

Undead 1171

Chapter 1171: Passing On

Five days later...

Eofel.

"Enough sulking. Whatever he faced must have still gone according to plan. You know how Actuass was, Fulina," Cyne said with a frown. He glared into the back of Fulina's head, and was sure she could feel his piercing stare, but she remained sitting against the wall, her head buried between her knees.

She had been like this since Rearren had come to Eofel with news of Actuass' passing.

Frankly, the news had taken Cyne a few hours to process and even now, he still found it hard to believe, but he wasn't going to spend a whole week mourning as Fulina seemed fully committed to doing.

Before Actuass embarked on his journey to Edagon, he had told him and Fulina, his two right hand people, to ensure that they claimed a territory in Pelian in case what Guissepo had done completely cleared the country, leaving no space for him to work when he returned.

What Actuass' next plan had been, following his acquisition of the Herald Jerthrax's soul, was beyond the two, but they had remained steadfast, awaiting his return.

Cyne wished Actuass had allowed him and Fulina to follow.

A part of him wished that if Actuass had actually perished, he would have perished alongside him, where he belonged.

But now...

Cyne looked at a lavish wooden door to his far right within the mansion, surrounded by the undead Fulina had made several days ago.

He sat beside Fulina. Her sobbing had stopped at least, and this allowed him to talk without her blocking his words with the wet, sorrowful sounds she made.

Cyne sighed.

"Have you considered what might happen if... if the thing Rearren said Actuass entrusted to him brings back Actuass?" he asked.

No reaction came from Fulina.

Cyne frowned.

"Well? You and I both know he could have done it, what with all that knowledge on the soul of his. There's a possibility, right? Perhaps he intends to use the EverSword brat."

Still, Fulina didn't answer, which heavily disconcerted Cyne.

"You have that little faith in his co—"

"It's not about faith!" Fulina screamed, startling Cyne.

Cyne scowled.

"What is it about then? You certainly cast away all hope very quickly," he hissed.

"It's not about abandoning hope...e-either," Fulina's muffled, trembling voice came from her filthy robe which hadn't come off her body for more than five days. "You always had a modest Undeath Concept, didn't you? You hardly ever tapped... tapped into how deeply woven death and the soul are. Well... n-n-neither did I, really. But Actuass taught me about it from time to time."

An odd silence followed Fulina's statement. Cyne waited patiently for her to continue.

"I doubt even Actuass could sustain his soul after death. Unlike us, he isn't from Aigas. His soul will linger after his body is dead. But... he can't maintain it for long. He is a mortal after all.

And considering the amount of energy he built up just by absorbing Rayne's soul, I can only imagine how difficult it would be for him to remain intact if he managed to obtain a Herald's power in addition to that. He couldn't have travelled a long distance as a soul to safely stow himself inside a new vessel.

Even if he wasn't successful in defeating the Herald he desired, if he's dead, no body on Aigas could hold his soul in that state for long. Whatever that book Rearren has... it... it probably has nothing to do with Actuass' consciousness or soul or whatever!"

Cyne remained silent. He had more than a few words to say, but he couldn't say them. They all seemed to have been countered by Fulina's expository outburst.

Yet...

"Is he really gone?" Cyne found himself asking, his face masked by darkness.

Fulina didn't answer.

The two sat in crippling silence for more than three hours, listening sombrely to the distant sounds of undead trudging on the dirt and muttering the same phrase over and over again.

It was strangely peaceful and soothing to hear them at a time like this.

The door which had remained closed for five days to their far right suddenly creaked open.

Cyne snapped in its direction at once while Fulina lazily did the same.

From the darkness the door had hidden for so long, a man emerged with a gaunt, tired-looking face that almost embodied the face of death itself perfectly.

He coughed horribly for several seconds and then marched in a limp-like manner towards the two with a morbid air about him.

Following closely behind him, scraping against the floor with her body, was a woman who was strangling his leg, refusing to let go.

She too looked as though she had looked death in the face and had grown extremely thin, her hair, once elegant, haggard and withered.

Marks of dried tears marked her face and her teeth were clenched in what might have been eternal misery.

"It is done," Rearren said, not minding his wife Milissa who had clung to his leg since yesterday. "It is done."

Cyne glared at Rearren, brows furrowed.

"What do you mean 'done'?" he asked shakily.

Rearren didn't look him in the eye.

"What Master Actuass desired. It is done. I expect... his plans for all of us will carry on. I expect..." he paused oddly, "everything will all work out in the end. Just as he promised."

Cyne and even Fulina found Rearren's wording strange.

"IT WAS ALL WORTH IT! IT... IT WILL HAPPEN AS HE PROMISED!" Rearren suddenly screamed, bewildering Cyne and Fulina and he wrenched his wife from his leg and cast her away. The sound of her head knocking against the wall was quite vivid. "As he promised. G-good future prospects!"

Cyne and Fulina didn't understand how exactly they were supposed to react to all this. However, the latter, bolder and just as driven as the clearly aggrieved Rearren set to ask him to explain himself when...

"What happened to that Paladin Champion? Revia, was it? You still haven't located her?" a cold voice sounded from the darkness within the room Rearren and Milissa had just left.

Cyne and Fulina's eyes went round with shock.

A formidable presence, crushing and full of Undeath blasted from the room and met their bodies.

It was extremely familiar.

It had to be...

Cyne broke into a wide smile.

Fulina soulless eyes brimmed with life for the first time in days.

Could it be...?

"You two. Find that woman at once. She is MY asset. I need her now more than ever. Do not return without her in your clutches," the cold voice said.

Immediately, the hopeful glow within Cyne and Fulina was doused.

The only thing that could have been worse than the words they had just heard, was the beginning of a great, rumbling noise...

Chapter 1172: To The Purity

Somewhere north of Pelian...

"How much farther?"

"Be quiet! I don't need you pestering me with that question every ten minutes. I already told you we are close!"

"He's right. Have a little more patience."

"Don't tell me how to feel!"

The four figures – well, three, and one (unconscious) lugged over another's shoulders – sprinted as blurs past the clearing, over the gorges and through the woodland in less than a minute.

The speed with which they travelled was quite impressive for the average top tier combatant, but to Revia, who was simply keeping up with their pace, it was dreadful.

She wished she had known their destination so that she could simply sprint over towards it quickly, leaving the others in the dust.

Unfortunately, the individual leading her and Alaris, wouldn't tell her the location of the Purity headquarters, thus she could only suffer in silence, allowing the burn of her fury to build up within her like magma.

Ruhrees turned to Revia's scowling face.

"Should I remind you that I can simply go back on my word, mark you as a criminal and cast aside my already reluctant desire to find justice for your objective? If you would prefer that, ask me 'how much farther?' once more," he threatened.

Revia scowled, but she didn't dare to ask again.

Ruhrees was the key.

Only the first to third-ranked Paladin Champions knew the location of the Purity headquarters even though the rest had been brought to it at one point – when they got sworn into service – before.

A short glance towards Alaris made Revia simmer down.

It was all because of him that the senseless conflict from five days ago had ended after all and that Revia was actually getting what she had wanted all along.

Revia had been with Fulina, Cyne, Reon and Milissa in Eofel, where they had decided to establish as a territory for Actuass' plans after he returned from Edagon.

Of course, their peaceful wait had been interrupted by the approach of two Paladin Champions – Ruhrees and the woman he was lugging on his shoulders right now, ranked sixth among all the Paladin Champions – who had either sensed the massive presence of Undeath in the city or had come to find if there were any survivors.

Ruhrees and Alaris, both of whom had been one of the few to escape the mess at the Venue of the Premium Age Royale, had made it a point to wander around the nation, saving as many lives as they could, after all.

Revia had immediately begun fighting Ruhrees and the other champion as soon as they approached closer, heavily wounding the latter while keeping a powerhouse like Ruhrees at bay. In the midst of their battle though, Alaris had arrived, disarming them both.

The Bloodless Steel Phantom had commanded a great degree of respect even among all the twelve Paladin Champions since the rise of his fame. Thus, Ruhrees and Revia hadn't dismissed his call for them to stop fighting.

In the lull, Ruhrees explained the circumstances to Alaris while Revia raved on about her own side of the story – how the Purity was corrupt and how she was willing to get some answers and see it burn before she paid the hefty price for deciding to help the necromancers.

Fulina, Reon and Cyne, who had been watching from within the city of Eofel didn't react to the sudden shift Alaris had brought on, and this allowed the Bloodless Steel Phantom to give Revia a stern look and say a few words that made her shut up.

"I wouldn't say your rage is misplaced. Your doubts aren't unwarranted. Believe me when I say, I've been in a situation where my powers have spoken more than my sense of purpose, which therefore clogged my judgement. You are struggling with the transition to put one on top of the other," he had said before turning at Ruhrees.

"I also have reasons to doubt the Purity. I want answers. The world is falling apart yet I have hardly seen any Purity knights marching out, colluding with the Capital Service knights to protect the people. I would hate to start believing that the Purity is as weak as the kind of royalty we have entertained in Pelian.

