

## Undead 961

### Chapter 961: True Veneration! (3)

The bald man was incensed by the comment.

Even as his bones bent, his fleshy curving to almost 360 degrees, he found the gritty tone to bellow out with pride, dozens of dark blood vessels printing against his skin.

"Don't underestimate me!"

He roared in pain, and then screamed out.

"This is my Creed, mend me back to the norm!"

In an instant, the bald man's body snapped back to its rightful form, the remnants of darkness that had been coiling around him being forced away. However, the man turned pale as he instantly distanced himself from Skullius who didn't follow up with another move.

He panted.

Sweat drizzled along the contours of his face profusely.

'The number of Creeds... the number of them it took to dispel that dark curse... I'm left with less than half of what I had just now...' he thought, severely panicked. 'How is he using abilities while inside my Territory? Wait... his mana core is stagnant as it should be...none of his mana is being mobilized but somehow...'

"Don't just stand there. Come on!" Skullius taunted.

The incessant, eager rain grew fiercer, and his body was melted and gouged without pause, yet with the glow around him, he healed before the briskness of a blink, making it seem as though there was practically no effect on him as well as the armor he wore.

The mud around him juttet towards him again, and as it did, the Incandescent Stager hurled himself towards Skullius!

'It doesn't matter how he's doing all this. He'll regret it soon. No matter what, once my secondary assault is ready...'

The bald man moved so fast that space was pulled on along with his movement. He was more than ten times faster than he was outside his Territory.

The moment he reached before a Skullius who looked to not yet register that he was there, he went for the head with an especially vicious uppercut that ground everything in the vicinity because of its uncanny force, before reaching its target.

BOOOOOM!

The blow was critical.

It practically erased Skullius' head down to his collarbone, as that was the goal; to stop Skullius from using the 'dark curse' by speaking.

Well... that's what was supposed to happen.

Or rather, it happened, but only for a split of a split of a second.

In one instance, Skullius' confident visage was there...then it blurred when the attack came... but remained as it was.

'What...' the Incandescent Stager gasped within.

Had this man just...

"| Ahgagsuzvsdhchsgxaicshajahsau |"

Incomprehensible nonsense sputtered rapidly out of Skullius' mouth and darkness like a bold shade bathed everything below his face, and went to spill on the ground.

The Incandescent Stager backed off with his face aghast.

He couldn't process what was going on.

Skullius could.

He had had everything he was currently doing in mind when he asked for his blessing – Graceful Monolith of the Eminent – to be made.

Everything, including the greatest mystery of all; the use of his Veneration art.

Back when Skullius lost control when faced with Rayn at the end of the Premium Age Royale, what took over was a rage inbuilt in the legacy of the Insurgent Magnus. A rage that burned from the remnants of Fulgardt living within him.

Rayn was his sworn enemy, a nemesis really.

As such, the weapon that came easily to the berserk cumulation of the Immoral's emotions manifested through Skullius' body, was [Pseudo Evil Veneration].

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[Pseudo Evil Veneration | 95%]

<Verbal Veneration Type>

Words delivered with a cruel intent will be actualized to reality to a certain extent. Due to the art being a lesser form of the true 'Evil Veneration', the use is limited to short phrases and the efficacy varies depending on luck and cruel the intent propounded is. Differences in strength barely matter, unless opponent has reached a higher Realm of power.

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This Veneration had existed as a lesser form of what it was original because Skullius acquired it by correctly deciphering the crumbs left behind by Fulgardt in the Labyrinth of the Yoke for prospective challengers. Of course, if the challengers acquired the full legacy, the ability would eventually rise in power to its peak.

This was what occurred, but not in the way it should have.

As the Veneration was held by a fragment of its original user – the berserk hatred of Fulgardt – it rose in strength, reaching as far as 95% to completion when he fought against Rayn.

And indeed... even though Skullius hid the fact from Maxim, Darwel and Vali earlier, he did remember what happened when he lost control.

He saw how else [Evil Veneration] could be used, and since it was merely 5% from losing its prefix – pseudo – reaching its full capacity, he concocted a way to push it. And it had succeeded.

...

The bald man watched in horror as pitch black darkness continued to spill from Skullius' mouth.

It pooled and formed a solid foundation for him to stand on.

And...

'The rain...' the Incandescent Stager gasped.

The Primary assault function of the Territory was still active... but it was nonexistent over where the darkness from [Evil Veneration] spread!

Yes. Naturally. Skullius had seen Seramoro do it. By casting itself a shade of darkness from [Pseudo Evil Veneration] it had voided the Primary assault of Rayn's Deific Moonlight Paradise.

And with that knowledge, the Hybrid Luman had wondered 'What else could the true version of this Veneration art do, when only half of it was so strong?'

What was its fullest extent?

Well, that was currently what he was testing.

When Vali successfully made what he wanted possible – creating a second affix on the Bashful Abomination – Skullius had declared what he desired wordlessly.

An affix that increased the Rank of every phenomenon to do with [Evil Darkness].

The affinity for [Evil Darkness] increased to A, every skill involved with it evolved, the Veneration art reached its complete status; all of this happened as long as Skullius was 'equipping' the Bashful Abomination. But of course...

The darkness around Skullius whipped about.

It was fundamentally different from that which came from [Evil Darkness Meshing] after all; it much denser.

Skullius looked ahead.

The darkness stopped seeping from his mouth.

The bald man began sweating.

"Come on. I'm still waiting for your next move. Shouldn't your Secondary attack be ready by now?" Skullius said, much to the added dismay of the bald man.

He panted heavily.

No way...

He had never seen anything like this....

None of it made sense.

The fact that there was someone like this on Opungale filled him with dread.

If he caught everyone else off guard, Incandescent Stagers like himself would be killed by being overconfident.

And if this man did it meticulously, this information wouldn't even be leaked...

Wait.

'Is that why he took me away somewhere without witnesses...?' the bald man shuddered at the thought, and his Maqi spirit was ignited. 'I have to kill him. I have to end him here!'

He pointed forward with both hands desperately, exhibiting the fullest extent of control over his Territory.

Skullius grinned.

"That's more like it."

Color instantly drained from the surroundings. The green faded from each direction except directly overhead.

The rain stopped, and the murky nature of the surroundings became clear white.

All the mud vanished, and the clear border of white Nitros onto which the Imaginary GeoScape of the Territory was laid was revealed once again, though it wasn't at all radiant. It was somber, ashen even.

High above, all the rot and its various manifestations gathered to create a horrendous figure.

It was hideous, unsightly, not to mention enormous.

A vile rock made from everything that was putrid and foul. It almost seemed organic, with mutant figures squirming over its face, as though life was born from the perfect rot qualities it exuded.

"Blister of Salvation!" the bald man called under the shadow of the gigantic mass.

...And then it fell; the Secondary attack function.

GUUUUU!

It attempted to flatten Skullius with its aerial weight alone, a great gust causing an unreal turbulence everywhere.

The falling mass would cover everything in sight and probably rot everything in instant. Everything except the bald man.

Skullius smiled as he sensed the Blister of Salvation's approach.

'Ah. I don't think I can completely negate that. That isn't the real purpose of [Evil Veneration] after all...' he thought as his hair was cast this way and that by the pungent wind. 'Oh well... I can at least make things interesting.'

Then the Hybrid Luman opened his mouth and spoke malevolently.

"| You are susceptible to your own Territory's attacks |"

...

The bald man heard this... and his fighting spirit waned.

For a mass of darkness rushed towards him, blasted through him and made what had been said just now a truly real reality.

...And then the mighty Blister of Salvation crushed him and Skullius before exploding into an ocean of rot.

## Chapter 962: The Reward of Forethought

The power behind [Evil Veneration] couldn't be overstated. Even Skullius was gleefully chortling inwardly as he attempted to see its full capabilities and how much more powerful it was compared to its limited predecessor.

