

Undead 931

Chapter 931: Three Measly Wishes! (2)

Skullius felt immense power barrel through him like a flood. His vessel almost seemed too fragile to contain the might that exploded within angrily, beginning from where [Son of Luserus] was etched!

The Hybrid Luman grinned maniacally, though with sweat trickling down his brow!

The first thing to change about him was that fact that a second wing protruded from his back!

A second [Wing of the Just]!

But then... a third emerged.

Then a forth.

Each of the wings, like soft light drawn taut to become thin and long emitted a sacred sort of golden-white radiance while the glitter that normally appeared around Skullius' body when the wings became active, clung around the Hybrid Luman's skin stubbornly, making it seem like it was covered by an illusory rainbow.

Luminants, as Darwel had described, were free to control elements, and mana was drawn to them. It clung to their bodies when they willed it or even when they didn't.

This was especially impressive since, from the moment Skullius heard this, he had imagined that the Luminants probably didn't have abilities like the ones found in Aigas – [Mana Manipulation] and the sort.

What made them capable of such casual power, was merely their racial qualities.

This same quality was transferred to El Sif, the spawn of Sif and Luminants.

As far as Skullius had seen, what El Sif could do with mana naturally, was staggeringly impressive, but he could do it all with [Greatest Mana Crafter].

When his four wings, branded to his back emerged, however, his findings flabbergasted him.

Even without testing anything out, Skullius knew that what he could do with the awakened racial qualities of a Luminant alone, was far beyond what he could do with [Greatest Mana Crafter].

In addition to that, El Sif normally had a twofold increase to the base qualities of their abilities and physique when using the Wing of Embrace.

That is what Darwel had said when she first discovered Skullius' identity, marvelling at how his single wing increased his power fivefold instead.

Now... Skullius had four wings.

Four [Wings of the Just].

"Ah..." a soft, pleased sigh came from his mouth.

He could feel his body tightening, turning compact in order to fully handle all the augmentation to his stats, which he received fourfold – twenty times!

His body before the shrine emitted a crazy, bubbling presence, battered as it may have been.

The Hybrid Luman laughed.

How funny.

How hilarious.

Just this was ridiculous – his four wings, his unfathomable capacity to allure mana which he was yet to truly explore given where he was – however...

All of it, all this... was merely the passive effect of the newly awakened skill, [Son of Luserus].

Indeed.

~~~

[Son of Luserus (Special) | Lv.1]

A blessing wholly granted to the beloved, graceful winged paragons of excellence, to shed themselves of their delightful grace and ignite their overwhelming ferocity when needed.

<Passive>

Gracefully, four wings remain etched to the user's back, perpetuating a 20x boost to their physical prowess and the overall performance of their magical abilities collectively.

<Active>

....

~~~

One would consider just this passive effect absolutely mental for a Special skill, in fact, even Skullius thought the same before nodding in understanding at something he had nearly forgot.

'Of course...'

Only that would excuse how powerful the passive effect of this skill was, not to mention its active effect which Skullius saw no reason to active at this moment. Just the description alone made him chortle.

How were the Luminants even defeated with such a thing?

No, no.

He was being silly. He knew why.

<Is it to your liking?>

The boisterous voice of Luserus came with a subtle hint of saltiness unbecoming of someone called 'divine.'

Skullius smiled.

"Quite," he said.

At once, his four wings turned dull and smaller. They didn't disappear, however.

The passive effect of [Son of Luserus] made it so that he would ALWAYS have the staggering augmentation of the [Wings of the Just] active.

With the great degree of familiarity Skullius suddenly felt he had with the wings, he found it to be an easy task, branding them onto the back of his tenebrous robes, such that they didn't appear as glaring bursts of light protruding from his back, but an intricate, bold design shining dully from his clothing.

It was flashy all the same.

The colourful glitter around Skullius also turned less extravagant, but it too remained visible.

"I take it I can make the rest of my wishes?" he said coyly.

There was only silence as his answer. It seems Luserus didn't see the need to yip at Skullius' every call.

Well, Skullius didn't mind.

The next thing he wanted done was something he felt would go a long way in progressing his goals.

Yes, it would progress them a fair bit.

Despite what Serenity had expressed about it in the past, he trusted how much he had been affected instead.

It had been Replicus' task to deal with this, but, well... there was hardly any need to wait for the avatar.

The Hybrid Luman's plans were far removed from that fellow, after all. Some would even say, they would soon turn averse to what that fellow wanted.

"I believe your divine powers should find this to be nothing more than a trifling matter. I tried to get rid of this some time ago, but I didn't have enough energy for it," Skullius said with an obnoxious tone.

"I need you to purge my atrocious luck and perhaps give me a fitting, positive equivalent. You were keen on blessing me, weren't you?"

Indeed.

Skullius felt this was the perfect opportunity to get rid of his bad luck!

Unlike Doom Factor 2, it was merely a trait that followed him as a result of his soul having been touched by Somanda, similar to how coming into contact with a rotting stench would leave traces that persisted for a long time. Of course, as Somanda was an Arch-Lich, one who transcended, his stench – the atrocious luck – could only be removed by something in the same league, or stronger than him.

Serenity had told Skullius in the very beginning that his atrocious luck was uncertain and shaky because of something that followed from his previous life.

But better yet, the stronger he got, he would find his atrocious luck become less and less intrusive.

This, for the most part, was true.

Compared to those days back in the Tremur and Inhone City, his atrocious luck seemed to have become more tame.

But that wasn't good enough!

It was best to get rid of it entirely!

Skullius had attempted this with the artefact Yuyui stole from the Grand Priest, but there had only be so much divine energy.

It was only enough to get rid of one of his problems.

Now, however...

<Very well. What sort of blessing would you desire from me then? Do keep in mind, my capabilities at the moment are heavily reliant on how much energy remains in the shrine.>

"I'm aware," Skullius said calmly. "I don't desire that great of a blessing. What I want is annoyingly simple."

Chapter 932: Three Measly Wishes! (3)

<I see. For someone so daring and vile, I commend you for your unpredictability.>

Luserus said after Skullius explained exactly what he wanted with annoying specification.

The Deity was stunned by how the Hybrid Luman before him seemed to be seeing a steady future where all his machinations created a functional system that solved all his problems.

He was arrogant and haughty, but he was intelligent, it seemed.

Luserus would have preferred it if Skullius was dumb and exploitable as a result of his mountain high hubris.

"Well, in truth, in time, I would be able to do this on my own, but time is something I don't have, unfortunately. I will settle for creating the more necessary miracles I need on my own when I gain enough strength for it," Skullius said with a toothy smile.

Luserus said nothing. Serenity also remained silent.

This was unsettling.

She didn't think what Skullius would ask of Luserus was something so...

"Do it, then."

At once, the hypothetical world shook and rumbled, and a sharp, colourless luminance fell on the Hybrid Luman!

How radiance could be devoid of hue was a mystery, but the visual was the least impressive thing to be found here!

Skullius buckled.

His figure became blurred as the onslaught continued, seeming to come from the skies above but without the hints of sacredness one would expect for purging the sickening stench of Undeath!

Skullius felt it, however, as he groaned and grinned, feeling a surging might take something away while granting him something in return that was – in his opinion – phenomenal.

The Hybrid Luman had to admit. If there was ever anyone who gave him the greatest motivation for growth, it had to be Sila.

Ever since he was awakened within Skullius' body by Somanda's presence all that while back, his ploy to steal Skullius' body, his revelation on the Temple of Unlusted Tears' whereabouts, and his intervention in the Premium Age Royale... it had all led to Skullius surviving and thriving.

Now, the Hybrid Luman found another dash of inspiration that spawned from the piece of soul. It was this that gave him the idea of the Blessing he requested.

It was going to change his life forever.

It was going to change how he fought.