Could you, sir Knight, allow me and her to have an audience with the Higher Authorities?"

It had taken Ruhrees a minute to decide whether what he was hearing was better carried as blasphemy to the leaders of the Purity or as reasonable concerns that deserved an audience with the highly secretive elders.

In the end, given that Ruhrees had seen the utter devastation that had been wrought both by the Premium Age Royal and the Great Rumbling, he himself found him questioning if the Purity was truly expending all its resources to help with the effort. He had to meet with the Higher Authorities and speak to them at least.

This switch in the Paladin Champion's thought process was how and why the group was heading north right now.

It hadn't been easy for Revia to leave Fulina and the others behind.

She had found herself locking sights with Fulina from the distance.

There were hints of mockery in Fulina's eyes. She seemed to say, "I knew you were merely biding your time" without moving her lips.

In the end, Revia didn't care.

She viewed her immortality as a sign that she had soldier on and finish what she had started. She had to confirm Elita's fate and confront the real truth behind the doctrine she had been conscripted into from a young age.

As the group rushed on, Revia suddenly gave a great wheeze.

She buckled and nearly stumbled to a pathetic fall.

"Are you alright?" Alaris stopped and looked at her with concern.

"I'm... fine..." Revia said, an unsure look on her face.

What was that?

Her body had suddenly grown weak just now. Her strength fluxed randomly, alternating between vibrant and feeble.

Her fingers were twitching irritatingly and her body was growing colder than usual.

'Get a grip!' Revia told herself and she tensed her muscles as best she could.

"Let's go," she said to Alaris and she resumed pushing on in a fierce sprint. Alaris gave her a look of suspicion before following on.

He had heard the gist of what Revia was. An undead. A special one that never actually died and didn't reek of the same foul energy as ordinary undead minions.

It was bizarre. He had never heard of anything like it.

GRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRMMMMMMM!

Suddenly, as the group retained its pace, the world rumbled. It shook just as it had done nine days ago when the ominous towers that spilled varying assortments of the Carven climbed out of the ground, standing tall over all settlements in Pelian.

What in the world was going on?

Chapter 1173: Master Index

Easily-HYPED readers, be advised; keep your hearts in check).

SKULLIUS:

Clearly dubbing himself by the name the guidance field gave him some months ago, when he decided to find a name for his flesh form – Festos Dawn – Skullius is the warped version of the beloved Main Character of the novel.

Due to the fact that he currently exists in two, the name Skullius has now begun to be associated with the new entity forged as a result of Fulgardt's WILLS corrupting Skullius, creating an odd personality who neither desires to carry out Fulgardt's old will of eradicating the Deities nor Skullius' goal of reclaiming the lost part of his soul.

Barring the strangeness of his mentality, however, Skullius is a force to be reckoned, as many might agree (and speculate), he just might become the calamity of the new age.

[Name : Festos Dawn]

[Level : 41]

Indeed, once Replicus accomplished the Trial to forge one of the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS, he jumped from Advancement Stage to Incandescent Stage because his soul had already been on the level of an Incandescent Stager.

[EXP : --- ; <Task Pending>]

[Core : Blue + Purple]

Because Replicus had his own source of mana AND that of the Preeminent Attegoth, he naturally has two mana sources of differing quality. The blue one for the core he has in his body, and the purple one for the one in the Preeminent Attegoth.

[Class : Insurgent Magnus]

[Race : Hybrid Luman]

[Inv. Status : Still doomed ×2]

[Stats]

...

LUCK : 0

Because of Skullius' deal with the Deity Luserus, he has managed to remove the annoying curse of atrocious luck, brought about by his soul having been in contact with an Arch Lich.

[MANA (I) : 2,000,000]

As one must know, Skullius' mana core has unique properties. Because it was created with Distorted Gravity in mind, the mana it discharges allows Skullius to manipulate gravity and also apply the property of WEIGHT to anything he desires. At present (last seen by the reader), he is able to imbue a maximum of 1.7 million tonnes.

[Null Life Essence : 12,000/12,000]

[Blessings]

[Graceful Monolith of the Eminent]

Allows Skullius to split off parts of himself – physical or otherwise – and attach them, rather, preserve them in a separate entity of his choosing. The chosen entity then becomes a Seed that when planted and bloomed, emerges, having perfectly merged with the elements Skullius injected into it, removing their limits, strengthening and cutting off weakness.

Currently, Skullius has made the Preeminent Attegoth the bearer of all his skills. It also exists as a separate version of him that executes his every whim.

[Preeminent Attegoth]

The Preeminent Attegoth is a construct of [Just Light] that Skullius, using Graceful Monolith, created to host all of his skills. As long as its activated, he is able to use all his skills through it and because its quite literally a different form of him, he can even use skills in an enemy Territory.

The Attegoth is capable of marking targets with a half a skull mark. This mark counts as the Attegoth making direct contact with the target, and it allows Skullius to use offensive skills on enemies without worrying about range once they have been marked.

[Heart of Revelation]

Using inspiration from Rayne's Territory, Skullius created this gem of [Just Light] which, when its rays touch an opponent, strip them of their defenses, revealing internal organs, mana cores and souls.

[Skills]

[Greatest Mana Crafter | Lv.89]

[Great Celestial Counterfeit | Lv.1]

The evolved version of the infamous 'Flesh It Like You Mean It'.

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[Celestial Hack | None]

A skill that allows Skullius to catch a glimpse of things inside and outside Aigas.

-

[Ungodly Flames of Debauchery | Lv.19]

[Null Extraction]

[Static Limbo]

[Null Life Aura | Lv.8]

[Graceless Hunter (Special) | Lv.7]

The skill Skullius uses to 'see'; by extending the reach of his senses using nearby objects, he can pretty much gain a very vivid image of his surroundings down to the most minute detail.

[Bombardier Bangster Fist Art (Special) | Lv.34]

A skill that focuses all of Skullius mana at the point of contact when attacking, causing a violent ignition that deals immense damage to the target.

[Greatest Mana Attraction | Lv.17]

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[Primal Caution (Special) | Lv.28]

A skill that warns and to a lesser extent, moves Skullius' body forcefully when danger is close-by.

-

[Undaunted Calamity (Special) | Lv.23]

[Beyond the Hype | None]

[Lesser Gravel Rune Mastery (Special) | Lv.22]

[Rune Assimilation (Special) | Lv.11]

[Advanced Potion Making (Special) | Lv.19]

[Class]

[Evil Darkness Meshing (Special) | Lv.59]

[Evil Darkness Creation (Special) | Lv.64]

[Immoral Authority (Special) | Lv.10]

Allows Skullius to steal the memories of his targets and with a firmer grasp, he may even steal their skills.

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[Boundless Evil (Special) | Lv.30]

Allows Skullius to travel long distances as a trail of elongated dark rag-like tendrils.

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[Absolute Zero (Special) | Lv.35]

[Crude World Projection]

One of the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths which, when activated allows Skullius to project himself out of his body as a being of darkness. While in this Projected form, Skullius cannot use his skills, but he can manipulate already existing [Evil Darkness] with efficiency far greater than when he is in his body.

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[Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge]

One of the Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths which, when activated turns Skullius into a terrifying creature with long dark hair and different manifestations of [Just Light] and [Evil Darkness] all over his body. This is said to have been Fulgardt's trump card back in the days of the Second Grand War.

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[Bead of Malevolence | Lv.10 (Max)]

[Perfect Night Domain | Lv.7]

[<Oddities>]

[Binds of Fukal]

These are cross-marks on Skullius' chest that prevent him from being blessed or cursed by any of the three governing Deities of Aigas – Quintess, Listafelle or Suzamete.

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[Fruit of World Myths]

The bizarre, flower-shaped object, likely the source of the Insurgent Magnus powers which rests within Skullius' body.

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[Omniscient Thought Cracker]

A tiny, grain-sized object in Skullius' head that helps him compartmentalise his thoughts for more efficient brainwork.

[Greatest Antiphon of Malignance (Super) | Lv.1]

The user is deigned a charming, rhythmic response to all that is disorderly, and all that is malice, gracefully equipped against every sort, every kind, and every caliber of evil there is. A true pillar of all that justice stands for by their own interpretation.

<Passive Effects>

The user's soul is consistently guarded against low to mid-level soul attacks. The user attains a third pair of wings which both augment his physical properties fivefold. When in dire peril, the user's body will be transfigured into light that repels all attacks which reflect its light. A lesser portion of the speed of light is added to the user's own speed.

Bare minimal resources are used to heal all wounds sustained, a majority of the cost for this replenished immediately; in extreme cases, larger volumes of energy will be sacrificed to resist the user's death, the costs associated replenished over time.

<Active>

[Sub-skill: OverLight]

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[Sub-skill: Soul Spawn]

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[Sub-skill: Masterpiece]

...

[Infinite Sword God (Super) | Lv.1]

You are one who cuts ALL things as long as you can envision it, whether with a blade or with a mere fingernail.

