

Undead 991

Chapter 991: Rise of the Wretched! (2)

Skullius' Aura was outlandish, far removed from the norm. When he had first gotten a taste of it, he had noticed that it was rather... strange. It was greedy.

It had adopted a dark blue hue back then, alerting everyone who had been with him and making Skullius a little hesitant.

When using it normally, it bolstered his strength a little more than that of the overage Advancement Stager, making him stronger when paired with Skullius' already absurd base power, along with the ridiculousness of his skills.

However, all this had been stripped away during the Premium Age Royale. At this point, Skullius would have regarded his death against Rias as the highlight of that entire event.

Not only did he meet Irisa in death back then, right after he was revived as result of Gabel turning back time, he used [Swordmaster's Quiescence] on the sensation of death, fresh on his soul, to amplify his already strange Full Body Aura.

What had happened to seemed to be a casual powerup, but it was actually far from it. Skullius' Full Body Aura had changed from a heavy shade of dark blue to a blackish red that coated his body like flame, barely leaving room for his bodily details to be seen clearly.

From then on, Skullius had begun to match Rias while using Demion's Dance, even going as far as to overpower him in some instances.

The state of his Full Body Aura then allowed him to embody the traits of whatever he was using. This worked especially well with Demion's Dance and the skill Skullius had managed to acquire because of it, [Swindling Death's Death], which made it impossible for him to die as long as he did the dance. Better yet, the damage sent to him by enemies would be returned to them several fold.

All this, was embodied by Skullius' Aura back then, making him even more efficient against Rias, who should have been stronger.

While the effect seemed to have faded with the time limit of [Swordmaster's Quiescence], Skullius' Aura still took on the deep blackish red hue even now.

It was unknown whether that held any significance or not, but what Skullius wanted to do with the Aura at the moment was simple; to combine skills.

The Preeminent Attegoth as a body capable of housing a mana core of the purple quality, could also generate Aura, and a massive amount of it compared to what he alone could produce.

This Aura mimicked the kind Skullius made with his core as well, seemingly because even while the source of the mana used to create the core was from the entirety of Opungale, it was refined in the same way Skullius would – just without the gravitational properties.

Additionally, the fact that the Attegoth could have skills branded within it was also a sign that it was a viable entity for the entire power system created by the three Deities of Aigas.

And thus...

"Let's see... [Parting Wave], [Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art], [Elite Swordplay], [Unmatched Sword Sense], [Swordmaster's Quiescence], [Swindling Death's Dance]. Let's combine them all," Skullius said with an eerie grin that seemed to ooze perverse desires.

The Attegoth groaned, and at the same time, the guidance field churned, immediately alerting Skullius of every step of the process.

[The skills you have selected are currently being merged]

[Please wait...]

There was a pause as the intensity of the Attegoth's quivering grew and grew some more until it began to make the waters within which its entirety was settled, boil furiously.

Skullius laughed.

"What in the world are you doing?" Ashema asked curiously.

"You'll see..." Skullius said to him.

"That's no different from what you said last time?!"

OOOM!

The great Precept of Light shuddered, and the shroud of Aura around it diminished considerably.

Skullius could feel the skills he had directed within the body of the Attegoth becoming saturated with concentrated Aura and then they began to get drawn together.

Usually, skills of the same caliber would work best for the combination process, but Skullius was banking on the fact that only two skills from the bunch he had chosen were classified under Normal, with the rest being Special, and thus likely wouldn't affect the success rate. Besides that, with the massive volume of Aura available...

[Skill merging complete!]

[Warning! The resultant compound skill has too many extreme subskills!]

[Warning! The resultant compound skill may interfere with the 'Insurgent Magnus' Hidden Class!]

[To lessen the burden, would you like to create a Legacy, a Hidden Class of your own?]

Skullius cackled.

'I see. This new skill has a lot of functions and traits that make it worthy of forming a Hidden Class. I didn't expect that...' he thought, thoroughly fascinated and elated.

Serenity's words rang through his mind once again.

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

Skullius scoffed at these words. Serenity had a lot of faith in that fake, and for some time, even Skullius had started to believe that going against him would be more than just a hefty task. But now...

"I'd like to see him try," Skullius' eyes burned with liquid-like darkness.

He then turned his attention to the blinking prompts of the guidance field.

Was holding two Hidden Classes even possible?

Beyond that, wouldn't creating an alternate set of skills as opposed to a single powerful one defeat the purpose of what he was trying to do?

'Hmm, I can handle a single skill. Besides, if need be, I can create the Legacy on my own,' Skullius thought and then...

"No," he said to the guidance field. "Proceed."

The Preeminent Attegoth groaned again, and then the guidance field set loose a flurry of notifications in the Hybrid Luman's sight.

['Parting Wave', 'Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art', 'Elite Swordplay', 'Unmatched Sword Sense', 'Swordmaster's Quiescence', 'Swindling Death's Dance' have been successfully merged]

[Congratulations! You have created the Super Skill, 'Infinite Sword God']

[The value of the weapon for you no longer dwells within the vessel that is termed as such. For you, there is no distinction between the tool you use for carnage and your limbs. To you, everything that exists can be cut apart with just the right intent]

The Hybrid Luman's face became decked in solid darkness that played in the crevices formed when he smiled sickeningly.

Oh yes. Oh yes, this was worth it.

Hobbu Gobbu wished he could have attained this kind of power.

Skullius felt Demion's Dance's voice get louder, and he even heard its edge speak to him as though even that specific of part of the sword now had a voice he could hear.

Worse yet, he felt the outline of his body grow sinister, sharp and... also undefined.

Even his fingertips felt oddly... dangerous.

It was almost as though a single swipe of them could split Opungale.

Right then, Skullius recalled a certain word spoken by someone he had held in high regard when talking about the sword.

'Swordmaster.'

"Have I finally reached it, Alaris? Or have I surpassed the very meaning of the word," the Hybrid Luman almost sounded deranged.

At least Ashema thought so.

..!!!

The Hybrid Luman suddenly felt [Primal Caution] get triggered, and his unusual sights were drawn towards the Ode and the old hag Umbett who looked at him and the Attegoth from afar.

"Oh, please be patient. I have one more thing to do," Skullius guffawed, and he selected all the skills related to [Just Light] within the Graceful Monolith to be combined.

All including his recently awakened [Son of Luserus] skill.

The Attegoth shook again, this time with as much vigor as the breaking of the world.

Chapter 992: Rise of the Wretched! (3)

[Progenitor of Light].

[Gradius Order Halo].

[I Am The World].

[Order-Soul Projection].

[Son of Luserus].

Skullius selected all these skills within the bulk of the Preeminent Attegoth to be combined.

[Progenitor of Light] was a skill he had acquired recently, after his affinity with [Just Light] had reached the S rank. It was an amalgamation of all his other [Just Light] production and manipulation skills.

[Gradius Order Halo], which was currently active, shut off, the giant halo over the Preeminent Attegoth disappearing from sight. The same happened for [Order-Soul Projection], which Skullius had used to transfer the souls of Viccil and Seville.

There was a subtle delay to the merging process because of the aforementioned two skills' effects being deactivated over every 'station' in which they were currently in use, but soon, the guidance field churned into commentating once again, announcing the progress.

[The skills you have selected are currently being merged]

[Please wait...]

Another pause ensued, much like before, and in that time, Skullius kept his sights on the Ode and the old hag.

As expected, she didn't remain still, allowing him freedom with what he was doing.

The Hybrid Luman grinned.

'What are you going to do?' he wondered.

Ashema, beside him, had a really bad feeling. While his vision wasn't incredibly advanced and unnatural like Skullius', he did manage to spot the dark, abyssal void in the eyes of Umbett that suggested how powerful she was.

'I might just waste another blood incarnation if I stick with this bastard,' he thought with a sigh before eyeing Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman looked confident, eerily so, even though Ashema was sure that when they met by the shore, Skullius had retreated because he was afraid of that old woman.

Said old woman made her move.

...!!!

[Primal Caution] gave its warning to Skullius, but he was already prepared. Unfortunately, he hadn't truly anticipated the nature of Umbett's assault.

As though the world around was but an intricate curtain, several tens of thousands of figures were spat out, positioned all around the Preeminent Attegoth... as they fell.

Skullius frowned.

'How ruthless...' he thought.

All 56,231 individuals to appear, were common Sif screaming for dear life at the top of their lungs!

