

Undead 1011

Chapter 1011: Daughters, Plural

Skullius and Embrell walked down a set of decrepit steps surrounded by worn, cracked walls that produced lively weeds. Neither needed light to watch for the next step even in the thick darkness, though, if someone would have watched their descent to the doorway ahead for the next few minutes, it would have looked more than eerie.

No words were exchanged between the two of them.

For Embrell, it felt uncomfortable, but for Skullius, it was bliss. He had a lot to think about, and this silent excursion was best used to think through what he was going to be doing in the next few days, starting from his ride to Maqi.

However, he hadn't gotten to that yet because...

'Tomato flinger! I will keep pestering you until you remember who you are! You have to save yourself! Don't let this go on any longer! You just might bite off more than you can chew!' Sila cried within the depths of Skullius' mind.

Well, rather than his mind, it actually seemed like his voice came from Skullius' brain.

'I told you. You scream all you want. It won't change anything,' Skullius said to him within their odd bubble of mental conversation. 'Oh. I should thank you for your selfless sacrifice. I didn't expect you to do that.'

You started off wanting to control my mind, then transitioned to being content with seeing whether or not your old comrades from the old days who were imprisoned in the Labyrinth of the Yoke are still alive, and now, here you are...'

Sila didn't retort.

He indeed had progressed as Skullius had said. He grew more detached to his own goals as time passed. Now, he had permanently killed any hope of getting himself a new body. Since his soul was used to fuel Skullius', he no longer existed in large part as his own self.

The long time it took before Sila had awakened – just before Skullius agreed to the Kuthmuk with the Ode – had almost convinced the Hybrid Luman that the bastard was gone, but it seemed that it just took him a while to get a hang of using an already occupied flesh body that he didn't have power over. Worse yet, Skullius' mind was saturated with information and voices from the WILLS.

It was like a mad man's mind, and Sila should know.

This must have sparked something in the Tower General. His Incandescent soul was tenacious enough to resist perishing after he sacrificed his soul, as was his consciousness – though that could be argued to be the same thing, as Skullius had discovered in his fight against the Ode. As such, he was determined to save Skullius from the chaotic influence.

As he was now inscribed within Skullius' body like a skill, sharing the Hybrid Luman's vision, his limbs, his organs... perhaps he could.

However, Skullius had been dominant when Sila was a piece of soul, and the same was true now. Unless Sila exploited small chances where Skullius was distracted, he couldn't control this body.

Even if he managed, he was only able to perform small actions that were largely inconsequential and could be nullified immediately after.

'What of it, tomato flinger? My Direction, my course for living has led me here. You broke me out of that prison back then, even if unintentionally. Now, it is my turn. It doesn't matter how long it takes. As long as you live, I will live too.'

Skullius didn't have much of a response.

He simply scoffed.

A few minutes of a peace lute persisted. Skullius and the Queen were close to the end of the stretch of steps.

"Is it true?" Embrell suddenly said.

Skullius had expected that she would ask eventually. It was only natural, after all.

"It is," he said succinctly.

Embrell didn't immediately follow up.

"Did you choose it?" she asked.

"Hahahaha. Is there much of your own input when you're dealing with something divine?" Skullius responded.

Embrell turned to him.

"You believe that you had no choice but to become powerful then?"

"If I desire power and ask for it, work for it, bleed for it until I finally attain it, does it mean that I'm being rewarded rightfully, or that me gaining the strength I asked for serves a purpose in the plans of the one who granted that power."

"Is there a difference?" Embrell narrowed her eyes.

Skullius turned to her.

"You think whoever grants power for those who seek it is also just and fair?" he asked Embrell.

"Is that an absurd thing to believe?"

"Yes, it is. Nothing can be just and fair. That is something someone else decides for the rest."

Embrell remained silent for a while.

"I see..." she then said, but the look in her eyes had changed.

The two finally passed through the doorway and entered a great hall.

Its ceiling had a large hole in it where a bundle of huge stems rose through. These were, of course, the stems of the Deathly Ruse.

At the feet of the stems, a man who looked just as beautiful as the Queen was kneeling before two younger figures who laid on the dirty floor, his hands over heads. A cool energy streamed out of his hands and was then injected into the bodies of the two who looked rather pale.

Embrell rushed towards the King.

"How are they doing?" she asked with concern livid in her tone.

"They... will be fine," the man said, and he withdrew his hands from his two children. "I feared using the Ruse on all our people and in such a short span would strain them a lot more. They must have been secretly learning to handle the Ruse better. They hardly have a fever."

Embrell looked relieved.

This was good news.

It took the purest El Sif to handle the Deathly Ruse, and her two eldest children were the most fit for that job. It was a rather strenuous task and would leave the two El Sif drained each time, but they were always pleased to do what they could to ensure that tradition was upheld.

Skullius was piecing this together as the Embrell and her husband spoke.

'Remarkable,' he thought.

The King turned to him with a strange look.

"I see you were someone we shouldn't have taken lightly," he said. "I have no idea how one such as you has gone so long without making waves on Aigas, but I can only be glad that your strength was used to save our nation this time."

Embrell gave her husband a complicated look. She didn't know if she wholly agreed with him.

Skullius grinned and nodded.

"You're welcome," he said. "However, since you are finally taking me seriously, I truly hope you will consider my earlier proposal. I have an obligation to meet that absolutely requires your daughter's input. Well, my input into her."

Skullius' obnoxious straightforwardness flabbergasted the two Royals.

The Hybrid Luman ignored their funny faces and his vision scrolled to the young lady laying on the floor.

"Make that, daughters' input," he added.

Chapter 1012: To Foster The Next Generation

The look on Skullius' face convinced the two Royals that he wasn't joking. This wasn't the time for a hearty fib anyway. The man before them really was serious about picking not just their youngest daughter, but their eldest as well.

For the King, who, unlike the Queen was already questioning Skullius' character because he apparently had the legacy of the infamous Fulgardt, this turned out to be a huge turn-off. A surge of fury built up within him rapidly, but was doused by rational thinking. For now, perhaps it wasn't a bad thing to entertain this man. He had saved Opungale after all.

"I must admit. Your interest in our daughter...daughters, has taken us by surprise. You must be aware that they are not tools or prizes that we can just hand Out. They are, in fact, individuals who have the right to choose who they want to be with. Their choice matters," the King said firmly.

Skullius' blank gaze fixed on him for a while, his face tinged with an apathetic expression. Then he said:

"You seem rather reluctant in the face of a genuine Luminant. I thought you'd believe in this by now and be more...inviting of my requests, especially one such as this."

Skullius head scrolled over to the Queen who stiffened a little.

She had watched the entire battle between the Ode and Skullius – at least what happened outside the Territory – and the latter's transformation did show hints that suggested the validity of what Darwel had been saying.

Or did it?

In all honesty, since not that much was known about the Luminants' old lives before Aigas – as they never spoke much about it – it was hard to confirm this. Besides that, no one expected to see more Luminants since they had all died.

"If you were in our situation, you wouldn't be inclined to believe just anything you hear, even from another devout Sif. There simply is no evidence of there being a Luminant who left Opungale. They weren't adventurous people, you see. Or perhaps, after being stripped from their original home, they simply made the effort to create a new one that wasn't too ambitiously large.

They could have wrought their fury on Aigas and expanded to conquer much of it, but they didn't. They instead lived and perished here where they built connections and the shrine for their Deity," Embrell said.

And it was indeed so.

The Sif prided themselves on having very accurate records of the past. These records were, after all, kept by beings that were millennia old – great, ancient trees of the various forests and the expansive seas. Nature kept everything that had happened on Opungale imbedded in its roots, its vines and its leaves.

As such, the High Family, the El Sif who could communicate with said nature, knew quite a lot about everything that was known.

Skullius nodded and folded his arms. He remained silent for a while, seemingly debating with something in his head. He then spoke after what felt like an hour.

"This god of the Sif. I spoke to him,"

...!!!

Embrell and her husband were stunned.

"What?!" the former exclaimed. "What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly as I said," Skullius replied. "Darwel took me to that place, to the Oath of Mourning which hid the shrine. She had promised me so back in Pelian. Since I do possess Luminant blood – stop looking so shocked, I really do – the shrine allowed me to come into contact with the Deity Luserus. He had been hoping for a Luminant to speak with him."

The look on Embrell's face suggested that she did not believe this at all. How could she? Her people always visited the shrine to pay their respects to the fallen Luminants who made it. The object merely looked like a regular construct used to stand in place for Luserus, not something that actually conjured the Deity.