But before that, Skullius had to acknowledge the forceful removal of something that had been a pain in his pelvis for a long time.

As the aggressive power of a Deity hammered down on him, striking his flesh and soul, he felt a vivid thrum of activation!

[Divine energy is purifying you...]

[The stain on your soul, the plague, 'Compromised Luck' is being erased...]

There it was.

It was working!

Compromised Luck. That's right. That's what the guidance field called it when he had attempted to get rid of it before.

Skullius laughed.

There was triumph in his voice.

It was not as great as when he purged UNCoddled, or its evolved form, Lord of Lonesome Sorrow, but it was win all the same.

[The plague, 'Compromised Luck' has been purged]

Skullius' grin became especially wide.

Finally!

He was gotten rid of another hurdle that had plagued him for so long!

'Farewell...' he thought with furious glee. It was another flesh you to Somanda.

Now he was free to expect things to go his way as much as they would for a normal person at the very least.

He could afford to be greedy.

Yes, greedy.

That mentality had been prominent within his soul as of late.

But he accepted it.

And because of this greed, Skullius looked forward to what he was about to get.

A Blessing.

It wasn't extravagant, but it sure was shockingly effective.

Its properties reminded Skullius of when he felt the crippling hopelessness back when Sila sacrificed his sight, his skills and his original mana core.

This was different, and far more beneficial.

The torrent of energy raining from the sky relaxed, turning less violent. It allowed Skullius to stand and welcome what was coming with his back straight.

[You are receiving a Blessing...]

'Good... good...' Skullius thought.

His Binds of Fukal only warded of the Blessings and Curses from the Deities of Aigas. Thus, he could welcome this freely, as it was a gift from a terrestrial god.

There it was...

Slowly, but surely, the Hybrid Luman felt all the skills branded to his body... vanish.

[Greatest Mana Crafter]

[Immoral Authority]

[Celestial Hack]

[Greatest Celestial Counterfeit]

[Graceless Hunter]

[Null Extraction]

...

...

All of them disappeared from Skullius' body!

Of course, all these skills weren't being destroyed.

No.

They were being... moved elsewhere.

Skullius' body rapidly turned into a vacant lot spotting only a vibrant blue mana core, and a powerful soul with two beautiful gems swimming within it.

[You have received the Blessing, 'Graceful Monolith of the Eminent']

"Perfect," Skullius chuckled.

The blast of energy surging from the sky finally stopped pouring, leaving the Hybrid Luman feeling light.

Well, he felt extremely light, actually.

All the skills that had been etched within him seemed to have been quite the burden on his flesh.

However, he could feel them safe and 'well-tended' just as he intended with this new Blessing [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent].

The Hybrid Luman opened his status and checked if the guidance field concurred with everything that just happened.

It was so.

~~~

...

[ Core : Blue ]

[ Blessing : Graceful Monolith of the Eminent ]

[ Class : Insurgent Magnus ]

...

...

[ LUCK : 1 ]

...

~~~

Only Skullius knew how much that '1' replacing 'Atrocious?' meant to him.

Normalcy.

"Good," he said.

He had a feeling his normal luck and Blessing would create interesting instances in the war that was coming to Opungale.

It was certain, actually.

<What is your last wish? It better not be an absurd ask.>

Luserus sounded impatient.

Skullius couldn't blame him.

If there was anything that surprised him the most, it was how much Luserus simply skipped asking questions that he thought he would ask.

He didn't ask how Skullius ended up becoming the twisted sort of Luminant he was. Though frankly, Skullius imagined the Deity just didn't want to know. He was right about that. How Dezrael died... wasn't pretty.

Luserus also didn't ask why Skullius had Undeath clinging to his soul, but again, Skullius imagined that the Deity felt like he would only get needlessly enraged. He was right. If he knew how deep Skullius' ties were to Undeath rather than to Null Life...

The trade-off to willingly remaining in the dark for Luserus, seemed to be an uncontrollable degree of impatience.

For helping this vile Luman, whose background absolutely violated the sanctity of the Luminant blood in his veins, it would be a while before he saw some payoff.

Skullius smiled at the Deity.

"This last wish is quite different. You might be right. It's harder than the other two," he said before expelling something from his spatial storage.

It was ancient piece of paper, a page that exuded a dreadful presence.

Within it, was the sealed soul of a Corrupted Deity.

Chapter 933: Three Measly Wishes! (4)

A relic containing the bound soul of the Corrupted Deity Nunax.

This was an item that Skullius had managed to acquire from Aurolio as a generous addition to the information the pale man offered to give the Hybrid Luman in exchange for his services at acquiring the souls of Null creatures.

Skullius vividly remembered VOW showing up out of nowhere, and even forcibly using his <Counsel> to advise him not to take the relic lightly.

Well, Skullius would have never dreamed of it, honestly.

The word Deity was deterrent enough.

Well, it had been enough back then.

Right now, he was casually facing a Deity in an odd world of their making while holding another Deity in his hand, a curious smile on his face.

Luserus couldn't seem to find what was so amusing about this ordeal, this last wish.

<That... How did you come by it?>

His tone was eerily cold, urgent and suspiciously careful.

"That's not really any of your business, is it?" Skullius said, much to the unsubtle rumbling in the sky; a sign of ruffled, divine feathers.

"I wonder, are you capable of subjugating other Deities? If you are, that would be very handy."

There was a nasty bit of silence.

What?

What now?

"You're underestimating what you're holding," Serenity was the one to answer first with a strict tone. "I can tell that you don't have the slightest idea what a Corrupted Deity is. After commending your forethought before, I'm surprised to find that you have enough stupidity to skim over something so important!"

Hearing Serenity's voice rise with blatant warning was a first for Skullius. Her flame body even flared lightly, temporarily turning burly with her outrage before fizzling back into a pitiable wisp with limbs.

Skullius gave her a sharp glance.

"What does it matter if its Corrupted or not? The fact of the matter is that it is trapped under effective conditions, with quite the tedious way to subjugate it that I'm not quite ready to trust yet.

Even if the method is tried and true, I'd rather opt for a safer alternative," he said before turning back to Luserus. "Thus, I ask again, Luserus, are you capable of subjugating another Deity.

One that's already sealed."

There was continued silence from the horizon.

The Deity diluted into the very world he had made only answered after Serenity had emitted an audible grumble of frustration.

<It would be possible. An imprisoned Deity that hasn't been nourished by deeds for an extensive period will always be weaker than the opposite. However... that relic... it's no ordinary artefact. I'm afraid the only way to open it is by following its instructions.

I daresay even at a glance, its craftsmanship is leagues beyond what you would know, mortal.>

"Hoo. Really?" Skullius said with strange enthusiasm.

It indeed was quite strange.

Despite how much he had tried to use [Greatest Mana Crafter], he couldn't gleam much about the ancient piece of paper.

Better yet, Aurolio who had a higher rank with his guidance field, had implied that he didn't know much about the relic either, and even he, who somehow managed to acquire the relic, was wary of it. Wary enough to give it away, for some reason.

As far as relics and artefacts went, the most powerful ones were Legendary, Mythical and Transcendent.

Skullius had yet to see a single one with a grade of Transcendent.

Rather than rare, it almost seemed like they didn't exist.

Before, he had thought that perhaps this ancient page, which appeared with no name, and grade on his guidance field, was Transcendent, but after considering a few other possibilities, he imagined that it likely wasn't exactly about the grade.

Given the fact that he had quite the appreciation for influences from outside Aigas; Veneration art, other Deities aside from the four in this world, Skullius thought that perhaps, this had more to do with the creator of this page, rather than the page itself.

The one to capture a Deity was probably a Deity themselves, and evidently, when a Deity was involved, it was foolish to remain hinged on the Rules one was used while in the demesne of another.

All that said...

"That's quite sad. I suppose I'll have to do as the relic says," Skullius said.