At once, the Hybrid Luman figured that these were the people that had been disappearing when the Maqians began their assault, back when the terrible gong was still affecting everyone.

He smirked, but the strain on his face didn't disappear. He understood, better than most, that this wasn't the attack...yet.

From this entire crowd of doomed souls, he felt a rapidly approaching detonation of mana that would trigger something unprecedented!

'She thinks I'll hesitate to destroy them all,' Skullius thought. 'Sadly... she's right.'

And indeed, Umbett was right, but for the wrong reason. Skullius didn't kill these Sif because he hesitated to take innocent lives; Umbett must have figured he was on the Sif's side in this battle.

Skullius didn't kill all these people because he felt the surrounding nature practically explode in his ear, begging him not to, and to instead, try to save them.

Skullius couldn't though, even if he wanted to. The only skill that could do that was currently unavailable.

He could have powered through the noise and attacked anyway to prevent what came next, but he feared that the cost to that may be more disastrous than simple inaction on his part, which was justified.

Thus...

OOOOOM!

Every falling Sif became bloated with a stark white glow from within their bodies, and then...

...!!!

Millions of purple heart colored tendrils, much like thick tree branches, replaced the flesh bodies that had been inhabiting the standing space all around the Attegoth!

They oozed of a toxic spray that layered over them as they wound around the great Precept of Light in a flash!

'That's... Transmutation!' Skullius thought. It was a Mage's skill to change the properties of all kinds of objects!

But for it to be used on this scale...

Their sheer quantity was daunting. The massive tendrils cast absolute darkness over Skullius, Ashema and the Graceful Monolith as they closed in, a fiercely corrosive trait abundant within them, noticeable by how the water within which the Precept drew form simply turned red and vaped.

The Preeminent Attegoth was bound in the next instant, not a speck of its light or the Aura burning from it visible at all.

But then...

'This makes it all muuuuch easier for me.'

Skullius had only been trapped within the toxic cage for less than a moment... when he placed his finger on the thick tendril closest to him.

From where his finger touched, the branch-like, purple tendril was shredded into dust, and a moment later, the Preeminent Attegoth was free, with only a heavy, powdery layer around it that was soon blown away by the wind.

The naked eye couldn't have explained how staggering what Skullius' had just done was. After all, no one could have seen how evenly the particles that made up this floating dust had been carved.

Not just that, the toxic fumes that had coated the tendrils had also been broken down to a state where they were no longer a threat to an ant, much less Skullius.

And better yet, the mana bounding them too, was not safe either. It had suffered a similar fate, and the inspiration for this, to Skullius, was how Hobbu Gobbu, the Finite Sword god, had been able to cut apart mana back then.

However, Skullius was different. He was better. He was stronger.

As the bearer of a skill with the bodacious title of [Infinite Sword God], this much was the least he could do.

Skullius smirked at the old hag from afar. She didn't seem too concerned with what how he had responded. She seemed to have a level of confidence in him, which Skullius found a little suspicious. He feared that she might have gleamed what she wished to gleam just from this.

Well, that wouldn't matter for long, because...

['Progenitor of Light', 'Gradius Order Halo', 'I Am The World', 'Order-Soul Projection', 'Son of Luserus' have been successfully merged]

[Congratulations! You have created the Super Skill, 'Greatest Antiphon of Malignance!']

Skullius took a breath and closed his eyes. When he opened them, it was as though he turned into a different being altogether.

His auburn hair lit up unceremoniously, becoming tinged in a golden light from its very fibers that almost washed out its natural color. His skin also got a tad bit bright, as though moonlight was glowing through his flesh.

Pairs of large, golden bangles, swearing that they could have been made of scorching light appeared around both his wrists, but they refused to touch his skin, opting to pretend as though Skullius' arms were larger than they actually were.

Several pairs also appeared around Skullius' ankles and his neck, and his red armor was cast away, leaving only his robe which turned darker to better match the light coming from Skullius.

It became impossible to tell if Skullius had worn something to replace his red armor or not because the robe cast a deep shadow from his neck to below his knees, leaving his bare feet, lightly aglow, visible.

Another set of large, radiant wings broke out from Skullius' robe, long, gorgeous and blinding. A moment later, they became imprinted on the back of the robe as well, signifying Skullius' third pair.

The Hybrid Luman took another breath.

His eyes remained white, but they shone brilliantly, beautifully even.

This... was the current passive effect of his [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance], and it was godlike.

It was so grand, in fact, that something else was inspired because of it.

[You have received the <WILL OF NONSTANDARD>]

Skullius' grin, more alluring than it was sinister, grew terribly wide.

Ashema by his side, was rather dumbfounded. He didn't even know what he was looking at.

Even if he couldn't die easily, he found himself backing away.

A shuttle of fierce might caused him to blink, and the Hybrid Luman was gone from his sight.

He was far, far away, standing between the Ode and the Queen confidently, boldly.

His opened his mouth to speak, his eyes narrowing to concentrate the light gushing from them.

"I believe I'm your rightful opponent."

Chapter 993: Rightful Opponent

Braxten Shannazah, a man dressed in rather flashy, colorful and silly clothing, wiped the blood from his hands as he watched the gaping portal before him close shut behind the corpse of the one who had created it. It was one of the Emeradis Summoners.

'Gave me a bit of a run for my money,' he thought. He had killed six of them so far, and he estimated that Kudobtu and her group had killed a similar number, but the rest had fled. He had sensed it. They had caught on to their fellows being killed off and retreated.

Thankfully, while this wasn't a typical victory, it did mean that the number of those summoned creatures there was now, wouldn't be increasing. At least not for now.

Braxten lazily sighed as he shot out of the way right when several of the seahorse wannabes rushed him, intent on sucking on his pure mana for a yet unknown reason.

He grabbed the staff of the dead Summoner and held it out before chanting a rather ridiculous sentence.

"Extra staffy staff of callidifying embering embers of the feverishly feverish fever!"

Instantly, the smooth staff shook and a visibly incandescent orange wave of energy expanded out of it to form a dome around Shannazah spanning up to thirty meters in radius. After expanding, the dome remained, retaining a solid, consistent shape.

The summoned creatures that were within range of this bubble suddenly began to release faint bursts of steam from their bodies, and then their shells began to sizzle, bits of hot blood and oils bubbling from them. In the next moment, they all fell to the ground, dead.

Braxten nodded in delight and began to go on his way. His destination was the glowing tree in the distance. His intuition directed him towards it. Perhaps when he got there, he could figure out how to end this mess King Royan had sent him to help with.

On his way, more of the summoned creatures rushed towards him only to succumb to the bizarre properties of the glowing dome and die without grace.

They couldn't have known, of course, that their opponent, was a master of fiendishly magical ridiculous speech.

*

"Should we go there? Most of the enemies aren't even moving anymore," Maxim said to Vali as they hid underneath the great, lilac tent.

They had been moving from Aurora to Aurora since Skullius had given them upgrades to their powers. In total, they had taken down roughly 43 Maqian soldiers; 42 Masters and 1 Incandescent

Stager whom they had, quite frankly, cheap-shotted after he came off a brutal battle against three others of his level from the Sif's side.

When the rain of summoned creatures appeared, Vali had managed to conjure this tent with her discount Imagining Technique. She was able to give it stealth properties that disallowed her and Maxim from being sensed. Unfortunately, it only worked to a certain extent.

Suffice it to say, this was the sixteenth tent she had made since the attack began.

"If that swarm above us leaves, then yes," Vali replied, her keen eyes looking out the tent. "I suppose Festos cut off some of his powers from us for a reason. Hopefully it's a good one. We should find out."

*

Sevill and Viccil woke up with a start and found that they were in a cramped space. Their souls had snapped back into their original bodies just now, and they discovered with surprise that Skullius had stashed their bodies somewhere deep underneath the mansion in the Wonderfall Torrents.

The constant race against the pursuing summoned creatures which they had had to endure before this, almost felt like a dream now.

As Skullius had said, while they were body-swapped with [Order-Soul Projection], it would take a while for them to gain the knowledge of their vessels.

With time, this had started to come to pass, but unfortunately, the memory of how to perform the secret technique other Maqians were using to ward away the greedy summons, had yet to surface, thus they only had the option of fleeing while watching their kin be saved as seeds.