"As you may or may not be able to imagine, Luserus was distraught at his children having all passed on. I assume there was no concept of the afterlife in the world that he made. Their souls must have perished upon death. A pity. Thus, I made a deal with him. I will nurture generations of Luminants for him.

The best candidates for this process, are of course, those with a portion of Luminant blood like me. El Sif. In other words, your daughters," Skullius continued. "I doubt your Majesty would be willing to mate with me, but I'm sure your daughters wouldn't mind."

The Queen's eye twitched at the last sentence, but she maintained her cool.

"Fostering a generation of Luminants... Is this true?" the King said with interest.

"Indeed," Skullius said, a small smirk growing on his face.

Embrell was nauseated by it.

This tale seemed ridiculous. The way Skullius said it made it sound so... casual.

A Deity distraught? Skullius made it sound as though he took advantage of the Deity.

"Forgive me, but I'm finding this all very hard to take in. You bargained with a Deity?" Embrell said, a look of grave suspicion on her face.

Skullius sighed.

"Let me make this clear. It wouldn't have been my first choice if there was anything else I could have offered that would pique the interest of a god. Only this would do. And let me elaborate: I am not trying to bind you or your daughters to myself. I'm not particularly fond of... bodily pleasures myself. I'm simply asking for a favor.

In any case, whatever dozens upon dozens of children are born will remain among your people. All of them Luminants – in one capacity or another. Isn't that an attractive offer?"

Embrell and the King looked at each other.

It was apparent that they saw things a little differently. They were surprised by the look they saw in the other's eyes – a dark look of uncertainty in the Queen, and a hopeful, expectant one in her significant other.

The King was very much optimistic about this entire ordeal. He seemed to be more like Darwel than Embrell. He had a burning fascination with the Luminants that breached his guarded securities and reason.

Did he have evidence of whether or not all he heard was true? No.

However, the more he thought about it... it had taken Benyn and Cosycn a while to return after he and Embrell had sent them to retrieve Darwel earlier.

Darwel and this man had gone to the Oath of Mourning then.

So maybe... just maybe...

"You will have to wait, I'm afraid," Embrell said, surprising the King. "Whether we agree or not depends on our daughters in the end. Sadly, as you can see, Evandelyn isn't in any condition to engage with us on the subject, and Darwel is currently a seed within the Ruse.

It will take a while to restore her, and that again, is dependent on when these two will be healthy enough to manage the Deathly Ruse."

The King sighed and said nothing.

He instantly figured that he was being a little too rash.

Skullius, on the other hand, tilted his head, and then smiled.

"Very well. We don't have to deal with this today anyway. I'll be heading to be Maqi shortly," he said, and the King reeled.

"What?"

"I'll tell you about it later," Embrell whispered to him.

She turned and saw Skullius departing from the way she and he had come.

While looking at his broad robe that swayed as he moved, Embrell couldn't help but wonder if it was any good letting this man wander freely on Aigas.

Chapter 1013: Yes, I did

"I thought for sure you were going to die. Hahaha. That's not a bad thing to say, right?" Braxten said with a huge grin on his face. His colorful attire painted his surroundings in a goofy light, hiding the true nature of the status of Opungale at the moment, if only faintly.

"No. If you guys didn't hold off that hag for so long, things wouldn't have ended so well in the Territory," Skullius said with his hands slotted in the darkness of his robes. He and Braxten Shannazah were walking down a grassy patch littered with the summoned seahorse-like creatures stitched to the world.

Of course, they weren't alone.

"I don't buy it," Agnees Kudobtu said with a stoic expression. "The fact that you were somehow able to use your abilities in a Territory and even break it, tells me that you must have had some kind of back-up plan. Hell, even after that giant, golden thing of yours was destroyed, you still had options."

Skullius chuckled.

"Maybe."

As he said that, both Shannazah and Kudobtu looked up.

The ginormous frame of the PHANTASMIC RETAINER, the Spirit of Drowning, was still floating above, a portion of it buried in the clouds. It remained as imposing and domineering as before, and the shadow it cast kept to its fierce depth as it followed along with Skullius' movement.

No one had deigned to ask about this and what it actually was. Even the two from the Six Houses of Pelian were afraid they might not comprehend the explanation.

"So, your mission is over, right? I bet your contributions definitely qualify as 'acting as allies for Opungale', don't they? Will the King give you a reward?" Skullius asked the two.

Braxten coughed awkwardly.

"Oh, I wish Royan was that much of a benevolent man. For the past centuries, the Capital Service and the Families have been responsible for every single duty that the Royal Family is supposed to oversee. It was honestly surprising to me when I heard Royan took it upon himself to have diplomatic talks with Opungale. Or maybe it didn't, now that I think about it.

That idiot has always been all about saving his own skin. I sometimes doubt that he is related to a legendary figure like a Philemen Royan," he said.

Skullius chortled faintly.

Right.

Philemen Royan.

The man who built Pelian and allowed humans to do what the beasts could naturally; to form a Territory.

Philemen was a man from Emeradis who united hundreds of thousands of people to occupy a piece of land both Maqi and Emeradis had warred over for a long time.

And to ensure that he reserved it without trouble, Philemen had wagered with Maqi and Emeradis that he could produce 100 Incandescent Stager in a decade, and that these Incandescent Stagers could beat 100 of the same Stage from both Maqi and Emeradis.

Of course, while he did manage to produce 100 Incandescent Stagers through the help of a mysterious creature known as a Truworth Bill, these 100 became the first to learn how to use Majestic Territories, a trait that allowed Philemen to succeed in his wager and secure what was now known as Pelian.

But also, to make sure that he wasn't terrorized for his secrets before the nation grew, he shared the knowledge passed on to him by the Truworth Bill to the other nations, which benefitted all as the years went by.

Philemen was indeed a remarkable man, as Braxten had said, and it really was mind-boggling how the current King was nothing of the sort.

Then again, it was also unusual how the Royan line had persisted on for 80 millennia, well, 4 millennia.

Many doubted that it was the same blood from the old times that sat on the throne of Pelian at the moment.

Skullius was curious as well.

The current him, at least.

Fulgardt had been alive in the days when the conflict between Philemen and the two nations burned the hottest. He had been there when Philemen died and was replaced by several others of his line up to Edricus Royan II who ruled over the course of the Second Grand War – when the Immoral had risen to become a global menace.

It seemed the fierce blood of Philemen had perished back in that time, cowardly, cold mercury replacing it.

'Maybe I'll visit that man after my trip,' Skullius thought.

That seemed fit for a side quest.

"If I may be so bold..." Braxten suddenly said to the Hybrid Luman.

"What?" Skullius turned to him.

"It's been scratching at me, you see... Am I imagining it, or have you suddenly leaped into the Incandescent Stage? I'm quite sure you were nowhere near this state when we last spoke."

Agnees' eyes sharply pierced Skullius. She too had had the same question burning at her throat.

Needless to say, much like Viccil and Seville, she had sensed that there was something odd with Skullius' soul, but it had been masked by how 'weak' his body had been, at least in terms of Stages.

Usually there was a cap to how much someone could grow if they were still within a certain stage, which was why Vali having so much mana was outlandish.

Skullius, however, had gone beyond outlandish with how his cosmetic body could endlessly attain stats and boosts from skills and Enrichment gems. His flesh wasn't of Aigas after all, and that was why, in terms of physical abilities, he was able to match people beyond him before.

Now though...

"Indeed. I have reached the Incandescent Stage. It seemed so impossible in a short amount of time, but here I am..." Skullius replied to the inquiry with a grin.

Indeed, the Hybrid Luman had skipped the Master Stage entirely and reached the Incandescent Stage right after completing his Second Trial; to forge one PHATASMIC RETAINER!

This was made possible by the fact that his soul had been enriched by Sila's, which was at the Incandescent Stage, and by the fact that Skullius' body was not of this world.

His body came with the Null Life complementary skill, [Flesh It Like You Mean It].

His name was chosen by the guidance field.

His Tasks and Trials were revealed to have been given by Fulgardt himself, however the Immoral had managed to achieve that.

Thus, since Skullius' soul had already transcended, his body, after being given a chance, also transcended to close the gap.

There was nothing the Rules of Aigas, which were never meant for him in the first place could do about it.

Kudobtu and Shannazah didn't even know how to react to this information. How would you even ask how that was possible to someone like Skullius? Technically, there were more questions to ask before even arriving at that point!