He gazed blankly at the page, feeling his fierce awareness of elements around him as a result of [Son of Luserus] make another attempt at dissecting what he was looking at.

It failed.

The Corrupted Deity Nunax.

Maybe it was strange that Skullius indeed seemed oblivious to what the tag 'Corrupted' meant.

The reality was, he truly didn't care, but for good reason.

A moment later, he stored back the ancient page within his storage and sighed.

"That's about it," he said.

<What?>

Luserus sounded confused.

"I'm done with you for now. I'll keep my end of the bargain as I said."

<You don't care to make your last wish?>

"You can't solve my other problems as you are now, I'm afraid."

Luserus felt oddly infuriated by the remark even though he had been budgeting the little energy remaining in the shrine while expecting demands that didn't match the degree of intervention that was allowed of him.

<I see.>

Skullius smiled.

"Yes. I'd rather use up the energy that remains in the shrine for my convenience."

<What? So that you can get rid of the tether that allows me to keep watch? If you dare to think you can walk out on the arrangement you so boldly proposed, you are sorely mistaken.>

Despite the crushing force that mounted as Luserus spoke, Skullius waved his hand dismissively.

"Pay a bit more attention, will you? Didn't I tell you that you'd be able to keep an eye on me even without the shrine? Well, I suppose, it'd still be through the shrine's properties, but you don't need it as much as you think. Release me from this... stifling place and I'll show you. Come on."

The note of hesitation was difficult to miss.

Luserus of course didn't trust Skullius, but he was going to need to release the Hybrid Luman anyway.

And thus he did.

Skullius found himself standing before the shrine in an instant, released from the hypothetical world.

'Hmmm. Interesting. I was actually duplicated and reflected through two worlds. Such power...' he thought and chuckled, ignoring the massive force of tension he felt from the shrine.

Luserus was steadily watching him.

The Hybrid Luman shook his head and extended his hand towards the massive construct with a large outward shadow, its many winged sculptures of jade joined together to make a massive, odd, lively shape.

Right then, he felt the pulsing of the intent used when making this shrine.

It was built by the Luminants out of love for their Deity, Luserus.

The strange means they used to forge it left a mark, a scent.

It was similar to how his [Wings of the Just] felt.

The powers of the Luminants, the immaterial yet magical devotion, was what allowed Luserus to peek into Aigas, however limited he was.

Thankfully, that power could be accessed by a Luminant too, or rather, a Hybrid Luman.

And as far as Skullius knew, the powers of Luminants, were highly compatible with....

['Just Light' has deemed the remnants of sacred communion profound enough to latch onto]

['Just Light' has been promoted to 'S' rank!]

The shrine shook vehemently, so much so that Skullius heard several screams from behind him.

The construct really looked as though it was about to burst into pieces, and it became encased in a dull brilliance that fed into the false narrative.

Skullius couldn't care less.

He was far removed from worry, fear, or concern at this moment.

The four wings branded to his dark robe protruded out and became blindingly bright.

They grew to twice Skullius' size and even more in length while pointing in four different directions.

[You have crossed an insurmountable gulf of treachery to reach this level, as the Fruit of World Myths intended]

[Your Mastery over 'Just Light' reaches the very summit]

[An authority from the Fruit of World Myths surges...]

Skullius grinned.

Good. Very good. All was truly blissful in the world right now.

But then, it was hardly as good as it could get.

['Graceful Monolith of the Eminent' is tempted...]

Right when this notification appeared before Skullius, the shrine, which was wildly tumbling animatedly at this point... vanished.

Chapter 934: Master of Light

If it appeared to be bias, then that truly was the case. Ever since acquiring the Hybrid Luman status from the Discount Human status, Skullius had found that his body was extremely receptive to all things [Just Light], and that the opposite was also true.

It almost seemed as though, by virtue of being human, it would be very difficult for Skullius to awaken [Just Light] at all, and the Null Lifeform had started believing it too, since throughout his life as a Discount Human, [Just Light] had eluded him – the excursion in the Labyrinth of the Yoke aside.

It was only when he used the Luminant Seed that [Just Light] awakened, and that only happened because of the [Wing of the Just], which the bright golden element was attracted to.

Just a few hours, when Skullius awakened, [Just Light] had erupted again, his affinity for it growing immensely, and yet [Evil Darkness] remained the same; completely unchanged despite the flurry of WILLS.

Curious.

Now, his control of [Just Light] had reached the pinnacle of what it could be, and something deep within the Hybrid Luman churned for the first time in a very long while.

The Fruit of World Myths.

Like a restless mark – flower, really – dark in tone, and with a bright cross over it, bits of darkness and light swirling around it, the Fruit of World Myths was what made the Insurgent Magnus what they were.

While it existed in the body of the user... it also didn't. Physical harm to the body it resided in couldn't damage it, and even if the body was destroyed, it wouldn't be exposed or cease to exist along with the host's body.

It was truly an odd and unfathomable creation.

Now, it churned as [Just Light] reached the 'S' rank.

The pinnacle.

[The Insurgent Magnus grows...]

[Your affinity to CONTROL and GUIDE with the light is elevated. Rather than a judge, you are the LAW. You dictate everything with the benchmark of JUSTICE and LIGHT you create with your own hands]

[The Authority of Light is all yours]

[You have awakened THREE of the NINE Seeds pillars of the Fruit of World Myths]

['Graceful Monolith of the Eminent' opens...]

...And then came notification after notification, aggressively, as though keen to prove the growth of the one who wielded the Fruit of World Myths!

['Just Light Creation' and 'Just Light Meshing' combine and evolve into the Super Skill, 'Progenitor of Light']

['Saint Lumis' Benign Arc' evolves into the Super Skill 'Gradius Order Halo']

[Destined Warp Steps evolves into the Super Skill 'I Am The World']

[Lucent Apparition evolves into the Super Skill 'Order-Soul Subjection']

...

...!!!

Every Skill with ties to [Just Light] evolved by several times and entered another tier of power – the Super category!

Skullius couldn't feel the rippling intensity of each skill as it exploded with additional power since they were all stored somewhere quite removed from his body, but the notifications were enough for him to appreciate what was happening.

He grinned in satisfaction.

He hadn't expected this, but it worked all the same in his favour.

Back in the Temple of Unlusted Tears, Skullius had read from the three plaques that [Evil Darkness] was for RESTRAINING and BINDING.

He had witnessed this with the [Perfect Night Domain], the enclosure of darkness which he learned to use to suppress weaker opponents in the past.

[Just Light], on the other hand CONTROLLED and GUIDED.

This was made evident by the Preeminent Attegoth, the massive construct, much like a tree made of bones which Skullius forged with light, its ability to execute complex actions for Skullius and to control anything that bore its mark.

All of this, however, had been done with abysmal affinities.

The 'S' rank of [Just Light] boosted everything that had been touched by light, giving them the power equivalent of Super Skills!

Skullius had acquired absurd boons from this as well, which were much less extravagant yet every bit as beneficial.

Super Skills required a purple core to cast, but he wasn't worried at all.

The [Graceful Monolith of the Eminent] was going to be a big help with that. Definitely.

All he needed to do, was plant his seed.

'Ah... I got too lost in my own little bubble...' Skullius thought as he opened himself up to the surroundings once more.

The first thing he felt was the overbearing presence of Luserus.

'It worked...' Skullius thought.

Even with the shrine now gone, along with its shadow, the Deity still seemed to be hovering around him... or perhaps above him.

The shrine wasn't destroyed. It had been assimilated, the same way all of Skullius' skills had been. It now existed somewhere within Skullius' invisible repertoire of powers, with only bits of the Luminants' devotion clinging onto it.

This was enough for Luserus to continue hanging about, but he couldn't be as expressive as before. At best, he could follow along with Skullius' exploits if he pleased.

