted with his eyes bulging from the sudden burst of pain just now.

Before he knew it, he had collapsed from his horse and he was crying out loud in a broken voice with excruciating pain written across his face!

Then deep within him... he felt something being sliced up and expelled from his body!

\*\*\*

In a far away land, a certain giant was kneeling with his large palms plastered together in prayer before a beautiful shrine when...

"Hmmm?" he frowned.

He noticed danger from within.

A terrible influence flooded from the outside.

It spilled sublimely somewhere delicate.

'The bond for my Tie of Exchange?' he thought while standing up, his mind quickly guessing what was happening.

To this, he couldn't quite give his signature smile.

As a burst of pain threatened to drag him to his knees once more, Sause merely grunted before narrowing his eyes, his figure vanishing to a convenient spot within the lands for consultation.

\*\*\*

Yuyui could tell something was wrong.

His master was angry, muttering negatives left and right.

Did it fail?

Was it for nothing after all?!

This question had no answer for now.



What responded was something else.

A sudden crushing burst of pain registered within her soul, making her scream bitterly as she felt something get pulled out of her and flung over in Skullius' direction!

The Penetrator had turned his attention to Yuyui when a piece of her soul was dragged into his, but it didn't merge with him.

"Huh?!" Skullius exclaimed in more layers of confusion.

What was this?

To make things worse, two more pieces of soul came rushing from who knew where only to disappear within him!

"What?! Whose souls are these?!" Skullius asked himself.

There was no answer.

The terrifying set of notifications had set him to prepare his trump card, his last resort as what he had joked about back then was actually coming true!

This was truly perilous!

An unrealistic dose of bad luck had somehow caused Somanda to gain DIVINITY at this moment, denying him the chance to purge all the curses he intended.

Wasn't this bending reality?

Was the abhorrent luck borne from convenience?

In that cause, this was too FLESHING convenient!

All the curses were being amped up, no doubt to enable them to resist purging, a gift from the dead Remnant Child of Polarity!

It had to be!

Unfortunately, Skullius did not have the time to fully comprehend all this and the implications surrounding it all as his consciousness suddenly waned, his surroundings vanishing from his sight.

A cold darkness washed over them, persisting for a time before a simple night sky replaced it.

Sky was standing within it. His body was extremely light, defying worldly laws. However, he wasn't truly a body right now.

He was a soul.

A dull, facially undefined and short soul that stood, a mildly luminous light emanating from it.

Had his soul left his body?

"This is our third time meeting and I swear, every single time, you do not fail to impress, Skullius."

...!

Skullius turned behind him to find the hazy figure of a man. A strangely familiar man.

'Shit.'

The man Skullius was looking at had dry, dark green skin that looked cracked in some places. Large red eyes that released trails of red dust that defiled the night's black showed on his face with a mouth full of brown teeth revealed on it as well.

No hair could be found on this man's head and his body was covered by shroud of darkness. It was like a dark veil with bursts of grey brimming within it, disallowing Skullius from truly seeing what the man's body looked like.

Skullius showed no fear in his eyes.

He had expected the worst when the first notification following the change of the situation showed.

"How long will you keep pursuing me, Somanda?" Skullius said. "Do you really not have better things to do?"

"Oh. Even your disposition has changed," the man with green skin mused with a smile, ignoring Skullius' taunt. "Will you not first congratulate me for joining the ranks of Divine Liches under the Eminence of Undeath?" Somanda said with a gleam in his eye.

Skullius remained silent.

Who was this Eminence of Undeath?

This was the second time Somanda had mentioned him.

The patch on Skullius' soul pulsed, attaining a brighter glow at his soul.

"I see," Somanda said, realising he would get no answer to his question.

This conversation wasn't moving along.

"What did you do just now?" Skullius posed a genuine question. "What were those souls?"

"Hmmm? Ah, you mean those?" Somanda said, pointing above Skullius' head.

The short soul looked up and saw...

...!

Three souls were swirling above him silently, their forms strip-like with bright shades of white that were barely humanoid, bordering on serpentine instead.

Now that Skullius could see them, he noticed that they had faces!

Familiar faces!

"Silrat! Kenno! Yuyui!" he exclaimed.

"Hoo. You know them by name? You have cultivated relationships despite having my curse? Hahahaha, amusing. Sadly..." Somanda cocked his finger and the souls swirling above Skullius floated towards the Lich!

...!