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[Evil Veneration]

<Verbal Veneration Type>

Words delivered with a cruel intent will be actualized into reality. Decrees from your speech are more effective the more succinctly defined they are, though, if expressed coarsely, they may still come to pass or at least birth mere shadows of your intent. Barring Transcendent or Divine intervention, your declarations cannot be dodged or blocked.

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This was [Evil Veneration] in its complete majesty.

As long as Skullius said something with the intent to harm, his targets would be affected, and as long as he streamlined what he demanded using this Veneration art, it would come to pass, guaranteed. While the limitation of not being able to affect anything tagged Transcendent or Divine was quite concerning, Skullius was aware that anything that matched the caliber of the two, was extremely rare.

The only thing that truly concerned him was the cost of using [Evil Veneration]. When he used it the first time, it had guzzled nearly all of his mana – bolstered twentyfold – in one fell swoop.

All for a single usage!

Thus, he had switched to using the Preeminent Attegoth's mana.



While Veneration art didn't necessarily need mana as its sole fuel, Skullius wasn't ready to start paying the activation cost with anything else.

'Well... acquiring this was worth it either way... I'm not going to start complaining when there's a chance to grow right in front of me...'

Skullius grinned as he spoke. Well, it wasn't at all obvious given the state of his face, or rather, his whole. Even that didn't suffice because Skullius was anything but whole at this moment. Rot like green char hung over his body, which at this point, looked quite like his old Boneman form.

His bones were also green, ugly decay having borne and broken through most of them, leaving just enough for him to stay standing within the raging sea of whirling rot – the climax of the fallen rot meteor.

Indeed, the price for acquiring [Evil Veneration] wasn't as simple as it appeared at first glance.

Vali's use of the Imagining Technique had indeed created a second affix slot on the Bashful Abomination, however, unlike the original, it wasn't as potent – it was only slightly above half as powerful, as such, Skullius had used the two Creeds swimming in his soul to supplement it.

Even as a Master, the machination of Creeds worked perfectly with his grown soul.

However, be that as it may, even this had not been enough.

Skullius had to use the Creeds in a different way than the expected.

He had opted to use the Creeds in order to make the affix slot on the Bashful Abomination strong enough to handle the affix: 'increase the Rank of every phenomenon to do with [Evil Darkness].' It didn't work.

Thus, Skullius worked around this. He instead used the Creeds to trade off something else to make the affix work for him.

So, his official Creed ended up creating:

'When increasing the Rank of every phenomenon to do with [Evil Darkness], the Bashful Abomination will lose its ability to cut...'

This had finally worked.

'Hehe...' Skullius laughed as he thought about it. The Omniscient Thought Cracker worked like a charm in having him figure out how to make it all work while fighting the bald man.

As for equipping the Bashful Abomination in order to be able to use [Evil Veneration], well...

The Preeminent Attegoth was one with Skullius. Its mark was on the sword, and this counted as him wielding it.

'For a moment there, I really thought I was going to die...' Skullius thought with a thrilled laugh. A soft light was bathing his body, making sure the whipping ugly around him wouldn't reduce him to nothing.

[Gradius Order Halo] was still active, and though the initial might of the amalgamation of rot had nearly erased him, it had packed enough oomph to keep him alive while working at maximum output.

Fortunately, Skullius didn't have to endure the onslaught of the rot for more than two minutes. The howling fury of the Blister of the Salvation began to dwindle... and the integrity of the Territory also followed.

With a massive crack, the abundant, ashy tone began to fade, the remainder of the rot from the Secondary assault function of the Territory spilling out to eat whatever was close before fading.

Skullius emerged back in the unbound, real world, fresh and whole. His red armor reemerged with style, along with his dark robe, imprinted on the back with four, stellar wings.

"You look pathetic. I suppose it wasn't as fun as you thought it was going to be..." he sneered while looking several meters before him on the ground.

Even without the usual – pupil sponsored – ability to see, he could still perceive the sorry image convulsing while laying sprawled on the dirt like roadkill.

If Skullius had looked horrible when he first took the full impact of the Blister of Salvation, then the bald man looked horrendously unsightly. It appeared all he had to defend against the attack was his physique which was bolstered by the Territory... the same Territory that released an attack that left him in this state.

The man had barely managed to believe it.

His arms were destroyed, so was half his face along with his most of his jaw and neck.... And pretty much everything below his chest.

The man couldn't even speak.

What remained of his right eye – bloodshot and veiny – was glaring at Skullius as he walked closer.

"I bet you wish you could use a Creed right about now..." Skullius said before stomping on the man's chest, clearing the air in his visible, deflating lungs.

The man groaned and spat blood from the open half of his face. His eyes scoured all over Skullius furiously.

"Are you wondering how I'm alive? How I was able to use my abilities in your Territory? Well, I'd say you fellows saw the answer and chose to ignore it. The hubris on you lot..." Skullius said with another stomp and he pointed towards the Graceful Monolith, the Preeminent Attegoth in the distance.

"You see... as long as that thing is erected, you'll be fighting two of me, both linked by something derived by the light beyond Divinity – a blessing. I wasn't able to use my mana in the Territory, well, I didn't mind that honestly. I also wasn't able to use my skills, but the neat thing is, none of my skills reside in my body. As long as they are activated through that thing, I can still use them.

Though, abilities that extend from my body to a target will be neutralized by the Territory with the sole exception of [Evil Veneration]. It's not a skill, after all. Also...oh..."

Skullius tilted his head.

[You have killed LV52 Human. 56,230 EXP]

[Your prey emits...]

"He's dead..." he said with a tone of satisfaction and melancholy at the same time. "I was riding the high of my complexities a bit too much, it seems."

Raising his hand, Skullius managed to catch the Bashful Abomination which came flying in his hand because of the influence of the Preeminent Attegoth.

"Dear Master! I wish you had taken me with you! I wanted to... do something! It's been too long. You haven't used me since..." the sword cried to the Hybrid Luman's ear.

"I just used you. I wouldn't have acted so free if it weren't for your abilities," Skullius said.

"Well, that's true..." the Bashful Abomination somberly said, "...but...what you wanted for the new affix slot you made... isn't it bad that you won't be able to use me for basic slashing attacks as long [Evil Veneration] is in use? I will be no different from a stick."

Skullius swung the sword. It was currently coated in a thick layer of darkness that actually made it look like a black stick. This was a visual representation of the first affix being in use.

"It won't be a problem. The trade off is worth it. It just means I can't use your first and second affixes at the same time. I can just use Demion's Dance when I need to cut something. On that note, I should try a dual wielding skill. I'll see if there's a capable fighter to steal it from..."

"I... see..."

The inflection spurned by jealousy from the Bashful Abomination was easy to recognize.

Skullius laughed.

"Dear Master... you still haven't used the original affix slot. It still has the [Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art]. Do you wish to use it?"

It didn't appear as though Skullius hadn't thought about it.

It actually would have benefitted him to use the original slot for making the affix that allowed him to use [Evil Veneration], as that would have subtracted some of the cost, but he didn't look to be thinking along those lines.

"I have something else in mind for that," he said simply before sheathing the Bashful Abomination.

Just by willing it, the Hybrid Luman's figure vanished from the rot-stricken land stained by the Maqian corpse. Everything whirled around him for a small speck of time, and he appeared back in the Wonderfall Torrents.

A massive Majestic Territory was shattering, revealing the figures of the individuals who had been battling within it.

The mood that came with this event told of a somber conclusion.

#### Chapter 963: Poison of Majesty

Viccil emerged out of the compound Territory, and her state was less than appealing. Her body was mostly covered in thick, wooden bark – shaped like bulky armor – but that didn't seem to have deterred the visceral blows she had received while fighting the lanky, square-jawed man before her.

Blood was gushing from several gashes over the bark that left her real armor and flesh exposed, seeming to have done no better job against whatever had been flung her way within the Territory, rather, Territories.

It appeared in the battle of expelled domains, she had not fared too well.

As she coughed a mouthful of blood from behind her veil, Viccil collapsed to her knees.