The two weren't included in the seedification by the Deathly Ruse as a circumstance of being body-swapped. Only a body with a soul was considered alive. Now, however, as their souls had returned...

Before either of the two could speak, they two were reduced to seeds and drawn to the Ruse.

"I believe I'm your rightful opponent," Skullius said with the graceful luminosity of his face making his declaration all the more aggravating for the trio he had rudely appeared amidst.

The Queen was especially revolted.

She had had to endure the doubtful looks on her subjects' faces when she confronted the Ode, but at least that doubt was supported by love.

Even if his form had changed, Embrell still recognized that arrogant face and tone. To think this so-called Luminant had dashed in to save her as though she had begged for a hero to come to her rescue.

...Then again, Skullius' appearance, did spark a bit of deep thought in her.

If Embrell took Darwel's desperate declarations that this man was in fact a Luminant, and applied them to his current appearance...

'It certainly does seem...' her thoughts began, only to be disturbed by the sneer of the Ode.

"Quite flashy. I didn't think the Sif had such an ally," the crimson-haired young man spoke, and then he turned back to Umbett. "Is this the tool behind that golden tree you've been fussing about?"

"It is," Umbett said with a sigh, her sharp, aged eyes narrowing at Skullius' features.

She didn't look quite as composed as before, but that wasn't because she was afraid. Instead, it was because she was torn inside as a result of what she knew.

"I see," the Ode smiled and appraised Skullius. "I'd call you human, but you have a glow about you that makes me doubt it. This is quite a brilliant skill you have, albeit a little showy. Is this what makes you think you qualify to stand before me?"

The Hybrid Luman chuckled and cracked his neck with his right hand.

"You've got it backwards. You're going to have to prove your worth before me," he said. "And on top of that, I'm pretty much bound by what I told my mother-in-law here. I alone will end this war. A man should live up to his words, don't you think?"

The Queen recoiled lightly at the second mention of this absurd idea while the Ode's face became splintered with shadow as a messy grin issued from his face.

"The value of my royal blood seems to fall every minute I spend here. First, common long ears, and now... you. Hahaha. I will have your head for that," the Ode said. "Very well. I'll take you on with the same conditions I had agreed upon with her Majesty.

If you manage to beat me, we'll leave peacefully. If not, well..."

The crimson-haired young man extended his hand towards Skullius. There was no need to state the consequences of the Hybrid Luman's loss. Both knew what the rough outcome would be.

The Ode felt the need to explain the mechanics of the battle rite of Maqi though.

"As you are obviously unaware of how Kuthmuk works, allow me to—"

"Don't insult me," Skullius cut off the young man.

To the two Maqians' surprise, the Hybrid Luman pressed his index finger on his forehead and then pointed it to the ground.

Right then, a complex weave of mana shot out boundlessly, disappearing in a blink in an expanding arc.

"I'm aware of the battle rite. No need to half ass it. I'll state my own terms as well," he said. "Let's limit this battle to this region alone. And if I win, on top of you leaving Opungale peacefully, I want you to grant me safe passage into Maqi."

...!!!

Shock smote all three individuals around Skullius like lightning.

The Ode, Embrell and Umbett wore dark looks.

What in the world... what were these terms? Wait, how did this man even know how to invoke Kuthmuk in the traditional fashion?!

Worse yet, why would this man want to go to Maqi as a reward for victory?

Skullius extended his right hand to the Ode, a cunning smile on his face.

The crimson-haired young man wore a look of suspicion. He glanced at Umbett, and after seeing that she didn't speak out, he too extended his hand to meet Skullius'.

"You're a strange man. You've reined in my curiosity a bit. But, I suppose I could always extract the answers I want after I tear apart your arms and legs," he said.

Skullius grinned.

Before the two's hands could meet, however, Skullius' left hand suddenly shot out and gripped the wrist to his right, pulling it back!

...!

Skullius was a little alarmed. A dire bit of strain showed on his face, but it quickly vanished.

'So, you're still in there after all, huh?' he thought.

'SNAP OUT OF IT, TOMATO FLINGER! DON'T LOSE YOURSELF!' a raging voice came from deep within, threatening to blast the top of Skullius' head off.

Skullius remained composed though. As much as he could at least.

"Is there a problem?" the Ode asked, glancing at how violently Skullius was strangling his own hand, keeping it from touching his. "Regretting this already?"

"No," the Hybrid Luman replied simply and he pried off his left hand's grip before shaking the Ode's hand.

"Let us begin then."

The declaration was set.

The Kuthmuk had been invoked.

Skullius was ready, but his mind couldn't have been more distracted. Forcefully, he was made to remember that momentous interaction within the Reflection of his Soul.

Chapter 994: Delusion

Before Skullius awakened...

"Well, I think it's about we had a chat, don't you think?" Fulgardt said as he looked behind the giant, skeleton siphoning both Null Life and Insurgent Magnus powers within its bones. It held a nasty green-bladed scimitar in one hand, and a longsword with its blade jagged horrifically in the other.

This monstrous creature was guarding a small, frail Boneman with blue flames issuing from its sockets fiercely, mirroring its turbulent emotion. Of course, this pitiable skeleton, was Skullius.

He shook at the gaze of Fulgardt piercing through the gaps in the ribcage of his guardian and attempted to swallow hard only to fail for obvious reasons.

"You..." he said, a notable tone of bravery and hate boiling in his voice.

Fulgardt – a broad shouldered man with an equally broad yet muscular frame, long dark hair cascading down his naked back and a piercing glow in his sharp, almond eyes – looked up. He saw the dark green sky looking as though it was ailing, and expressed what Skullius almost thought to be pity. His eyes then turned to the fiery sea around the broken island on which he and Skullius stood on.

"The Reflection of your Soul is quite tragic. Except for this murderous thing protecting you, nothing here quite... embodies what you are, Skullius. But I suppose, that's the Direction you have been

dealt. Same as me," a smooth voice that flowed like water only to become as rough as rust where the Immoral aimed for emphasis, leaked from his mouth.

Skullius would have frowned if he could.

"What's it to you, damned sockethole?!" he growled. "You're the last person I expect to barge in with fleshing nonsense about us being alike!"

It was worth noting that despite the ferocity in his rebuttal, Skullius was beyond terrified. This scenario had played out just as abruptly as one would imagine. Skullius had just awakened to this scene where a man he immediately knew to be Fulgardt was standing before him.

Why Fulgardt was suddenly in the Reflection of his Soul; why he himself was here; what had happened to his body after that bright flash...

All these were questions that a hypothetical search engine in Skullius' head was looking for the answers to.

Fulgardt smiled... and then he sat down on the torn ground littered with flowers that showed globes of light over their petals which displayed blurred out memories.

"Of all the delusional people I've met, you might not even crack the top ten, but I'd say you're in the same league, Skullius..." he said.

The Boneman shook in fury.

The bulky skeleton guarding Skullius seemed to react to the swelling in his emotion. It lunged towards the seated Fulgardt and swung down its longsword with great speed and might!

Fulgardt raised a hand briskly and caught the sword effortlessly, gripping it so tight that the great black skeleton couldn't withdraw it.

The Immoral then wore a grin so sinister that Skullius could have sworn this island they were on turned several notches darker because of it.

"You see? This is delusion. What madman attacks another madman who is responsible for their life and their powers?" the Immoral said, his eyes piercing the Boneman standing at a safe distance.

Skullius' socket flames blazed with emotion.

"Responsible for my... for my life? Flesh you! Perhaps you wouldn't know, but I braved the terrors of the Tremur Forest back then on my own, without your damn help! It was all me! Even in that detestable Labyrinth of yours, it was my efforts that counted in the end, even beyond your rigged sets and gifts. Surely you know that.

I wouldn't have gotten your Legacy with just the free skills you gave, right?" he said.

Fulgardt chortled. With rough force, he pushed away Skullius' Reflection and its sword.

"Hmm. You did do well. You deciphered a little of the markings on the wall to receive my [Evil Veneration], used your [Mana Manipulation] to live long enough against Dezrael, employed a little cunning, not to mention a boatload of luck, to escape the Hall. But let's be honest, all of that wouldn't have been possible without my design. All the tools you needed to reach the prize were in that Labyrinth.

Do you know why there was a stack of rusted and worn Legendary and Mythical grade tools right in front of the chamber that held my Legacy?"

Skullius had no answer.