While the two were debating and digesting what they had just heard, the figures of Vali and Maxim approached.

Skullius didn't sense them immediately, as he became absorbed in future prospects. He hadn't begun to think about what his rise in Stages would mean until Shannazah brought it up.

Now, he could help but wonder how he should craft his Majestic Territory.

It wouldn't be easy or instant, but he already knew the steps.

He wasn't going to make a run-of-the-mill Territory. He wanted to forge something that would be a nightmare for any opponent he would have to face on Aigas or outside it.

Especially... that damned fake.

Chapter 1014: Arrogant Voyage Ahead

"You can stay here if you want, you know. I can practically feel your fear oozing through the air," Skullius said to Maxim who quivered and punched him in the shoulder.

"It's impolite to say a woman is scared. Especially me. I feel like you don't even know me anymore," Maxim retorted with a frown and massaged her hand. The Hybrid Luman's shoulder had been tougher than she expected. "But well... are you sure it's safe to waltz into Maqi with their prince as a hostage? What if Diviners from Maqi have already foreseen this and are waiting for us?"

Skullius chuckled... as did Vali who stood next to him. She gave Maxim a sly smile.

"If that happens, then I guess we are going to have to die along with him," she said to the pink-haired lady whose frown deepened.

"I have a family to get back to in Pelian. I don't think I'm ripe for death yet. Do you? Don't you have like... an empire you created by signing off your cousins during the Premium Age Royale?" she said.

"That 'empire' needs a leader who's known to have stepped into a den full of murderous monsters hundreds of times stronger than she is, and came out alive. I need that sort of legend under my belt to garner long-lasting fear and respect, don't you think? Besides, half of those I signed with may already be dead by now."

Maxim wore a look of disgust.

Vali's response had started off inspiring only to turn morbid real fast.

Skullius' senses crept aboard the great ship a few dozens of meters away from the shore.

It was one of the few the Maqians had arrived on; more specifically, the one the Ode and Umbett had been on.

The two Maqians were had already settled on deck.

Using the Spirit of Drowning that remained above him, Skullius had adjusted the stitches that held the two in place. Other than restraining, their ends could also traverse the space they were attached to, pulling on their victims to a destination that Skullius desired without compromising the aforementioned function.

With such a convenient option, Skullius had been able to move the Ode without having him leave the delightful wonderland he was lost in.

As for Umbett, the old hag continued to give Skullius a nasty glare that pierced through the hardwood which made the ship to settle on him.

'Sheesh. I better make sure I have other options to beat her down in case she has some means of breaking free. I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of that fury,' Skullius thought.

"Will you still not tell us why you are going to Maqi at least? It better not be to lay some arrogant challenge that gets us all killed. If it is, you can leave me right here. I'll find my own way back home," Maxim said. She seemed to believe that Skullius really was going to pull something like that.

The Hybrid Luman couldn't help but feel offended.

"I'm not an idiot. I wouldn't get cocky just because I beat that kid. He's yet to fully mature and earn the title of 'strongest' alongside his father. At the moment, there's probably hundreds in Maqi on the same level as him or stronger. I can't handle that kind of force with brute strength. For now.

My agenda is a little more... savory," Skullius said vaguely.

"Savory?" Maxim said with her brow raised.

"Precisely. Now get on the ship," Skullius said with a bit of a commanding tone.

Before he knew it, Maxim shook lightly, the look in her eyes turning indifferent. She then stiffly, but briskly walked forth to board the ship with a hefty leap.

Skullius sighed and nearly facepalmed.

He... had just compelled Maxim by mistake.

'I should get used to not doing that every time I put a little oomph in my voice,' he said to himself.

Vali wore a seductive smile and reserved whatever her thoughts were on the ordeal. She walked as stylishly as ever, following after Maxim onto the ship.

Skullius looked back.

His connection to the nature here allowed him to take one last look at Opungale's expansive mass.

'I won't have this supernatural sense when we arrive in Maqi. A pity.'

What was also a pity was the fact that the King and Queen didn't come to see him off, which Skullius understood. Despite his straightforwardness, he understood that how normal people would react to him. And that was the point; making sure that he was heard and understood without the need for reading into the subtext of his speech.

Thankfully, Kudobtu and Shannazah did give modest farewells from close to the shore. They seemed hellbent on making a swift return to Pelian.

The Hybrid Luman chuckled faintly and boarded the ship which soon set sail, the towering mass of the Spirit of Drowning following along.

The sea was serene under the night sky, despite being more than a few notches dark.

Strange.

All that chaos which ended half an hour ago had only persisted for less than a full night. Strange indeed how much could happen in such a short span.

The ship pushed against the non-retaliatory current. There was a light jerk and then it was moving towards its destination rapidly.

At the same time, however, something seemed to drop from the sky and hang right by Skullius' ear.

It was a drop of blood the size of an earlobe.

From it, a rough voice came, audible only to the Hybrid Luman.

"You didn't even bother to give as much as a nod for the favor I did for you, yet I undoubtedly contributed the most to your survival. You are not only a heretic against Boron, but also stingy, I see."

Skullius laughed, which drew Vali's and Maxim's attention.

"You're still here? I thought you fled," the Hybrid Luman said to Ashema who was nowhere to be seen.

"Of course, I'm still here. I'm considering you the perfect guide through this world. Your strength and annoying confidence is attractive to a foreigner such as I. I barely have to exert effort, do I? Especially when going to a place I'm sure the Herald told me not to."

Skullius was silent for a while. Then he spoke with a somewhat dark tone as he walked over towards the Ode, in his mind several plans designed specifically to draw as much about his rare trait as possible.

"Do as you please."

...

Ashema, who soared above clouds smirked.

His body was all healed. Or rather he had incarnated into another body to void the damage he suffered when defending the Attegoth.

All he said was true. He was an explorer for now, until Lord Boron rose and rallied all the Carven. As such, for the time being, he would play that role while riding in Skullius' shadow.

Unbeknownst to him, he wasn't the only one watching from above.

Someone...something else was sneaking a peek from a far distance that couldn't be traversed through natural means.

Nothing but the Divine could have seen a curious eye looking not at Skullius or Ashema, but the young Ode.

Chapter 1015: HER Perspective

<To think three of his Odd Souls have already been defeated. I wonder if HE will place the blame on me. Probably.>

A voice that sounded both like nothing and something spoke. It was heavy yet light, cold yet caring.

Bearing great contradictions was in the very nature of being a Deity, and SHE was no exception despite being the lightest out of a bunch.

Where SHE resided was like a plane made out of an infinite sky both above and below, yet she wasn't alone. Chosen mortals surrounded her at all times, heeding every order she gave.

<Hmmm. How curious. This one did not wield his powers as genuinely as the last. He too must be oblivious to the truest extent of his capabilities. How HE so casually imparted upon the world the ability to gift that rare, Odd power to his most favored creations amazes me to no end.>

Her eyes pierced the veil that was the clouds and settled on the young man bound to the very fabric of the world she helped create.

So unusual. This power which bound this young man was as potent as it was back then. All those years ago.

SHE gave a sigh of exasperation as her gaze turned towards the other man in a dark robe whose hand was pressing on the head of the young man, seemingly attempting to learn everything there was about him.

It was this LITTLE ONE again.

<This is the second time he has entangled his dark Direction with an Odd Soul and crushed their destiny. Or maybe they are all just drawn to him. Lured by an invisible trap that blinds foresight and caution.>

Perhaps.

The last Odd Soul this LITTLE ONE entangled ended up here, in her slice of Aigas, and this one had been too arrogant.

But well... in all fairness, it wasn't only this LITTLE ONE who had managed to tame an Odd Soul.

SHE shifted her gaze.

Quite honestly, looking over to this side of the world was quite difficult now, given what had happened to Aigas as a result of the other human-shaped whirlpool of misery.

Aigas had been split after all.

It had been split up to the SKY.

Her eyes scrolled past the shattered Central Boundary and settled on a vessel blasting at full speed over an ebony sea constantly tortured by falling blisters and rips to the abounding space.

On this vessel was someone even more fearsome than that LITTLE ONE.

He too had tamed an Odd Soul and begun his massacre of fate.

SHE couldn't loathe him for it, however, after all, SHE was the only one who understood him wholly.

He was relentless.

He was selfless, but also merciless.

A part of her BOLD SOUL admired him terribly, even though the others would have sought to smite him at all costs, way before he mutilated the world they created and brought on excessive chaos.

But... they weren't here.