"No!" Skullius dashed and gripped the souls, pulling them so that they didn't reach Somanda.

The High Lich grinned.

"What are you doing?!" Skullius called in fury while pulling as hard as he could. This wasn't good!

How could these three lose their souls?!

What was Somanda doing and how was he doing it?!

"Is that a serious question? I'm turning them into my undead of course."

...!

"What?!" Skullius was astounded.

Turn them into undead?!

"Don't be so surprised. Even as I have Transcended the realm of normalcy, I still cannot intrude in a world of Deities casually.

You broke my only point of contact with my sworn spawn and now using you, my conduit bound with a portion of my powers and your powerful connections to decent individuals..." Somanda said nonchalantly but with a forceful pull from his finger, the portions of the souls of Kenno, Yuyui and Silrat landed in his hands.

They swirled slowly, their small faces looking to be filled with despair above Somanda's palm.

Skullius' face hardened.

"If you have already achieved DIVINITY, then what do you still need me for?" he asked as stealthily, he prepared.

"Who would deny the prospect of growing stronger, my dear Skullius? I have hundreds of High Liches to compete with. Divine Undead. I am yet to be something special," Somanda said as he reached for Skullius with his bony hand. "Besides, you are my possession, something I won from a dying world fairly. Now that I have Transcended, nothing stops me from claiming your soul.

Even Rules are more lenient towards me and my belongings. I will return for this world, but you..."

Skullius felt his soul draw near towards Somanda and he knew...

He was doomed.

Fortunately, he had prepared a failsafe.

The patch of soul clearly visible on him, closing up a ghastly wound on this form beamed with energy that pulsed at regular intervals.

This was a very dangerous method but at the very least, Skullius would live to fight again. He would remain in this world and reclaim everything that was his... eventually!

Skullius grinned.

This persistent son of a fossil...!

'You're not getting me today,' he thought as...

"That's enough. Both of you."

...!!!

Both Skullius and Somanda were shocked to hear the voice that sounded from between them.

A flicker of blue flame emerged after, lightening up the surroundings splendidly.

It crisply torched the two only to flicker and flicker again.

The flame forged a humanoid appearance. A feminine one.

With its flickering nature, it might have lost most of its frightening value in a different scenario but right now...

"Serenity."

Both Skullius and Somanda said at the exact same time.

A fiery hand grasped Somanda's thin, green hand and pushed it away before swiftly snatching the three pieces of soul in the High Lich's other hand!

...!

Somanda's face hardened and his red eyes gleamed bright.

As Serenity's figure paused, souls in hand and protectively standing before Skullius, the short soul couldn't help but put a halt to his last ditch attempt at escape.

Serenity seemed to notice as she turned to Skullius with her plain flame ridden face.

"You're bolder than I thought," she said before returning her gaze to Somanda.

"Shall I tell the Eminence of Undeath that the youngest of his kin has finally shown herself?" Somanda taunted.

"Do as you like. Unlike Void, I play smart," Serenity responded with a proud confidence.

Chapter 558: Curious Words

Somanda cackled at Serenity's response.

"Smart, eh? The Eminence of Undeath has been hunting for that treasure of yours with scorching sockets, mobilising many for the search. Yet you are here. How?" he said with his keen sight on the flickering flame body of Serenity.

The mysterious blue entity scoffed.

"Same way you are here. We're both latched onto Skullius, though our specific circumstances are quite polar," she said.

Indeed.

Somanda's tie with Skullius originated from his ownership of part of his soul. Therefore, as Skullius' free soul carried plagues that had evolved with Somanda's recent rise in strength, the Lich had found adequate leeway to manifest himself using Skullius as an anchor.

Serenity on the other hand was tied to Skullius through the powers she had given him that were mostly latched onto this part of his soul as well.

With Skullius' recent growth into the second Tier, added upon by the STUPENDOUSLY DESIRABLE LUCK that gave Skullius special racial evolution options that had greater ties to Null Life, she was afforded a chance to manifest like this also, though limitedly.

The two beings owned portions of Skullius or at the very least 'sponsored' him.

"Latched? Hilarious! You're the weakest among your kin! Even with a dreadfully powerful treasure with eons of unnaturally cultivated history, you still have only ONE bearer and you feed off of his existence like a parasite! Say it as it is," Somanda guffawed while tilting his head to face Skullius who was wondering what the hell these guys were talking about.

Serenity, a parasite?

What was this conversation about?!

He wanted a clear picture dammit!