"It's because none of it would work. I paved the way. No path other than what I created would do," Fulgardt said with a tone of authority.

The Boneman shuddered and reminisced.

There were indeed stacks of weapons back then, not to mention corpses. It was from that pile that Skullius found Demion's Dance, actually.

"So what? Why are you here? Wait, let me guess. Is it because I'm delusional?" Skullius said sarcastically.

Fulgardt laughed.

"You really are a funny fellow. Too bad you're actually right," he said. "You and I are similar in that regard. At least an earlier version of me. I too believed that I was destined to break out of a cycle I was born in. That it was common sense to find my roots.

My true roots which led to me finding myself. Perhaps I was destined to be a renowned farmer, a carpenter perhaps, or a fearsome warrior. I didn't care, as long as there was a mark that said 'I was here, I achieved this'. Well..."

Fulgardt looked up at the green clouds.

"...that was a crass thought. The majority of us are meant to carry out the will of someone else, Skullius. The true value of an individual only shows itself when they discard themselves and became the legs and not the head. You were living such a life, weren't you? You were living out your calling under the might of someone else, becoming a part of a bigger machine.

But you abandoned that only to find that once again... you've become a slave to someone else."

Skullius' sockets blazed. He grew furious.

What was this bastard rambling about?

He had escaped Somanda because he was about to get extinguished like a candleflame, and chose not to sit still and watch it happen!

The Boneman balled his hand into a fist and the Reflection a few meters away from him hunched, preparing to shoot towards Fulgardt again.

Fulgardt laughed.

"I can feel the defiance practically wafting from you. Funny. You claim that you didn't need my powers before you reached the Labyrinth. Fair enough. But weren't you hanging off of Serenity's

powers before then? Wasn't your faithful Bone boar, born because of her grace, the one to save you many times before you came to me?

Weren't you yearning to evolve so that you could escape the clutches of your former master to serve a new one? What did Serenity say again? Ah, yes, that when you reached Tier 4, she would tell you everything. That your, grand purpose will be given to you. Do you honestly think that purpose is to be her equal, or to be a pawn, serving her whims?"

...!!!

Skullius shook.

He immediately wanted to deny it, to reject it. Several bullet points worth of valid counter points had risen in his head, but they were immediately washed away mysteriously by an overwhelming sense of...acceptance.

All of sudden the Boneman swayed and dropped to his knees. He felt reluctant to argue.

Was Fulgardt right?

Was his path just a road to switching masters?

But wait...

"No. No, you... Sause told me all about this! The stronger your powers inside me get, the stronger you get as well. You're just trying to flesh with me!" Skullius cried, refusing defeat. He even rose to his feet, his socket flames beginning to pop and flare. "You're wrong!

I...Serenity is just...!"

The sentence just couldn't form in Skullius' head.

What did he want to say dammit?!

"Hmm, that's what I thought," Fulgardt said with a look of pity. "Like I said. I used to carry that delusion. You see, everyone in the world, in a world, rather, serves someone higher. In Aigas, the answer, is the Deities. Everything done on the ground doesn't matter.

It doesn't prove anything other than the fact that you are a subject. You live for someone else. I was blessed enough to understand this quickly. When I told everyone this truth, they pitied me. They looked at me as if I was some kind of sick dog. I pitied and hated them in return.

Listen Skullius, we mortals are bound to this, but some of us can gain the privilege of choosing who to serve."

"SHUT UP!" Skullius suddenly exploded.

His Reflection hurtled towards Fulgardt with its swords raised.

The Immoral disappeared from where the thing aimed to attack and appeared behind Skullius whom he grabbed by the collarbone and soared up into the sky with!

The Boneman hurried to wrap his hands around the Immoral's neck and he squeezed with all his might.

"STOP TALKING! I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOU THINK! SHUT UP AND LEAVE THIS PLACE! I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING, YOU SOCKETHOLE! YOU'RE NOT TAKING OVER MY BODY!" Skullius screamed.

Fulgardt wore a vicious smile as he drew Skullius' skull to him and screamed back:

"WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT TAKING OVER YOUR BODY! YOU, SKULLIUS! YOU ARE GOING TO BE THE NEXT FULGARDT!"

Chapter 995: Our Will

The two soared far into the clouds and penetrated them, continuing their flight into the deep green past them, where a horrid presence of Undeath swirled about freely.

Skullius' eyes would have bulged if he had any.

What had Fulgardt just said?!

Did he just say that...

"The next...Fulgardt?"

"YOU SOCKETHOLE!" Skullius screamed and punched his long-haired foe.

His fist did no damage at all. Fulgardt's laugh, which came next, only served to add an unamusing tone of complete helplessness.

The Immoral hurled Skullius across the sky with such a force that Skullius' pale white figure became lost in the boundless green space.

"You can't fight against me, Skullius! You can't resist! From the moment you took on my Legacy, you had already lost the battle! You celebrated getting stronger, thinking that each instance was a small, personal victory, but you were wrong!"

As though the sky was a cartoonishly large trampoline, Fulgardt kicked off it and shot like a comet right to where Skullius was spinning as he flew. He grabbed his collarbone again, and chucked him far in another direction!

"What did you think my WILLS were? That they were a plot for me to rise again in the flesh? To incarnate? Don't take me lightly! A WILL passes on an idea! It doesn't bring its previous host along!

There's no need! There's a natural order to this world, you know, which goes beyond Rules!"

Again, a disoriented Skullius was nabbed mid-flight and thrown far.

"All the WILLS were preparing you for continuing my work against those blasphemers! All of them, not just the ones that made Aigas! They are equipped with precious knowledge! Precious resolve!" Fulgardt yelled, his voice thundering across the skies.

He caught up to Skullius once again, and drew his face towards his.

"I was ready for there to be no one capable of continuing what I started. That was why I placed my corpse right before the door to the chamber. If there proved to be no one worthy, my immortal corpse would continue to absorb the powers of everyone that came into my Labyrinth bloated with nothing but greed and inevitably failed the challenge.

After a time, it would rise and tear down Aigas in a wild rampage. But of course, that was just a last resort."

Skullius' socket flames were spinning, but he was conscious, and he could hear all that Fulgardt was yelling. He was flung once again.

"But YOU came along, Skullius! Desperate to live! Yes, you will take over!"

"THE FLESH I WILL!" Skullius barked.

The Reflection suddenly shot up from below, parting the clouds and grabbed Skullius as it soared high.

Skullius could hardly be thankful. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

The mystery behind that thing that almost sapped all the powers he had gained back in the Labyrinth....

So that was what Fulgardt had been planning. He really had wanted someone to attain his Legacy, but he also had a failsafe.

But then... if his body was 'immortal', then how did he die? Better yet, Skullius could tell – quite obviously – that this Fulgardt wasn't a figment of his imagination. He existed as something on par with what Skullius was right now. Something like a soul.

Perhaps, since Fulgardt was said to have reached Divinity, his soul was unbound by the Rules governing Aigas. But then... why wasn't he carrying out his crazy scheme himself? Couldn't he bond his soul and body again?

Skullius didn't bother to ask.

That had merely been a side thought, after all.

What truly filled his mind was the thought of himself getting warped by Fulgardt's philosophy. All those WILLS he had received. Their purpose was to...

"TOMATO FLINGER!!!!"

A boisterous voice crackled from way below, beyond the clouds.

'Sila!' Skullius thought and commanded his Reflection to head down.

Right then, however, the Reflection was suddenly smacked away, and Skullius watched it disappear into the green canvas around them.

The Boneman grunted as Fulgardt grabbed him again. This time, Skullius tried to poke his eyes out, but his fingers merely bobbed off the Immoral's eyeballs.

Fulgardt sneered and the next thing Skullius knew, the two had plummeted to the weak island with staggering speed. They landed right beside a deep gorge, carving out a crater on the ground.

Skullius was dragged up, his fractured frame looking like it could shatter at any moment. He tried to resist, kicking at Fulgardt, but to no avail.

"Look," the Immoral said, his eyes staring deep into the gorge.

Skullius grunted and looked. He already knew what was within it, but was surprised by the state it was in.

"Sila!" he called in concern.

Deep within the gorge digging into the Reflection of Skullius' Soul, was indeed the Tower General Sila, his blurred, unclear figure bound by chains of light.

It was just as Skullius remembered from that time Sause had appeared within this place, but...