SHE was all alone. A blissful smile blossomed on her face as SHE watched him.

He was nearly there.

Maybe he would actually thrive over all the odds that were against him.

Maybe he would sacrifice even more of the children of the gods to do as he wished.

SHE giggled like a little girl.

At the moment, she might as well have been when compared to what she had been before the world split.

He had made her so.

Yet she could never loathe him for it.

<FU, FU~.>

A man with long, black hair, and the same shirt he always wore that looked to be made out of mithril – a metallic sheen over it – craned his neck.

He looked at the blonde beside him who was busy tuning his lute.

Such confidence.

Erlton really believed that everything was going to work without a hitch. Well, he believed that he (the black-haired man) was going to do a bang-up job.

"You know I'm not best friends with these creatures, right? I will have to ask for their help. Grovel even, and diligently at that. Why don't you go and talk to them? They may respect a Herald like you better than they do me," the man with the long hair said with a fold of his arms.

Erlton scoffed.

"I'm still a stranger to them either way. Besides, they accepted your past and they call you a colleague at the very least. Weren't you there when that one giant ape ascended? No other living creature outside of the beasts' most trusted circles would have been allowed to witness that, Soidon," he said.

The man whose name was Soidon grumbled.

He had nothing to retort.

Erlton was right.

Karima, Azila and the Aqua Ripper were very friendly to him despite what he was. What he once was.

Though, Erlton was mistaken about him witnessing the ascension of the Great Mane Mountain Ape, it wasn't too much of a leap to say that if Soidon wanted to, he could have stayed long enough to see it.

A powerful beast was become even more powerful, hippee~.

Then again, maybe he could see what had become of Azila now, since he and the Herald Erlton had reached the deepest part of the Tremur Forest.

The air was livid with pure mana and everything was serene, yet tension was still hidden in the folds.

Soidon frowned.

"You really love dumping your problems onto other people, don't you?" he said.

Erlton kicked the large root he sat on.

"When did I ever do that?" he asked with a sneer.

"You left the mess that one of your own created to that little skeleton, didn't you? You could just throw caution away and contend against the other Herald, you know."

Erlton glared at Soidon.

"It was safer to allow him to handle it. You should have heard him, prattling on about how he was going to end the war all on his own. And guess what? He did. Fulgardt really is growing in those bones," he said with a testy tone. "What about you?"

Wasn't whole the reason behind your hunting him down to help him? You didn't dare meet him after he woke up."

It was Soidon's turn to look angry.

At first, he stammered. Erlton was right. But...

"That wasn't the man I wanted to meet. You said he looked at you as if he wanted to kill you, right? Like heck I'd go right up to him and tell him, 'Oh, hey, I'm a former Lich. I'm here to help. I can relate, you see.'" Soidon retorted.

Erlton harrumphed. Soidon had a point.

That wasn't the version of Festos that would accept help from someone who tore himself from the straps of the world of the living dead.

"And aren't you the one who had me holed up in that inn telling me to wait until the 'right' time? I could have met him much earlier, when he was still sane!" Soidon added with more fury.

"Enough!" Erlton said, and he rose to his feet. "We both have our good arguments. Now, let's get this over with!"

"Heh!"

Soidon wore a smug, triumphant look.

After a little, mocking nod to a cross Erlton, he led the way beyond the humongous sycamore trees; where the grasses and shrubs transitioned from green to a faded grey.

Chapter 1016: Doubting Glorious Purpose

Two figures soared across the Pelian sky over a strange, great turtle with two large wings instead of its front flippers. It had a great red beak that looked much like that of an eagle and three purple lazy eyes above it; this completely ruined its designation as a turtle.

A man with equal portions of black and purple hair sat over this creature, along with another who wasn't gifted with such colorful hair, or any hair for that matter. He also lacked hands, as the ends of his arms merely featured two bland stumps.

Neither of the two was concerned by the disability, however. In fact, of the two, the disabled man seemed to be the livelier one. He made animated gestures as he spoke to the man beside him who kept a stoic, firm expression, his eyes looking below where the carnage of the black towers was yet to cease.

Villages were destroyed.

Cities were ruined.

Towns were eradicated.

Human and beasts' lives were ravaged.

All this was the aftermath wrought in the wake of Guissepo's actions.

His gaze bore a dull shimmer about it, neither showing joy or remorse at what he saw.

This was the first time he was getting to see the state Pelian was in post the ascension of the Herald; the ultimate result he had seen all the way back then, when the Galemonger broke him out of prison and passed onto the vision from Boron.

How meticulous and fated it had seemed back then.

Guissepo still felt the same way today, but his view was... a little complicated.

"What's the matter, Guissepo? You seem less... explosive today. You've been especially reserved. I thought seeing the fruits of your hard work with your own eyes would make you even more unbearably bubbly," the man with no hands said.

"I thought so too," Guissepo said somberly. "I had extravagant belief in that idea, but..."

But there was a clear distinction between a fairytale realized in the very depths of one's brain, and one realized in, well, reality. This distinction was starting to become a little clearer to Guissepo now.

In fact, the seeds for it had already begun to show when he saw the enormous figure of the Herald and all her stone-like beauty.

This was the realization of the painfully mundane and generic dream Guissepo had before and after he joined the Evenfall.

The bald, handless man gave Guissepo a questioning look as the flying turtle took a dive, making the wind fiercely beat against both men.

"What then? You did the impossible. You gave us Summoners purpose, a role. You endured solitary months in that stadium through sheer passion. You gathered millions of Blessings for the cause; for Lord Boron and successfully created a way to bring him back.

If there was anyone keeping tally of glorious achievements, I'd say you'd compete with the heroes of the Grand Wars!" the Summoner said encouragingly.

Guissepo closed his eyes and frowned.

"That...is exactly the point."

For as long as he could remember, Guissepo had been quite religious, as his family had been. His parents shoved down his throat sentiments that the Deities were always watching over them, that each bit of suffering was wrapped in sinews of wonderful, future prospects.

That message turned to hold less and less water when Guissepo noticed that there was an unfair distribution of Deific privilege. Why did some live in luxury, extravagance, rather, while he had to suffer?

Why did he have to hope for future prospects instead of getting what he needed now?

What even determined this dichotomy?

Not everyone deserved to suffer and not everyone deserved to live lavishly.

The gospel spread by the Purity didn't answer Guissepo's question or give him a reason to continue to live on as his naïve family did.

But be that as it may, Guissepo knew more than anyone else that trying to achieve a goal like 'creating a perfect world devoid of suffering', was impossible. Good things were never made in

abundance. There would never be a version of balance or equality that involved handing out riches to all.

That was why Guissepo's goal was to create the opposite; a world where everyone suffered equally.

Surely then, those that were promised future good prospects would find that fortune rescuing them, right? And those that had had it easy before then? Well, as long as they proved that they were worth more than their unearned extravagance, they deserved to live.

Yes. This was what Guissepo had yearned to actualize.

But seeing it with his eyes now, he couldn't help but think...

'Did I really achieve all this? If so, why don't I feel any extravagant satisfaction from it? This was the work of my hands, yet there's no weight to it.'

Indeed. Guissepo truly felt this way.

Even from this distance, he could see hundreds of corpses, some layered with dirt, some torn pathetically.

He could see dark creatures, Carven of different designs hunting down those that had yet to reach safe refuge.

He saw esteemed beasts fighting for their lives as swarms of these black, stone-like abominations invaded Sacred Forests.

Guissepo had a mighty hand in making this a reality; straining the peace and creating chaos that affected everyone. Worse yet, this was just the prelude.

However, it barely completed the fury he thought he had towards the natural course of life; inequality.

'Do I feel this way perhaps, because I share this victory with that masked bastard? No. That was a means to an end that I accepted without any reservations,' Guissepo thought. 'Then is it...?'

...!!!

It smote him!

'Ah. That's right. That's why.'

Of course, the reason was that simple.

"What do you think about the Herald, Sipffon?" Guissepo asked, turning his head to the Summoner who somehow managed to make the great turtle swerve around a particularly tall mountain.

"The Herald?" Sipffon asked incredulously. "This isn't a trick question, is it? Well, apart from being a little arrogant – please don't tell her I said that – she is rather accommodating. She's answered every question I've gathered the bravery to ask and she doesn't seem to detest us like some of her other fellows."

Guissepo nodded, and then smiled.

"She is accommodating, is she?" he said, much to Sipffon's surprise. "It's good that you see it in such an extravagantly simple way."