Her opponent looked extremely tired, but he found enough mirth on his tongue to amuse himself with silent jests about his enemy. Now, all that was left, was to finish her off. He had won all else, hadn't he?

Unfortunately, that was not easily done.

It might have been very easily forgotten by lesser combatants, but there were several prices to pay for using Majestic Territories, after all, they were taught to humans by the beasts of Sacred Forests, and weren't an inherent part of the Incandescent Stage initially.

To create one required a massive amount of Nitros, which could be produced by condensing mana to its limit.

In the olden days, powerful experts deemed that using Creeds to double one's sum of mana would suffice for the creation of a Territory, and somewhere along the line – in the time that followed this discovery – it was defined such that calling out the name of one's Territory, would be the command that spurned one's Creeds to be used in order to double one's mana volume at once – streamlining the process of Territory activation.

As such, following the use of a Territory, the toll of suddenly gaining double the amount of resources, only to use them all up in one fell swoop, would catch up to the Territory User in full force, inflicting first, unbearable exhaustion.

The feeling was especially grueling when the cast Territory failed to finish the job.

That was why the square-jawed Incandescent Stager standing before Viccil swayed a little.

"You were... surprisingly resilient. But that was all..." the man said with a cocky sneer.

Viccil panted hard.

"Well, then thank goodness I'm not alone..." she said.

...!!!

The whistling of a sword came for the lanky Maqian, quick and vivacious.

Yet, somehow, he managed to duck and side step its following assault, much to Seville's dismay.

She had found the optimum chance to swoop in and save her fellow Sif, only for her exhausted prey to somehow show incredible tenacity, even while experiencing what was commonly known among all Territory users, as the Poison of Majesty.

"Another enters the fray. Come on! Give me a better show!" the man grinned as he roared.

Sevill scoffed while she swung her slender jian around. To think this man was so zealous even while being devoid of a single drop of mana.

"I'll send you off with a bang!" she said, but she didn't advance. Instead, she backed away and threw her hand forward, pointing towards the square-jawed man. "Hear me, O Quintess, devour my enemies beneath, so that they may never again see the light of day!"

The Maqian instantly tensed.

A blessing?

Suddenly, below his feet...

Wait...

There was nothing below his feet!

"Aaaah!"

The man screamed as he fell. The ground had opened up under his feet, as though it had never existed, revealing a depth of no end which he dropped into.

The man descended until he could see no light.

Until he saw only darkness and grew sick of the insurmountable void.

...

Sevill walked to a square-jawed man laying on the wet ground. He kept convulsing and flailing his limbs, as though having a nightmare.

All the man had seen, was false.

In reality, the world never opened up to receive him.

Sevill's blessing induced the potent illusion of such. Just that single, simple illusion. It worked particularly well on experts who weren't too adept at sensing their surroundings beyond their normal, enhanced senses. Most Form Users, for instance.

TCH!

Sevill's sword penetrated the man's brain, ending his life.

"Job well done."

Sevill turned to see Skullius walking towards her and Viccil, who also turned.

"Lord Luminant!" they both called.

"Looks like things turned very chaotic here," Skullius said as he watched through the agonizing trees the ugly image of what the Wonderfall Torrents had become. Darwel's great mansion had sustained more damage than before, and the clear pools around it were now stained in the blood of several experts along with many Sif servants who had been unfortunate enough to be in the thick of the battles.

Shannazah and Kudobtu were nowhere in sight.

"The Maqian soldiers... they are very strong," Viccil said as she pushed herself off the ground. "I can tell, what we have been fighting are the average combatants. A mere Master almost got the better of me last time – an assassin back in Genhuis who was sent to kill Lady Darwel."

Skullius rubbed his neck.



"I can imagine that they only sent a few powerhouses with a boatload of 'mediocre' fighters. In any case, I've seen who they really sent to stir things up over here," Skullius said.

Both Viccil and Seville nervously looked at him.

"What?" the latter said in surprise.

"Indeed," Skullius nodded, and then he pointed towards Viccil, and a golden, half a skull mark appeared just below her neck.

She blinked as she felt for it, having noticed that a spark of light had touched her skin.

The same happened to Seville.

"To stand a chance against who we're up against, strong or mediocre, you'll need these. Hmmm I wonder if I can mark every Sif on Opungale. That's probably a bit too much..." Skullius said more to himself than the two staring at him curiously.

"Uhm... Lord Luminant. What are these?" Viccil asked.

"We'd also like to know..."

From the desecrated entrance to the mansion, Maxim and Vali walked out – well, the latter sauntered.

"Oh, you're still alive?" Skullius turned and smiled.

"That's rude," Maxim said as she brushed chunks of dirt off her pink hair.

Vali wore her seductive smile as always, and when she saw the Bashful Abomination in Skullius' hand, it grew wider – rather, wilder.

"How is it? I didn't exactly get a chance for a review," she asked.

Skullius grinned.

"It's pretty neat."

#### Chapter 964: Bolstering The Allies! (1)

It was indeed unmistakable just how much Skullius cherished Vali's superb achievement.

The Bashful Abomination had never felt more attractive to Skullius. It had been a great asset, of course, but it was always an option. Before this, it wouldn't have been a stretch to say Skullius held Demion's Dance in higher regard than the Bashful Abomination, especially after its awakening during the Premium Age Royale which pretty much saved his, Tallo's and Maxim's lives against Baddan.

This was not to even mention the fact that it hadn't finished evolving to its greatest height, as it had held itself back because of the rules of the Premium Age Royale.

And there was also the mystery of Irisa.

In the battle against Rias, when he was given the title of Game Master, Skullius had seen her; after the EverSword heir had conjured the Cluster General and killed him and several other contenders. The Hybrid Luman was certain that Demion's Dance's awakening, was tied to this somehow.

In any case, the fact was, at the moment, Skullius was riding the high of the Bashful Abomination's upgrade, and that was all owed to Vali.

"It's pretty neat. I've been able to cheat my way against stronger opponents," Skullius said.

Vali wore a cheeky smile.

"Well, if that was indeed an Incandescent Stager after your ass, and you are here now, I imagine only trickery got you the win," she said, referencing the brief glimpse of Skullius and the bald man she had seen when they fell through the mansion.

"Perhaps."

"Enough with the flirting. You were about to explain what these are?" Maxim butted in while gesturing towards the glow on her neck.

Skullius scratched his chin with a finger.

"Hmmm. That's right," he said before turning to Viccil who remained dank in her own blood.

At once, a golden white glow bathed her whole, and in an instant, her body was healed!

"Wow..." Maxim commented with a brow raised.

Viccil gasped as she shed the bark armor she wore, and frisked herself.

"My wounds... They were quite fatal!" she said in shock.

"Nothing [Gradius Order Halo] can't fix," Skullius said. He was amused to see the looks on the four ladies' faces. Well, he had to sense the surprise from Viccil and Seville.

"Festos. You mean to tell me..." Vali was the first to voice her inference on the purpose of the golden marks with narrow eyes, but she didn't get to finish.

"Yes. It's pretty obvious isn't it? Whoever is marked is under my protection, plus other benefits," Skullius said with an unrealistic smile.

As he said this, it struck Maxim.

Putting her astonishment about Viccil getting healed aside, she looked up at the girthy, ginormous tree in the distance, above it, an arc of runes, like a crown, and at the end of its branches, scary figures of skulls.

"That... that's yours, isn't it?" she said with a slight quake in her voice. "I should have realized it before, since the timing couldn't have been a coincidence, but we got attacked right after."

Everyone else turned to look at the Graceful Monolith of the Eminent.

Viccil and Seville had realized that it had to do with Skullius when it first bloomed, as had Darwel.

"What is that?" Vali asked as the golden white was reflected in her eyes. She had assumed it had to do with the Sif's defense... until she remembered that Skullius had used something like this in the Premium Age Royale!

"Something divine," Skullius explained simply. "What's more important, is what it is capable of. I wouldn't want you all to be rendered useless just because the caliber of our enemies is quite high. That's why I have chosen to give you access to some of my abilities. As long as you have that mark, you can use my powers."