Sila had grown very small, so small that he looked like a defenceless toddler jailed for a ridiculous crime.

The Tower General seemed to be looking up, though his facial features couldn't be seen.

"You've gotten a real friend you know, Skullius," Fulgardt said as Skullius quivered. "He's been giving up his soul's energy to keep you alive since you lost yourself. Soon, he will more than likely disappear, as if he had never existed."

Skullius opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

He hadn't thought... he didn't think... he couldn't have imagined that...

"Sila..." he murmured.

Skullius remembered that blast of energy from Rayn's Territory.

The first micro thought to enter his mind when he had appeared here, had been that he had died again, but as time passed, he had convinced himself otherwise.

He knew that he should have been dead, especially with how his soul had been messed up because of that Territory, and it hadn't made sense why he wasn't. Until now.

Skullius didn't even know how to feel.

"You see this. This is a gift to our cause. You are inheriting the soul of an Incandescent Stager and you will wake up feeling new and driven," Fulgardt said, his eyes still locked on Sila. "You will pursue a greater purpose now, and with strength enough to back it up. You'll have it easier than I did when I started. Trust me, much easier."

Skullius attempted to release himself from Fulgardt's grip.

"You really think I'll just fold? You think I'm that weak?!" he barked.

"Oh, it's not about weakness or strength. You're simply in too deep. If it were you before you inherited a single one of my WILLS, you might have been able to fight against this. That was why I never showed myself. I only guided you as best as I could with everything I could get my hands on from within you. That guidance field... it's rather interesting."

Skullius struggled again, but to no avail. He felt another mysterious tide wash over his erect desire to resist, but he was failing, just like that first time.

"Why...why don't you just DO IT YOURSELF?! This is your mission, right?! Didn't you get your ass beaten by Rayn just hours ago! Don't you want to go out there yourself, grab your own body and hunt down the Deities yourself! This is YOUR grudge!" Skullius bellowed.

Fulgardt laughed again. His mirth was especially unbearable.

"It's our mission, Skullius. Ours. We will destroy all these false gods and introduce the world to the primordial being that deserves all praise. The fact that it's only us, makes this assignment worthwhile. The high difficulty brings about the best prize," Fulgardt said casually. "Besides, I failed once.

I died even. I'm not a Deity. My Divinity has its limits. I can't return from death, and after it, I become something as obscure as this. Something between a soul and a vague concept."

"And this goes way beyond grudges, Skullius. I inherited hatred from Him and so I fight as though it were personal. You will inherit this too, and you can't betray me."

Skullius felt another tide of unknown influence wash over his mind, diluting his thoughts. It was as though his mind was reacting favourably towards Fulgardt's words.

'Damn it! This isn't good!' the Boneman thought. He was trying to resist, but the reason why he was resisting kept slipping out of his fingers.

Suddenly...

BOOM!

Something foreign and blunt smote the island and the skies, causing them to shake terribly.

Chapter 996: The Immoral's Successor

At the sound of the aggressive impact which might have been the result of a massive bowling ball smacking the island, Skullius shuddered in shock, and Fulgardt grinned.

"This is a sign. It's time for you to wake up, Skullius," the Immoral said, his sharp eyes turning to the Boneman.

BOOOOOOM!

The crisp impact came again, its cause still yet to be seen.

What was it?

It seemed like something was attacking Skullius' soul, but what could that be? What from the outside world could be attacking him? Could it be Rayn again?

The thought scared Skullius. He understood from when Ferex visited this place back then, that time seemed to move differently here when compared to the outside world. Perhaps during this interaction of his with Fulgardt, a plethora of harrowing events had already happened outside.

But what was he to do?

The only thing to mellow his concerns was that Fulgardt didn't seem too concerned about this. Since he seemed to know a lot about things that happened around Skullius, the Boneman decided to confide in the fact this meant he wasn't in fatal danger just yet. Was that comforting though?

"Tomato... Flinger!" Sila called from the depths of the gorge. His voice expressed more than what his face could have; a desperation to be heard.

Skullius, who felt a considerable amount of strength leave his mind, snapped in the General's direction.

Sila looked much smaller, no bigger than a fist.

Fulgardt was right. He really was sacrificing himself. But what would become of him?

The former Tower General also seemed, tired.

BOOOOOM!

"Don't lose heart yet, tomato flinger! You can beat him! This is YOUR soul, mind and body!" Sila yelled in encouragement.

Skullius could hardly hear him, or was it that his mind was tuning him out? It was impossible to tell.

'I can beat him? How?' he thought to himself. 'Fulgardt is probably right. My entire goal is to switch from one master to another. That's all there is to it. Maybe everything is a lie.

What sister did I ever have? Maybe that's just Somanda's way of luring me back to him...'

Indeed. Maybe Camilla never existed. Skullius hardly felt anything for that vague memory he kept seeing from time to time anyway.

It wasn't so important.

A shot of lucidity sprang in Skullius' mind at that moment.

'What am I thinking? Ah.... this is bad,' he thought.

It seemed like everything was turning clouded and stuffy. His reasons, his motivations.

What about the Doom Factors? What would become of them if he abandoned what he had been fighting for all this time?

Did Sila's sacrifice to heal his soul mean they didn't apply? Was the problem solved just like that?

Inklings of these concerns pulsed and faded in Skullius head without end.

He heard Sila call out again, his voice as though drowned in a sea.

"You don't need to win the battle today, tomato flinger! These aren't your thoughts. You have people waiting for you out there, don't you? They will help you... and when they do... use that chance... to fight back!"

Sila seemed to grow smaller and smaller. His voice also turned into an incomprehensible, distant scream.

...And then Skullius couldn't hear it.

"Indeed, you do have friends, don't you?" Fulgardt suddenly said. "Well, the stronger you get, the less likely it will become for them to reach you. That's a price you have to pay for some sense of freedom. Trust me, you don't need them anyway. All they are good for, is raising you higher. If they can't even do that, they will only betray you."

"N...o..." Skullius struggled to tell Fulgardt that he was wrong, that he wouldn't know about the value of intimacy with people.

However, a little introspection made him wonder if he was a model for intimacy with others himself.

Most of his life on Aigas had been the opposite. He had had to be under contracts with people because of UNCoddled for their safety, and as such hadn't quite been able to bond with people.

Afterwards, he had been happy to be rid of that curse, but the desperation to grow meaningful connections with people without the need for conditions had made him remember Somanda's cold words:

'Have you ever wondered why you and your crew of Lesser Undead have emotions? Why you feel things that a bunch of bones mana shouldn't? ...Your emotions carry more emotions and show the sorrow that your soul bears through the camaraderie that you try to cultivate among yourselves as the dead!'

Was what Skullius felt... real?

The Boneman's body became heavy, and he dropped his knees again.

Maybe Fulgardt was right. He was simply... a slave to someone else.

Maybe... maybe if he chose this path... he would indeed get to choose whom he gave his allegiance.

Yes.

Yes!

This all made sense!

'Ah, that's right. If everyone is meant to forever be below the feet of someone higher... then this is best option. All I need to do is...'

He was supposed to wake up and...

"Go on then," Fulgardt beside him said as he looked up at the sky. "Go and show them all the WILL of the WANDERER WHO SEEDS"

Present time...

Skullius took a breath.

He still heard Sila calling loudly in his head.

'TOMATO FINGER!'

The Hybrid Luman smiled.

'You can scream as much you want. It won't change anything. I am who I am now,' he told the Tower General who was somehow still alive after giving up his piece of soul.

Skullius didn't have time to wonder much about him though. His eyes stared ahead while his senses, which were massively more effective and expansive gathered information on his surroundings and his opponent.

The old hag, Umbett gave him a keen look before zipping hundreds of meters away.

Queen Embrell gave a sigh.

"After boldly stepping in on my behalf, you better not doom us all," she said with a rough, tense voice that couldn't have made it more obvious that she lacked faith in Skullius.

The Hybrid Luma turned to the beautiful El Sif.

"Don't you worry. I will bring him to his knees," he said with a sinister smile that bloomed gorgeously over his gleaming face.

The Queen merely narrowed her eyes and vanished from sight.

Skullius turned back to what was ahead of him; a young man with crimson hair, small satin grey eyes and a long face with hollow cheeks. He was naked from the waist up, but an intricately designed fuzzy hide covering his midsection to his knees. He was quite muscular but not overbearingly so, which, in a way, made him all the more intimidating.