Serenity didn't respond to Somanda's provocation.

Instead, she released the souls that she had swiped from Somanda. As soon as they were free, the three rushed off in three different directions, returning to their owners as if drawn by desperate forces!

Skullius was relieved. At least that didn't end too badly.

Somanda opposite him grinned at this.

"I may just one day claim those, you know? They already have my stench," he said.

"Perhaps. This ONE bearer of mine does not see it that way," Serenity said to which Skullius hardened his vaguely sculpted face and nodded.

Sure. He wouldn't let Somanda have Yuyui, Silrat or even Kenno. For charity, love or whatever. He wouldn't let the bastard do as he pleased.

"Why the fixation on this world, Somanda? You have lingering ties and an awfully nauseating signature here that traces your presence through dredges of deep history and time. Find other worlds. There are too many to count, are there not?

Worlds.



Indeed there were many.

Yet some were better than others.

The concept of other worlds was largely unexplored by common folk, but Skullius understood quite a bit of it.

Somanda's figure soared high.

As it turned out, these three were in the high skies of Aigas on this night, the miniature scenes of housing, fields, snow, seas and all looking so insignificant from this height.

"Divinity, Direction and Ambition. These are the things anyone who desires growth seeks. For one with a dead heart such as I, the lusts of the living do not entertain. I can only revel in malice, mystery and persistence," Somanda said with his longing red eyes looking greedily over Aigas.

A mystery sort of lust nested in the glow of his sockets.

"Besides, how could I simply let go of a world whose two governing Deities have not be seen in ages?"

...!

'Ah.... what did he just say?' Skullius thought in absolute shock.

Haven't been seen in ages?

Two Deities?

Was Somanda saying two Deities were out of the picture right now?!

Skullius was already lost to the mechanics of being a Deity, but now, with the implication that one could make up a world with their own body but have the ability to 'not be there' as well...

The short soul held his head.

If this was true...

"The Deities aren't your only problem. Besides Skullius, Void has his bearers here, you know? Let's see how easily you think this will go," Serenity said as she withdrew to stand beside Skullius.

Somanda turned to the short soul with an amused glint.

"How proud you are of him," he said.

The High Lich leisurely ran his withered finger across the dark space, tearing it apart casually to reveal a large, familiar space.

...!

Skullius grunted and was jolted into extreme shock.

A familiar block of ice with a luminous white soul trapped within it appeared grandly, the background showing innumerable structures similar to it!

'Not this again!' Skullius frowned.

Somanda gave a toothy grin.

Skullius' soul was drawn to this view involuntarily but Serenity extended her hand, stopping his movement. She noticed that just now, Skullius was about to enact his prepared 'solution' once again but discouraged it with a shake of her head.

That said, she didn't dismiss Somanda's doings.

After all, this had to do with Skullius' soul. At the very least, if he wanted to see...

"Aren't you the tiniest bit curious? Or perhaps longing?" Somanda said as he swiped his hand across this rift, causing a change on the other side where the faceless soul of a girl could be seen.

This undetailed face of this soul came to life, dark flowing hair matted at the fringes with a light brown appearing, its stringy textures lightly kissing her ivory skin. Her eyes remained closed but her high nose and ideal lips still depicted a rather sorrowful expression on their own.

This was the extent of the change as the rest remained the same – a luminous white outline.

Skullius felt his soul throb painfully.

This face was vaguely familiar from his own original memory but extraordinarily important to him. He had seen it when Ferex had created a picture taken from his travel into his soul but seeing it now....

The girl known as Camila.

Skullius clenched his fist as even though he was currently a mere soul, a hard breath escaped from his face.

This picture would never escape his memory but...

"That's enough," Skullius said. He had realised that Serenity wouldn't get in the way of him finding some closure, something she had stated she couldn't flat out give to him because of Rules, but he was done playing Somanda's little game.

Serenity moved.

"Leave," she said to Somanda who shook his head and closed the rift.

His body started to burn with a red flame as he grinned, his eyes never leaving Skullius.

"With our continuous encounters, I've become quite convinced that you and my little servant in this world are fated to have a wild clash. I wonder. Who will emerge victorious?" Somanda said before vanishing.

Skullius finally calmed down.

Serenity's flickering figure seemed to also be put at ease.

"Perhaps that good luck you chose to take worked for the better in the end. Strangely, you seem to have had a solution for the worst case scenario," she said while turning to Skullius.