Of course, Guissepo saw it differently. Or rather, he knew that this wasn't the case at all.

The Herald was very good at hiding her emotions, and that wasn't just because she was a carved stone.

She only gave a non-hostile impression because Guissepo and his band of Summoners deserved that much.

Deep down though, she loathed humans with a great passion. Guissepo felt it at times. Her ruby red eyes sometimes gleamed menacingly when she set her gaze on him.

She only held back her revulsion because she was to be the vessel of Lord Boron. She held herself in high regard. Killing Guissepo and the rest awarded no glory or prize anyway.

It was this, paired with the sight of the chaos below that made Guissepo realize that while he truly believed in his goal, this wasn't the way he had hoped to achieve it.

The Carven were exacting vengeance on the creatures of the surface for the deeds of the Deities..

That wasn't the kind of unfair calamity he wanted to summon.

It was the wrong kind of punishment.

It felt... wrong. Ironically so.

Guissepo scowled and sighed.

"Head West," he said.

"What?" Sipffon was puzzled. "Weren't we supposed to meet with the Carven in—"

"Take us West. There's something I need to do," Guissepo gave a command with lethal finality.

Chapter 1017: Evolved Goals

The Reacher Academy of Higher Magic Virtues stood proud in the middle of a completely wrecked Genhuis City. With how much it stood out as this almost sacred ground guarded by a silver glow which traced along the circular premises, more than several would have wondered why it wasn't swarmed by monstrous Cavern struggling tirelessly to get in and rip the Mages hidden within to shreds.

It must have truly been tempting.

The large area divided into four quadrants, each with four towers – excluding the bold figure of the Wormworld Spiral – looked neat, albeit devoid of human life on its pathways even as the sky was beginning to brighten due to the gracious arrival of sunshine.

Of course, all the Mages and other Energy Formers were hidden in the many towers, continuing the courses of their everyday life as if nothing had befallen the world at all.

Only Mages could have behaved this nonchalantly.

After all, Arch-Mages – forces to be reckoned with – were relatively abundant in the Academy.

Such experts in the field of Magecraft were quite proud. They rarely moved against threats unless they disturbed their way of life; threatening fellow Mages and Energy Formers affiliated with the Academy, or if said threats were interesting.

Both of these reasons could explain why the Mages of the Reacher Academy refused to help the city when the towers emerged.

The City Guardian, Gillear, had tried to call for their help once more, as they had acquiesced to when those peculiar, indestructible creatures which could overwhelm Incandescent Stagers casually, had assaulted the city months ago; the Null Badubs. Predictably, he was met with refusal.

The glow around the Reacher Academy was potent enough to resist the influence of the towers as well as the might of the creatures that spawned from it. As such the safety of the Mages was all but guaranteed. Thus, the Mages so no need to assist.

Beyond that, the higher authorities within the Academy assessed the threat and deemed it... not worth their time. Apparently, something capable of making Gillear evacuate what he could of the city was beneath them.

Gillear had been appalled.

To think those overpowered geezers would rather shut themselves away, continuing their long, arduous journeys towards attempting to grow beyond the Stages; to follow Magecraft until they could become stronger than any Transcendent Stager or Beyond the Veil Stager – the peak of the Stages, closest to Divinity – without relying on Tasks and Trials.

Such a harrowing objective.

However, in extreme contrast to this cold, hard passion, someone else stowed away within the towers had no desire for such.

He did not have excessive pride, a high degree of self-preservation or outlandish interests related to power.

Instead...

"You know, when I began all this, all I wanted was a fitting position of power in the Guilds Association. For someone like me – at least the me from that time – it was a grand goal. I had to become like my father nomatter cost. I wanted to prove to him that I too had the necessary gifts required to lead such an organization that is seldom governed by stringent rules.

I wanted to show him that I would rise in ranks through my ability to spot the talented and ride their glory to reach my own..." Silrat said somberly as he sat on the chair. "Well, when father died, I kind of lost that objective. But since I had been trying to prove myself for so long, I felt like all that stuff was all I could do. All I needed to do.

All I would do until I died a common, glory-less death."

Arch-Mage Wyatt guffawed.

"That did happen, didn't it? You died," the aged man, decked in a thick robe said as he caused a rather fancy spoon to stir his tea cradled in a mug far from where he was crouching, rummaging through an old drawer in the small room.

Silrat groaned.

What was worse than being trounced verbally by someone who was performing three activities at once; listening, scrounging and manipulating mana, was if said person was right.

"You say that this friend of yours, Festos, did something to make you disappear until only recently, right? That is death, boy. A merciful one, I say. If you were alive in the past few days, you might not have made it out alive. And by some standard of luck, you just so happened to be saved by me before you got devoured by the status quo, hahaha! I'd say you have all the favor in the world."

Silrat's face strained.

Yeah.

He knew Skullius had saved him, given the narration of the events from the past few days he had heard from Arch-Mage Wyatt, the man who rescued him before he was attacked by a Cavern.

But then, with Skullius' whereabouts currently unknown, Silrat couldn't help but feel as if he was being left behind by the one person he thought was going to lift him up.

Arch-Mage Wyatt saw the look on his face and gave a cold smile.

"So, this objective of yours... will you still follow through with it now that the world is very likely to turn to ash?"

Silrat felt a drop of sweat roll down his temple, but his visage retained a resolute firmness.

"I have no choice. My previous goal evolved. That's all there is to it. I can't stop now anyway," he said before facing Arch-Mage Wyatt. "Anyway, I highly doubt I'm welcome here. Could you help me get somewhere?"

An estate not too far from here."

Eofel.

A fearsome battle had taken place outside the range of the desolate city, littered only by corpses that kept chanting the same dark words over and over again while awaiting for the command to burst into action.

Their master, who had been spectating the battle, did not see the need to lend her assistance to the panting former Paladin Champion with long, lustrous, silver hair, a concerningly pale face and a long sword that she held with both hands.

This former Champion had her hands full facing off against not one, but two other Champions, one of which was ranked the third strongest among all twelve.

Ruhrees and his fellow Paladin Champion, a woman who was ranked sixth, stood sixteen meters away from Revia. The two also looked winded, with the latter having several, deep gashes to her armor and flesh, some of which hung loosely. She looked wobbly, but had just enough resolve to hold herself up.

Ruhrees gave her a side glance, but quickly returned his gaze to Revia.

'She's stronger somehow. Faster too. Did she gain more power in exchange for siding with these necromancers?' he thought, his face growing darker than it already had been.

Indeed. Revia was much stronger.

What she had displayed back at the stadium was no fluke.

The fact that she had time to completely overwhelm the other female Paladin Champion while fending off Ruhrees, was indicative of that leap in strength.

Ruhrees clicked his tongue.

His hand was set aglow by a vicious red light as he donned a vile look.

"I swear, Revia. You are dying here even if I have to give my life to do it. You might as well perish if this is what you have become!"

Revia allowed herself to pant some more before wearing a weary smile.

"Be my guest. It's not as easy as you might think," she retorted.

Right after she said her piece, she and Ruhrees set to launch themselves into each other and collide without any regard for what might happen next.

But...

A smooth, sharp force spawned from thin air and smashed into Revia's closed palm, which instinctively opened.

The former Paladin Champion's sword fell to the ground immediately.

At the same time, Ruhrees felt a staggering blow to his thigh which forced him to kneel and twist in pain.

Both he and Revia looked at the space between them.

A figure had appeared without the both of them picking up his presence fast enough.

It was a man with caramel hair and a full moustache with the same pigment.

His black, high steel boots made him easily identifiable to both Revia and Ruhrees.

It was the Bloodless Steel Phantom.

It was Alaris.

Even while facing such powerful individuals, he spoke freely, boldly:

"This ends here."

Chapter 1018: The Meaning In Ascension

Agmold, Pelian.

GUUM! GUUUM!

"Dear Quintess! What in the world is that?!"

"Aaargh! Run!"

"Why aren't the Capital Knights doing anything?! Why don't they kill it?!"

"It's going to flatten our houses at this rate!"

A great ape moved regally through the wide streets of the capital of Pelian.

Its size was immensely intimidating.

It wasn't an overreaction by the crowds to flee and curse it as they clung to their loved ones, after all, most people were used to watching the march of a twelve-meter-tall beast to senseless destruction, and in truth, that usually was the case.

It didn't help that the greatest city in Pelian had endured several attacks by the Carven which had been warded away swiftly by the most powerful band of Capital Knights this generation had ever known, propagating the bias further.