"Bring me to my knees, you say?" the Ode chortled and tilted his head. His face suddenly looked as though it was a cracked mirror, webs of shadow decorating it as he scowled.

Then his voice deepened as he uttered:

"Kneel."

...!!!

Skullius suddenly felt a terribly aggressive influence fall upon his soul, coercing it into doing as the Ode's voice commanded.

In the next instance, his knees gave out and he knelt down on the ground, digging two pits in it!

A look of surprise was etched on the Hybrid Luman's face.

'Compulsion? But it's not supposed to work on me anymore. Hmm, this somehow seems different,' he thought with suspicion and raised his head towards the Ode.

The young man walked towards Skullius with a confident, arrogant gait and soon, he was looking straight down at the Hybrid Luman.

"You shouldn't talk big like that without knowing your opponent. You ended up giving me an idea on the best possible way to put you in your rightful place," he said before extending his hand to harshly grip Skullius' neck.

But...the Ode's hand soon learned that it couldn't casually touch one who was declared as not just the Antiphon of Malignance, but also the Infinite Sword God.

Fourteen pieces of fingers cut finely at the joints, and a palm sliced into six wide ovals flew in different directions as the Ode wore a dumbfounded face.

The Hybrid Luman wore a devilish smile, his white eyes growing wide with insidious pleasure.

"Looks like we both like to talk big," he said as he rose to his feet.

The Ode drew back a few steps and looked at his non-existent hand.

"Indeed," he said with a sigh that changed his whole demeanour.

A green flame ignited around his feet, burning so fiercely and with such heat that the ground melted in seconds.

"Tell me. What's your name?" he said.

Skullius chuckled.

Demion's Dance appeared in his right hand, the Bashful Abomination in his left. He then gave his response.

"You've yet to earn the right to say my name. For now, you can call me the Insurgent Magnus."

Chapter 997: First Move!

"The Insurgent Magnus, huh? Sounds fancy. I thought we could be courteous to each other before getting to the more brutal part of this bit, but I suppose... your response is fine," the Ode said, a shallow smile drawing upon his face with a smooth transition.

He then looked at the bleeding stump at the end of his arm.

Flesh began to bubble there like cancerous boils laced with bright mana, forming bones, muscle and blood. Soon the Ode's hand was restored and he flexed it a couple of times – twiddling his fingers and balling the hand into a fist twice for certainty.

It only took two seconds for him to be satisfied with the result.

"Neat trick," Skullius said as he twirled Demion's Dance, the shorter of his two swords.

"Thanks," the Ode said, and he began appraising the Hybrid Luman up. The look in his eye was made hollow and frightening by the green highlight issued from the flame burning at his feet. "Let's see. With those ears, you can't possibly be a Sif. Any kind I know of."

His eyes then settled on Demion's Dance... then the Bashful Abomination.

The Ode narrowed his eyes and in the next instant his newly formed hand whipped into the air to defend his face.

A piercing whistle cried aloud as something quick but unseen knocked against his hand and bounced away!

Whatever it was, after it ricocheted off the Ode's hand sliced everything that was to the right of the crimson-haired man – every bit of infrastructure within the Aurora and beyond, to an end unseen – leaving behind a fifty-meter thick gaping track that reflected only the depth past the Opungale crust!

All this had happened in barely the blink of an eye. The average human or Sif wouldn't know what happened until they saw the shocking aftermath.

The Ode glanced at the destruction and then at his hand.

There was a cut along the back of his fingers from which blood leaked.

The man sighed.

"It's not only you. Your sword is aggressive too. A mere glance at it makes it want to kill?" he said.

Skullius merely shrugged wordlessly and began walking towards the young man.

The Ode gave a short laugh.

"Given your doubly annoying fondness of swords, I'd say you're from Pelian," he said. "Lovers of the conventional. That's why your nation has always been so weak except for those... what do you call them? Houses." The Ode then also took steps towards the Hybrid Luman, his green flames following his feet. "Just this once, I'll play along even though I detest these things."

Green flames blazed in his hand and forged a large bastard sword that he held firmly. Wisps of the fire flicked off its body, their heat so ferocious they warped the distance between Skullius and him.

Then, in the moment that followed...

Both the Ode and Skullius vanished and at almost the same time, the area between them exploded, somehow becoming devoured in a great ball of fire that expanded every microsecond before suddenly being diced up into triangular portions continuously, until it dissipated.

Twenty meters away from the where the fireball had emerged, from both its opposites, Skullius could be seen in one, the Ode in the other. Their backs were turned against both the patch where the conflagration occurred and against the opponent.

The two vanished again, and then elsewhere, another fierce explosion of fire ensued, its intensity more than twice as staggering as the last.

...But the two combatants were not seen.

BOOOOOM!

The sky became the next battle ground.

A great eruption rocked from it and sent a shockwave so cruel to the ground that every structure in the Aurora was flattened without exception!

Another boom, another explosion, another blast, another burst!

The flying summons that remained rushed to get out of the way. This wasn't something they would have liked to join in on. Those of them that weren't fast enough in their retreat were turned to dust by the force of the explosions, and even those that were quick enough, were sent flying away at unwanted dangerous speeds!

The clouds parted and the mostly untouched space in the sky became tainted and ruptured.

One needed to be close to be able to tell. Space was momentarily expanded, and then shredded almost simultaneously, but it remained intact. For now. Perhaps, it was because of the existence of Clusters that the world was used to this kind of abuse and had learned to bandage itself after every instance. Or was it something else...

The Ode kicked off the air, the flames on his feet turning into streaming jets, and with a crazy grin, he swung his flame-made bastard sword with an absolute sort of killing intent!

TSSSS!

For a split of a split of a moment, a searing thin green line was drawn in his vision, with its target being the individual in the black robe several meters away in the air.

Such an attack would have cleaved even accomplished Incandescent Stagers without exception, but for the Infinite Sword God...

The precise attack, a fine sword slash travelling at speeds far greater than sound, and closer to light, broke like a shard before it could touch Skullius.

No.

Rather than broke, the sword slash was cut apart by something faster and more potent. Something that only passively guarded the Hybrid Luman.

The Ode laughed within.

'Incredible. Anything that tries to reach him is diced into nothingness. Whether it is physical or not. I've never seen an ability like this before. It certainly makes traditional fighting... impossible,' he thought.

The jet of flames at his feet bellowed, and a great outpour of fire was spat up so quickly that it pushed the Ode rapidly towards Skullius.

As a blur he went.

As a bolt he sped.

...But the Hybrid Luman could feel him. He could sense every inch of movement he took.

The Hybrid Luman raised the hand which held Demion's Dance.

The Ode grew wary and decelerated.

Was his opponent throwing down an attack of his own? A downward sword slash?

No, that wasn't the case. Not at all.

What actually happened, threw the Ode way off.

Where Skullius' right arm rose just now with the green sword in his hand... there still remained another right arm on his shoulder, only, it wasn't wielding Demion's Dance.

...!!!

This third arm stretched out, and an index finger from it pointed to the night sky rather ominously... and then IT happened.

It wasn't a downward slash.

It was the evisceration of something that had clung to the night, to the sky, to the space.

The Ode didn't even know if something like this should be possible with such casual motion, but it happened anyway.

All the air... was cut up in an instant, leaving nothing a harrowing vacuum between the two combatants.

The Ode's eyes grew wide with both shock and excitement. He knew what would happen next.

This wasn't a ploy to suffocate him, or something so mundane. Rather...

The Ode's bastard sword vanished from his grasp, as did the coiling flames around his feet which enabled him to fly as he pleased. The crimson-haired young man was left bare.

'Incredible!' he called in his mind.

Right then, a gorgeous glow then lit up over the Hybrid Luman's head, soft like moonlight but as vicious as the sun's ray at the same time.

This light came from what seemed like a gem, its looks deceiving.

The Heart of Revelation.

Its radiance then stripped the Ode of his skin, to reveal what was beneath; his organs, his bones, his mana core, his soul.

All was laid bare.

All was made vulnerable, so that when Skullius' first right arm, which held Demion's Dance fell down like a sharp gavel, pulling in the sky as it descended with so much mesmerizing grace and precision, there would be no hindrance to the certain death it carried...

Chapter 998: Unusual Monsters! (1)

Perhaps it was because everything happened in rapid succession, causing the Ode to almost miss the whole scope of every detail...