<Passive Effect>

Enhances the efficiency of all swords wielded by 500% A field of imperceptible slashes constantly protect the user and may automatically improve their own potency if need be through increasing mana output The user can freely understand the effects and intent of any sword in their proximity The user will be dragged into a flow state whenever they feel enlightened, with the extent of the effect judged by their own understanding of what is possible or otherwise

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<Active>

[Sword Style I: Absolute Severance Divine Sword Arts]

Every three minutes, the user is allowed a ten-second period where natural concepts and principles become submissive to their sword's sadistic desires, allowing them to easily cut apart that which can only be mended by Divine and Divine-conceived powers.

-Sub-skill: Absolute Sever-

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[Sword Style II: Slow Ghost Divine Sword Art]

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[Sword Style III: Unmotivated Bender Divine Sword Art]

...

[Sword Style IV: Beyond-Scale Critical Divine Sword Art]

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[Demion's Dance]

-Mythical-

A beautifully crafted sword given to Demion on his birthday by his lover, Irisa, to commemorate his legendary battle with Escus.

-Damage-

500,170-789,900

-Durability-

467,795/467,795

-Special Effects-

95% Increase in movement speed

70% increase in reaction speed

[Skill: Full Memory]

The user is able to assume the full mastery and attack power that Demion displayed in his battle against Escus.

[Skill: True Impermanence]

Death is the destination of all things. As the user of a shard of death, you are allowed three instances a day where you can create an expanding field that KILLS any mana borne phenomena of your choice, as well as its source. A minimum of 1,000,000 (I) Mana Points is required, and may increase depending on the scale of the feat.

[Skill: Courting Death]

A field of malevolence born from mass producing, and refining Mortal Ruin is erected around the user. The density and the range can be expanded as the user sees fit, taking their sword mastery and mana into account

[Evil Veneration]

<Verbal Veneration Type>

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

[Bashful Abomination]

<Pseudo-Mythical>

A sword carved deep in the depths of ambitious soils to aid in the growth of a newly risen General. Its origin and birthplace as well as the time it spent there gave the weapon a unique trait where anyone but its chosen master will be fatally wounded if they gaze upon it.

-Damage-

362,000-375,000

-Durability-

234,800/465,890

-Special Effects-

+64,500 to Agility with Absolute Conversion +40,900 to Strength with Absolute Conversion
+20,000 to Mana with Absolute Conversion

[Skill: Make A Wish]

The sword can impose on itself an affix – any unique ability that its master desires. Said ability, if too powerful for the sword to enact, will be downgraded to a reasonable proportion but not wholly changed. A single user can only create one affix and it cannot be changed after finalisation.

Affix I:

<Increase Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art proficiency by 475%>

Affix II:

<The affinity with [Evil Darkness] is increased by one grade as long as the Bashful Abomination is equipped>

By having Vali Kinn use her lacking rendition of the Imagining Technique, Skullius forcefully manifested an extra affix on the sword, which raises his B rank in [Evil Darkness] to an A, which

allows him to use [Evil Veneration] at full throttle, and use the Spirit of Blind Drowning, one of the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS.

[Noboboyama, Spirit of Blind Drowning – PHANTASMIC RETAINER]

Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths currently attached:

Number 6, 'Melding Stitches' – Stitches targets to the fabric of reality, rendering them immobile.
Number 8, 'Delight's Pursuit' – Ensnares targets in a wonderful paradise within the realm of their minds.

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 from the original.

He has since become a four-armed, monstrously overpowered menace that has decided to embrace the core beliefs he began his journey – as Skullius – with.

He is the leader of a yet-to-be-named band of experts that were formerly aligned with the Severed Union and still enjoys some level of renown for having become a Faction Leader so quickly, and for having grown to stand above even the likes of Eaniss, the Head of the Severed Union.

[Name: Skullius]

[Tier: 4]

[Level: 1]

[EXP: ---]

[Null EXP: 43,560,755,232]

[Core: Purple + Gold]

[Class: Nullmancer]

[Race: Colossus Warmoth's Progeny]

[Inv. Status: Doomed x2]

[<Stats>]

[DUAL CONCEPT-TRACING IMPACT (II): 95,940]

Its effect is yet to be revealed.

[JU`WTTE BLIZZARD MOTION (II): 78,000]

JU`WTTE 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.

[PHANTOM OMNISCIENCE (II): 4]

PHANTOM OMNISCIENCE is a replacement for Replicus' INT stat. When he wishes, he can summon 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.

[EMPOWERED TRIGGER DEVIANT BUILD (II): 15x]

TRIGGER DEVIANT BUILD is a replacement for Skullius' END. Any physical damage Replicus receives has a chance of ricocheting back to the opponent with 15 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 15 times buff, in which case, Skullius' will only receive a portion of the blow's damage in exchange.

[LUCK: Atrocious?]

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

[MANA (II) x4: ---]

These are Replicus' main mana cores, replicated by [Mana Centurion] from 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.

At the moment, Replicus can accomplish this feat seamlessly with Maximum Catalyst.

[MANA (III) x2: ---]

Two out of Replicus' six cores have managed to reach the gold quality as a result of [Mystic Macer].

[Mana^ (I) x6 : ---]

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. Currently, Replicus uses it for the essence of Maximum Catalyst, causing a rise in efficiency.

[Null Core : 3,150,000 /3,150,000]

[Skills]

[Ju'wta Resounding Restoration (Super) | Lv.2]

When Replicus knocks his Ju'wta together, he can heal himself from all injuries.

[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.

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-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%.

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-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.

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[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.

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

Duration: ---

Cooldown: ---

[Wanton Royal's Void-Biting Serpent (Super) | Lv.1]

The evolved version of [Nullmancer's Unforgiving Lancet]. It adjusts to the target according to how much of the opponent's abilities and powers have been recorded with [Unbridled Wisdom of the Nullmancer].

[Unbridled Wisdom of the Ascended Nullmancer (Super) | Lv.1]

A brand of power that allows the user great purchase in understanding the nuances and infinitely minute details in every concept and every concept's application in order to form better, less vulnerable versions of these dissected powers; it then renders their obsolete counterparts useless against the Nullmancer.

-Passive-

-Without manifesting the Masterful Garb (which represents the commencement of the nullification of weaker and analysed powers), the user is capable of comprehending any application of an ability, weapon or concept at twenty-five times the norm as soon as an attack touches them. There is no charge for learning concepts below the Rule-Level.

For Rule-Level Concepts and beyond, a discounted price in Null Life Essence is required.

+10,500,000 Mana with Absolute Conversion

+3,250,000 Null Life Essence

+1,550% Penetration Damage against all learned concepts applied by enemies

-Active-

-As soon as the Nullmancer dons the Masterful Garb, all skills up to the high-level Super tier, even without being analysed, will deal minimal to no damage to the Nullmancer.

-All analysed and replicated skills and concepts will be emboldened and fed to the 'Access Cache'.

[Mystic Macer (Super) | Lv.1]

Formerly known as [Depths of the Core], this skill upgrades the quality and quantity of a core with a single usage before going on a 150-day cooldown.

[Resource Vault (Super) | Lv.1]

Reduces the cost of activation for all skills below the Supreme tier.

[Mana Centurion (Super) | Lv.1]

When activated, the user's mana reserves are quintupled while maintaining the quality of mana they produce. A 700% increase in mana regeneration is also granted to all mana cores.

[Greatest Null Weaver | Lv.18]

A skill that allows Replicus to manipulate Null Life Essence.

[True Nullmancer's Wretched Reaper of Ugly Divinity (Reverse Supreme) | Lv.1]

A skill created when Replicus combines Inverted gold quality mana with [Wanton Royal's Void-Biting Serpent] and adds the Primary assault function of Actuass' Territory, Deathward Maw into a soul arrow from the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow.

[Apostle's Liege | Lv.1]

Born from the merging of [Apostle Armament] and [Apostle Summon], this is a skill that allows Replicus to create Apostles who are forcibly evolved to the Fourth Tier with high-quality evolutions.

All Apostles are also given the [Blessing of Serenity] and can use Replicus' skills.

All Apostles are created with Null Cores at the ready.

[Warmoth's Fortitude (Super) | Lv.3]

Gives a 300% boost to Ju'wtte efficiency and power.

Directly counters incoming attacks with Ju'wtte.

Empowers all equipped artefacts by 250%

[Unrelenting Ju'wtte Chain (Super) | Lv.1]

Can designate up to 10,000 targets which it strikes with a linked chain of piercing Ju'wtte that will rebound and strike again with added power if it fails to kill its target.

[Fulgrous Virulence (Super) | Lv.1]

An infection of Ju'wtte that attacks a target from the inside and rips them apart.

[Rune of the FIRST]

When the user is attacked first by the opponent or is the one to attack them first, the Rune boosts their power by a maximum of 700% and gives the opponent a random deadline before which they must beat the user or else suffer a permanent loss of half their strength.

[Rune of Immolation]

Yet to be revealed

[Bloodline Awakening: Warmoth's Return]

Yet to revealed

[Warmoth's Emphyrean Ambience]

Gives the Warmoth's Progeny the presence of the Warmoth.