Of course, Azila didn't care for the notions that the humans held. He didn't care for their fears or worries.

They were such fickle creatures anyway. Well, most of them.

On the sides of the street that he languidly pranced, flanked by great, rising buildings that mostly served as stores and displays for business, rows of Capital Knights decked in silver armor stood at the ready, but did not emit hostile intent. They, unlike the ignorant masses, were trained to distinguish between common beasts and guardians that emerged from Sacred Forests.

This wasn't a new thing, after all. It was common eighty millennia ago, rather four, for humans to communicate with such creatures.

As such, the Knights allowed the majestic beast to pass while keeping caution in their pockets.

Azila audibly scoffed, but deep down, he was impressed that there were still humans who were this educated.

Eventually, the screaming and flailing common folk prone to panic, also started to notice that this visitor did not mean any harm.

The first indicator, was its steps.

Despite the impact the ape's fists had as they hammered the ground, the wide, clean brick road was no damaged at all. There was a concise rhythm to the beast's movement as well.

Better yet, rather than looking like a vicious, mad abomination, the great, ape, which featured an equally great mane around its neck, had clean, glinting black fur wreathed in golden runes that were so vibrant they seemed to move in mesmerizing patterns. There was even a sweet scent that seemed to waft from this fur, which smelled like a mix of cinnamon, mint and banana.

The most bizarre yet interesting feature about this animal, though, was the great crown of light which floated over its head.

A faint star was lit in the middle of this crown, its luminance different from that of the crown itself. It seemed to hold some significance. Some grave description that brought on a calm to this section of the city.

As Azila continued to saunter, the reception he received from the different individuals from different parts of Agmold told him a great many things.

Just like beasts, indeed, not all humans were the same.

Of course, his purpose here was not to learn about the supposed superior races of this world.

His goal soon flourished in sight

The Royal Mansion.

His path was blocked by several, mighty experts before he could move beyond a certain point, though.

Even a regal, intelligent beast had to explain why it suddenly walked into the personal domain of the King.

Azila obliged. Unlike his visits to his superior, Karima, humans seemed to regard meaningless protocol. Maybe it was because they held to absurd standards that didn't give all authority to the strongest around.

Pathetic.

The Great Mane Mountain Ape suddenly began to shrink in as ordinary of a fashion as one could think of until he was the same height as the tallest of the Royal Guards who blocked his path.

Using a high-level communication ability, he expressed his intent and one of the guards obliged, offering to lead him into the Royal Palace so that he could speak to whom he wished to speak.

Surprisingly, by the time Azila reached the throne room, the individual whom he wanted to speak to, was already there. Well, only Azila noticed this.

When it was only him and this figure left in the room, Azila comfortably sat on the thick, clean carpet and spoke:

"For a while, I thought it was beyond me to come and visit you so casually, O Asthon."

A short bow that came after these words revealed the Great Mane Mountain Ape's respect for this figure.

His respect for the bird that sat casually at the head of the empty throne ahead of him.

It was a small bird, yet it had an air about and a smell that didn't fit in the mansion, in this city, or in this nation.

It was a bizarre little thing.

"Oh dear, Azila. How many years has it been? Your rich blood has kept you alive for this long? Truly fitting of your breed, I see," the bird opened its beak and responded in a shrill voice.

Azila wore a smile at the recognition. There was reminiscence in his eyes. However, the warmth within them quickly died.

"Ashton. Would you entertain my inquiry? Why have you, the infamous Truworth Bill chosen to reduce yourself to this state for so long?"

The bird's beady black eyes shook and it tilted its head.

"Reduce myself? Whatever do you mean? Dear child, I have only increased from what I was back then."

"Increased?" Azila said, confused. "Do you have any idea how many years have passed since you made a covenant with that man from so long ago? How does babysitting his entire lineage and ensuring that his bloodline retains the throne serve you exactly?"

Ashton bounced to the left on the head of the throne. He might have easily been mistaken from a common robin.

"I see you have ascended," the bird said.

Azila frowned. He didn't get an answer.

"Yes. I finally managed to reach you. Hence why I am here to speak with you," he responded.

The Truworth Bill remained silent for a while.

"Few among us know what it truly means to ascend, Azila. I know you don't either, and neither does Karima or any other beast on this continent or the next that has actually managed to ascend. Ironically, those that haven't ascended understand the true essence of it. We beasts are like... roots. We don't show ourselves in most cases, but we do a lot of heavy lifting. That is our design.

Our counterparts, humans, Sif and Giants. Among them are leaves and fruit. A product. The product."

Azila scowled and stood from where he sat.

He understood Ashton's analogy quite well. Frankly, he had feared this was what he would hear today of all days, when he came to seek help and wisdom.

"You mean we are stepping stones for humans?!"

"Ah. There it is. Brutish pride," Ashton said with a cackle that sounded much like that of a crow. "Your immediate thought is to spit on the very thought of being below a human. A beast like you, with esteem and reason would rather be equal to them or above them. Well, that is not the way of the beast nor that of a root."

Ashton, the Truworth Bill, bounced off the throne and dropped to the floor.

"I know several beasts from back in the day who began to understand the true essence of being a beast. The patience it demands. You remember Feem, that conniving dog, Onun that filthy bear, and Dellan that sly, ever-grinning fox? What did they all make of themselves?"

Azila quelled his rage and thought on these words.

All these beasts...

What had they chosen to do since the Grand Wars? Oh, right.

"They came into the service of powerful humans," Azila replied.

Ashton cackled.

"More specifically..."

Azila sighed.

"They made themselves guardians of human legacies."

"Precisely!" Ashton screamed and he flapped his wings. "It seems like they earned nothing for all these years they spent waiting for seekers of the legacies they guard, but I should ask, what becomes of a fruit after it is spent? Say an apple that turns ripe and remains unplucked. What happens to it, my dear Azila? What happens to its flesh and seed?"

The great ape gnashed his teeth.

"They falls to the ground... where the roots lie."

The Truworth Bill cackled again.

"Indeed. Now tell me. That greedy fox who spent a quarter of his life guarding the Immoral's tomb... He might have been far less gifted than you in the beginning, but where is he now?"

Azila strained.

He knew the answer, but he didn't want to admit it.

Chapter 1019: Master Index

Replicus:

Born through a skill exclusive to the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, [Brisk Storm Avatar], Replicus is a double of Skullius who has gone on a different path to the main body, acquiring different variations of abilities related to the Penetrator series primarily owned by Skullius.

He is the leader of a yet-to-be-named band of experts in the Severed Union and has quite some level of renown for having become a Faction Leader so quickly.

[Name: Skullius]

[Tier: 3]

[Level: 78]

[EXP: ---]

[Core: Purple (Temporary)]

[Class: Vehement Bone Nullmancer]

[Race: Titan World Storm Penetrator]

[Inv. Status: Doomed x2]

[]

[DUAL MANA-SOURCING FORCE (II): 95,940]

The designation (II) stands for empowerment by purple quality mana. This is currently because of the skill [Sage Strain].

The term DUAL-MANA SOURCING FORCE is a replacement for the STRENGTH stat to Replicus as he upgraded his STR with [Unbound]. Its effect is yet to be revealed.

[ASTRAL BLIZZARD MOTION (II): 78,000]

ASTRAL BLIZZARD MOTION is a replacement for Replicus' AGI. Whenever he moves, a spatial corridor that only he can move through is formed, which, when he enters, both accelerates his travel speed and makes him nigh impossible to perceive until he emerges out its other end.

[SUBJECTIVE PHANTOM INFERENCE (II): 4]

SUBJECTIVE PHANTOM INFERENCE is a replacement for Replicus' INT stat. When he wishes, he can summon miniature thought phantoms; consciousnesses with more intelligence than his own that help him think through any details he desires by bringing in inferences that the original may miss. Of course, they are visible only to Replicus.

[TRIGGER DEVIANT BUILD (II): 7x]

TRIGGER DEVIANT BUILD is a replacement for Skullius' END. Any physical damage Replicus receives has a chance of ricocheting back to the opponent with 7 times the force, and at least the same degree of lethality; including the positioning of the blow.

Of course, depending on the strength of the opponent, the damage sent back might not receive the full 7 times buff, in which case, Skullius' will only receive a portion of the blow's damage in exchange.

[LUCK: Atrocious?]

[PRIME PERPETUATION : 60,750/ 60,750]

PRIME PERPETUATION is a replacement for the HEALTH stat. Effect yet to be revealed in the story.