"That's good enough for you, isn't it?" Skullius chortled as he spoke to the open air.

The reply he got, was the easing up in the pressure around him.

"Good."

The Hybrid Luman then raised a brow as he looked beside him where a bright blue flame with a human shape had its wispy head turned to him.

"What are you looking at?" Skullius asked with a condescending smirk.

Serenity didn't speak immediately. Her flame started fizzling out bit by bit as the seconds passed, and then, before she disappeared, she said:

"You think you've won and you believe you're lost. I pity you. He will set you straight."

Skullius' smirk disappeared.

His first instinct was to retort, but he wasn't allowed the chance. Serenity had disappeared.

A deep frown emerged on the Hybrid Luman's face.

"Don't speak to me of that... fake," he hissed under his breath before turning behind him where Sevill dropped on one knee at the sight of him, the two Sif at her side hesitating slightly before collapsing in awe and reverence as well.

Chapter 935: Safe

Silrat felt his feet strike a floor.

Well, to be honest, it was hardly a floor at this point, given the amount of it missing everywhere the sight went, as though some creature had bitten generous chunks of it out.

Silrat took a deep breath, his eyes wide open and bloodshot.

He didn't speak for a while, and thus the song of silence persisted around him, only disrupted every now and then by the collapsing of small pieces of rubble from the torn ceiling overhead, which allowed one to see the destroyed roof.

The Bryne Family Mansion, prepared by Genhuis City for the Premium Age Royale... was uttered ruined.

In this night, it somehow managed to look even more tragic than in the light of day. Half of it was crushed, other parts of it burnt unevenly or indented. These were quite clearly signs of a terrible battle.

Silrat couldn't register all of this though, not for a long while.

It almost seemed like his existence was trying to reforge itself within the confines of Aigas' space; re-establishing why it was relevant in the first place.

Why it had exited before....

"Uh..." Silrat choked before falling to his knees.

His bangs of crushed garnet slid over his eyes, attempting to hide the terror and confusion within them, but the satin grey glow from his irises refused to be doused by the shadow.

Its gleam, along with Silrat's heavy breathing saturated the hollow mansion with a great sombreness.

"I... I remember..." Silrat said shakily.

Indeed, he remembered.

He remember when Skullius crushed something in his hand and threw it at him, a kind of smelly dust.

He remembered how Skullius struck him in the chest, making him breath in the dust and then...

He was no more.

A sharp blow had landed behind his neck, and then everything had gone dark... until just now.

"He did that..." Silrat said.

There was a lot of conflict in his voice.

He remember what he had thought the moment all this happened.

He had thought Skullius was being controlled.

He had dreaded that it was a genuine betrayal.

He had lamented that he was going to die when his goal had never been so close, but now, from the looks of it... it didn't matter.

The full view of the city shown through a horrible gap in the Bryne Family Mansion represented the destruction of more than just property, but lives and dreams. Whatever horrors had befell Genhuis to leave it in this state must have been truly ghastly.

Apparently, it hadn't mattered that there was a City Guardian with an all-encompassing second sun that could see all and attack all.

It hadn't mattered that he was at the Incandescent Stage, with capable Capital Knights of the Honoured level to assist him if need be.

Silrat wondered if there had been many survivors.

"Survivors..." he said with a sigh, his heart finally calming down a little.

After suddenly being able to resume his rage-filled and confused thoughts, Silrat began starting to piece things together rationally.

Another look at the flattened, borne through, chipped, gashed buildings; the torn corpses of men, women and children alike – some chewed, some rotten, some flayed – forever frozen in a mess of ghastliness that would make even a seasoned mercenary grimace, and it became clear.

Skullius' intent had been to protect.

"It ended badly, after all..."

Of course it had.

Skullius and Silrat had both been guarded against the eventual conclusion of the Premium Age Royale and yet...

"I was a fool. I should have known he'd get attached..." Silrat said with a hollow laugh.

To think that cold man he had known and saved from Inhone, a man who seemed so detached from everything but freedom and strength, would be protecting him so desperately.

Silrat took steps from holey floor and the rubble and stepped outside.

The lack of liveliness was unnerving. Right around this time, the city would still be bursting with life, with people talking about the Premium Age Royale and their conspiracy theories around it.

Now, the faces of most common folk visible from this distance told only of horror.

'I was probably going to be one of those...' Silrat said sombrely.

But rather than him, what had become of Skullius?

Was he safe or had he succumbed to whatever happened for the both of them?

It wasn't for Silrat to know apparently, despite how restless it made him to not know.

He walked through the silent city while making sure his presence was as fickle as that of a mouse. Perhaps what laid waste to the city was still around. Close.

Silrat shook.

He met a peculiar shadow in his careful travel.

It was especially dark on the ground. Darker than the ones from miscellaneous obliterated buildings and human carcasses.

He looked up, behind the tall, broken walls around the city, and saw a massive tower rising into the sky.

In the darkness, it was shockingly easy to miss, especially given what Silrat was looking out for instead.

The image of the tower turned him to stone for a moment.

While he couldn't see it clearly, he felt as though the designs over it were things he should not see. They were obscure and terror-inducing, even while veiled by the dark.

Quickly, while sweating profusely, Silrat avoided the shadow of the tower, and kept moving around the city without looking at the thing.

'Why do I get the feeling that it's not only Genhuis that is left in this sorry state?' he thought.

Genhuis was one of the three great cities in Pelian. If it was brought down, what of the lesser cities and towns?

Just who were these enemies?

As someone who wasn't exactly a powerhouse, Silrat was almost brought to despair.

His plan was to leave the city and travel somewhere safe, but where else could be safe?

The capital perhaps?

But would he be able to get there?

All on his own?

Dammit!

Silrat had just passed the poor, caved-in remains of the Guilds Association.

He would have loved to still have the ability to mobilise resources yet...

Just as Silrat's hopes were dying down, something unexpected manifested in his line of sight. Rather than manifesting, it came into full view, showing the same degree of wholeness Silrat remembered.

Could it be...?

However, another surprise dashed at him before he could feel the glow of relief burst fully within himself.

Another shadow was cast over him from behind right at that moment, its properties expelling as ominous of a feel as the tower in the far the distance.

What was even more terrifying was the wafting pressure that was produced from shadow, pinning Silrat to the ground like hostile gravity!

Silrat couldn't even find the instinct nor the strength to look behind him. He felt weak all of a sudden, as though his body had just decided that the best course of action, was to surrender.

It took no genius or prodigious expert to figure out that the tall, thin, humanoid shadow had an owner who stood behind him, on its face perhaps the single thing of note being a large maw with razor sharp teeth moist with saliva.

This was one of the monstrosities that had reduced the city to what it was right now.

Silrat stood no chance.

He gulped.

'What... is that thing?' he thought, shaking.

He was done for.

He really was done for.

"I didn't think I'd see another survivor..." a voice suddenly broke the immersive despair.

...!

Both Silrat and the creature behind him were stunned, shaken even, by the appearance of a man in thick robes that could only have belonged to Mage.

Then again, only Silrat was allowed to gawk at the new arrival for more than second, because the creature behind him fell to the ground, its torso mysteriously detached from the rest of its body.

Silrat turned in shock, and saw the creature's convulsing legs in a pool of blood.

He then whipped his head to the old face before him.

"Come along now. Don't want to stay out here for long. You won't find another Arch-Mage willing to save your common life," the old Mage said, beckoning the former Overseer.

Silrat nodded hesitantly, his mouth agape and followed after the man to the only place that remained standing in the city, completely unharmed.

The Reacher Academy.

Chapter 936: Odd, Unrighteous Sides

Eofel.

Thousands of undead were moving around the city, some aloof and some hunched, yet all muttering the same thing over and over again while the glow in their eyes continued to light up the night in red.