[Embryotic Stuffing]

The third and final configuration that Replicus made to his body. As of yet, its effects are unknown.

[Violent Bond - Veneration Art]

Yet to be revealed

<Affinities>

[Distorted Gravity – C]

[Stagnant Space – D]

[Spatial Lightning – B]

[Grand Fire – S]

[Maximum Catalyst – S]

[Coordinated Disruption – C]

[Lambent Phosphor – B]

[Absolute Frost - D]

...

[Warmoth's Spine]

-Pseudo Transcendent-

Made from a miniaturized section of the Warmoth's thoracic spine, the Warmoth's Spine is an artefact bearing a portion of the true essence of the Colossus Warmoth. It is naturally resistant to the effects of all concepts and is especially generous to all those who carry the will of the Warmoth through its Legacy and the Ju`wta.

-Damage-

1,890,000-3,000,500

-Durability-

975,000-990,000

[Special Effects]

-Weightless to the user

-Allows the user to adjust their size

-Gives the user a fragment of the Colossus Warmoth's regal aura

-Can veil itself when needed, limiting its interaction with the material world

-+500% to Ju`wtte production and Ju`wtte skill efficiency

-+500% to all energy reserves

-Each swing applies triple the maximum attack speed of the user

-Each attack has a chance to deal 500% additional damage

-Each attack contains 100% Crush and Shock damage

-Each of the six vertebrae blades (spinous process) can be used separately from the Spine with just the user's will.

[Skill: Honoured Lacerance]

By infusing 500,000 units of Null Life Essence, the user can unleash a vertical slash that WILL NOT fail to cut through any foundation or entity existing within the dimensions of a world and below.

[Skill: Full Spine]

For a limited time, the user can unleash the full length and girth of the Warmoth's Spine, amplifying its powers. Usable only once a day.

[Skill: Warmoth's Peal]

By infusing units of 100,000 Null Life Essence, the user can unleash a devastating sonic and Ju`wtte blast.

[Full Release: Locked]

[Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow]

-Transcendent-

Forged using the soul of the man named Actuass Seinold Fe'krel, which was melded with that of the ancient Deity vessel, Rayn, and the Herald Jerthrax, the Vision of Misery, the Fallen Reincarnator's Shadow is a powerful object with powers centred around eradicating and edifying souls as well as the deeper application of Divine energy and Blessings.

-Damage-

1,567,450-2,900,500

-Durability-

920,340/920,340

-Divine Energy Reserve-

50,000,000/50,000,000

[Special Effects]

- Can adjust its size
- Strengthens the user's soul by 7,500%
- Increases resistance against soul attacks by 9,000%
- Deals 7,000% soul damage with each physical strike
- Allows the user to freely interact with foreign souls by direct touch.
- Can release arrows of light capable of extinguishing exposed souls
- Can remove status ailments on the body by temporarily increasing the grade/potency of the user's soul
- Allows the user to give life and unfathomable strength to their shadow
- Allows the user access to the Divine Blessing, 'Brunt Divide'
- Stores and passively generates genuine Divine energy

[Skill: Divine Blessing Creation]

By expending 10,000,000 units of Divine energy, the user can create a Divine Blessing with at most two stipulations. Only two Blessings can be created in one day.

Available Blessings:

Cluster Dominance – Allows the user to control all Clusters within range.

Mana-Null Life Essence link – Creates a fundamental link between mana and Null Life Essence
cores Mana-Null-Life Essence conversion – Allows the user to trade Null Life Essence for mana at
a rate of 1:10 Territorial Harmony – Allows the user to anchor the effects of Deathward Maw's
Primary effect 'Ordained Reverent Machination' over their own Territories

[Skill: Rule Creation]

By expending 50,000,000 units of Divine energy, the user can create a Rule that affects the world or
a separate enemy. After a Rule is created, the passive generation of Divine energy will be stalled for
an hour before re-commencing.

[Skill: Soul-Body Coalescence]

Using 5,000,000 units of Divine energy, the user can augment their physical properties a hundred
times over while adjusting their souls accordingly. Effect lasts for one minute. Cooldown lasts for
ten days.

[Skill: Territory Reflection]

Chapter 1174: Rally The Beasts

Tremur Forest...

"Karima. This cannot go on. As free-willed as we are, I think we need to step in this time. That is
the purpose of our ascension, is it not?" Azila said.

"Yes! Thank you! We can't keep going back and forth for another week! It's not as though the role
we are asking of you is too unreasonable!" Soidon cried with relief at seeing someone, rather,

something, other than himself and Erlton persuade the beast seated atop a throne of luminous, abstract shapes to do the right thing.

Said abstract shapes, each of a different colour and strewn about chaotically in the deep, dark space of Karima's Dormant Territory, swam serenely, slowly, only trembling lightly at intervals where it looked as though invisible, silent bolts of lightning struck within the dark domain.

Aside from Azila, the Great Mane Mountain Ape, other figures could be seen on either side of Karima's throne. The Aqua Ripper, a great, blue aquatic serpent assuming a humanoid form where its scales covered its extremities, like clothing, could be seen seated opposite Soidon, a man with long, dark hair, and Erlton the Herald, his lute in his lap.

There was a clear division between the two 'humans' and three beasts, it seemed, mirroring how their opinions had differed very much for the last eight days.

Nothing had yet to enter or exit Karima's Territory other than Azila who had been on a journey to Agmold when the two 'humans' arrived.

"Not unreasonable, you say? Do I, again – for what might be the thousandth time – need to outline how tall of a task you are asking of me? It is no easy feat to rally the guardian beasts in all the Sacred Forests. There are many ascended beasts in those Forests that are equal to me or stronger than I am. You yourselves have even expressed that I am not mistaken in considering this.

You are privy to the strengths of the Deities' creations, are you not?" Karima said in an exasperated tone, his words directed moreso towards Erlton than Soidon.

Karima was a rather short beast with matted black and white fur covering his entire body. His long arms were easily the most unique thing about him, that was, if one didn't count his face which was pink, raw and no different from a bat's.

There was wisdom that could be traced in his beady, black eyes, however, and quite like Azila, he also featured a ring of light above his head in which a brilliant star sat, giving hints of some imperial significance.

Erlton gave the ascended beast a deep look.

"It is not lost to me the fact that there are many beasts stronger than you are," he said, "but – and I hate to insult your intelligence – you are not so foolish as to not know that Tiers mean little to beasts like you" – he looked towards Azila – "Beasts who have interacted with the relics left behind by powerful humans are infinitely wiser and skilled."

Azila's expression grew severe.

He indeed understood what Erlton meant. He had heard it from Asthon himself, after all.

Karima hardly looked insulted though. One of his long arms supported his drooping head upon which a placid expression could be seen.

Erlton continued.

"I stress again, beasts progress in a manner that is different from humans because ultimately, their purpose is different. YOUR purpose is different. You are not the equals of man. You are – whether you like it or not – the stabilisers of the world you reside in," he said with his brows furrowing. "This must have been shown to you by the simple fact that Clusters cannot emerge in Sacred Forests.

The spaces beasts like you inhabit are THAT stable. You – not humans – are what keep Aigas aloft. You are the best lines of defence created by the Deities! While humans and Sif rise through their Stages, yearning for Divinity, you ascend, becoming pillars, bastions of nature!

This is why I can only count on you to help against the madness that is about to ensue – more than you already have, of course."

Karima gave a mirthless laugh.

"And again we argue. I have no qualms with the fact that we are not man's equals. I daresay, when you first mentioned it, I was indeed quite... disconcerted by the fact that beasts were barred from reaching Divinity by our own Majestic Territories, which we all thought to be our greatest strengths, but still... Tell me. Beyond the call to duty you present, is there really a chance?"

These creatures... the Carven, you call them, are as many as the humans on Aigas. How much, really, does my and the presence of other ascended beasts contribute to the victory you see?"

"Plenty," Erlton said firmly. "In case you don't know, there aren't nearly as many humans with the ability to combat these creatures. And besides from that, I hardly think I can count on Maqi to go out of their way to help save the other nations. Worse yet, while Opungale could be saved for a short while by having its entire population become Seeds, that isn't exactly a solution."

Karima did not speak.

It was funny really. There wasn't really anything new presented in this argument since it began eight days ago. Many points had been flung around, but ultimately, they remained afloat, neither rebutted or accepted.

The fact of the matter remained that Boron was soon to rise. Erlton confirmed it.

The Carven that had risen from the Under so far were only a prelude. The real numbers were soon to burrow their way up to Aigas with their Lord when he showed his face for the first time since Aigas' creation.

For this, Erlton, duty-bound as a Herald, had to rally Aigas' resources to prepare for the worst. He didn't know what would happen when Boron rose, but he had a nasty idea. The best bet he could think of – along with whatever else he was sure his other remaining companion, the third Herald, rallied – was having the Sacred beasts of Aigas take arms to defend it, as they were meant to.