...!!!

Only Seville and Viccil grew excited at the prospect.

Vali and Maxim weren't quite sure that was as appealing as it sounded. After all, they had both fought with Skullius before. Maxim was more inclined to believe that what she had just seen Skullius do to opponents that she herself couldn't beat earlier, was a product of his soul growing stronger, his stats getting inflated as a result.

What else could he do besides that? What arsenal of skills and abilities could he possibly have acquired while stuck in bed for three days?

"No offense, but... what kind of powers do you have that can make us capable of fighting those monsters on equal grounds? Don't get me wrong, I think being able to... share your abilities – like healing – is great but..." Maxim said with a strained face.

Skullius saw that her earlier failure to even land an impactful punch on the bulky Maqian woman had shattered her confidence, and worse, her hope.

He smiled.

"I have several. And minor correction. This isn't just a healing skill," Skullius said and the four women immediately felt an explosion of energy bursting through their bodies!

It was like having a stream of cool energy running through your body, just under the skin.

All four women sucked in a deep breath, and... and...

Maxim felt her muscles scream, burning, or rather fuming with zeal. It was as though profound cells had suddenly been born within her, urging her original cells to work better by vomiting onto them what she could only describe as liquid vigour.

"Festos! WHAT IS THIS?!" she was so dumbfounded that she screamed what should have been a calm inquisition.

Vali felt the effects best...or was it worst?

Because of the nature of her technique, Cellular Supremacy, she quite literally felt all her abundant, vivacious cells vibrate with an excess of power, and they multiplied continuously.

Sevill and Viccil had more tame reactions, even if the nature of what was happening to them was the same. They simply looked thrilled. Viccil who had felt the uniqueness of the healing properties that had just bathed her, could understand that it was the same skill causing her to feel such an overflow of power.

What was this skill?

Could it actually be a skill above Special? How was Lord Luminant Festos able to use it when he had a blue mana core?

How could she know?

At the same time, the four women felt the influx of knowledge on abilities that weren't theirs.

[Graceless Hunter]

[Instant Blaze Charge]

[Bombardier Bangster Fist Art]

[Primal Caution]

[Undaunted Calamity]

[Greatest Mana Manipulation]

[Swordmaster's Quiescence]

...

It went on and on.

'Too bad I can't grant them access to my Insurgent Magnus abilities. They'd need the Fruit of World Myths for that...' Skullius thought.

As the women guzzled the information in awe, he gathered his plans for them. He wanted to bolster them... to use them in different ways (however lewd that sounded).

He turned to the two Sif who were still visibly stunned.

While sending his intent to the Preeminent Attegoth for the activation of a certain, newly evolved Super skill, he asked them:

"Tell me. What do you know about incarnating?"

Chapter 965: Bolstering The Allies! (2)

"Incarnation?" asked Seville. "Isn't that tied to coming into another form of existence after death?"

Skullius scratched his chin, an amused smile etched over it.

"Not exactly."

It was Vali who spoke.

"It doesn't ultimately imply death at all, incarnation," she said and faced Skullius with a bright expression as the glow of [Gradius Order Halo] continued to outline her shapely figure. "What are you thinking of doing? The last thing I expected you to say was something like this."

Maxim would have said the same thing, if she wasn't too preoccupied with feeling for the extent to which her body's capabilities had been inflated by whatever skill Skullius was using.

The Hybrid Luman slotted his hand into the darkness of his robe as though pockets existed there that no one else could see.

"Incarnation is a concept that appeals more to the efforts of Divinity. Celestial bodies gaining tangible form – inhabiting mortal vessels; the condensing of concepts into actual, physical forms... The thought that death should have any part in that, is merely a lie created by the Purity.

It formed when they forged the lie that after death, there's a precious reward for their followers..." Skullius said with some manner of disgust.

Vali narrowed her eyes.

Once again, much like Darwel... she truly felt as though at times... this calmer Skullius was someone else. The one she knew would have never started spouting about incarnation... especially with such a level of glee... as though he could relate.

"If... Incarnation is for the Divines... then what would you have us do?" Viccil asked, a tone of reverence in her voice.

She had been enlightened by Seville on what had happened at the Oath of Mourning, at the Luminant's shrine. At the moment, she and her fellow Sif were deeply sunken in the idea that Skullius had changed for the better after the unknown circumstances that followed his frozen state as he had stood before the shrine.

Skullius walked up to Viccil.

"You'll see..."

The moment he touched the Sif, she immediately collapsed to the ground.

...!!!

Viccil was stunned, as was Vali and Maxim who snapped back to reality.

"What happened?" the pink-haired woman asked in surprise.

However, Skullius didn't answer. He simply went on to touch Sevil, who, after hesitating a little, let herself feel the light palm of Skullius over her chest, and then she too fell to the ground.

Skullius then turned to the corpses of the Maqian warriors.

He felt the residuals of the energy they had been carrying.

"There are only two Incandescent Stager corpses here. I assume the other was killed by either Cosycn, Shannazah or Kudobtu. Well, lucky me, I suppose..."

Over the latest corpse, which had been made so by Sevil, a golden half a skull mark appeared, and an intense golden light suffused it for a moment. In the next instance, the body was healed. In fact, rather than healed, the flesh of the corpse looked firm, the skin attaining a shade of colour that suggested life!

The same happened for the other corpse.

Vali was most impressed.

'This kind of healing goes beyond what I'm capable of. It's almost like he's applying a Super potion.'

Vali, despite her proclivity for combat and her outrageous abilities, was an advanced Healer, so she knew a thing or two about differences in calibre of healing. While her own abilities could achieve similar feats to what she had seen Skullius do, she was certain that there was some kind of added refinement and finesse to this skill Skullius was using.



Well, the man had said it himself.

This was not just a healing skill.

~~~

[Gradius Order Halo (Super) | Lv.1]

<Passive>

Minimal resources will be utilised in order to reform the body to its peak state after every defined figure of damage, and in case of continuous attack, evil influence, instant erasure offenses or curses, more resources will be used to counter the source of damage by mimicking the properties of its natural or related deterrent perpetually, until it can no longer damage the user.

Half of the resources used to enact the aforementioned will be reimbursed to the user each time.

-Caution-

The duration and effectiveness of the process is determined by the severity of the damage taken – where physical damage and curses are concerned.

<Active>

The user can create a halo which grants a 200% increase to every aspect of restoration that the <passive> grants. The halo affects the user and their allies as they wish, and will grant a 290% increase to their overall ability. Lasts 30 Minutes.

Mana Requirements: 80,700 (II) Mana Points, 15,000 (II) Mana Points every minute

Duration: 20 minutes

Cooldown: ---

~~~

It was only the passive abilities of [Gradius Order Halo] that were implemented on the two corpses, and they already looked fresh.

Skullius was indifferent towards the result, unlike the two still wondering about this ability of his and what had happened to Viccil and Seville.

He then pointed at the corpses.

"[Order-Soul Projection]"

As he spoke, the two bodies trembled as a faint light, much like that which one would see in the morning, through thin curtains, sprang forth from them. It seemed to whisper as it wiggled out like smoke, and then...

The corpse of the square-jawed man Seville had killed, quivered and snapped awake!

The man sat up, a look of incredulity on his face.

He breathed heavily, his breaths practically pulling and pushing the surrounding air.

He then looked at his hands in what seemed like either horror or intrigue.

"How does it feel?" Skullius asked.

The man looked at the Hybrid Luman and tilted his head a little, confused. A moment later, he seemed to realise something and he quickly stood up.

"Lord Luminant! I... This is..." he said in a chaotically masculine voice.

This was ridiculous!

The other corpse – that of a short, albeit busty woman – which had been a distance away, floating in the blood-tainted pool, came rushing towards the group.

"How's that body, Sevil?" Skullius asked as he turned to her.

Sevil, who was inhabiting the body of the short woman, couldn't find the words.