Though her flame body couldn't be said to have a back or front, she seemed to enjoy turning this way and that.

"Kind of," Skullius said as he looked at the patch on his soul.

Sila's soul, as he had foretold, was only here to act as a last resort move against such a problem.

One that he was glad he didn't have to use.

Before thinking about anything else, Skullius hurriedly asked.

"Since Somanda is latched onto me, won't he just return again? With how you look, I don't think you can last against him," Skullius said with concern. "No offense."

"You're right. However, even if he has transcended, you are still in a world protected by Deities and their Rules. Right now, that old idiot can only manifest around you because the curses he gave you have grown stronger, increasing his connection to you."

"You still have that massive well of Divine energy. Perhaps it's no longer as potent as it was supposed to be because of... recent developments, but you can still sizably reduce your connection with Somanda by a great deal. Destroy some of those curses and you will be fine," Serenity said before grabbing Skullius' shoulder.

The two descended down at a speed faster than that of light and before he knew it, Skullius was standing next to his body that was standing vacantly in the snow.

He looked at it and then at Serenity, likening the four blue socket flames to Serenity's own form.

Hmm. Interesting.

Skullius had a lot of questions but he was sure he wouldn't get answers, which was Serenity's whole shtick.

He knew what she would say.

Reach Tier 4 first.

But...

"What was this about two Deities not being in Aigas? Surely since Somanda has already spoiled it you can tell me in detail, right?" Skullius said, eager to hear an answer.

Serenity sensed his desperation and relented.

"Right. Somanda said it first so..." she said. "It's true. Only one of the three governing Deities of Aigas is here right now. The other two are... not present."

"What? Why? What happened?"

Serenity sighed.

"I can't tell you that but it's not a recent thing. There hasn't been the trio of Deities in Aigas since the Ashing of Time. Don't worry though, there are mortal elects charged with carrying out roles necessary to keep this world in order. Deity stand-ins, if you will. I'm sure you'll meet them one day."

Skullius was left gaping by this piece of information.

What the hell?!

Stand-ins?

Were they human or something?

He moved his vague lips again but Serenity pushed him into his body quickly before leaving a last message.

"Let's stick to our chats during evolutions, alright?"

With that, the Null entity vanished.

Chapter 559: Free!

Skullius sockets flared wildly as his soul returned into his body.

He looked around and found no one.

He clacked his teeth.

'Damn! She escaped with the answers again,' he thought, displeased.

That was some juicy stuff.

The criticisms surrounding the Purity weren't unwarranted after all.

There was some funny business with the Deities after all!

'One Deity, huh?' Skullius thought. This did make him nervous.

Stand-ins or not, this wasn't good news right?

That last statement from Somanda also got Skullius jittery.

"His little servant on Aigas? The only person I can think of is..."

The Penetrator recalled to when he had encountered a man with the strongest power of undeath he had ever felt. For a human that was.

That masked man he met in the cavern that time ago.

Didn't he die though?

Who knew?

Skullius then turned to the distance and rushed towards it, kneeling over Yuyui's body.

She wasn't screaming in pain anymore and was comfortably lying down on the snow in a state of unconsciousness. Hopefully this was the same for Silrat and Kenno.

"Thank goodness Serenity showed up when she did," Skullius said before caressing Yuyui's green hair with a soft glint.

His socket flames flickered a bit as he became self conscious, pulled back his bony hand and hurried to stand up, awkwardly looking left and right.

"Right. I need to get rid of the curses. I wonder how the Grace of the Sky Lady's Hand will handle my collection of plagues now," Skullius said while consulting with the guidance field to hear the verdict.

With the evolution of the curses, there was bound to be more costs involved with purging each of them now.

[Processing...]

[The Divine energy around you is only capable of removing one curse or plague within you with absolute certainty. The remaining energy may not completely purge any of the other curses completely]

"Hmmm. Is that so?" Skullius said while scratching his chin. "That's more generous than I thought."

There really was a massive amount of energy in this necklace.

First, Skullius decided to check what the evolved versions of all his curses and plagues could do now.

The Doom Factors didn't change much.

Doom Factor 1 which wasn't a threat for him before, now demanded 50,000 units of mana every two days to stay away, quite an improvement on the 3000.

This would have been a problem for him before his adventure to the Temple of Unlusted Tears but now, since these 50,000 units were demanded in the form of basic mana, Doom Factor 1 still wasn't a problem for him.