[MANA (II) Partial : 742,023]

This is Replicus' main mana core – the one he forged after Sila destroyed the original in exchange for greater stats. Because of the effects of [Sage Strain] and [Sage Save], it has temporarily reached the purple status and the total value inflated wildly. As a caveat, this discount purple core is unable to fully cast Super Skills to their utmost ability.

[Mana^ (I) Partial : 2,204,755]

This is the second mana core Skullius acquired after using [Unbound] on his mana stat. The official name for this mana core is called the Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core. It is a mana core that makes it easier for Replicus and Skullius to attune to elements. With enough mastery, it is possible to produce all forms of basic elements with it.

Because of [Sage Save and Sage Strain], it has temporarily reached the blue quality status, and the total value of mana it can hold has been increased dramatically.

[Null Life Essence : 24,000/24,000]

[]

[Sorcery of Essence (Special) | Lv.8]

All standard forms of energy and essence are brought to submission by the user's will, as their concentration, pattern and properties are exploited fully to achieve various incredibly complex commands that mirror what the user desires.

-

-Passive-

- All external forms of energy and essence automatically become richer and more potent when the user draws them, giving a 10% efficiency to what the user utilises them for.
- All internal forms of energy and essence are enriched by 120%.

-

-Active-

[Sage Save]:-

Once activated, this sub-skill builds a potential 0.0001% boost to additional mana quantity every moment the user spends without using their internal mana reserves. The total boost is added to internal mana reserves the moment Sage Save is deactivated. Effect lasts for five days with a cooldown of 24 hours.

-

[Sage Strain]:-

Once activated, this sub-skill builds a potential 0.001% boost charge to mana concentration every moment the user spends without using their skills. The total boost is applied to internal mana reserves the moment Sage Strain is deactivated. Effect lasts for five days with a cooldown of 24 hours.

-

Mana Requirements: 300,000 (I) Mana; 100,000 (I) Mana every day.

Duration: ---

Cooldown: ---

[Nullmancer's Unforgiving Lancet | Lv.4]

A majestic tool built from various kinds of Null Life Essence in order to maximise its response to the Nullmancer's command for retaliation. It is easily the best and fastest tool a Nullmancer can attain, and is irreplaceable, even when considering the benefit of Racial benefits, and the loyalty of Fond Calamities.

-

-Effects-

- When applied after opposing concepts have been acclimated to, the lancet gains added striking power depending on the grade of the acclimated concept, with the current upper limit being 500% at S grade affinity and 100% less per each lower grade.
- When applied after opposing concepts have been acclimated to, the lancet is able to inject Livening Pulpous Venom into living targets which turns them numb and swells up their mana channels, blocking mana flow.
- When the lancet hits a target incapable of defending themselves, it devours their souls and increases its efficiency at harming ethereal forms of existence.

Mana Requirements : None.

Duration : ---

Cooldown : None

[Brilliant King's Adoring Stars (Special) | Lv.5]

Levin blossoms in a humble form – blissful stars – in as many a number as the Penetrator desires, and constantly heals and enhances them with jets of full purity packed with an immense amount of rejuvenating Null Life Essence from the domain of the Crippler.

As long as the Levin continues to bathe the Penetrator they may surely never die, while stars for the jets of Levin – fifty at once – enhance the Penetrator's attack power by 210%.

Mana Requirements: 112,000 (I) Mana, 100 Null Life Essence every minute active; double the cost for another set of stars.

Duration: ---

Cooldown: 30 minutes

[Greatest Null Weaver | Lv.18]

A skill that allows Replicus to manipulate Null Life Essence.

[Wealth of Spoils (Special) | Lv.24]

A skill that allows Skullius to extract and imprint skills as well as stats from one source – usually objects – to another.

[Nullmancer's Royal Raiment of Acclimation (Special) | Lv.5]

An ancient robe is summoned, one that fitted with a unique type of Null Life Essence. The capabilities of the Raiment are a bane that the Nullmancer wields against any form of magic grown in distant lands.

- Nullifies any normal low grade Super Skills and below

- +100,000 Mana with Absolute conversion

- +25,500 Intelligence with Absolute conversion

- +50,000 Endurance with Absolute conversion

Any skills or concepts the users understands with the use of become ineffective on them depending on the degree of understanding reached

....

[Distorted Gravity – C]

[Stagnant Space – D]

[Spatial Lightning – B]

[Grand Fire – S]

...

Araeyn Deragin Exonn:

[Astute Duke of Transversal]

This is an incredibly prodigious race honoured among the stars and favoured by the many worlds in the Null Verse. The Astute Duke of Transversal is loosely related to one of the most formidable races within Serenity's treasure, and has even adopted traits that go beyond the very definition of its name.

Asides from being extremely favoured by various versions of Null Life Essence, and having several innate powers that bar contact with the Duke's body unless it allows it, and several racial manifestations that house dreadful offense capabilities, this species has the ability to temporary transplant various regions of the Null Verse anywhere it wishes, and quickly adapt them to its advantage.

(Due to its unique powers, the Astute Duke of Transversal has inherited a flaw to balance its existence among the natives of different worlds.

The Astute Duke of Transversal can NEVER truly become subservient to another being because of its close ties to a royal race. To sway it into service somewhat, a LEASH will be provided, however, even after using it, the Duke will slowly grow more and more rebellious with age unless its master tames it UNCONVENTIONALLY).

-This species has the possibility of awakening a hidden AUTHORITY in the future.

-This species has the possibility of awakening a Second FOND CALAMITY in future.

-This species has the possibility of awakening a SUPREME skill in the future.

[Name : ARAEYN DERAGIN EXONN]

[Tier : 1]

[Apostle Trait : None]

[Rank : None]

[Level : 1]

[EXP (NLE) : 0/500]

[Core : ---]

[Class : None]

[Race : Astute Duke of Transversal]

[Inv. Status : Furiously... but mildly pleased]

[]

[Strength : Depends of Null Life Essence]

[Agility : Depends of Null Life Essence]

[Intelligence: On perpetual rise]

[Endurance : Depends on Null Life Essence]

[Luck : 0]

[Health : Depends on Null Life Essence capacity]

[Mana : None]

[Null Life Essence(s) : 300,000/300,000; 80,000/80,000]

[]

[Excel | Lv.1]

[Elite Null Life Aura | Lv.1]

[Greater Flowing Hubris | Lv.1]

[Null Extraction]

[Greatest Mana Understanding]

[Inverted Boundary | Lv.1]

[Accelerated Inverted Boundary | Lv.1]

[Grandiose Manifestation | Lv.1]

[Dimensional Submission | Lv.1]

[Imbued Fester Blights | Lv.2]

[Empyrean Ribbon]

Null Life Essence

[Empyrean Ribbon]

Four thousand enslaved Sages of the Musing Embroider were tasked to carefully create this beautiful piece over seven years, by an ambitious fiend that sought authority. Soon after it was finished, tales of its profound abilities, as well as its exploits in the hands of the ambitious fiend called upon powers that coveted it so much, that they killed the fiend and each other for it.

-Special Effects-

- Responds to the user's will
- Can find anything that the user's desires
- Can heal itself with Null Life Essence
- Embodies traits of the user to make itself stronger
- Extremely resistant to physical and elemental attacks
- Can stretch as far as is needed

[Skill: Suffocate]

Whoever this Empyrean Ribbon wraps around will be flooded with Null Life Essence from the body to the core until all their active abilities are shut down.

[Skill: Crossition]

By expending the user's Null Life Essence, the Empyrean Ribbon can create alternate versions of received attacks and send them back to their source.

[Skill: Gluttonous Bringing]

Once a certain number of substantial sacrifices are fed to the Empyrean Ribbon, it gains the ability to draw restricted essences, their bodies, essences, and weapons are mutated and fed directly to the user. This skill works in combination to [Imbued Fester

Allora:

Allora is a member of Replicus' Faction who was recently promoted to the rank of Unlimited after brazenly deciding to challenge a legacy.

On top of her previous Class, Shaman, she acquired a Hidden Class known as the Charmed Illimitable Rounder, which allows her to gain to an infinite amount of mana and access to every basic Class – except her previous – once certain conditions have been met.

Said conditions involve Allora getting her mana core damaged in combat, which is relatively easy as her abdominals became very vulnerable ever since she obtained her Hidden Class.

The downside, after she has entered the advanced state of endless mana and mastery of all Classes, is that if she uses her Shaman abilities, she will lose access to all these powers and have to start over.