Honestly, the fact that she was somehow possessing this woman's body was the least shocking thing.

Deep within her, she felt the overwhelming strength trapped within the body coming to life. It wasn't her own, which she knew remained in her Sif body.

No.

In this cage of flesh, she felt decades of harsh, brutal and ruthless training regiments that involved battling merciless, drugged Cluster beast of higher Tiers without rest and sometimes without food... and sometimes without light.

She felt the tempered flesh of one who never rested, one who never feared, rising again, accepting the fact that someone was ready to exploit it.

The purple core in this body thrummed to life again and Sevil felt that it was much deeper than her own.

"Unbelievable...With this..."

It had taken Kudobtu to use her unusual abilities somewhat seriously to kill this woman who was rather ferocious. Sevil had seen it.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Skullius said to Sevil with a grin before turning back to Viccil who inhabited the body of the square-jawed man.

"Get a hang of these bodies as quickly as you can. Don't fight against the muscle memory. I need you as my spies."

#### Chapter 966: Something Else In Mind

[Lucent Apparition] was a skill Skullius acquired after using [Immoral Authority] on Hobbu Gobbu. He had managed to catch the large goblin 'lacking', and used the latter skill to extract his abilities and memories.

The skill was enhanced by the favor from [Just Light] to become what it was; an ability that allowed one to project their consciousness onto something else.

Skullius hadn't used this skill himself. Instead, he allowed Sila to project his conscious into a suit of armor, and into the jade orb, the Hexer's Inheritance, which had been vital to some of his feats during the Premium Age Royale.

[Order-Soul Projection], the freshly evolved version of [Lucent Apparition], was a quite different though.

Sevill and Viccil who were far from done marveling about this unique out-of-original-body experience, could attest to this.

Their souls had seamlessly been pulled out of their Sif bodies and placed into these ones without consequence. The new bodies even snugly welcomed them as though there was no distinction between the old and new souls whatsoever.

This was bizarrely unreal.

"How in the world..." Maxim gaped. "How is this even possible? Manipulating souls to this degree... that's not something just anyone can do. Even Incandescent Stagers can't inherently do that!"

Vali concurred. She had felt something shift when the bodies of the two Maqians convulsed.

"That's true," she said. "Incarnation. This might as well be it. I thought you said it was only reserved for the divine."

Skullius grinned as he once again slotted his hands back into his pockets.

"Well, I did tell you before that the Monolith over there... is something divine."

Both Vali and Maxim were unsettled. Vali could have sworn that the Preeminent Attegoth hadn't been anything too special back when Skullius used it during the Royale.

Now... what it was capable of according to Skullius...

The Hybrid Luman crouched and imbedded his senses within Seville and Viccil's original bodies.

They were still in good condition.

[Order-Soul Projection] was a Super skill that allowed Skullius to safely move ethereal bodies while guaranteeing that both extraction and insertion was done in a way that completely rid the chances of rejection and corruption between the original source of the ethereal body he was moving, and the body receiving it.

In the case of the latter, Skullius had [Gradius Order Halo] to ensure that the vessel receiving the soul was in pristine condition. Even for combat purposes, the skill was perfect, as it was even capable of revitalizing the mana core of a dead recipient.

Unlike beasts, humans' mana cores didn't crystalize upon death. The mana stored in the mana core would remain until it expired from slowly fading with time. After all, the soul which it was connected to would be gone, meaning the continuously supply of mana would be lost too.

"I need you to move around Opungale. Kill the enemy if they are few in number, assimilate if they are many and stronger. It's not possible for you to extract the memories of your vessels in such a short amount of time, so instead, gather as much intelligence as you can. However, don't stop moving. Cover as much ground as possible.

If you make an interesting discovery, speak while touching the golden mark, I will hear."

Seville and Viccil barely managed to stifle their still shaken selves as they acknowledged what Skullius said. Viccil in particular was not yet accustomed to being... male.

Beyond that, the thin film of light around them told of the fact that even in these enhanced, stronger bodies, they were also bolstered by the might of [Gradius Order Halo] and were capable of using the plethora of skills Skullius had, which had been informed to them!

Dear Deities...

"Also..." Skullius said, his tone quite grave. "If you encounter an old hag who looks like she could leave this world at any moment... run, or better yet, will yourselves to return to your bodies. While my ability makes it so that upon death, you will simply return, I can't guarantee that that woman will allow it."

All of sudden, the air turned tense.

The two Sif remembered that Skullius had said that he had seen who had been sent to truly stir things up in Opungale.

"We will keep that in mind, Lord Luminant..." Seville said.

Skullius nodded.

"Go West. It should be better to start."

Seville and Viccil heeded and hurried out of sight.

"What about us?" Maxim asked with narrowed eyes. "You can't make me feel like I can topple a mountain with a sigh and then send me on reconnaissance, right?"

"Oh, sockets no," Skullius said with a grin. "Not for you two."

"What do you have in mind?" Vali asked.

Skullius walked up to her and caressed the fabric of her loose clothing.

"Wear something nice. Something that won't look ugly with blood on it."

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"Old Umbett. Are you sure we aren't ignoring something that might bite us in the ass later? That tree... or whatever it is... unnerves me..." the young Ode said as he looked at the distant glow that towered and branched freely, as though it owned the skies... the dark skies.

The old hag whom the young Ode was sauntering with, along with other combatants – barely twenty in number – sighed.

"It should do more than unnerve you then, if you truly want to worry about," she said and licked her chapped lips which went on to become dry a moment later."

"What's that supposed to mean?" the crimson-haired young man turned as he asked.

"Mystery. Dark mystery. Something... familiar is wondering around this island. I first sensed it on the shore... and now, it's laid bare. However, neither you nor I, I feel, are quite ready to know whether the feeling in my gut is true or false," Umbett said with a cough.

"That's the most cryptic you've been so far, old hag. Well done. Whatever it is though, is it something even you can't handle?"

The old woman gave an aged, mucousy laugh.

"You need to only worry about your objective. You intend to challenge the rulers of this land to Kuthmuk, do you not? You promised your father you wouldn't back out or lose, regardless of who it was you were to face."

The Ode sneered.

"Oh please. Like I'd be defeated by scrubs who befriend trees."

Chapter 967: Allied Assault

In a fallen Aurora.

"Pretentious. Look at them. Some are just barely stifling the desire to break down and beg for their lives," one man with abnormally downturned eyes that held a dense degree of condescension, snorted.

"What do you expect? They are cowards. History has told us that much. I wish I was part of the torturing. It would make me feel better if I got one of them to scream for mercy. I'd have a decent story to tell my wife at least," another broad Maqian with a giant axe said.

They were standing close to the entrance of the Aurora, keeping watch as they had been told. However, they couldn't resist peering past the burning houses, corpses and mutilated features within the Aurora to watch the proceedings at the very centre of the settlement.

Non-combatant Sif of all ages were lined up, made to kneel, their limbs bound.

Thousands of them could be seen, all having lost or losing the hope that local forces would come and save them. The knowledge that there were so many Auroras in Opungale made the majority feel like their loyal defense forces would be spread too thin, and if that wasn't the case, then perhaps they would be butchered easily the moment they came.

After all, that was what had happened to the Sif experts stationed in this place.

Despite them being highly disciplined and powerful, it almost seemed as though they were nothing in the face of the mere twenty enemies that were here. They had been ripped apart, not just because of the overwhelming, individual prowess of the Maqians, but because of their incredible adherence to formations and absolute knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Hell, the most terrifying warriors among the group, two Incandescent Stagers had barely participated at all until now. The rest – the Masters – had handled everything up until this point, hard as that was to believe.

Thud.

A head fell, blood spitting from the stump came after a soft jaw.

Shudders and screams echoed from the long line of hostages who were once again reminded that they were probably not getting out of this alive.



"Yeesh. Is that bastard harvesting again?" the man with the downturned said as he peeked at the man walking behind the rows of Sif, a brown robe decorated with rat and mouse skulls on every fringe and hem cloaking his athletic body while a freakishly tall staff towered over him.