"You cannot comprehend the true beauty of death. The only true Divinity among many falsehoods. The truest reality in all the lands. You cannot..."

The city was showered with the mostly annoying buzzing of these voices. It had been for hours, and honestly, to some degree, it was welcome.

Enduring the ominous quiet brought only by death and destruction would eventually become impossible, even for powerful experts. The current circumstances within Pelian added to this.

That said, one young man felt that the opposite would have been acceptable.

His dark hair with blue fringes, rippling in the night wind, and the narrowing of his large, honey-coloured eyed, all seemed to convey the gloomy, cold frustration he bore towards the chattering dead walking below him.

"Couldn't you shut them up?" Rias said with blatant annoyance.

"I prefer the noise," Fulina said with the sort of stubborn tone that suggested that she wasn't about to fold.

"I see," Rias said indifferently. "So this is the best you could do, huh? A small city like this? It barely looks like steady territory. Would Master Actuass be pleased with this?"

Fulina gave the young EverSword heir a sharp glare.

"You're much too young to know what Actuass needs, boy. If you haven't got anything productive to say, keep your mouth shut," she hissed.

"Uhm... please Rias. I'm sure this woman knows what Master Actuass wants better than we do. Best let her take the lead, no?" a frail looking woman approached hesitantly from behind the two, taking shaky steps onto the balcony of the building.

Rias looked back at her and nodded, saying nothing else.

Millisa sighed in relief.

She hadn't been sure her son would back down, but thankfully he did. Despite how cold he could be, he was quite obedient to her and Rearren.

Alarming so, some of the time.

"Remind me again, why it is that Rearren thought it would be best for you two to come here? Isn't your Estate a much better place to hide than here with us? Not to mention that you travelling here might just end up leaving us worse off if you were followed," Fulina asked.

Millisa straightened her back as best as she could and replied.

"Well, because of the latest... incident, the Houses have mobilised their forces against us. Over the last few days, we have been attacked constantly, but since our mansion is quite sturdy and well-guarded, it's been holding."

"Rearren said he didn't know how long it would last though and he sent me and Rias here."

Fulina rolled her eyes.

"That man is making too many plays off the script. You two won't make our job easier at all, even if you have the strength to back up your reason for being here. If the Houses show up, we'll have to relocate and look for a safer place to stay and that will be highly inconvenient with my arm of undead," she said.

Millisa shrank while Rias flared, a little annoyed.

"Your army should be the least of your concerns," Revia said, emerging from deep inside the house they were in, dimly lit by dozens of candles. "If need be, I can transport us all far enough away."

"Hopefully, there won't be any need for that," Fulina quickly said.

The tension rose and died down, bringing with it awkward silence.

Revias found it hard to believe that the increase in company, only brought forth more awkwardness.

She had dreaded being alone with Fulina, but now, she wished it was only them two.

Her eyes fell on Millisa.

Ever since this woman arrived, Revia had felt that she was out of place. She fussed over Rias like a common woman, a common mother, and didn't seem quite like the type to plot against the world alongside Rearren and Rias.

Revias got the feeling that much like her, she had been included in something she didn't want to, though, unlike her, Revia had a bit more free will.

The former Paladin Champion hid away her sympathy and...

"What's that?" Rias said, his eyes squinting at something a short distance away from the city.

Well, rather than something, it seemed like someone... some people, actually.

They approached the city with slow steps; with caution.

Revia saw a dash of shine.

There was white.

There was gold.

There was a three-pointed star.

Before she could even think, her body bellowed with strength, and in the blink of an eye, the silver-haired girl had crossed the crowded three kilometre distance to the outskirts of the city and was standing before the two figures.

The two didn't have an exaggerated reaction to her arrival, but they both donned frowns at the sight of her, as did she.

"Ruhrees..." Revia said while grinding her teeth.

The Paladin Champion didn't reciprocate the dramatic call out, and neither did his female companion. She merely looked at the undead within the city, and then at Revia with disdain.

"When you told me that Revia had gone rogue, I imagined something different. To think she's chosen to surround herself with the corpses of innocents. The words fallen from grace can't do justice for this evil," the female Paladin Champion said.

Revia's eyes lit up murderously.

"Watch your mouth. You're not that different!" she barked.

"Not that different?" Ruhrees spoke before his companion could retort, a look of fury melting on his face. "You dare say that to us after aiding what happened in that stadium?! Did you see how many lives were snuffed out because you sided with that necromancer?! And you say we are NOT THAT DIFFERENT?!"

Revia bit her lips and for moment, she felt as though they had been stapled together. She couldn't speak. She couldn't retort. The only answer she had as for why she was doing this felt like an excuse, yet she stood by it.

She glared at the two and unsheathed a sword that began to rapidly vibrate in her grip.

"I'm willing to pay for it in the end, but not before I expose you all. All your self-righteousness hidden behind a doctrine the Deities didn't ask you teach," she said seethingly. "I was going to hunt you all down bit by bit. But thankfully, you came on your own."

Ruhrees' fury seemed to only rise. The female Paladin Champion by his side stepped forward.

"Keep using Elita as a crutch. That's what this is about, right? Let's see if that damn Cursed Blood will return the favour, wherever she is. Hopefully in the afterlife."

The trigger was pulled immediately.

Before a second passed, Revia was already upon the two, brandishing her weapon with the intent to kill.

Chapter 937: Approaching Madness

They had drawn closer, though the speed with which the ships moved was dreadfully too damn for Ashema's taste.

Opungale was a good two hundred kilometers away, and at this distance, a great, faint barrier encasing the enormous continent finally became visible to the eye and perceivable to extraneous magical senses.

With a single glance, Ashema appreciated how powerful it was.

The most unique thing about it, was the fact that it had an unbelievable amount of resources powering it. As far as Ashema knew, constructs meant to protect or guard, usually had a pulse which exposed the network of the supply – where the flow of energy was strongest and where it was weakest.

No barrier was perfectly even, as far as he knew, because there was always a finite level of energy allocated to a barrier.

This one was different.

It felt bloated, like how an expert giving their all into a battle would use all their energy at once. But this barrier seemed to maintain a high output of power at all times, and with every section of it holding the same amount of energy.

Was this why the experts on the ships sailing to Opungale had yet to make a move now even when they were so close?

Ashema was sure it would take any of the experts aboard the ships below him a few seconds to cross the stretch of distance, but he doubted they could breach that barrier easily.

Beyond that, there was already a welcoming party which he could see from this far out, perched along the shore.

There were quite the number of obstacles.

What would these people do?

The frustration he imagined they felt was almost as much as his.

He was already itching for them to cause chaos so that he could seamlessly flit between them and their enemies, analysing and revelling in the carnage that would ensue without being turned on.

That could easily happen if he wasn't careful. Common races could band together against him if he showed himself.

The people aboard the ships seemed to be making hefty preparations, which he couldn't fault them for really.

He and his kin had been doing the same for millennia, while anticipating the day or days when they would be able to rise to the surface and battle against the chosen ones, those blessed enough to live above them.

"What is that?" Ashema asked himself with his eyes narrowing on what was below the clouds.

Something massive had appeared on the deck of one of the ships, summoned by a particularly old woman.

She chanted something with her hand on the thing, and it emitted a soft gong as her mana penetrated it.

A young man with a subdued, yet powerful presence about him laughed when the hollow sound rang and he patted the old woman's shoulder with a jovial expression.

Ashema immediately got the impression that he underestimated these people.

Darwel led the way out of a large Aurora where the people once again gave her gifts which she accepted, with Seville, Cosycn and Benyn carrying the others.

Unlike in the other Auroras that Darwel and Skullius had passed, a cordon of two hundred soldiers created a wall that only opened up when Darwel reached in to receive gifts and greet small Sif children who desperately wanted to meet her.

It was quite ridiculous to think that six Incandescent Stagers were around her at this time, with the additional three being from this Aurora.