Sacred Forests existed, transfixed, in order to ensure that natural forces remained no matter how strong man became. That was why, even in the times when humanity peaked millennia ago, Sacred Forests and their guardian beasts remained objects of reverence and respect.

"I find hard to swallow the idea that it is you preaching this message of togetherness and whatnot, and not that cult humans made. Do the Deities not speak through them anymore?" the Aqua Ripper said with disdain, her eyes on Erlton.

"It's not a cult. It's a decent order for the Deities – the Purity," Erlton answered with a sigh. "And the Deities do speak. Better yet, they have acted. Aigas was split in two not too long ago. I hardly think any of you felt it, but it has already been mended.

That's one less problem to deal with."

The Aqua Ripper snorted. She didn't give her own opinion on Erlton's proposition. Rather, she waited on Karima's decision. His choice would be hers too.

Azila took advantage of the silence that followed.

"Ashton, who has been keeping to a deal he made with the royal family of this human land would have gladly accepted your proposal. I'm sure he would have urged us all to as well. I admit, I'm reluctant. I was told that beyond our ascension, it is necessary for us beasts to draw close to humans and learn bits of their craft in order to truly reach our full potential.

Perhaps for that reason alone, I might consider joining forces with human combatants and fight, but as for rallying the other guardians..."

Azila looked at Karima. The bat-faced beast said nothing to proceed the ape's slick segway into his final decision.

Instead, he looked at Soidon.

"If I do as you ask, what will you do, REPENTED LICH? Will you stand and watch as always, or will you join in this time?" he asked.

Soidon's face scrunched up.

He had opened his mouth to reply when Erlton suddenly interjected.

"He's here."

...!!!

"What?!" Azila asked with a note of intense anxiety.

The Aqua Ripper quivered.

Karima grunted and sat up straight.

"Boron?" he asked what everyone else seemed to be thinking.

"No," Erlton said, frowning and he turned to Soidon. "HE has just set foot in this forest."

Chapter 1175: Meeting An Old Friend (1)

A group of beasts of different kinds – goblins, boars, lizardmen, bears, Dare wolves and many more – bunched up in neat rows, all standing on two legs and doing a funny dance where they threw up their right feet into the air, then their left ones and arched their torsos to the right slickly – some with a nasty crunch that caused them to shriek in pain as their bones cracked – marched through the deeper part of the Tremur forest.

Their march and movements rang through the trees and grasses with a strange, sombre rhythm that hardly had the capacity for levity. Bestial screams were mixed into the sound of their feet thumping, and it was likely these sounds of agony that forced some of the creatures that would have pounced at anything that breathed, to hide and merely watch from the shadows under the harsh sun.

"How delightful. I don't know if I've mentioned this already, but you all enjoy some unnecessary gifts in flexibility up here! I can't get enough of this!" Ashema cried jubilantly from the skies where he puppeteered the mass of two hundred beasts with strings of blood that oozed from his fingertips and branched out to attach themselves to his victims.

His eye gleamed, his expression trembling with joy as he saw hooves and dirty feet fly up. Blood was pumping, heating up within the bodies of the ensnared, and this greatly excited him. Ashema had hardly gotten a chance to mess with as many of the surface dwellers as he would have liked over the last few days, but today, he got his chance.

Ashema was a Carven with shiny grey skin over his face which featured two, great, twisted ebony horns and a fierce, red eye. He wore what might have been called a blasphemous set of armour from which, burnt-looking, scabbed limbs protruded freely, heavily emphasising that where Ashema was born, there might have been great heat, but no light.

As a Carven, Ashema had always considered the creatures that lived above him, above his master's domain – the Under – as the prizes of the traitorous trio of Deities that had locked his master below, forcing him to create a world limited in every sense of the word. Thus, Ashema felt no small amount of glee from torturing beast and man alike.

So far – as evidenced by the blood stains on his grey face – the Carven had amused himself by donning the cleaved and cleaned head of a goblin whom he had had a particularly delightful time

torturing. To Ashema, it was quite comical to be heading the dancing beasts below while wearing the face of one their own.

He had used one boar's spine to conduct his dance group as well, but when that proved too difficult in conjunction with some of the moves he had been forcing upon the hundreds of beasts, he had settled for simply watching as they broke, cracked and shattered for him.

Of course, Skullius didn't mind.

This might have been the best thing that attracted Ashema to this man.

He didn't care when he, Ashema, had drained the blood from a family of a six they had passed on their way to the Tremur Forest, having them all turn into human raisins that he munched on as snacks for the trip.

Skullius had said nothing when Ashema had used a few children to try out how his blood incarnation worked with shorter, smaller humans. The Carven had almost gotten the impression that Skullius would have helped if he could.

Since their meeting in Opungale, Ashema couldn't deny that he had grown fonder and fonder of the individual he had decided to follow and enjoy the exploits of as a spectator. Well, a devout spectator.

"This is all in your honour, you know!" Ashema yelled, his eye turning to look below, at the back of dark, swaying robes.

The one who wore these robes, which seemed steeped in the same ink that made what the living called 'the night', did not turn for Ashema.

His light auburn hair, slicked back stylishly, was illuminated vaguely by a beautiful, shining gem that was suspended above him – the Heart of Revelation.

Below his feet – for which it was hardly clear whether they were encased in any protective footwear at all because of an intense darkness from his robes – a deep, dreadful shadow that took many different forms and shapes every ten seconds cast itself wide, sometimes licking at the trees and grasses around him, causing beasts that had been brave enough to draw close to scurry away in terror.

"In my honour, is it?" Skullius said, and his spotless, blameless face was raised in a casual smile. "I'm almost charmed."

The great robes he wore seemed to echo his words. Their edges, which stood parallel before his chest were cast in bright gold clover patterns, elevating their beauty several fold. However, if one did not look close enough, they might have been made to believe that Skullius wore an additional set of robes below the one that was seen; none of his features beyond the open robes were clear, after all.

They were all covered in chilling darkness all the way to his feet.

The movement of his legs was masked in the robe's shadow, and perhaps it was because of this reason that his steps made no sound at all.

Ashema groaned.

"You've been lost in thought ever since we left that place. Maqi, was it? Are you still thinking about your great plans for how exactly you will leave this world with a whole nation behind you? Or was it perhaps, an empty promise?" he asked.

Skullius' blank eyes narrowed.

"I don't make empty promises. And I haven't been pondering over those meatheads. No, I have more pressing matters... concerns and prospects," Skullius said, and his smile grew wider. "Ah. It seems we are here."

The dense forest around him and Ashema along with his puppets suddenly split to form a vast, desert-like plateau.

There seemed to be nothing impressive about it, but Skullius remembered the feeling he had got from this place all those months ago when he, Benzard, Irlen, Reon and Denille had reached it, rich with ambition and resolve – well, the four humans, at least.

Skullius gave a long look towards the plateau.

The golden-brown soil that made it extended as far as the eye could see, but of course, back then, it had transitioned into a darker hue that had caused him much dread. A particularly powerful beast had stood guard, its Dormant Territory protecting the 'treasure' hidden here.

"Is this what we are looking for?" Ashema said curiously and he made the beasts under his control start to do what might have been push-ups.

"Yes," Skullius said, and a soft breeze beat at his face, whipping his auburn hair back. "Sadly, as I don't have any of the keys required... Well, I wasn't here for this anyway."

The Hybrid Luman brought his hands together and cupped them. He then blew into the shape they made and a strange whistle blew out from it, ringing far and wide.

Ashema drifted low, reaching Skullius' side just as he finished the whistle.

"Are you calling someone?" he asked.

Skullius chuckled.

"Yes. An old friend. Though, I'm not sure he still considers me as such."

Right then, birds perched on some trees in the distance flew away and the thumping of great paws against the ground sounded.

Soon, a great, furred beast emerged from the cluster of trees from Skullius' right and he turned with a welcoming smile.

"Long time no see. Or, I suppose not at all."

Chapter 1176: Meeting An Old Friend (2)

"Long time no see. Or, I suppose not at all," Skullius said relaxedly.

The beast that appeared before him was a great white fox with dark eyes. It pushed away nearby trees, its immense size causing rocks and pebbles to bob up and down with each of its footsteps.

It stopped only when it was five meters away from Skullius, sat on its hind legs and wore a menacing grin. This grin, however, did not have an ounce of mirth behind it. It was merely a behavioural trait engrained in the beast, as hinted by its name – Grinning Jester Fox.

A harsh breath left the creature's nostrils and it peppered Skullius lightly.

Ashema gave a whistle and released the strings of blood connected to his victims. They all slumped down, laying flat on their chests and he used their bodies, which rose in a mound, as his seat. Producing a large, dirty gourd somewhere unseen, Ashema then excitedly began to extract the blood from all the beasts he had been toying with, feeding it into the vessel.

Soon, he was sipping the mix of bloods with intrigue while watching the proceedings expectantly.

The Grinning Jester Fox didn't spare him a glance. It only had eyes for Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman waved with a bright expression.

"Have you gone senile, Dellan? I think I just offered you a greeting," he said.