"Why not? He's only limited to convicts half the time back home and you kno—"

"Know what?" the man with the downturned eyes raised a brow and then turned to his partner, wondering why he hadn't finished his sentence when...

...!!!

The Maqian was appalled to find half his friend's head missing, with only the bottom row of his teeth, along with squirts of blood remaining atop.

Without wasting a moment, the man turned and screamed at the top of his lungs.

"AN ATTACK!"

He immediately saw his fellow Maqian raiders past the conflagrations snapping into action without asking questions; the best result possible. He, on the other hand, did the same. His Perfect Aura gushed out of him fiercely, and he guarded, preparing for any attack from any direction.

"Way to make things harder for me, Festos," said the voice of a woman who emerged, walking from the dense forest surrounding the Aurora with an annoyed visage. She tied her pink hair into a ponytail as she briskly walked forth, garbed in a dark blue and silver steel armor with long linen straps – or what looked like it – on both sides of the slender waist.

A soft golden glow was around her, inspiring a certain degree of... unease that the Maqian who glared at her squinted at.

"You go on ahead. I'll deal with this!" Maxim said as she shot forth.

Just as she did, a brisk shadow sped past her and past the tense Maqian.

Caught by surprise, the man spared the fast figure a glance, debating for a split second if he should pursue it instead.

That momentary distraction turned out to be a mistake, or at least a chance that was exploited by the enemy.

Maxim shuttled towards him with a manner of speed he didn't expect; frankly, from the look she adopted, she didn't expect it either, but that didn't stop her from grunting as she spread her arms wide, lowered herself and hammered into the Maqian with her shoulder!

There was a rough, blunt noise and the two crashed into the ground ten meters away, only for them to disentangle and split off.

As they stood facing each other, the Maqian with an odd face, and Maxim with a thrilled one, the dancing, fiery orange, gave highlight and shadow that crafted an intriguing image between the two.

...

This image was unfortunately marred by the arrival of two more Masters from the opposing side.

They strategically placed themselves in a way that made it difficult for Maxim to keep her eyes on both of them.

"I'm almost flattered," Maxim said languidly, confidently.

The enemies immediately lunged – the man with downturned eyes too – not giving Maxim a chance to adopt a plan or compose herself against the sudden numerical disadvantage.

Of course, this wasn't the bulk of the enemies' strategy.

A heavy wall of mental energy suddenly smashed down right where Maxim was standing, and the atrocious force caused the ground to cave in over a wide area, as though it was hollow underneath.

"Hahahahaha!" another Maqian immediately followed up by sucking in a deep breath and vomiting from his mouth a massive, jelly-like dog that looked as though it was made of sweltering welts and

blisters that sizzled, a putrid smell coming from them. It leapt up and dived into the pit that had been made by an ally Mind Caster, and transfigured into molten goop, much like acid.

Thick billows of smoke jutted from the huge pit, obscuring the surroundings rapidly, along with a dire heat.

It seemed the beast summoned by the Tamer, was a construct of something akin to a potent, scorching acid.

The blow of mental energy was sure to have knocked the target into delusion for at least a hot minute, which would have given the summoned beast a chance to attack while Maxim was disoriented.

Surely...

CLAP!

A loud clap sounded with vigour. It came from the deep indentation in the ground.

However, it wasn't all just sound.

A terrible pulse of Aura exploded out with it, and then...

The pit turned flat, becoming a large, thin plate that floated in the air.

But that wasn't all.

The melting mess, like boiled disease, floated above the pit plate and above it in a turn, was a plate that showed a vast cloud of smoke trapped within!

The three Masters turned wary.

What technique was this?!

The caster was standing below all the plates, on a patch of confused ground, a crazed smile on her face.

"It's so much easier! He wasn't kidding at all, the bloody genius!" she exclaimed gleefully.

"Kill her!" the man with downturned eyes called to his fellow experts, however, just like before...

...!!!

He felt Maxim already standing behind him!

What was this speed?!

It was unnatural!

It was as though the enemy wasn't travelling at all.

The man felt Maxim's arms clutch at him, winding around his waist, and then, with staggeringly swift motion, his head pounded into the ground.

Maxim let out a cackle as she flipped back, leaving her victim groaning in hard dirt and dust.

Another assailant, the Mind Caster was coming after her. The Tamer circled around them to attack from the side.

Maxim dodged a blow to her head infused with Aura. Another came from the side, a straight punch that aimed for her liver. She dashed back, allowing the fist to barely miss her. The Mind Caster leapt back as well and swiped his hand across the air in front of him with great effort!

WHUUUP!

The burning structures in the way crashed or exploded under the unseen might, and scale of it was truly staggering. It was as though a quick tide came and washed everything away, even going as far as to dig through the ground mercilessly!

However.... Maxim, who had been standing before all that had been taken down, remained.

She had her arms up in a guard, a wide smile etched on her face.

The Mind Caster was flabbergasted.

There was no damage on his actual target!

Why did it not work?

Maxim didn't even seem the slightest bit dazed or disoriented.

"Not looking good, huh?" the pink-haired woman said as she immediately leapt up to dodge an uncanny, worm-like creature that the Tamer had just sent her way.

Only now did she activate her Perfect Aura, as she was airborne. A spiky, watery glow engulfed her and then... she vanished.

Her figure blurred, appearing behind the Tamer who realized it too late.

"Hya!"

A penetrative blow smashed into the centre of the Tamer's back!

But that wasn't all it was.

The Tamer shrieked hoarsely before collapsing limply to the ground.

Strangely, he was still conscious, but a look of bewilderment was on his face.

His back...

No, his spine...

It had been turned... flat!

Maxim grinned at the sight.

Just as the man's Aura died down with his failure to keep steady concentration, she turned him into a large, glass-like plate that she then stomped on, shattering it completely.

"Now. Who's next?" she said as she turned to the frowning Mind Caster and the man with downturned eyes, who had risen from his perk in the ground.

Chapter 968: Silent Savior

The call of one of the two who had been guarding the way into the Aurora had alerted everyone, not just the Maqian raiders. The bound Sif gained a glimmer of hope; they perked up, bright expressions appearing on their faces as they expected to see vigour-filled Sif warriors of the highest caliber storming the burning Aurora to overwhelm the enemy.

Such a thing didn't happen though.

There was no army of Sif.

However, a savior had come.

Skullius hung in the air, courtesy of his gravitational mana.

"There's so many..." he said to himself as he saw the cordon of desperate hostages looking around for any sign of salvation. He sighed.

Coming to the rescue of these people wouldn't have been his first order of business if he could help it. Unfortunately, there was a persistent nag within him that appealed to his Luminant side from the surrounding greens which truly felt like they were seconds away from uprooting themselves from the ground and chasing after those harassing the inhabitants of Opungale.

Skullius felt a constant urge, a constant sense of urgency pushing him to play the savior of the Sif.

He exhaled.

"The only benefit I can see from intervening personally is perhaps getting an easier time getting Darwel. Her mother will probably fight me if I don't do something to earn her trust. <Sigh>. I might have told Luserus that there are many candidates present for me to use to give him descendants with Luminant blood, but I've yet to meet another...ripe El-Sif. Hmmm, didn't Darwel say she had siblings?

She hasn't mentioned or introduced them yet..." Skullius said to himself.

That was indeed true.

The Sif Princess had said something like that.

Skullius was hoping that these siblings had a semblance of gender variation to them, and perhaps greater number wouldn't hurt. If he could find two of them as females, that would be phenomenal. Surely, if Darwel was subservient, reverent even, to the current him, they would be too. All El-Sif besides the King and Queen would probably view him favorably.

His deal with Luserus would prove useful with two or three mates; willing mates.

'Maybe if I become strong enough, I'll just reach Divinity and void that arrangement altogether. It's not like we made a contract. I have a feeling keeping to it will be somewhat tiring, not to mention tedious, after a while,' Skullius thought.