The trail of trained soldiers caused a commotion that led to millions crowding around the exit from the Aurora to get a glimpse of the El Sif.

While she entertained the masses, Skullius was just several paces behind her; behind Seville and Cosycn who were behind her in turn.

He had a bit of an annoyed look on his face, but it wasn't so pronounced that the average Sif could see it.

Serenity's words kept ringing in his head.

'...He will set you straight.'

The Hybrid Luman clicked his tongue.

Previously, he hadn't thought that fake would be a problem at all. That fake fellow he created.

As far as he was concerned, his duty was to run extraneous tasks that Skullius didn't have enough time to allocate to. No doubt, he would probably be much stronger than the previous him, but for Serenity to consider him enough to 'set him straight'...

'She must be able to sense his progress somehow...' Skullius concluded. 'Well, we'll just have to see about that. He will indeed come.'

Shedding his tense visage, Skullius wore a relaxed smile again and beckoned Benyn to him.

"Yes, Lord Luminant?" the Incandescent Stager hurried towards Skullius and even bowed humbly.

After what he had seen past the Oath of Mourning, his reasons for doubt had shifted. He believed, much like Seville and Viccil, and had been appalled that he had even thought of crippling Skullius during the chase.

Such an unforgivable thing!

Yet Lord Luminant Festos, had forgiven him of this folly when he called himself out, expressing his sins.

The four, pretty golden white wings etched onto Skullius' dark robe attracting a bit of attention from both the crowd of Sif and the Sif combatants, were evidence that what Benyn had seen... what he felt, was real.

But Skullius didn't want anyone else to know yet.

"I thought you said Darwel's parents wanted to see her immediately. Why are you allowing her to take her time entertaining common crowds?" the Hybrid Luman asked Benyn.

The Sif stammered a little.

"Because you didn't speak against it, Lord Luminant..."

Skullius rolled his eyes.

This was exactly what he had been dreading when he refused to make these two royal guards submit to him immediately after they confronted him and Darwel. They were two entranced by him now. He didn't want this kind of behaviour when they went to see Darwel's parents.

"Right..." Skullius said. "Was there actually an urgent matter their Majesties called Darwel for, or was it something unimportant?"

"There was actually a matter of interest, Lord Luminant."

"What was it?"

"Well, my Lord, allies from Pelian came to assist against the approach of Maqi. They are from the famed Six Houses of Pelian."

Skullius raised a brow.

"Really?"

This surprised him.

To think that alliance which caused the commotion in Pelian all that time ago was actually coming into play.

But then...

"Why would the Six Houses rush to help Opungale? Isn't Pelian itself in danger? There are monsters running amok there, right?" he asked. "Did Opungale ask for help?"

Benyn shook his head.

"No, Lord Luminant."

Skullius clutched the bridge of his nose.

There was no way the threat that shook the world, literally, had already been solved, right? That didn't make any sense. Surely, the Premium Age Royale created problems that couldn't be dealt with in a few days by a few experts.

Skullius almost felt underwhelmed by the notion that it could be true.

Well, behind that subtle feeling of disappointment, he felt as though Aigas hadn't seen this much action since the Grand Wars, disjointed as this variation of conflict was.

The masked man was on the loose.

Maqi was attacking Opungale.

Pelian was dealing with its own threat.

Deep within, Skullius hoped that this chaos would persist.

Chapter 938: A Seed

Exercising the authority he had on the Sif, Skullius decided it was time to move things along once the parade exited the city, with Darwel still showing an intense desire to spend her time with people beneath her.

Skullius still couldn't tell if she was possessed by duty, and a sense of longing for the attention or if she genuinely cared for her people. He couldn't bring himself to decide on either completely because somehow, he felt a bit disconnected from everyone.

It was an odd, gradual feeling.

Curious.

Darwel relented without much opposition.

Much like Seville, when she had noticed Benyn and Cosycn seasoning their words with reverence when addressing Skullius (after coming out from the Oath of Mourning), she had been delighted.

She had also noticed the huge change in Skullius and her deep interest in him only grew.

Somehow, he felt more like a Luminant than before. His presence was practically suffocating if he didn't deliberately keep it in check.

She enjoyed its overbearing nature still.

Moving through the Auroras they did after that excursion to the shrine would have been impossible if Skullius didn't rein his presence in, but apparently, according to the Hybrid Luman, his ability to effectively hide what he was, like he could do before, was gone.

"Are you going to reveal yourself to my parents outright?" she asked brightly "My mother is likely to pick up on the energy coming from your wings instantly, though, whether or not she will believe in you, is a different matter."

"It depends. It seems they have company," Skullius replied. "I will decide when we meet them."

From the playful look in his blank eyes, Darwel got the distinct impression that they weren't talking about the same thing.

How odd.

"Benyn, if you don't mind?" Skullius said to the royal guardian.

"Of course, my Lord Luminant!" Benyn said before promptly mobilising his mana.

Skullius paid keen attention to it.

He didn't need to, but he still did so.

Whether he liked it or not, the intricate details within every spot of mana around were relayed to him with excruciating detail. He felt Benyn's purple core churn at his will, and with slowed perception, he felt the Sif's mana trickle out of him vibrantly before activating a skill stowed in his body.

'The nature of the mana the Sif use is different. It is very lively, quite like the life energy I've seen from their plant life. Is this a product of evolution?' Skullius asked himself.

He also noticed a portion of Benyn's mana trying to drift off course from his mana channels, tilting towards him.

The mana from the Sif's very core... was tempted to follow Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman was amused.

'It's probably because his body submits to me. It only works with the Sif...'

At that moment, a flood of brilliant light encased the five, arching and falling on itself aggressively around them, and then...

VWOOOSH!

The five individuals were lifted off and carried across a large distance in an impressive bubble of radiance!

Their travel speed was quite modest, but the conditions of movement themselves were rather spectacular. It was so comfortable within the embrace of the light, and if not for keen senses, it would be impossible to tell that they were actually moving.

Skullius nodded, impressed.

Benyn didn't miss the note of appreciation.

He smiled.

They crossed the sky over massive hedges of forestry far larger than anything Skullius would have ever seen.

Many, massive Auroras with millions of souls and thousands of soldiers moving within them registered in his senses.

His awakened racial characteristics as a Luminant were shockingly effective.

Skullius recognised every soul below him without the need of any skill at all. He felt... connected to nature around him to such an degree that it told him whatever was around it, and over it. Even the Aigas crust.

It was like having the whole of Aigas as your personal snitch.

Skullius heard voices from it.

He felt the most minute motions through the mana around him.

He even detected collective sentiment.

Fear, worry, devotion.

This night was particularly stressful for the ordinary Sif.

'Makes it seem as though they were destined to become my responsibility...' Skullius thought with narrowed eyes.

As they glided a bit higher in an effort to avoid what Skullius immediately sensed to be a Sacred Forest with quite the larger number of powerful entities, he sensed something overhead.

It was far beyond the heights they were travelling, and perhaps that was why he hadn't sensed it before.

"What is that? A barrier?" he asked.

Cosycn hurried to answer.

"It is, my Lord Luminant," he said with a respectful tone far removed from the testy one he had used before he knew, or cared about who Skullius was. "This barrier has been around Opungale for as long as we can remember. Legends say that the nature and the oceans around Opungale willingly constructed this barrier to protect us Sif as a reward for treating them right.

"They constant supply it with energy, and as legends also say, this barrier is equipped with defences against physical, mental, elemental, even lesser divine attacks."

"Even divine, huh?" Skullius said with chuckle.

In theory, that meant even if an attack was imbued with Nitros or Primus, it wouldn't be any more effective than one which used mana.

Astounding indeed. To think such a thing was made because common greens couldn't figure out how to say thank you.

"Why does it look so faint?" Skullius asked.