The fox didn't seem to acknowledge him. Only after taking a few drawn-out breaths did it frown, one of its eyes shimmering in a vibrant orange hue, and then asked:

"Who are you?" the fox, Dellan, asked sombrely.

Skullius chuckled.

"How rude. You guarded my labyrinth for four thousand years and you dare to look me in the eye and declare that you don't even recognise me?" he said coolly.

Dellan trembled ever so slightly. Skullius went on.

"Speaking of eyes, that eye of yours should already be telling you who I am, shouldn't it?"

And indeed it was so.

Dellan's orange eye, which had been able to tell the peculiarity in Skullius' existence all those months ago, when he still wore the most basic flesh, was sending a great deal of information up to the fox's brain. However, he couldn't quite fathom what the eye saw.

"No. You aren't Fulgardt. But... you are..."

"I am the little skeleton you accompanied through this very forest as a gift for conquering the Labyrinth. I know you remember," Skullius said and he began to walk into the plateau, his shadow and the Heart of Revelation following after him like loyal, living monstrosities. "Back then you seemed so intrigued. You were so eager to see what I would become.

You always harped on the fact that you were different from other beasts, uncaring about the normal conventions that should concern beasts of your calibre."

Dellan gave a keen look to Skullius and slowly, hesitantly, followed after him. Ashema remained on his throne of corpses. He could hear the interaction just fine.

"You seemed so unfathomable back then," Skullius said, and his smile broadened comically. "But now I laugh. You benefitted greatly from guarding my Labyrinth, didn't you? You learned a great deal. Well, I'm pleased for you. All that time you spent holed up... it helped you quite a bit.

You are no longer a docile little cub in need of strength just as you were back then."

"WATCH YOUR TONGUE!" Dellan hissed and terrible ripples of power exploded from him, casting a frightening shockwave that made the trees in a hundred-meter radius lean backward, some shattering from their trunks.

Ashema whistled again and gulped a few human raisins in excitement.

Skullius ignored Dellan. The release of power hadn't affected him in the least. He kept walking on.

"Ah, yes. How wise," Skullius mocked. "Bare your fangs against the one who sharpened them."

"You are not him. You're merely an imitation. If I had known that the little critter I watched march out of this forest triumphantly, after merely succeeding because of luck would end up becoming a pathetic copy of the glory of Fulgardt, I would have—"

"No, you wouldn't," Skullius cut Dellan off, his voice cold, and he came to a stop. "You wouldn't have done anything. And still, you will do nothing."

The Hybrid Luman turned and gave Dellan a sinister grin that drove the beast back a step.

"See? You see Fulgardt's shadow in me, don't you?" Skullius said and he turned back and walked on. "Fortunately for you, I am not Fulgardt. I am Festos. Festos Dawn. I don't intend to become another calamity, another Immoral.

I have better, greater sights, old friend. I wish to build and expand, rather than to focus more on destruction."

As he said this, Skullius extended his hand forth, and space seemed to melt around him as a terrifying blob of [Evil Darkness] shot from his ever-changing shadow and began to construct a vast, wide tower that rose three hundred meters into the sky, so solid, and so reproachful of light that it might have been a pristine painting.

Slivers of golden white [Just Light] then raced from his fingers and painted select portions of the massive, exquisite structure, marking what might have been windows and roof tiles that seemed to mark the end of each floor on the rise and half skulls that hung from the rafters of said roofs.

Skullius, Dellan and Ashema looked up at the tower. It was rather impressive, and the shadow it cast against the Tremur Forest seemed absolute. Everything that was touched by it seemed to lose its state of existence, as though it didn't exist.

"I will never regret my hunts and idea to eradicate the Deities from back then, but it didn't serve as grand of a purpose as I thought. What did I stand to gain by killing those embodiments of falsehoods – those hypocrites? It's best to teach others to look upon the Wanderer Who Seeds, master of all. To believe in him is to cast away – to shed rather – all unneeded impurity.

The past, meaningless connections. Everything worthwhile on Aigas deserves to leave it and experience the broader world above," Skullius said.

Dellan didn't know what to say to this.

From the way the individual, the creature rather, before him spoke, he could tell that there was indeed bits of Fulgardt in there. If that had simply been the case, he wouldn't have been so disconcerted. However, there was something undoubtedly ominous about the way Skullius spoke.

There was something evil about the way darkness crept from the shadow, how light sprang erect, aloof, from his fingers.

Above all, the obvious hypocrisy and feigned righteousness with which he imbued his words.

No.

This was likely to be worse than before!

Skullius then turned to Dellan and pointed a blameless finger at him.

"But first," he said, "I need your eye."

Chapter 1177: Meeting An Old Friend (3)

...!

Dellan was taken by surprise.

Something was strange about his vision.

Why was half of it dark?

Why could he feel blood spilling from the side of his face?

Why...

Why was it that Skullius, who was standing before him, was holding in his right hand a large, bloody eyeball with an iris that still shimmered orange!

Everything finally caught up with the Grinning Jester Fox, all the sensations and the dread.

He let out a howl of agony and backed away rapidly, pain throbbing in his empty eye socket.

"What... what did you do?!" Dellan cried, his sharp teeth bared, but he did not pounce.

Skullius' expression as he looked blankly at the quivering beast was cold. He massaged the squishy base of the eye that was in his hand and sighed.

"Four thousand years ago, the greatest hurdle to my campaign was Rayne, the man blessed by the Deities with a body that could hold even the strongest among them. I admit, he was quite the challenge, but I quite enjoyed battling him. He was everything I loathed. A vessel for the hypocrites.

Crushing him meant quashing the very ideology of the beyond-Divines who made Aigas," he said in a bitter-sweet reminiscent tone. "I wasn't even a match for him and all the other vessels that joined him in battle, but after reaching Divinity, we became somewhat even. I could hold my own very well."

A cold chuckle then left Skullius' lips.

"This time, things are different. One must improvise against rather... treacherous unknowns," he said, and he stowed away the eye and sat down on the ground, looking into the thick of the forest. While he saw nothing, Skullius sensed the presence of five individuals approaching behind the agonizing Dellan.

Ashema sensed them too,

"Company," he said, and he floated up and towards Skullius, settling in front of the great, dark tower the Luman had made.

All five individuals shadowed in the distance, walking as though they hadn't just journeyed here together, stopped right where the plateau began and looked at Skullius.

"We meet again, Erlton," Skullius said with a smile and a wave.

Erlton sighed but returned the greeting.

"Indeed," he said. "I didn't think I'd see you here. I almost feel... stalked."

"Oh no. It is just a mere coincidence," Skullius said airily before setting his gaze on Azila, the Great Mane Mountain Ape. The beast gawked at him. Skullius grinned. "I suppose it's no secret to you now who I am, is it? Emperor Bonet sends his regards."

Azila didn't know what to think.

Several minutes ago, he had just been told of the identity of the 'HE' Erlton had referred to and the depth of the revelation had left him astounded.

To think that little skeleton he had nearly killed in his Territory months ago, whom he had allowed to slip because of the tale he had shared about being the emissary of some individual known as Emperor Bonet... was here, donning flesh and wielding the powers of the Immoral!

To think that all it took to piece together all the pieces Azila, Karima and the Aqua Ripper had been attempting to fit together months ago, was this individual whom they had been curious about in the first place...

Skullius then turned to the man with long, dark hair.

Soidon held a great deal of apprehension at meeting Skullius. He had made sure to steer clear of him back in Opungale after realising that something about him had changed. Even now, he still felt that he oughtn't be here.

Skullius seemed to appraise him with interest as well, but he didn't address Soidon. Instead...

"What brings you all here?" Skullius asked in the same way a host would ask his guests.

"You dare disregard me even as I stand here?" Karima, who stood at the forefront of the lineup of five, boomed. His size might have been underwhelming compared to Azila's, but the power that

bubbled out of him, like distorted winds feeding into and crippling the surroundings space, was far more formidable than that which Dellan had expelled earlier.

Speaking of the fox...

Karima pointed at Dellan.

"I will not tolerate sacred blood spilled in my presence," Karima said chillingly, and Dellan vanished from where he was, appearing behind the bat-faced beast, where the mound of corpses Ashema had mutilated could be seen.

Skullius didn't move or speak for a few seconds. Instead, he placed his elbow on his thigh and supported his chin with a fist.

"Seeing as you are not rushing to exert your authority, my dear bat, you must be hoping I will quietly vacate myself," he said, much to Karima's annoyance. "I'm afraid that won't do."

Karima started towards Skullius at once, but Erlton gestured for him to stop with a small bow.

"Please, don't. We require you for something a lot more important than this, remember?" the Herald said in a small voice.

Karima contemplated him sharply and then he acquiesced. He snorted and turned back to the sight of the corpses. They were all instantly burnt to ash as he walked through them and disappeared into the thick of the forest. Dellan followed after him, but not before glaring at Skullius for a moment.

The Aqua Ripper also gave the Hybrid Luman a sharp look before turning and following the two.

Soon, only Azila, Erlton and Soidon remained, looking at the Hybrid Luman.

