

## Undead 221

Chapter 221: Screwed Over: This...This...B! (1)

In the mind of a certain Discount Human, an analysis was beginning to weave itself, after all, Red Rage's intervention had only served to rejuvenate his resolve which had been shaken by Terian's strength.

He was still in hot soup, all things considered.

'Alright... calm down and think...' Skullius thought to himself after delivering a few lines to the people before him that lead them to narrow their eyes and think deeply on what he had said.

Cursed?

This was a new one.

What manner of story would this man weave now?

With a bit more thought, Skullius discovered a few things about Damilla's Divination. They were practically obvious.

What had shaken her was undoubtedly his Penetrator form which she had seen seemingly out of context within her mind. She wasn't able to tie it to Skullius.

She also didn't mention it being a skeleton, which meant even that was vague to her.

Perhaps she couldn't see it all, otherwise she probably would have said everything he did in detail.

Furthermore, her account seemed to be centralised around a single event, naturally, but extending to the events of the next day when Skullius had been reading the stolen books in his Penetrator form.

There were many things to consider, but the main thing of note which he was quite sure of, was that Damilla didn't know everything.

With that, a quick weave of lies was woven and spat. He had limited time but every ounce of his intelligence, he conjured everything he could think of.

"The curse that is upon me... summons the tall creature you saw in your... whatever that was... It appears anytime of day and then demands something from me. On that particular day when I burnt the library, it appeared suddenly, causing a panic and then demanded that I burn down the place or else, it would kill everyone I had associated with until now."

Deep suspicion and complete disbelief smothered the room.

Skullius' words were not believed in the slightest and he began to sweat profusely.

Of course, he hadn't expected to be believed so casually but such a reception made him nervous.

Damilla showed her disdain as clearly, she had already labelled Skullius as a member of a particularly infamous group according to the image she had seen.

"Hmph! So you expect us to believe that all this was because of some mysterious curse? Don't make me laugh! Even if it's true, you'd have to be charged for endangering the welfare of millions by being so careless!" Damilla said accusingly.

Terian had not yet formed an opinion but he was inclined to believe that Skullius was lying, as was Erkus.

Silrat on the other hand was amused by the tale.

Skullius wore a troubled expression as he weaved in some more stories to distort the subject. This was the best way to tell a lie.

He played his trump card, a mystery that he had had after roaming the streets of Inhone these few days. A truth for him and an unknown for others.

"I did try to get myself help but..." he paused and faked a sigh. "I was in Eofel a few days ago. The Green Neolists attacked when one of those shiny knights, a Paladin something they are called, was

escorting a priest. The whole city was in chaos but I helped with the situation along with the female Paladin whatever. Her name was Elita.

I think that was when I got the curse and it even affected her after we finished fighting the enemy."

"..."

Erkus turned more serious with this. This was not what he expected the young man to say.

Was this true?

"It's unwise to tell lies of such a scale, Festos, especially when they concern the Purity. You have even brought the identity of a Paladin Champion into your story," Terian said with a serious gaze.

"You are free to have... this kind woman do that thing again to check it out. She'll see that I am telling the truth," Skullius said with a resolute expression that still shook slightly at Terian's gaze.

That was it!

Even after living in this city for a few days, Skullius had not heard a single thing about the incident in Eofel, which had boggled his mind.

The only conjecture he had come to was that people here simply didn't know and he had placed the thought to the back of his mind, not knowing that he would be using this detail to try and save his life.

Erkus was mulling this over.

If such a serious event truly happened in Eofel, it wasn't outlandish for there to be no news that had reached Inhone or any of the nearer cities as Eofel was pretty much cut off from the usual networks because of the City lord's pride.

There wasn't even a Guilds Association branch there, which limited communication lines further.

Perhaps, this was actually true.

"If you can, please look into this," Erkus said as he turned to Damilla who had also wore an unsure expression after seeing Skullius' resolve.

Unbeknownst to them all, the Discount Human was betting on the fact that Damilla's 'sight' was somewhat obscure to the full detail. Even if she saw more clearly, what he had said was the truth.

The woman walked up to Skullius and gazed into his shaking eyes.

'A few days ago is it?' she thought as she laid her thumb on Skullius' forehead. She didn't ask Skullius for a specific time frame as she sought to look into other bits of him.