He felt the brimming energy within the barrier. It was more intricate than it appeared. "Has it always been like that?"

"I suppose. It's hard to see it from the ground," it was Darwel who answered as they passed by a massive canal that fed into quite a large lake.

Skullius nodded in understanding.

...

"Stop," he said immediately after.

At once, the five of them paused in the sky, shrouded by the intense light.

"Is something wrong, Lord Luminant?" Seville asked.

"No," Skullius said with a grin. "Not at all."

He looked blankly below at the massive expanse littered with animals, hills, plateaus, coves, forests and of course, the great lake.

The Hybrid Luman stretched out his hand towards it.

"That is perfect," he said and his hand became smothered in a bizarrely gorgeous shroud of golden white light.

It was far more brilliant than the one from Benyn's skill!

A notification popped up in Skullius' view immediately.

['Graceful Monolith of the Eminent' opens...]

Right before Skullius' palm, something slid out of the luminance he manifested with [Just Light]. It had a spherical shape, and was about the size of an average human head.

Its appearance could be likened to that of an almond, but with a faint tinge of orange.

The four around Skullius looked on with intense interest. Or perhaps, it was more apt to say they were enthralled by the look of this thing.

A moment after it appeared, the object fell down gracefully before sinking into the lake.

"W...what was that?" Darwel asked.

The others were also very curious.

"A Seed," Skullius replied simply.

He only gazed upon where the seed had landed for a few more seconds, leaving wide ripples, before telling Benyn to resume their travel; everyone was a little disappointed. They truly felt as if something phenomenal had happened here, but they couldn't tell what it was.

Nevertheless, the group continued their flight and soon enough, they reached their destination.

Gauurdfell, the Royal Mansion, as it would be called in human terms.

In appearance, it looked quite like Darwel's home in the Wonderfall Torrents, but was much bigger and grandiose, with more impressive defences, no doubt. Skullius could already tell that much.

While his keen racial senses drew him towards every detail the elements around him picked up though, his instincts alerted him to the presence of someone sitting by a giant fountain before the great mansion and its circles of huge, bowing sycamore trees.

It was a man strumming a spent lute while singing a song.

The moment Skullius and company landed, the man gave them all a relaxed sweep with his vibrant eyes.

Then he locked onto Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman also fixed his focus on this man's figure and for a while, it remained as so with Darwel and the others not daring to break the unexpected tension.

Finally, though, Skullius spoke first, an annoyed tone buried in his voice.

"So, you're the one they call Erlton, are you?"

Chapter 939: Meeting Erlton

Erlton wore a soft smile before strumming a last, sharp note on his lute. Still, he didn't speak, however, even after being called out by the Hybrid Luman.

Skullius was a little annoyed by the man's demeanour.

He could feel the Sif he had travelled with struggling between their respect for him, and that which they had for Erlton because of the sheer degree of power he held, which outclassed the Incandescent Stage by far.

Skullius could feel it as well.

The mana around him was screaming and fleeing away from the modest bench the Herald sat. He could almost hear its voice.

The hunched sycamores – so thick that ten men could surround them with linked hands and still not be able to fully conquer one – which were bowing in a perfect circle to the compound around the mansion a few meters away, also seemed to shiver at the presence of Erlton.

Skullius grew even more annoyed.

Rather than Erlton's demeanour...

Rather than his power....

Rather than the fact he had spilled his secrets to others...

It was the fact the he was what he was that irked the Hybrid Luman so.

"I was waiting for you, Festos," Erlton suddenly said without looking at the group. Then, with a different tone that implied that he switched focus, he then said, "Why don't you all go on ahead? We'll be following in soon enough."

The four behind Skullius hesitated and looked at him.

Sensing their gaze, Skullius nodded and soon they disappeared behind a set of double doors that had no reason being fifteen times larger than the average Sif, their frames covered by verdant green roots sprouting roses of similar pigments.

What preceded the doors was a set of large, pristine white steps which seemed to be layered with white glass. The same material coiled around the large fountain and smothered everything else that came before the great mansion in a perfect circle.

"Come sit, will you? I know you have things to get off your chest," Erlton said.

Skullius narrowed his eyes suspiciously but he still walked forth and sat on the dark bench with the Herald.

A soft light livid within the shiny glass under his feet reflected into his and Erlton's faces ominously.

"I suppose you weren't particularly fond of me telling your friends what you were?" he said with a soft voice that could have been mistaken for a whisper.

"Not particularly, no," Skullius said.

Erlton gave a muffled chortle.

"There's only so many ways you can make man and Sif believe that the monstrous, charcoal-black skeleton sleeping in the back room is just a friendly, misunderstood soul, you know."

"Misunderstood?"

"Would you have appreciated it if I made you sound a little more sweet? An ancient romantic scouring world after world for his true love?"

"A darker lie would have done much more good."

Erlton strummed another note. Surprisingly, it sounded sad.

"I thought you would be alright with telling them the truth. They matter to you, right? Surely you would have done anything to have them stay by your side," he said.

Skullius' eye twitched.

"There you go again, painting me as some kind of pathetic man who needs to be understood or pitied," he growled with note of fury.

"Why does that make you so angry? I thought having willing company that didn't melt before your eyes was something you always wanted."

The Hybrid Luman's eye turned to Erlton sharply.

"So you know more, after all..." he said dangerously.

Erlton gave him a side glance.

"Indeed, I do. So much more..."

There was a brief stretch of silence.

A cold, rigid silence.

Skullius knew exactly what Erlton was insinuating, but he didn't allow it to become the prevailing subject. As he felt before, it was evident that Erlton's knowledge was still limited. He was content leaving it at that.

"Seeing as you're all-powerful and supposedly all-knowing, why is it that you have yet to do anything about the situation in Pelian or the forces of Maqi coming to cause needless chaos on Opungale?" he asked.

Erlton lost some of the lustre in his eyes and some of the spark in his demeanour.

"Some things aren't mine alone to control," he said.

"Every cowardly authority I've known has pretty much said the same thing in their own way. What makes your version different?" Skullius attacked.

Erlton took a deep breath.

"You've found your own handle against me," he said with a soft laugh. "I can't stop what's happening... what's about to happen in Pelian. The ones who granted me my powers ordained it to be so. I could never go against it. As for Maqi..."

I had just gone on a trip to straighten that issue out."

Skullius raised a brow.

"To Maqi?" he asked with an odd level of interest.

"No. To the one who manufactured Maqi's hate for Opungale," Erlton said.

Skullius frowned.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

Erlton wore a bitter smile.

"Some time ago, this world was broken, falling apart. Many forces invaded and killed, stole and tortured as they pleased. Then, one of the olden Heralds stopped it. He mended the Rules that had been broken – giving leeway to atrocities – with his great, flame breath. However, in his success, there was also failure.

He burnt the air that made living beings so powerful and special back in those days, and distorted time as well as memory."

"Throughout the millenia, I and other Heralds reforged the broken flow of time and the jumbled memories. I admit, there were things we rewrote in order to maintain order..."

"Like the fact that the Giants lost the First Grand War?" Skullius suddenly said sharply.

Erlton was startled.

The questioning look on his face lingered, but then it dissolved into a knowing smile.

"Right... You've met a Giant..." he said with a tone of amusement. "Indeed. Like that. However, each of us had ideals we wished to propagate. We had our own views of the greater good.

One of us believed... believes that sowing chaos every now and then is good for the four nations. To accelerate an age of warriors of the olden calibre, he thinks it is necessary for there to always be conflict."

Skullius folded his arms.

Conflict, ey?

Fascinating.

As far as he was concerned, it wasn't entirely invalid, especially given the wide gulf in strength between those from the Grand Wars and those of this era.

The Six Houses and some of the more powerful Families of Pelian were products of the desperation that brewed in that time, when the Giants came and when...