Doom Factor 2 had a rather concerning change, one that wasn't quite clear in wording. It didn't affect the time he had left but there was a vague tag.

<Progressive Soul Confusion>

At the end of the stated time for Doom Factor 2, if Skullius hadn't reclaimed his soul, he was supposed to go mad. This was added on top of it. Therefore, as unclear as it was, without any option for elaboration, Skullius decided to keenly keep his awareness up.

The ones with the most problematic upgrades for him were his atrocious luck and UNCoddled.

His atrocious luck or Compromised luck, as the guidance field put it, was now...

~~~



Luck : Atrociously Horrendous?

~~~

This was its upgrade, which didn't sit right with Skullius.

What was worse than atrocious luck? Atrociously Horrendous luck!

'Even then there's still that question mark. Does it mean this... power dating back to my past life, as Serenity said, is still going to be interfering?' Skullius thought.

Another mystery.

UNCoddled was the worst of all.

Apparently, it decided that a name change would be cool too.

~~~

[Lord of Lonesome Sorrows]

You are a sentimental wanderer condemned to walk within empty lands. Your mere presence incites death to the weakest and invites the melting of the soul to the strong. Enemies and allies alike detest your shadow and flee your side, the souls of those you kill by your lonesome march becoming a fuel for the one pulling your strings.

~~~

Perhaps because this was the only actual curse Skullius had, it had been granted the most immense powers after evolution. Or perhaps it was because it didn't have any effect that warranted Serenity's direct intervention like Doom Factor 2.

"This is too much. I can't survive with that hanging around me," Skullius said. UNCoddled was a nightmare on its own. This upgraded version...

It had to go.

Thankfully, the necklace had enough juice for it.

"Purge Lord of Lonesome Sorrows," Skullius said with confidence.

[You have selected 'Lord of Lonesome Sorrows' as the target to be purged]

[Processing...]

Finally, this menacing curse was done for.

With this, he wouldn't have to worry about having people melt when he interacted with them.

There was no longer a need to keep Tie of Exchanges afloat just to keep friends alive. Skullius knew Yuyui would be happy about it.

The dangers of erecting Tie of Exchanges were noted with this one event as now, Skullius could tell other beings could use his connection to others for their own benefit.

'I honestly didn't see that coming. Then again, Sause managed to protect himself somehow,' Skullius thought.

Speaking of the giant...

"That one notification that showed..." Skullius scrolled through his guidance field and found the notification he was looking for.

[The remnants of nourishment to your soul by a Mythical grade are erased...]

This notification had showed after the string of the ones representing evolutions of his curses and plagues.

'This confused me at first but.. Tsk. Of course my previous rank of guidance field couldn't register it before. This was probably the lingering effects of that tool Sause used when I was evolving, when he merged the WILLS of Fulgardt with my soul. I wonder what effects it had on me. Did it affect my powers? My luck?' Skullius thought.

He would know soon enough since the effects were gone.

As he was thinking of these things...

[The curse 'Lord of Lonesome Sorrows' has been purged]

"..."

Skullius looked at this notification without shifting his gaze.

It was done.

Within the depths of his soul, he felt a relieving sense of freedom as a staggering amount of power from the necklace shrieked around him, burning away an intangible evil.

"Ah...." Skullius revelled in the feeling.

The power that transcended DIVINITY.

The power of a Deity.

It was blissful.

The Penetrator wished he could smile just about now.

"Hehehehe!" he laughed as he looked at the notification of a huge victory once more.

Be gone you pain in the flesh!

But Skullius wasn't done.

"For the next target, even if it won't get rid of it, this should work right? I choose Compromised luck," he said.

Skullius couldn't imagine how terrible instances of atrociously horrendous luck could be like. Thankfully, an unfortunate circumstance hadn't intervened to cut off his moment of triumph against UNCoddled as it was.

[Warning! There is insufficient energy left within 'Grace of the Sky Lady's Hand' to fully purge 'Compromised Luck']

"I get it," Skullius said. "Do it."

[Processing...]

A short, expectant wait later...

[The plague 'Compromised luck' has been partially purged. Its effects have been subdued]

"I thought as much," Skullius said while checking his status.

~~~

[Luck : Atrocious?]

~~~

"Hahahahaha!" Skullius laughed hard. "Welcome back my bro."

It was funny. He was back to the usual portions of bad luck but only for a little while.

Soon, when he began his operations, he would collect enough artefacts like the necklace to purge all of his curses and plagues. That wasn't a distant goal.