As he thought of the possible routes he could take in the case that Darwel was the only one who was willing to mate with him, he saw Maxim battling three Maqian Masters.

She looked to be having a blast, exploiting the speed granted to her by his skill [I Am The World] to completely overwhelm them while testing out how her technique, Planate High, was boosted by the active effect of [Gradius Order Halo].

The results were phenomenal.

Maxim didn't take that long to take out one of the Masters by flattening his spine with her technique and taking the chance to kill him. By speed blitzing another of the three, she used her overwhelming strength while bolstered by [Gradius Order Halo] to beat him to death quite brutally.

"I almost forgot how cruel she can be," Skullius said, amused. His figure then began floating forward towards the centre of the Aurora.

There, Skullius saw a brisk figure darting here and there, bobbing and weaving, avoiding attacks from Maqian warriors with ease.

It was Vali.

She, for what was probably the first time in her life, had donned a less suggestive piece of clothing – a rather fat cloak that hid the slender leather armor she was wearing underneath. She wasn't going heavy on offense like Maxim. Instead, she seemed to be sizing up her opponents who relentlessly cast different types of attacks her way.

The synchronicity between their long, mid and close-range fighters was ridiculous.

Despite the crowding of attacks, none of them ended being dealt against allies. They all fell on Vali who managed to dodge each time, though narrowly.

"They are quite organized..." Skullius commented.

Seeing Vali's movements impressed him all the more, however.

She applied minimal effort and movement for dodges and perhaps even less for her blocks, which weren't followed up with counters.

"Is she trying to learn their fighting styles?"

Skullius assumed that's what she was doing.

This went on for a longer while, and the Hybrid Luman took the chance to study the captives and the powerful spellcaster who remained among them.



It was a Shaman, a Master.

Like Skullius, he was analyzing Vali from afar.

'That staff...' Skullius thought as his senses honed in the staff the Shaman wielded, whose length was nearly twice his height with a curl to its head. It had an ominous pressure to it, one that Skullius found to be quite interesting.

It didn't feel generalized, like how certain tools could be used by any regular Joe. This staff seemed to be tailor made for Shamans, and thus spotted a funky energy more fitting for bearers of such classes.

'Hmmm, I wonder if that Shaman himself made the staf—'

...!!!

Suddenly, Skullius felt a familiar surge of energy and turned, leaving behind his thoughts.

Its source was coming from Vali who had created distance between herself and the six assailants she had been battling who kept dashing about in an attempt to confuse her.

Skullius watched her closely.

Her eyes twinkled as though saturated with stars, and she gave a light smile.

Beside her, a great lilac flame formed.

She was using her version of the Imagining Technique!

From the flame – the conduit – a simple, double-edged sword fell out and Vali caught it with a thick grip.

Then...

"Well damn," Skullius said with a spark of excitement, and the slightest bit of panic.

Immediately, golden half a skull marks appeared on the foreheads of the thousands of Sif captives, and in the next instant, they were flashed away just in time.

If they had stayed a moment longer...

Vali's eyes rolled back into her skull and with a sway, and then a brilliant stance that had all the passion in the world, she slashed across with her mundane sword!

[Swordmaster's Quiescence] was in use.

Skullius recognized it in an instant!

It was this skill... which allowed Vali to cut a decent portion of the Aurora with her blade not even reaching any of the things that it carved in two cleanly, regardless of their flimsy defenses!

Chapter 969: Interesting Match-Up

Skullius was stunned.

Vali's range was shocking!

When had she even begun practicing the sword?!

[Swordmaster's Quiescence] was an ability that allowed any sword practitioner to reach a state of flow and immersion that enhanced their powers to an astounding degree; a qualitative degree to be more precise.

Skullius hadn't known Vali to be Class Branching seriously into swordsmanship. That was the only way she could possibly have managed to use this skill of his.

The Hybrid Luman watched as four of the Maqian enemies were killed instantly, all cut up differently, but cleanly.

The rest had either managed to dodge or were hit, but used diverse means of recovery to their less-than-fatal wounds, which was rather admirable.

They weren't random fodder, it seemed.

Vali's sword shattered into pieces after her slash.

Skullius could feel her unnatural reserves of mana flowing into and saturating it. Unfortunately, the sword hadn't been strong enough to hold such power. It had only been a regular sword, after all.

As the sword broke, [Swordmaster's Quiescence] was broken, and Vali, seeing the survivors, sped from her spot with [I Am The World] and appeared right in front of one of them.

Before the female enemy she targeted could mobilize her guard, she watched as Vali's arm bulged, the super-powered cells within it – products of Cellular Supremacy – funneling an abundant degree of power deep within the recesses of her muscle fibers. This might was then loosened into the Maqian woman's face, the fist that smashed into her burning with Vali's Perfect Aura for good measure.

'How brutal...' Skullius commented on the mess that followed. Amusing.

It was almost as amusing to look at as the Shaman's face.

Given how wide Vali's attack range turned out to be, it could have killed a decent number of civilians, not to mention the Shaman himself, but he had managed to dodge. However, the stunned look he donned was also because he had no idea how the hostages he had been keeping in sight had suddenly vanished from before him.

Vali dispatched the rest of the enemies with some level of difficulty. If it were her normal self, she wouldn't have fared as well.

She looked quite pleased with herself, but it seemed she hadn't had enough. She walked up to where the Shaman was, and the two stared each other down.

'This might be an interesting battle...' Skullius thought.

Energy Former against Energy Former.

Three hazy, yet detailed figures floated out of the Shaman's body in an instant, rising to tower over him like ancient, spiritual guardians. They were all in the likeness of old human figures, Maqian figures, each with pronounced, distinct, features on their bodies that were similar to those the Shaman had – attire-wise.

These weren't Genuine Incarnations.

Shamans had the ability to connect with natural entities, be it flora, fauna or elements. Once the connection was made, a Shaman would be able to exploit the inherent power of these for an assortment of spells, rituals and even curses, which was quite useful. However, this wasn't the greatest highlight of the Shaman class.

Shaman was the only normal class to give its users the ability to pass on their powers to another user of the same class. Skullius remembered seeing something like this as early as back in the Tremur Forest days, with Ukur, the leader of the Bloated River Goblins.

The hazy figures to manifest above the Maqian Shaman, were the soulless figments of Shamans who entrusted their powers to him. Each of them, under his command, would use their powers to attack his enemies freely, though of course, their power outside the Class wasn't factored.

'What will you do against that?' Skullius thought to himself, wondering how Vali would beat the Shaman. He was clearly a cut above the rest she had killed, especially with the added advantage of his mysterious staff. Thankfully, he wasn't at the Incandescent Stage, but he was still extremely powerful.

Vali didn't look all that worried.

After the Shaman set loose his magical inheritance, she... began to split.

Cloning was a big part of Vali's powers. By rapidly producing a variety of cells, she was able to empower them with her outrageous volumes of mana, and with the effect of her class, form them into more of herself; more Valis.

The clones spread out, the seductive grins they wore hiding devious, devilish ideas.

"Hmm..." Skullius hummed.

He could already guess the result of this battle. Thus, he moved on, flashing away from the Aurora.

It seemed the Maqian army was spreading out too thin. Despite their might, they wouldn't be able to attack the whole of Maqi that quickly or that easily. Even now, not even 5% of Opungale had been destroyed. This was why Skullius concurred with the assertion that the Maqians who came, weren't exactly the 'A team', save for the Ode and of course, that old hag.

In fact, it seemed to Skullius that rather than destroy, the Maqian army was here to... conquer.

So far, all he knew was that there was some kind of conflict between Maqi and Opungale, and said conflict was manufactured by someone else, according to Erlton, a Herald, like him, which was the reason he gave for not being able to participate.

'Excuses. It seems everything formed out of the Deities is quite fond of creating convenient responses that exclude their involvement. I see now...'

So, was that other Herald's plan to see Opungale burn like this?