"So then, I take it you and this other Herald can't interfere with each other's plans?" Skullius asked.

"We could. However, fighting another Herald will only sow more chaos. And well... I'm not the most competent in battles. I prefer Divination and guidance," Erlton said.

"Is that right? And what if a powerful threat arises. One that can't be handled by your peers alone?" Skullius sneered.

Erlton looked at him.

"Not every problem can be dealt with by being competent in a fight, Festos. For instance, no amount of punching will repair Aigas in the state it is in right now."

Skullius recoiled. Erlton wasn't talking about the cases he knew about.

"What state do you mean?" he asked.

Erlton wore another bitter smile before sighing.

"As we speak, Aigas is drifting as two separate pieces. A chunk of it has been isolated."

Chapter 940: We Need No Allies

Skullius was shocked.

Split in two? Aigas?

Just the thought of it, especially with how... 'normal everything seemed at the moment...

"How in the world did that happen?" Skullius asked with an odd sort of furious look.

"The masked necromancer," Erlton said heavily. "Even though I'm human myself, I am quite impressed that he managed to play his cards so well, avoiding Divination against his identity and the truest extent of his plans. I can't even be sure which time period he hails from."

Skullius frowned.

"The masked man, huh?" he said before giving Erlton a judgey look. "How did he slip through your fingers even after the Premium Age Royale? Such an event should have alerted you, right? Millions of souls reaped from millions of people..."

Erlton donned a dazed expression.

"I once divined about a shadow that would never pale everywhere around Pelian. At the time, I got the feeling that something big was going to happen, but it was hard to pinpoint where and who was behind it. It was only when the Premium Age Royale began that I was sure I found my answer, but unfortunately, the Royale was tied to something that was supposed to happen. It was off limits.

The rise of Boron, as Quintess and Listafelle wanted before they left... No Herald could lay a hand on the event."

"It was only when the Royale ended that I surmised that the masked man was behind this. He didn't really hide it then. Unfortunately, by that time, he had acquired the power to fight effectively against Heralds like myself. He has the power to contend against Divine powers and even absorb them."

Skullius scratched his chin.

Well. That was quite the bomb of information he hadn't known.

He knew about the two Deities that left Aigas.

He had even known about the Heralds.

But the rest...

Several conclusions bloomed within his mind.

So... in the end... the masked man's plans were this grand?

The reason behind the need for all those souls.

The reason why he resurrected... that man.

It was all to be able to fight Heralds.

"Where is he right now?" Skullius asked without turning to Erlton.

"Way beyond the Central Boundary. He should be close to Edagon by now. Well, he and his pursuers," the blonde Herald said with a sharp glow in his glow.

Skullius nodded.

"Dragonsson..." Skullius chuckled, recalling the name the Grinning Jester Fox had called Sause way back then, after they exited the Labyrinth. "That necromancer is after the dragon in Edagon?"

Erlton nodded, surprised that Skullius didn't ask about the pursuers he mentioned.

The Hybrid Luman's eyes moved erratically within his sockets.

"Will Aigas be alright in this state? How long can it last?" he suddenly asked.

Erlton gave him a cautionary stare.

"For now, there won't be any problems. I'd say only about a fourth of Aigas is missing from the whole. The Herald in Edagon will be able to fix it if he wills it," he said.

Skullius scoffed.

"if he wills it? Sounds like you Heralds have just about the same amount of lazy whims as the Deities themselves..."

"Perhaps," Erlton said with a vague smile.

Silence lingered between the two again.

Skullius seemed to consider everything the Herald sitting next to him said in great detail.

Aigas split in half.

The masked man having the power to fight Heralds.

Things ordained and things not ordained.

Rules, Divinations...

For now, all these things only made him laugh hoarsely.

As though the darkness approaching Opungale wasn't as vexing enough.

"I see. I suppose someone is going to have to clean up your messes, starting with the one that's on its way here," Skullius said. "Is that also why you've lingered here, making sure I was.. 'understood'."

Erlton didn't answer.

Skullius didn't need him to.

The bastard was likely taking advantage of the fact that he... was a bearer of an Existential Parallel.

Oh well. It wasn't like he didn't have possible solutions.

He rose, his dark robe dancing about.

Erlton stood up as well and stashed his lute behind his back.

Without a word the two walked up to the steps leading to the giant doors of what looked like mahogany, upon their faces carved winding folktales of long-eared caricatures from top to bottom.

The two men then stopped. It almost seemed as though they were appreciating the tales told by the doors when in reality, they couldn't care less about it.

"You said an olden Herald distorted time, space and memory..." Skullius said while facing the doors. "The modern texts say it's been eighty millennia since the Grand Wars. If these texts have your prints on them, that means this is false, right? How long has it truly been?"

Erlton gave a brief smile before answering.

"I suppose it's been a little over 4,400 years..."

Skullius donned a broad grin.

"No wonder," he said before pushing the doors before him open.

Inside Gauurdfell, the Royal Mansion of the High Family, one from a normal human background would be astounded to find that there was no such a thing as a throne room.

What would have been a hall that one would find upon entering the abundant space which featured smooth grooves on the polished, white glass floor that spotted thick vines neatly fitted within while coiling in loops immaculately, was the space designated as a sort of council room.

Within it, a huge, round table with ancient runes that responded to speech could be found, split into four parts that remained more or less connected.

On one of these quarters, were two tall seats, majestic in their own sort of natural way. They didn't rely on gems or jewels to give distinction to whoever sat on them.

Two mature El Sif sat on these chairs, their ears longer than normal, and their faces alarmingly beautiful. It was honestly difficult to tell who was the 'he' and who was the 'she', especially given the fact that the two wore baggy outfits that hid their finer details.

Their hair only made it all the more confusing, as without paying much attention, it would seem as though the two were actually siblings.

Benyn and Cosycn were standing behind these two individuals.

On another of these slices of the table, was Darwel, seated alone with Seville behind her.

On another, was a man, a human, dressed in harsh-coloured soft clothing, a cheery expression on his face.

On the last, was a human girl donning a dark suit of armour, behind her fourteen men and women dressed in a like manner.

The atmosphere around the table was rather odd. It was more unsettling that it was actually tense.

It kept getting more and more awkward for the humans seated against the Sif, especially when considering the twenty-five experts standing against the four corners of the expansive hall, all of them... Incandescent Stagers.

The man in the colourful apparel gazed around sheepishly.

"Your Majesties," he said with a smile most lacking in seriousness. "Surely, you wouldn't have us return to Pelian, would you? Believe me..." the man looked around. "...I have no doubts about your military prowess at all, but we have come at the request of the King. He simply wishes to honour the alliance you forged with him."

One of the two seemingly androgynous El Sif seated almost twenty meters opposite the man, coughed lightly.

"We too would like to honour that alliance, Shannazah, was it? We suggested it, after all," a feminine voice came, allowing for better distinction. "However, it is quite the foolish decision to jump to another's aid without settling your own affairs, don't you think?"

"It is not our place to question the King," the girl in dark armour spoke with her eyes staring deeply at the El Sif who had just spoken. "If he feels that the nation can still stand without us, then we accept his wisdom."

No one seated upon the four quarters of enchanted table believed the last sentence, not even the girl in the armour herself.

A masculine voice came from the other mature El Sif.

"Maqi is coming with a force of 1,000. If we need allies for just that – regardless of those brutes' reputation – then we might as well offer ourselves on a floor-sized plates without resistance."

"Precisely," the other spoke, supporting her male counterpart fiercely. "We wouldn't dream of driving you out and taking your actions for granted, but please, do not interfere. If the war indeed begins, take no part in it. We will end it ourselves."

Suddenly the large doors leading directly into this hall opened wide, and two figures entered.

One of the two wore a grin and spoke with a tone of hot confidence.

"Indeed. There will be no need for allies. I alone will end the war."