Skullius' sockets flared excitedly.

One victory down.

Now it was time for another.

The biggest one.

The main event.

The time seemed perfect.

15 days had passed since the last time he used [Bringer of All] and after a quick check with the skill, he found that he was hours late to celebrate it coming off cooldown!

It was that time again!

Thankfully, Skullius had grabbed the thing he needed – his Apostle – before he and Yuyui had left the mansion. To successfully reset the cooldown of [Depths of the Core], the skill that allowed him to improve the properties of his mana core, he needed the variation of power, Ogwulf the Limitless, which would allow him to get the effects of Ferex's flaw. The RESET.

Naturally, if he was to do this, Skullius needed something to fight in order to trigger the RESET, otherwise after the five minutes were over, he would simply split back into himself and Ferex.

A waste of the skill after half a month of waiting.

A potential problem was that Ferex could be RESET. All his new skills, and personality traits could be wiped out if Skullius messed up.

The Penetrator wouldn't allow that to happen. If he could dictate the RESET, like he did before as Ferex's master, despite the risk of bringing the BoneTender into existence, they would be home free.

Hopefully his atrocious luck didn't have something to say about it.

Skullius carried Yuyui and began the march to look for a powerful beast or beasts to battle.

It wasn't easy.

There wasn't a Cluster or anything in sight. He had scouted the area before, so he should know.

Bandits would fit the criterion for what he needed but...

Shuff! Shuff! Shuff!

Skullius heard noise in the distance after travelling away from where he had been nesting.

It wasn't bandits unfortunately but it was the next best thing.

Three carriages rushed up the pathway to a distant settlement, several Knights on horseback escorting them.

With Skullius' [Epiphany] enhanced [Greater Mana Crafter], the Penetrator managed to gauge how strong these Knights were. One of them was a Master Stage expert while the others were all at the peak of Advancement Stage!

"Good! That's good!" Skullius said with a callous excitement.

This would do.

He expelled Ferex from his storage ring and paid the full price for [Bringer of All].

5000 Null Life Essence points and 5000 units of mana!

What freedom!

What could be better than a bloodbath shortly after ridding yourself of a troublesome curse?!

#### Chapter 560: A Different Variant

The clip clop of horse hooves was masked by the snow that stained the pathway, the only thing being heard being the movement of the large carriages, the clanging of armour and the low chatter among the escort Knights.

"You reckon we'll be rewarded for this unnecessarily long trip?"

"Not a chance. Even if we've been borrowed, the only thing we stand to gain is capital punishment if something bad happens that lustful blob and his company."

"Seriously? I'd rather be a Contract Knight if this continues. Or better yet, a Stray Knight."

The two Knights guarding the front most carriage said in hushed tones, the horses under them snorting as if in agreement.

From the carriage behind, a barely discernible moan was heard then the entire thing shook with feminine giggles coming out of it.

One of the two Knights rolled his eyes at this.

"Put me out of my misery. How am I supposed to keep my wood down if I'm hearing all the action from here?"

"Pipe down, will you? I for one am interested," the other Knight said with a smirk while cupping his hand and pulling it to his ear. "Let's enjoy it while it lasts. And mind your words, will you? You might jus—"

The Knight suddenly felt a blistering heat blast against his face, the sizzling of flesh and the fuming of it with thick smoke registering in his senses all at once before he could even express shock!

His comrade as well as his horse were turned into black char within a second!

The Knight quickly drew his sword and yelled, "Stop!"

This alerted the other Knights and coachman who stopped the vehicles in panic.

The Knight who had called for the emergency stop looked this way and that, trying to identify the enemy but he couldn't find him.

He disembarked from his horse and took steady steps in front of him, mana fiercely coating his body as he did.

"What happened? Explain yourself or you'll never hear the end of it!" another Knight on horseback, a man with two of the most beautiful satin grey eyes one could ever see hurried to his mate to inquire what happened with a strict, commanding tone.

Though this wasn't the time to focus on such things, the Knight wielding his sword in caution was annoyed by the tone used against him.

Explain yourself?

Only the captain had the right to speak to him with an authority like that. Who did this guy think he was?

"Desmont is dead, can't you see?" the Knight said pointing at his burnt comrade with a scowl.

Strangely, the Knight with sparkling grey eyes didn't turn to check. He merely nodded.

'What's wrong with this guy?'