What kind of beef had he manufactured using the catastrophe that was the Ashing of Time, a product of the salvation of Aigas from the broken Rules back then?

Curious.

Skullius swept past two Aurora that were in flames, corpses and trees alike burnt to a fragrant char.

The death toll was rather huge.

The Maqians liked to be thorough.

The Hybrid Luman felt the urgent urge from the surrounding nature and he clicked his tongue as he picked up the pace.

He swept through two Aurora that were under attack, the main assailants being Masters who were finishing off the resistance with relative ease. Indeed, it seemed like their teamwork was what allowed for their fearsome efficiency.

This was way different from the Maqi of old...

Thankfully, Skullius was also efficient.

He quite easily killed the raiders without even descending among them and transported the living Sif in the Auroras elsewhere lest another batch of brutes came.

None of the Maqians even saw how they died, and none of the saved Sif even registered that they had been saved for several moments.

Two more Auroras later Skullius saw another, fresh with assault. The stationed guards were fighting back fiercely against a slew of vicious, wild Maqian Masters and a single Incandescent Stager... and they were losing.

Skullius sighed.

"It almost makes them all seem weak..." he mumbled before willing the millions of Sif in the city, soldiers and all, to be branded by the mark of the Preeminent Attegoth. A moment later, they all vanished, leaving behind only the three Sif Incandescent Stagers who had been fighting among them.

There was confusion in the air for a single instance... and Skullius took advantage of it.

With Demion's Dance held tight by the glowing 'appendage' of the Graceful Monolith, he killed five Masters in that single instance.

The sword whizzed through the air quick as lightning, unseen, and it decapitated all in its straight path before shooting up into the sky, leaving only death and panic in the following sketch of time!

Skullius lazily looked at the proceedings, wondering if he was going to have to do such tedious hero work for the next few hours... when he suddenly sensed something bellowing from the sky above him and shooting down quickly.

"Hmmm?"

There was no inherent hostility from it, so Skullius didn't attack immediately, but he did sense a familiar enthusiasm.

"It's you! It's definitely you!" a voice cried excitedly.

Skullius raised a brow... and then he frowned.

It was this odd creature again.

It was Ashema.

Chapter 970: It's You Too

Ashema had been watching when the Maqian army had infiltrated Opungale through the giant gap made through the nation's barrier – an ancient, natural protective mechanism – by the singular attack of bloated green flames which wiped out 15,000 Sif who had been waiting by the coast for the army's arrival.

When the army had split, upon disembarking from their ships, with the prominent two that he had been keeping an eye on taking a different, more lackadaisical approach to what could possibly be a highly intense war – evidenced by their relaxed gait and non-aggressive movement through the thick forests of Opungale – Ashema had followed the group that was least likely to catch onto his presence.

That group, headed by a single Incandescent Stager, turned out to be the very same one that Skullius was assaulting right in this very moment. Ashema had instantly recognized Skullius from his hidden spot high up.

"It's you! It's definitely you!" he cried as he floated opposite Skullius who gave him a rough appraisal with a frown on his face.

Ashema's one gleaming eye shook excitedly.

It wasn't mere instinct or something so vague that allowed him to recognize that the pitch-black figure blending in with the night that he had seen over half an hour ago, was the same bold, more tangible one in front of him.

No.

It was the robe.

As well-defined as Skullius' features were while he was in the Crude World Projection form, they couldn't have given him away faster than his current trend of fashion, the robe of darkness which he adopted even in the Projected form. Perhaps, it was more apt to say that it gave the definite credence to the fact that it was him who Ashema had seen on the shore then.

"And it's you..." Skullius said with his eyes narrowing. "What are you?"

"I asked you the same thing, and you never answered," Ashema said coyly. "Isn't it common courtesy – even among the kind that populates this place – to reply to the first inquisitor?"

"Not really..." Skullius said with a scoff. "You'll find that there's less civility when hostility is involved."

Ashema grinned and rubbed his ebony horns.

"Hmm. Strange, and quite pathetic. Lord Boron abolished such things as hostility amongst our kind. I can't even remember the last time someone killed anybody else among us, unless of course, be it by Lord Boron's will..."

Skullius tilted his head.

'Lord Boron... wait... is he...?' he thought.

"So, you're one of the creatures terrorizing Feinheath, huh?" he said.



Ashema looked a bit stumped, or perhaps puzzled for a moment.

"Fine what? Oh, I see... terrorizing is a bit misleading. We haven't even begun to do that much. Frankly, we aren't too interested in that until...hmmm..." he said and paused in the middle. "... looks like I'm stuck answering your questions."

Skullius floated a little higher.

"Well, it's good that a specimen like you flew all the way from Feinheath for my convenience. I was quite curious about the details of everything going on back home," he said. "Neither of us are willing to do much talking, so how about we try other... methods. I honestly don't even need you talking to learn everything you know..."

Ashema grinned.

"Is that so? What a coincidence! Me neither!" he yelled shrilly and extended his thick, charred arm to the side where a swathe of darkness exploded out.

Skullius paid close attention to it.

Everything about Ashema was quite curious.

He hadn't shown it, but he was quite disturbed by the fact that he hadn't sensed Ashema's approach, well, not in the way he wanted to sense it at least.

He preferred to sense enemies by their energy, not by how their physical beings interacted with the matter around them, especially for stronger individuals. Because the Preeminent Attegoth currently held all his skills, and because its effective range for all said skills was the entirety of Opungale, the Hybrid Luman could sense all the fierce energies of individual Sif and Maqians.

That was how he was able to advise Sevil and Viccil on which point to start their mission from, and how he knew where Vali and Maxim could get an easier time testing the new scope of their abilities.

He could sense everything, even determined the level of strength of enemies if he looked through his Graceful Monolith.

Ashema was different.

His body didn't seem to exhume any form of energy.

Worse yet, given the deduction about his absurdly good control of darkness earlier, that which the dark creature summoned now, was practically invisible to his senses, even to the sense related to his [Evil Darkness] darkness skills.

Ashema cackled, seemingly understanding Skullius' struggle.

The darkness he conjured vanished, and what was left was a long, dark scythe. Its handle was rugged, as though made from bone, or more specifically, a truly long spine. As Ashema whirled it about, it whistled like a flute, bringing to attention the many holes on it that suggested it was indeed, made like a flute, and was possibly hollow inside.

After the five-meter-long pole of the weapon, came a two meter long, curved blade with a hole in it as well. It was quite thick, and showed off a decrepit, filthy energy that was almost visible to the naked eye. Its ebony gleam was menacing, but above else...

'What grade is that weapon? I've handled all kinds of weapons, from Common to Mythical... but this...It doesn't even seem like the grade is the anomaly... It's almost like... it wasn't made using the same system that we use in Aigas...' Skullius thought, instinctively backing away within the air.

Ashema cackled at his reaction.

"Are you reconsidering your pompous declaration yet? Well, too late!" he cried, and another clump of darkness formed in his free hand only to disappear, leaving behind a large, ugly gourd in Ashema's grip.

Right when it appeared, Skullius felt activity down below.

Despite his timely intervention to save at least 90% of the people that were in this Aurora, several hundred thousand had already died.

It was these corpses that moved, convulsing as they laid on the ground. They then shot blood in the tens of liters into the air, towards Ashema!

The scene was so abrupt and bizarre that it alerted everyone still alive in the Aurora to the presence of the two in the sky.

The dark blood, made even darker by the prominent black in the sky, poured into Ashema's gourd with sickening wet, sloshy sounds.

'Better not wait for what's coming next...' Skullius thought, and immediately acted.

He directed Demion's Dance towards the creature's neck.

The green sword came in like a vague blur from behind Ashema, packing an incredible amount of speed.

However...

Right before Demion's Dance could decapitate the abomination, a thick scythe blocked it, and the impact unleashed an unsettling metallic ring.

"Don't get impatient..." Ashema chuckled at Skullius.

"I'm not," the Hybrid Luman said as he cocked back the sleeve to his robe. "I was just trying to check if you were actually worth the effort."