"I'm sure your goal wasn't to welcome me here, of course. What do you seek from me?" Skullius asked the Herald and Soidon in particular.

Erlton's face hardened.

He didn't quite like Skullius' sudden appearance.

It was costing him Karima's cooperation.

While heavily accomplished in Divining, Erlton wasn't able to see small future events. He was normally privy to the greater, larger events – disasters.

He had seen several in the past few months, some of which had already happened, some which hadn't. But when he felt Skullius reappear earlier, he had imagined that he had probably seen another devastating disaster involving this man.

Not all of the things he saw were clear, however, and at times he wasn't able to tell just who was behind the events he saw.

A part of him drew him to this place.

One of his Divinations must have shown him something about this. He was sure of it. That was the only reason to explain the increased sense of dread he felt at seeing Skullius here, despite being – all things considered – not being particularly bothered by him just a few days ago on Opungale.

His mission for now, was to persuade Skullius to leave the Tremur Forest, capturing his interest with something else and quelling it until he had solved the ordeal he was trying to deal with at the moment. For that...

Erlton urged Soidon with a pat on the shoulder.

Soidon stiffened and sighed before looking at Skullius.

He couldn't believe he was going to have to reveal himself in this way and to this version of the man.

"The stench on you has lessened considerably since I last saw your body," he said. "You must have gotten rid of some of the miasmatic presence of the Arch-Lich who cursed you, right?"

...!

Skullius' blank eyes narrowed.

"What?" he asked.

Soidon steadied himself.

"Ever since Azila told me about you and that ludicrous story you told him, I had wondered. I followed the stench of potent Undeath on you from city to city. It wasn't until I analysed your unconscious body that I realised that the smell came from your soul. Erlton then clarified what you were," Soidon said sombrely. "I remember being somewhat pleased to meet someone whom I could relate to."

Skullius' brows furrowed even further.

"What are you saying?" he asked sharply.

Everyone felt the switch at once.

Soidon straightened.

"I am a Lich. A former Lich."

Chapter 1178: Repented Lich (1)

Skullius scratched his neck right as one of his brows slowly rose up his forehead.

"A Lich, you say?" he said without the expected infection of someone who was drowned in surprise – as Soidon had thought.

Soidon gulped and glanced at Erlton. The Herald urged him to go on discreetly.

"Yes. I don't look like it, yes, but there's a story behind that," Soidon said as his face continued to look more and more strained, as though something soft, voluminous and invisible was pushing against it from all sides. "Aigas has many secrets, you know?"

Skullius kept his brow high, but said nothing.

He then looked to the side, his white eyes seeming to gaze at something that no one else could see.

"I'm surprised. A former Lich? So, you once took on Undeath within you, did you?" he asked in a tone that hinted at his scepticism.

"Took on?" Soidon said with a humourless laugh and then he grew bold. "Seeing as you were – or rather, must have been – no more than a standard undead minion, you should know that Liches, Arch-Liches, are far more than beings who 'take on' Undeath. I was the face of Undeath along many others in the service of the Eminence of Undeath.

I was no different from all my companions and rivals – Solon, Sovas, Souwen, Sogmat. I was conformed to the edge that proceeded life and death."

Skullius said nothing. His empty gaze returned to fix upon Soidon, who took this to mean that he had captured the Hybrid Luman's attention.

How could he have not?

The revelation must be shocking on a number of levels to Skullius, Soidon imagined.

He indeed was a former Arch-Lich, one who was often referred to by his now-companions – Karima and the others – as the Repented Lich, despite his great dislike of the moniker. It was woefully misleading.

Often times, Soidon couldn't believe he had a heart, and he was especially frustrated by how fast it was beating right now.

He stared intently at Skullius.

Erlton had explained to him that Skullius had a lingering connection to Undeath. A rather potent one. This, to Soidon could only mean one thing. He had never seen anything quite like this himself in Deadmanland, but where trillions of Undeath vessels roamed, it would be surprising if at least one anomalous event such as the one he had suspected didn't happen at all.

"I... I suppose you'd wonder how I came to be like this – flesh over bone? Oddly, we share that in common despite the different circumstances, eh?" he said, but the Hybrid Luman didn't respond, and he forced himself to continue after Azila gave a faint cough. "It happened during the Ashing of Time."

Soidon remembered it vividly. His memory wasn't limited to the confines of the fatty brain he now wielded, after all.

"I, quite like all the other ambitious Liches, had eyed Aigas among many other worlds for a long time. Rich Worlds are pretty easy to notice, even from the outside. I, like my competitors, had left my stronger Death and Calamity Knights to prowl the void, looking for an opportunity to invade among all the worlds I had a vested interest. Many sentinels with different allegiances watched and waited.

I remember dawdling stupidly in my tower... or hmm... I might have been attempting to create a new series of Death Knight at the time, I don't recall quite... Ah, in any case, I was alerted by my sentinels that the Rules that held around one of the worlds I was interested in had slackened. This was, of course, Aigas. I was overjoyed."

"Before I knew it, I was using my limited store of Contiguous Sap – which was supposed to last me another millennia before I was due for a refill – to warp towards Aigas! I wasn't the only one. Many Liches crowded around Aigas at that time, though we did find to our surprise that the void had been bruised. Powerful beings had streaked through it, eradicating some of our sentinels as they left.

Of course, I soon came to know this to be the result of Quintess and Listafelle leaving. Odd, really. They didn't bother with what they knew would follow after their departure."

"I didn't know or care about any of this at the time though. I sent more of my minions down into Aigas, fearing that the loosened Rules might tauten immediately... but they didn't. They did not recover for a while. I... we were enthralled. Though it was still difficult to pass through ourselves – us Liches, I mean – it mattered not.

We sent our Undead warriors with tools that would allow us to engage easily with them on the new world and command our armies. I sent forth my loyal Desdana – oh beautiful Desdana – with my Staff of Keen Watching. And I saw it. The ugly life, rich still, too rich to be that of a common world. The others saw it too and soon, it became a race."

Soidon paused.

He had drowned in his storytelling almost too completely. He had forgotten to observe and engage with Skullius who remained silent, staring at him with a neutral expression.

His silence was creepy.

Soidon glanced at Erlton again and the look he got told him that he needed to speed things up.

"The terror my kind brought on Aigas was immense. As it went on, I and the others felt the Rules weaken further. The temptation was palpable. After waiting for a while, some of us dived, hoping to break through and increase our chances of emerging as the true victors in the race, the first ones to reach the gem that made Aigas. I was among the first few.

I was convinced I could be first and use that to my advantage," Soidon said with what looked like a forlorn look. "I was only half right. I was indeed the first to pierce through the loose Rules, but that was not to my advantage – as the Lich I was, I mean."

"I saw fire, fire that stood on equal footing with the Olden Flame of the greatest Arch-Liches. It was Jiggorrhax, the Abiding Madness. He was my scourge and also my salvation. The Divine flames that blazed from him melted away half of the whole of Undeath that I had known to be my refuge for countless years. I was... purified, in a sense. It's a haunting memory but also one I find enlightening.

I can never forget that scalding heat that seemed to burn away half of what I was. Even though I was confident my phylactery would not burn away, I was also sure that with time, I would surely die. But I did not. I landed on Aigas, more than half of my powers gone. It was then, in those days, when mana turned to ash, that my journey back to humanity began."

Chapter 1179: Repented Lich (2)

"Humanity, ey?"

Skullius suddenly speaking caused a start.

Soidon nodded with a severe expression.

"Yes. Humanity. Every Lich was once a living thing before they submitted to the Eminence of Undeath. I... was a human once," he said, his chest rising proudly for some reason. "Having Undeath burned away... I still don't understand it even now... but life began to bubble through me again. Slowly...surely."

Skullius' eyes narrowed.

"Life energy?" he asked.

"Yes, life energy as you know it," Soidon confirmed, feeling emboldened by Skullius' growing interest. "It was not easy adjusting to what I was back then, but I had to acknowledge that I was changing. I lost control of all my undead – as I'm sure all the other Liches also did following the mending of the Rules. I had to adjust to my changing body. I couldn't call myself invincible anymore.

I couldn't discard my body as I could before, because of my phylactery. Over the millennia I've been here, it has merged – bonded, really – with my flesh."

Liches were beings that were capable of preserving the true essences of themselves within objects often kept away from their vessels or bodies – phylacteries. Phylacteries appeared in different forms, but they were the key to destroying Liches in general, though, when a Lich ascended to Divinity, they got more assured forms of existence.

Soidon had kept his phylactery with him. Living in Deadmanland among other Liches who occasionally waged war on each other made him hesitant to keep it sealed within his tower or granted territory.

Skullius' fingers twitched slightly. With the same unfazed expression, he asked:

"You mentioned that only half of your Undeath powers were blown apart. What of the rest? Do you still have ties to some of your Lich powers?"

Soidon nodded.

"Yes. I was surprised. Even though I've mostly shifted back to a human form, I still have Undeath residing within me. I didn't know – despite my revulsion at the sight of anything living – that Undeath and life energy could blend so well, almost as though they are two sides of the same coin.