Soon the other Knights came around with one who wore an extraneously designed armour coming forward and analysing the burnt corpse.

He was the captain.



"Hmmm," he hummed. Instead of asking questions he checked the ground for any strange traces of movement while sensing the air for unique mana signatures.

Nothing.

There was nothing.

"Spread out in groups of two," he said simply, to which the 22 Knights nodded, following his command.

The Knight who had been with the casualty jumped on his horse, the one with grey eyes joining him on a search to the left.

From the first carriage, the door was blasted open, a rather heavily built, half naked man wobbling out with sweat over his body.

Behind him, a nervous lady with a surprisingly delicate physique peeked, curious as to what was with the hold up.

"Captain! Why have we stopped?!" the fat man asked with a deep frown.

"Get back in your carriage!" the captain said, a burst of Aura shuttling out of him with a shocking intensity.

The large man gulped and slowly slipped back into his sheltered locomotive, his ego having been crushed under true might.

The captain was in no mood to entertain. He did the same with the others peeking from other carriages.

Somehow, he could feel it.

Something was wrong.

He had felt it from a minute or so ago.

The air had just suddenly... changed.

'We may need to setup camp. Moving about in a territory likely to be riddled with bandits would be...' the Knight began with his thoughts but...

He turned his head to the right and quickly drew his sword.

The six pairs of Knights and their horses who had gone to search in this direction had turned, their eyes strangely squinted and all looking straight at him.

The captain turned to his left.

Four pairs of Knights could be seen, one of them seemingly missing.

Apart from the Knight who had died, there were supposed to be 22 men!

Where was the other?

WHOOOSH!

Suddenly, all 21 Knights, all gazing at their captain with blank gazes activated their Full Body Auras and rushed at him with their steeds!

...!

The captain was shocked.

What was this all of a sudden?

Were these men possessed or what?!

Before a few seconds could pass, one of the Knights had already lunged at the captain, his sword clashing with his!

Then another and another!

"Bert! Ridge! What's wrong with you lot?!" the captain growled.

He couldn't bring himself to just cleave away at his men without trying to help but....

Even he, as a Master Stage expert would have trouble against 21 Advancement Stage Knights if he didn't take them seriously!

They didn't hold back at all and they showed no signs of struggling against whatever was plaguing them, which was terrifying!

Was this absolute?!

What more, he noticed that some of his men looked... dead!

Wait! Not some! All!

"Haaaa!" the captain roared as his Perfect Aura charged out of his body. He couldn't neglect his mission. His own life was in danger too!

With expert precision and skill, the captain clashed with and incapacitated ten of the Knights within a mere six seconds!

That hefty amount of time was divided between him fighting and also trying to figure out if there was something about his men that could lead him to a solution or at least to the cause of this.

While applying maximum effort in his inquisitive skill, the captain found something!

Barely visible silver strings could be spotted trailing from the back of his men's necks and leading away to a singular point!

The captain, followed the strings and was shocked to find them leading to a short distance on the pathway they had been following.

There, one of his Knights, presumably the one who was missing was riding his horse comfortably.

It was the Knight with the beautiful grey eyes!

His existence seemed fleeting, as if he wasn't there at all, making the captain suspicious of what exactly he was dealing with.

'Nomatter! If he's the source of this...' the captain said before he lunged at the Knight at full second, crossing the distance in half a breath. He was about to knock out this Knight with the bottom of his hilt when three of the men he had just zipped past just now, shot from the side, eclipsing him in speed and blocking his charge!

'What?! These men are only at the Advancement Stage! How are they faster than me suddenly?' the captain said as his figure was enveloped by the full earth shattering force of his Perfect Aura.

Was he going to have to kill after all?

The man narrowed his eyes and clenched his sword hilt tighter than before.

"Funny how the soul works, isn't it?"

A voice called from behind the Knights that were standing defensively around the one with the grey eyes. The one who seemed to be source of it.

This voice sounded like an amalgamation of three different voices mashed into one, its tone creating a mesmerising ring that caused something deep within the captain to react... positively.

...!

This Knight, as he rode his horse, smiled.

BAM!

A greatsword suddenly spawned from his hand and fell to the ground, sinking its tip into it. Bits of flame roared from it before vanishing, announcing to the captain that this... was the culprit behind the first charred victim.

"Who are you?" he asked with caution but his enemy didn't seem to have any intention of answering as he wanted.