Additionally, entering the unique state drains her stamina heavily, and as such Replicus made her a Granted Armament that covers this weakness.

Grim:

Grim is another of Replicus' Unlimited with a Hidden Class called the Esurient Hoarder. Passively, the Class grants Grim exaggerated canine features, and its active features include beast forms he can transform into such as Avhanar the Voracious, Paradon Parody and Esurient.

While the properties of the other two remain unknown, the Avhanar form is a gigantic, white-furred wolverine head with a great dark maw which is capable of devouring everything and turning it all into fuel for Grim.

Naturally, these beast forms are draining for Grim, but he can offset their tiring nature by stockpiling energy from consumed targets in the wolverine head form.

Pherdanta:

Pherdanta is the only one among the Unlimited without a Hidden Class. In one of Replicus' dealings with a formidable Diviner named Riba, he was fooled, given the location of a unique Advanced Class instead of a Hidden Class, and this was what Pherdanta claimed.

The name of the Advanced Class has yet to be disclosed, but it allows the stoic beauty to merge two or more swords into one perfectly; one sword with multiple abilities.

The prerequisite for perfect synergy, however, is that Pherdanta must fully understand the weapons she is merging, otherwise the result will be less than satisfactory.

In addition to this ability, Pherdanta also has the uncanny ability to be nearly undetectable to all senses. Unless she interacts with others through speech or action, most will become completely oblivious to her presence.

Baddan:

Baddan is a Cluster beast from the Cluster world that was chosen as the venue for a grand event known as the Premium Age Royale. After it was destroyed during the battle between Rayn and Seramoro, he escaped with a few of his kin only to be seized by Grim and brought to Skullius.

After swearing his allegiance to the Titan World Storm Penetrator, he was given a powerful ability that allows him to use six Null beasts that Replicus hatched and modified.

The skill is known as the Incarnation of the Six Wild Exigencies, and to activate it, Baddan must first chant, 'Grant me the chances' to manifest two circular disks above his head called Forechance Deemers.

The larger of the two disks has six slots while the smaller one has three.

Baddan's technique does not allow him to choose a beast to summon as he pleases. Thus, a small metallic ball which appears over the Forechance Deemers chooses for him.

On the larger disk, it lands on one of the six slots which represents the six beasts.

As of yet, only a single beast of the six has been identified; a hideous multi-limbed creature with a veiled face known as the Masked Façade, Lipttis.

On the smaller disk, the ball randomly chooses one option of three.

It is unknown what these do except for, one, a Magnification effect which triples the size of the selected beast and doubles its strength.

As an added effect, for whichever beast Baddan summons, a particular set of garb and weapon, both with unique traits, are granted to him. They tend to complement the abilities of the summoned beast.

It is worth noting that in just a few hours after receiving this technique, Baddan incorporated it seamlessly into his Majestic Territory.

Chapter 1020: Deep Spite

Three days later....

A great vessel sailed over the rather calm, ebony waters which had been hostile for days on end. It was massive, sturdy and without sail, with the force propelling it forward being the large spikes protruding from its back end, all spitting out lengthy trails of furious flame.

Even though the ship wound and meandered a lot because of the tall, still cracks in space – some etched in the boundless, bright sky; some submerged in the viciously poisonous sea or somehow, both – the conditions of this voyage had gotten significantly better.

High above, beyond the peppering of still clouds, the ceiling of Aigas revealed its true form. Its grievous scars from the Ashing of Time caused by Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness were apparent, yet less gloomy because of the daylight.

From them, no longer did huge scalding liquid trails fall every moment, plummeting into the ocean to prompt a surreal, scorching steam to rise and burn the voyagers. The Scorching Tears, as they were called, had finally ceased a day and a half ago.

Also, despite the abundance of the aforementioned cracks in space, Reverse Clusters – bizarre distortions to the world that expelled anti-spatial and anti-flight influence – were noticeably fewer this far past the Central Boundary and close... very close to Edagon.

The oceans were also a lot calmer. There were no gusts to rock them, and of the unique Cluster Beasts that would have been consistently launching attacks on anything moving over the poisonous waters, it seemed very few lived anywhere close to the top third of this vast water body.

Only the most powerful, adapted monstrosities remained, and they did not particularly like rising up from their slumbers and from their Territories.

This did well by the vessel practically soaring over the layer of ebony ocean.

Aboard it was the figure of a pretty woman who was adorned – as was commonly known of her even in perilous events – light, casual, revealing clothing.

Warding Pride was one of the few Faction Leaders in the Severed Union to have very distinct characteristics that made her stand out even without her doing anything.

Her fashion sense, which rarely included armor was one, and another, was the blue shade of skin from her neck to her feet. While garbled in her silk, white mini-dress, the deep shade of blue was eerily apparent.

She didn't seem to mind. She never did.

As she leaned against the tough edge of the ship, looking into the distance, her grey eyes seemed saturated with something other than what was ahead of her.

The subject of her thoughts could easily be introduced by the view to Warding Pride's left. A perfect, massive, circular hole was borne into the ship's hull, then its deck – revealing part of the underdeck beneath – and then the other side of the ship.

This wound on the vessel had not been inflicted too long ago, and thus the experience was still flesh in memory.

What concerned Warding Pride most wasn't the damage to the ship, however. It was the experience of almost being bested, which she had felt at that moment.

The culprit behind that nasty, bitter feeling vexed Warding Pride to not end.

Bright Storm.

The beauty clicked her tongue.

If it hadn't been because of her timely reaction, manifesting one of her stronger barriers – as was her main proclivity – to guard against the immense blow from one of those deadly canons Blight Storm whipped out mysteriously...

The consequences were boarder-line nauseating.

Even in the best case scenario, if she merely lost her ship and kept her crew and herself alive, she would have to either fight another Faction Leader for a vessel or beg to come aboard Eaniss'.

The Head Faction leader had been especially welcoming to those that lost their ships or the few survivors of some of the terrible incidents on this voyage.

However, it seemed, the price was something akin to fealty and submission.

Warding Pride couldn't do that. She would never.

None of the Faction Leaders were especially fond of Eaniss. They merely respected her strength and cunning.

But then again, that was a norm. No one felt particularly strongly about the other in the Union.

What Warding Pride felt against Bright Storm though, was dark, and for two reasons.

'Am I the only one who knows what he is? Does Eaniss know?' she asked herself, her face turning darker with creases from a frown.

It was indeed THE question.

When the Factions first set out for this journey, Warding Pride had set to rattle Bright Storm and see how Pherdanta, a tool he stole from her, would react to her presence.

It was during that interaction, which in itself was spawned from mutual dislike between the two Faction Leaders, that Bright Storm revealed his face.

That loathsome face.

'Pherdanta sticks with that thing while knowing what it is? Perhaps she deserves to die along with it then,' Warding Pride thought and hints of a smile began diluting her frown.

She hadn't seen it necessary to feed this information – Bright Storm's nature – to the other Faction Leaders because that... would be idiotic. If there was a prize to be gained from revealing Bright Storm's nature, she would only do so when he was dead before her feet.

And if there wasn't... well, then he'd do well as a trophy on her wall.

The ugly kind.

Warding Pride giggled.

'I wonder if he's even still in the running after losing his ship. Will he turn tail? Hmph. I would like to see the look on his face when he sees what has become of the little island Eaniss gave him...' she thought.

The Factions were constantly in conflict.

Even during an event like this where the stronger among them ventured away on critical missions, those that remained in their territories usually warred hard.

The losers lost their treasures, their land, and if the winners willed it, their lives.

Newcomers like Bright Storm were given a grace period before raiding began, but that time had drawn to a close for the fresh Leader.

Warding Pride suspected that the strongest of Bright Storm's men were here with him, save for one.

And if that one alone was in charge of guarding that pathetic island, then it must have already fallen.

Warding Pride's giggle turned into a full blown hysterical laugh.

It mortified the young man who had approached her with a delicate object in his hand, quite like glass, but as brittle as a dry leaf.

The young man spoke.

"Your Ladyship... Lady Eaniss' invitation keeps calling to you. Will you still... ignore it?"

Warding Pride ended her mirth and raised a brow.

"Let it scream. It's not like there will be a VISIT if I don't go. Now, leave!"

After her subordinate rushed away, Warding Pride returned to relishing in her thoughts against Bright Storm.

For a moment, she thought she heard a distant roar, but she didn't think much of it.

Her loathing of Bright Storm was infinitely better to hinge on.