As it turned out, it wasn't just the air that had been destroyed, causing his flames to die out so instantaneously.

No. That would have been too regular for the Infinite Sword God.

Ambient mana, gravity and space had been cut apart, leaving an odd dark patch of existence that looked more like the remnant of a fallen dream than anything else.

Within this patch, was where Skullius' Heart of Revelation shone vibrantly as the only source of light, its unusual properties revealing what was hidden within the body of the Ode.

Within this patch, was where Skullius raised his third hand which held Demion's Dance and swung down with cruel intent, his motion wholly unhindered.

The green sword couldn't have appeared any stronger than it was at this moment.

The [Infinite Sword God] skill had several passive effects; which included the instantaneous slashes that reacted to anything that attempted to touch the Hybrid Luman, and a granted critical damage efficiency of 500% to any sword Skullius held – this boost applying to both the sword's basic special effects as well as its skills.

The latter of these two was in play, and as Skullius brought his sword down, the Ode grinned.

'Well, this was unexpected. I took this a little too lightly,' he thought while watching even this presumed patch of nothing around him crumble, be pulled in by the incoming attack. 'To think I'd lose a life. How long has it been?'

The single slash that came for the Ode was terribly devastating.

Before he knew it, every aspect of him was minced into oblivion.

His flesh.

His mana core.

His soul.

A flash of deep red came with the Hybrid Luman's slash... and the Ode was no more.

Not a speck of his existence remained in this dark patch, which, in the next moment, vanished to be replaced by a full sky where mana, gravity and space thrived once more, as though nothing had happened just now; as though it had not all been torn down.

'This is quite handy,' Skullius thought as he descended a notch, his blank gaze falling to his swords. The odd third arm to appear on him faded as though it were ghost.

Many things were possible with this astounding power of his. Not only did he have a skill called [Infinite Sword God]. He was the Infinite Sword God himself.

As a result of that title, Skullius could use conjure sword slashes with any part of his body, and each one was strong enough to even shatter the concepts that were produced by the Rules of this world, though, only temporarily.

In theory, anything he wanted to cut could be cut as long as he used the right amount of heft. However, a Super skill could not permanently influence the Rules that kept a world stable, especially when said Rules were made by powerful Deities; they would instantly reform.

Speaking of permanence....

Skullius looked down below. The nature several hundred meters below him painted him the full image of what was happening.

'You wouldn't die so easily, would you?' the Hybrid Luman thought.

It would be foolish to assume otherwise. Perhaps, if it were the untainted Skullius, he would have grown quite hopeful, but the current Skullius knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that this fight – a fight with Maqian royalty – would never end so easily.

The First Horn and his Ode, in every era, were monstrous powerhouses that stood far above the Maqian standard.

'There it is...' Skullius thought.

Down in the Aurora he and the Ode had flattened with just the sheer force of their battle, a green flame could be spotted.

It had been left behind by the Ode right before the battle turned cataclysmic.

The green flame burning on the ground suddenly grew vicious and bellowed, turning from an ordinary camp fire, into a bon fire.

It rose, and from its mostly consistent tone, a detailed figure exploded out and let out a might screech!

A great phoenix unfurled its wings and proudly wagged its marvelous tail – a wondrous bundle of tassel-like feathers had a rich white to their various shades of green. A crown of feathers could be seen over the creature's relatively small head which spotted starkly white, sharp eyes and a hooked beak.

SCREECH!

The phoenix called once again before soaring a decent distance over the bulking flame below which began to part, revealing from within it... the young man who had just perished in the night sky.

The Ode walked out rather confidently, and looked up at the sky.

With the way he almost looked like someone coming from a short nap, one would think he hadn't just died moments ago.

The Ode wore a thrilled grin, and without a word, he reached into his full head of crimson hair and pulled out a long strand that he held oddly between his fingers.

The strand was then suddenly ignited by a red flame and it was transfigured into a large red bow with black, glossy additions – like pretty wax bumps – where it curved inward. There was a glow within its build that pushed forth the idea that the item was indeed magical. Terribly so.

The Ode pulled the orange, sizzling string to the bow, and a furious arrow of red fire that looked as though it was crafted meticulously for decades appeared, was nocked on it.

Skullius narrowed his eyes at the sight. Even though there was a great distance between himself and the Ode, he felt immensely uneasy.

'There's something really off about that arrow. I better counter rather than find out if it can pierce through my defenses...' he thought.

Right as he planned, the Ode said something in an heavy, commanding voice.

"Sleep."

When the young man spoke, his voice echoed throughout the region.

Skullius felt his voice travel like a tremor even through the sky, making sure its command was heeded.

It was not loud, yet, evidently, every living thing heard it and obeyed.

Skullius, unfortunately, was no exception... and neither were his swords.

Before he felt an effective sense of drowsiness fall upon him, he vividly sensed the lively voices of both Demion's Dance and the Bashful Abomination grow silent, their presences turning dim.

'This... again...?' Skullius struggled to think, but he couldn't resist.

His eyes closed shut and he began to fall from the sky.

The Ode's grin grew wider.

"Let's see if you too can live after you die," he said, and let lose his arrow.

Chapter 999: Unusual Monsters! (2)

There was no lag in time between the moment the red arrow was released, and when it reached Skullius' forehead, its tip bearing as much of a threat to his life as his devastating sword slash towards the Ode.

However, before it could penetrate its target, it was bombarded by thousands of violent disembodied sword slashes that threatened to rip it into something, some things, more miniscule than atoms.

...Yet, this passive defense proved to be lacking.

While sparks flew from the countless collisions between the mysterious arrow and the Infinite Sword God's defense, they did not signal a victorious block to the threat.

The arrow, while knocked slightly off course, met the sleeping Hybrid Luman's flesh regardless.

The Ode grinned from the ground, having seen that his attack was worthy enough to reach his opponent.

The young Maqian was blessed with a Hidden Class passed down solely among Odes and used only as one still retained the title of 'Ode of the First Horn'.

Falcon's Restricted Ternary.

The user of this Class was graced with three different kinds of flames: the Thriving Green, Emporium Red and Famished White.

What the Ode was currently using, was the Emporium Red, a facet of his Hidden Class that stored 25 limited use treasures with different, destructive flame or heat related abilities on his body as per his desire.

The bow and arrow the Ode conjured had about as much destructive power as what six Grandmaster Mages could output with their raw mastery of various unfriendly energies, which was nothing to sneeze at, especially when there was no defense in play, and the receiver of the attack took it bare.

Unfortunately, this designation couldn't have fallen on the current Hybrid Luman. He was not without more competent defense.

Even while he was asleep...

The Ode's face changed a microsecond after he had donned a grin of triumph, for the Hybrid Luman, who had already tasted the tip of his red, flaming arrow with his forehead just now... became as brilliant as the sun.

The light that showered from his entire body was different from the mellow, moonlight sort the Heart of Revelation released. It was dominant and dictatorial!

It cast itself over everything within a mile's radius prominently, giving the illusion that the night had already expired and afternoon had taken its place.

The Ode's eyes turned a little grim.

'Another passive defense...' he thought, as his bow scattered into faint, red sparks.

The light that blanketed him was not only in the form of beauty, however. Its purpose, was to repel everything that reflected it, despite its size and natural resilience!

The arrow that had almost pierced the Hybrid Luman had no choice but to shuttle away at an atrocious speed, denied an intimate audience with its prey!

But it was not only the arrow.

Tainted, unclean air, impure mana, and adverse natural concepts were denied any contact with the Hybrid Luman as long as they had even a glimmer of potential to harm, and were cast away!

In the next moment, however, the brilliant light died unceremoniously, and its source – back to his casual appearance – manifested right before the Ode, with barely half a meter to spare between them.

"Looks like you have many tricks, but they all work on me," Skullius said, his stark eyes facing the crimson-haired young man's face.

"I see that," the Ode said... and his body was minced to nothingness by the innumerable, rapid cuts from the unseen defense that guarded Skullius.

Once again, the Ode had met an end, but Skullius knew it was only temporary.

He turned to the flame that had revived the Ode before and he swiped laterally from this distance with Demion's Dance.

His strike was as a calm wind, smooth yet swift.

Even the particles that made up fire were not safe from Skullius' slashes. The green blaze he targeted was swept away as though doused by the sea's waves...but not before the Ode sped out of it as he soared into the sky.