"This power is fascinating. Instead of mana manipulation, I used the new skill my Apostle derived, [Dark Soul Bending] this time as the basis for which to create our fusion. It's a lot more complex and very... entertaining," the Knight said and pointed at the Knights remaining still behind the captain.

"These fodder aren't a match for you. However, if I draw upon the essence of the souls of these other Knights and feed it all to these three... The memory within the souls... the sheer power within... It might just give you a challenge."

As these words were said, the strings leading up to the 19 Knights left behind were cut off and they all fell down like dolls. The detached strings then stuck themselves to the three Knights before this man.

This Bringer of All hiding within the soul of another.

The three Knights' air suddenly changed. One of them quivered for a bit before his body exploded with strength, a storm of mana rising up into the air!

Without warning, he then dashed towards the captain who didn't even understand what was happening until his sword had clashed with an overbearing force, his body being pushed back slowly, trenching across the dirt.

The other two did the same, their bodies rushing to join in as they displayed a level of skill and power that transcended what they normally showed.

A fierce clash ensued.

No longer was the captain holding back as he had to use his full strength just to hold his own against all three of these Knights.

Confusion struck him.

Fear struck him.

For his real enemy though, only amusement could be seen on his stolen face.

Naturally, his enemy was Skullius.

No.

It was Ogwulf the Limitless.

However, his form was safely nesting within the soul of this Knight, allowing him to control everything about him.

Ogwulf wiggled his fingers, ensuring that the Knights gave it their all despite their bodies breaking apart from being unable to handle the surge in power.

"Hmm. It's quite imperfect. I can't even control a soul unless I've touched the body it inhabits. It's fairly easy with enough planning but... Tricks I really wanted to see in action, I regrettably can't spare the time..." he said to himself.

Five minutes was his current limit.

Ogwulf, after appearing, had silently inhabited the soul of this grey eyed Knight and established a connection with all the Knights by simple touch, which wasn't hard. After that, the rest was easy.

While he couldn't control them with just a connection – the string – he could still cause harm to their souls, killing them instantly which allowed him full control of their bodies as their souls remained until he let them go.

As [Bringer of All]'s specialty, the skill upon which the variation was created, [Dark Soul Bending] would be expanded on, creating various skills that spawned from the one. One of these was the one Ogwulf was using now to temporarily boost the souls of the three Knights and henceforth their bodies.

Sadly, the soul was a very tough subject and Ogwulf couldn't quite crack everything yet, especially with the time crunch. That would be left for Ferex.

Speaking of time, a solid two minutes had passed with the four still clashing heavily, the damaged bodies of the Knights near rupturing gruesomely.

"I suppose this counts as a tough fight. I'm the one doing the fighting, after all," Ogwulf said before extending his hand forward.

It was time to end this.

[Serration Zone: Baneful Edge]

"Slash."

A horrid wave of turbulent Null Life Essence leaked from Ogwulf's hand, enveloping the Knights and the carriages in a heartbeat, suspending them in a sort of limbo for a moment, before horribly slicing them all apart!

All of them!

Cleanly sliced flesh chunks could be spotted everywhere along with pieces of the carriages that scattered on the noise!

The Knight's Perfect Aura couldn't guard against Null Life Essence and sadly for him, he hadn't even been able to divert his attention from the fight to see the attack coming.

Ogwulf lifted his hand and absorbed all the Null Life Essence.

Apparently, without releasing the soul, a body couldn't give Null Life Essence and it was only when Ogwulf was done with his mission that he could absorb it all, recovering the amount he had used just now.

With all that done, a fuming dark figure was expelled from the grey eyed Knight like a pillar of smoke, leaving the body to slump down lifelessly.

The image of Ogwulf, different from his mana variation appeared, its shape similar to Ferex's new form but with a transparent look bordering on ghost-like with undefined outlines.

In design, the only things that differed from Ferex's form were the sockets, the blinding four sockets on its face that arrogantly looked down on everything as it floated.

"There's still a good half a minute left before I revert back. Perhaps doing it in this state is much better since I have this this large pool of Null Life Essence," Ogwulf said with a chuckle.

What was the use in holding off on it?

In the [Bringer of All] form, not only did Ogwulf have access to Skullius' and Ferex's skills, he also had the combined pool of Null Life Essence from the two, which was 15,000.

Of course Skullius' pool was not full and neither was Ferex's but they still had a good 12,227 points.

Ogwulf touched his chest.

"Let's see what happens when [Unbound] is used on my mana."