The more I practised with my powers, the more I realised how I could still do some of the things I had the freedom of doing when I was an Arch-Lich," he said and he glanced back at Erlton. "If you are interested in seeing how—"

"Do you have access to Deadmanland?" Skullius cut across him.

"What?" Soidon said, a bit startled.

"Can you – with sufficient power given to you, that is – open a gateway to Deadmanland? I assume that is a privilege of Arch-Liches."

"Well, I..." Soidon hesitated. He noticed Erlton urging him from the corner of his eye. "I believe that question is better answered in show rather than tell. How about I show you where I'm at with that? I have tried re-creating a portal to Deadmanland with the resources here. I'm sure you would be interested in it."

Skullius didn't speak. At first, Soidon thought it was just a momentary pause, but when a minute passed in silence, he was compelled to emphasize his points once more.

"The fact that you have interest in Deadmanland tells me you desire to rid yourself of the curse you have. You are in some way bonded with the Lich who made you. That much has been clear to me for a while. I can show you, perhaps teach you everything I know in case you truly want to—"

"You are mistaken," Skullius said flatly over him. His fingers twitched again.

"What?" Soidon asked and Erlton tensed.

"I have no interest in going back to Deadmanland. I have no interest in Somanda. I have no interest in what you have to show me."

There was a rigid, convincing coldness in Skullius' voice. What he said was exactly what he meant.

This stunned Erlton and Soidon.

'Somanda?' the former thought with a bit of dread.

"What do you mean?" he said to Skullius. "Your soul... I can tell even now that it is incomplete. Do you not care to get the rest of it back? I can—"

But Soidon was forced to pause. He gaped as he saw something unusual happen to Skullius.

The Hybrid Luman's fingers jerked terribly and, in the next instant, his hand shot up toward his throat, seemingly intent on tearing through it!

Skullius casually caught it with his other hand, but his brows creased.

"Again? Give it a rest, Sila," he said testily.

Ashema behind him chuckled. He had seen this happen more than a few times in the last eight days. It was like Skullius was fighting himself.

The Hybrid Luman clicked his tongue.

While Sila giving up his soul for his sake had been superb for his growth into the Incandescent Stage, the unexpected result, where Sila's consciousness still remained, now as part of Skullius', body was rather dreadful. More than once, when Skullius wasn't expecting it, he'd find that one of his hands attempted to maim him.

Thankfully, however much control Sila had, it didn't seem to extend past Skullius' hands.

The Hybrid Luman cast his attention from his now relaxed hand and gazed blankly at Soidon again.

"As I said. I have no interest in whatever you think works best for me. I also don't have any intention of leaving this spot, you see. I'm afraid nothing you say or do will make me change my mind," he said.

Soidon was lost for words.

Skullius didn't seem to have much intrigue in him at all despite all that he had said, all that he had revealed.

"What is it that you are waiting for here? Is it something to do with your Labyrinth?" Erlton asked with a frown.

Skullius didn't answer immediately. He considered Erlton for ten seconds that might have ten minutes and then said:

"Someone rather interesting will be coming here shortly. Perhaps not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon. He has no choice. If he were the one who you" – he turned to Soidon with a growing, sinister grin – "were sharing your sob story with, perhaps he might have been immensely intrigued and engaging. Unfortunately, both of you won't get the chance to interact. My goal is him and his goal is me.

And in the end..."

A dark, disgusting presence wafted out of the Hybrid Luman.

"...only I will be left standing."

...

RRRRRRMBBBBBBLLLLL!

The world suddenly rumbled at that moment. It seemed to want to tilt and spill everything it bore on its plate, and there was a violent change in the weather from sunny and cool to dark and humid!

Skullius, Azila, Soidon and Erlton looked upward.

However, Ashema alone looked below.

He shrieked with glee.

"YEEEEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAWWWWW! FINALLY!" he cried jubilantly and his entire body was encased both in darkness and flying blood.

His figure grew to thrice in its original size, and the Carven rose into the sky, a demented look on his face, arms spread wide.

"LORD BORON IS HERE! MY MASTER IS HERE AT LAST!"

Chapter 1180: Boron's Rise (1)

As the rumbling of Aigas persisted, bringing the same foreboding experience as when it had occurred more than a week ago, following the end of the Premium Age Royale, the Carven sat by the wide portal which had once been the Extreme Formula – the seal that kept the Under and Aigas separate, restricting the fourth Deity, Boron.

A sombre atmosphere between the nineteen Carven, all ranked high and above the rest seemed to melt away the noise and leave only the catastrophic vibrations which acted as a prelude to what was to follow. All nineteen pairs of eyes looked at the channel leading below – under, really – with heavy expectation.

It was finally happening.

Among these Carven, one was more excited than the rest.

It did not show on her face, which looked as though it was made of black amethyst, but her heavily lashed eyes shone with a deeper ruby red glow than that of the others.

As this Carven sat, it wouldn't have been possible to guess that she was at least twenty-five meters tall, but both the dark lance in her hand, its tip stabbed into the ground, and the ferocious pressure she released to the surroundings, certainly suggested that even when discarding the matter of height, she was stood on a higher pedestals than her peers.

She was, after all, the Herald of Boron.

She had been awaiting Boron's rise, to finally become his vessel as he doled out his pent-up frustrations and hate on the surface.

It wouldn't be too long now.

"Where, pray tell, is that strange human? Should he not have been back by now? I assumed that since he played the greater role in releasing us, he might have felt honoured to be here, witnessing first hand the Lord's rise," one of the Carven said as he extricated his eyes from the portal and gazed at the Herald.

"I do not know. I share the same sentiment. He wasn't so foolish that he didn't recognise the destruction that would befall this world as a result of his actions. I would have thought he would have liked to make his presence and allegiance known to Lord Boron as soon as he appeared. He would be spared and even granted a place in our ranks.

Yet now..." the Herald said and she looked into the far corner, where a number of the Summoners Guissepo had gathered around Pelian were huddled.

It was clear – because of the looks in their eyes – that Guissepo's continued absence continued to instil dreadful doses of fear in them. They felt abandoned.

"What shall we do with these then? I feel that human will not return," another Carven said.

The Herald sank into thought.

"Nothing. We will keep them. They have uncanny powers that allow them to reach out to creatures outside Aigas. They even use the Abyss to do it. I believe they will be valuable to us. I have no doubts that Lord Boron will have greater ambitions than this sorry land and its seas," she then said.

The Carven around her agreed with deep grins.

The thought of Lord Boron having unfathomable goals that might take them farther than this world excited them.

After such a long time without being able prowl any further than the bounds of the limited Under, it was a genuinely exciting prospect to have a promise for greater sights; for greater heights.

That privilege was also likely to be granted to the strongest among the Carven, and nineteen of the lot of them made up the group seated here, waiting for their Lord's rise.

Seeing the looks on the faces of her fellow Carven, the Herald was urged to encourage them.

"When the Lord takes over my body, he will have memories of your names and deeds. He will certainly reward you better than the others. I assure it," she said and the eighteen others bowed in gratitude.

At that moment, it happened.

There was a blinding flash of light whose source was barely discernible to any of the Carven and then, before they all knew it, the Herald was lifted into the air.

She soared upward with a grace that suggested that, to the force behind her ascension, she weighed no more than the air.

Her dark body was straight as an arrow as it pierced through the clouds and only came to a halt after it had overcome their overwhelming mass. At this height, all that could be seen was the pretty white, fluffy cover below the open, untouched blue sky.

The Herald then convulsed and jerked.

Her body began to shatter, bursts of thin light flashing from the cracks made into her dark, stone skin. Her visage was finally vibrant with character, with emotion – her ruby red eyes bulging, her mouth opening wide. Her carved, stone hair went livid, flying in all directions animatedly.

Then, as though the pretty, rough textures of her body were merely a shell hiding a far more, profound, extraordinary beauty, they all fell away, making room for a pristine, starkly white being.

Unlike the Herald, this being compelled the clouds to scurry away as quickly as they could.

Unlike the Herald, this being's figure was five meters taller, and had a robust, masculine build.

Short hair was carved onto his being which still resembled some kind of stone – quite like marble – along with a thick, curly beard.

His eyes glimmered not with a ruby red glow, but an all-consuming obsidian hue. With them, he gazed around him with about as much curiosity as that of a new-born baby and then looked below.

He saw everything.

He felt everything.

How curious it all was.

After all this time... he was finally here.

He was finally free.

That pact he made with those other three so long ago was finally fulfilled.

It took quite a while, longer than he had expected, but all the same.

A subdued, mocking chuckle left his lips.

<They couldn't even wait for me?>

The disappointment was nearly palpable in the voice that came from him; it sounded as though it came in several different tones and from four different directions.

<You know they could not.>

An unwanted reply came to Boron right then, as the sky parted, cracking like a Cluster. A young, human woman crossed from it and floated before the massive Deity branded in glorious stone. Her gaze was unwavering, bold even, though painted with hints of sadness.

<Ah... Of course. It could only have been you they left behind, my dearest>