Skullius clicked his tongue and went after him.

'This bastard can somehow compel me to do as he says. Even my swords are susceptible. I suppose Demion's Dance has a soul, and the Bashful Abomination's consciousness counts as one too. If it wasn't because both of these swords are bound to me, they would have continued to remain asleep,' he thought.

Unbeknownst to him, the Ode had a similar evaluation of Skullius' power going on in his head.

'This man... He has two kinds of passive defenses. That last one is especially effective against anything else that that invisible field of slices can't stop. Hmmm. As if that isn't absurd enough, he is able to resist the effect of my compulsion. If I had to guess... he has a powerful means to protect his soul, though, against me it only works to reduce the effect of what I command,' the Maqian thought.

'Heh, heh. I don't like my odds, but oh well... I'll just go all out from the beginning then!'

Skullius had already reached the Ode and the Bashful Abomination had already bit through the guard of his raised arms laced with potent Nitros cleanly, as though it was nothing, and gone on to carve through his neck when...

"Majestic Territory Expulsion..." the voice of the Ode came despite his slashed neck. It had not come from his lips, after all!

Oddly, Skullius found where the voice came from, and the discovery shocked him almost as much as the speed at which the Territory was projected to its full capacity!

Skullius was used to seeing the blanket of white that the details of the Territory – the Imaginary GeoScape – were printed on, manifest with a speed he could follow, and then everything else, but in this instance, that wasn't the case.

"...Old Folks' Campfire."

By the time the Hybrid Luman heard the name of the Territory, a colossal, well-defined space – much larger than most Territories he had seen – had already been set up.

The Ode, who had been about to fall to his attacks once again, was gone from sight.

'Dammit!' Skullius thought.

Before he could even appreciate the features of the Territory, the Primary assault function of the actualized space smashed into him mercilessly!

"SUCCUMB!"

"SOUL-DRAWN!"

"SPLIT!"

"SURRENDER!"

Four voices that might have belonged to gods, or at least titanic men. bombarded Skullius' ears... and each of them came true!

Skullius felt a suffocating sensation of despair that stripped his will to fight; his soul was dragged right out of his body; his body and soul were split into two parts that floated above each other, and finally, the Hybrid Luman felt himself turn docile.

The idea of even opposing the owner of this treacherous Territory, was cast far away, in favor of simply giving in; surrendering, admitting that he had lost.

Chapter 1000: Unusual Monsters! (3)

The Majestic Territory, Old Folks' Campfire, was just as dreadful as it was enormous. Instead of looking like a titanic piece of abstract art, its appearance was based on real life elements and sights.

A sunless grey sky stood over clusters of whirling, dark thunderclouds that all seemed to be marked by a small ball of red fire deep within them. Below this upward view – right beneath the centre of the curled clouds – stood what looked like a prairie, cast in a darker shade, like that of night.

Tall stalks of grass, taller than any man or Giant in Aigas ruled over the prairie, dying it in a subdued hue of green which looked quite even and picturesque from the skies.

Far removed from the beauty, however, was the most bizarre sight in the Territory, settled in the midst of the gloomy prairie; four giant, old men seated on large boulders gathered around a great bonfire.

Each of these men, seated in four different directions such that they surrounded the verdant flame, were roughly twenty meters tall while seated, and had haggard faces full of sweat, grime and gloom. Their beards were grey and dry, their eyes as blank and hollow as those of the dead.

Their muscular frames betrayed the life they had in their bodies, though, as did the monotonous activity they performed by the fire; sharpening their four different weapons – a cutlass, an axe, a chakram and a spear.

It was these four men who had called in loud voices the moment Skullius was dragged into the Territory, and it was above them that his segmented, dismantled and defeated bodies – soul and flesh – could be seen floating as though they were as light as the air.

One of the Primary means of offense for the Territory, was the commands of these four men, which had just about as much power as the voice of the Ode, if not more.

Immediately after Skullius was incapacitated, the Ode walked out of the great bonfire between the four men, and stepped into the lush prairie from between the massive legs of one of the four.

The wound on his neck was no more, and sly confidence was fully restored onto his face.

The Thriving Green flame from his Hidden Class, effected any and all things with life within them.

It offered its restorative benefits to the user, tempted always to revive them after death, and had a profound negative effect on anything living, being capable of stealing life and destroying any vessels of such if allowed to dwell longer on them.

Anyone caught of guard, even when considering scores of powerhouses, would be incinerated completely, but that effect was only when considering a regular wielder of the Hidden Class, Falcon's Restricted Ternary.

The Ode was far from a regular Incandescent Stager, after all, and the effect of his Hidden Class was many times more efficient in his Territory.

The Ode looked up at Skullius. He would have piled on attacks on him as he was currently helpless, but he felt something odd about the Hybrid Luman, something that shouldn't have been possible within his Territory, within any Territory, for that matter.

The segmented bodies of the Hybrid Luman were suddenly enveloped by a graceful light that hid them from sight in a great sphere that, unfortunately, failed to illuminate the gloomy prairie.

'There. That shouldn't be possible...' the Ode thought.

The brilliant light exploded out with an intent to restore, and when it died down, the Hybrid Luman was restored, his dark robe that cast a shadow on his torso to his knees; the bangles of light around his wrists, ankles and neck; his glowing skin; his two swords; and of course, his will to fight!

The Hybrid Luman looked down at the Ode for the second time, and he too had just as wary of a look to his enemy that the Ode had towards him.

'This man can use his abilities in my Territory. How?' the Ode thought.

...And yet, Skullius thought about something even more harrowing, and expressed it outwardly.

"You..." he said. "You're a Spirit Warden."

...

The Ode was stunned by the accusation. His face showed mild surprise.

"Well, to think someone from Pelian would know what that is," he said, a chuckle leaving his mouth. "But indeed I am. Sadly, the fact that that is what I am hasn't managed to help me put you down, now has it?"

Skullius frowned.

A Spirit Warden.

He didn't know that much about them, even with the knowledge that came with the WILLS Fulgardt had instilled in him so far.

In fact, he had only guessed just now.

It hadn't made sense to him that an Incandescent Stager would have such powerful reign on souls, even those of other Incandescent Stagers, not to mention Mythical grade weapons. The nail on the coffin was how the Ode had spoken the name of his Territory with his soul rather than his body!

That was when Skullius recalled that the only person he had met with such a level of bizarre command of souls as this, was Bek; the stray knight bound to a wife who had died and turned into a Spirit. The man he had met back in Harifrast.

Skullius frowned.

'This isn't go—'

"Now isn't the time to get distracted. You're in my favored environment, after all," the Ode said, and four booming voices came from the men around the fire, much to Skullius' horror.

"FALL!"

"FAIL!"

"FOOL!"

"FLAYED!"

Again, Skullius was smitten by the effects of the voices.

His defense could not cut apart speech, and his reflective defense – which reacted only to attacks that he could not defend on his own – could not repel a voice, thus...

Skullius suddenly plummeted straight towards the green bonfire at absurd speed as his skin was stripped from his body in a grotesque fashion.

His mind turned jumbled, and for a moment, he seemed to cackle aloud like a madman!

Right as he fell to the verdant, fiery doom, however...

The Ode pulled a strand of his hair and grasped it in his right hand.

A micro-moment later, his arm was engulfed in a crimson flame that soon formed a smooth, thick, dark gauntlet that began at his elbow, decorated with rings of red-hot protrusions all the way to the knuckles!

With an insidious grin, the Ode, bolstered physically by his Territory to a degree most among Incandescent Stagers could only dream of, streaked into the fire right when Skullius was plunged into it!

Before he could come into the range of Skullius' passive defense, he threw his first with mad intent, a terrible force erupting as he did!

A scorching heat wave condensed into blunt, blistering carnage travelled through the great, green flames that already produced a sensational kind of scald.

As expected, the Infinite Sword God's defense attempted to dismantle the raw force... but it wasn't quite effective, not with the speed with which the mass of pure, cruel burn moved.

No light defense could have saved Skullius either.

BOOOOM!

The force and heat crashed into Skullius wholly, and for a moment, his body, bolstered by the might from an extra set of wings, the special effects of his swords, the boosts from [Infinite Sword God] and [Greatest Antiphon of Malignance]...simply couldn't endure it.

Skullius was baked to the bones, and even those were reduced to dust a moment later.

But...