Her eyes turned white as she tried to anchor her powers towards a few days prior.

The first thing she saw when she slid through the bounds of time in Skullius, was a tall gremlin with freakishly long arms, then an obscure figure lying down seemingly broken into pieces.

'Is this a Cluster?' Damilla asked herself as she turned back the clock, seeing Skullius being carried by an armoured Knight, then a bunch of scrambles as the Discount Human seemed to be practising something in the night and then...

"Hmmm?" Damilla murmured to herself.

"What is it?" Terian asked.

"I see... I see, a woman. That armour she's wearing... it really does belong to the Paladin Champions..."

Erkus narrowed his eyes as he turned to Skullius who was frowning in discomfort from the tingles he felt from his soul.

With a foggy vignette that bound the borders of her vision, Damilla also saw a large figure with a dark armour battling the Paladin Champion and the same silver armoured Knight that had carried Skullius in choppy frames which made her frown with bits of sweat trickling down her brow.

'Dear Quintess! What is that monstrosity?!'

At the edge, she saw Skullius unfurl a beautiful scroll from where a deep red light shot and brought down the creature with a long arm from which other smaller ones protruded!

'He wasn't lying?' Damilla thought.

She hesitated as she kept trying to pry more information, pacing up the time to see if she could see what happened after the fight.

She saw the Paladin Champion start screaming and roiling on the ground pitifully, the vision she saw cutting on and off.

Skullius' face kept scrunched up as it seemed like this Divining was jabbing a little too deep at his soul.

Why was it even able to affect his soul?

Was that how it could derive other aspects of what the user sought to find?

Still, the Discount Human persisted on.

'Hasn't she seen all she needs to see? Even if she sees my Penetrator form, there is not much she can say now. Unless... if she goes back a few more steps and...!' Skullius gulped as he cut off this line of thought.

Damilla suddenly drew back her thumb from Skullius and faced him, her eyes returning to normal.

"What he said is true. About Eofel at least. There truly was a creature that he, a certain Knight and the Paladin Champion battled. Also, at the end, it really did seem like something happened to the Paladin," she said.

'Yes!' Skullius internally celebrated.

He might as well celebrate all the small victories right?

Erkus looked concerned. This was a big deal.

"There was also something else that I didn't understand..." Damilla as she directed her gaze to Skullius before asking with a bit of hostility in her voice. "As I was about to dig deeper, a naked young girl appeared in my vision. She seemed to be pale and cold, screaming at someone that... felt like you. How does this girl relate to you?"

Skullius' eyes once again widened as his mouth gaped open!

'WHAT?! NO! NO! WAIT! THAT DOESN'T EVEN MAKE ANY SENSE!' SOMEONE WHO FELT LIKE ME?'

This girl was appearing again?!

The expression on his face only served to make Damilla more suspicious as she drew in closer to him.

"Your face says much, Festos. Fine. I'll just look into it myself," Damilla declared as she hurriedly clutched his forehead and dove again.

This time, she put her back into it, as in her thoughts, she thought Skullius to not be the innocent individual he tried to portray himself as.

If he had been defiling children too...

Damilla's body blew with a ferocious might as Skullius then felt what had merely been jabs at his soul turn into murderous stabs that tormented him with excruciating pain!

"AHHHH!" Skullius yelled in pain.

Damilla kept a focused expression as her eyes turned white, ignoring his cries.

Then...

[An external force assaults your soul. Doom Factor 2 takes advantage. 12%]

...!

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...!

The moment Skullius saw the notification, he almost lost his mind.

The pain that called from his head momentarily stunned him and it was only after a full five seconds that he regained the ability to think!

12%?!

Doom Factor 2 had risen up again and Skullius knew that this pertained to soul damage which made him grimace and struggle!

'WHAT IS THIS... THIS... B...AAAAAH!' Skullius stammered as a certain word he wanted to say refused to surface!

The pain gushed through him like a heatwave but he couldn't struggle because of the firm hold of the flame shark!

Damilla's body blazed with more light as she enhanced her strength to see more clearly. She searched for anything more about this girl, feeling her powers dig deep into her victim!

She wanted to uncover it all instead of looking into snippets!

And with the more strength she applied...

[An external force assaults your soul. Doom Factor 2 takes advantage. 14%]

...!

"STOP IT!" Skullius barked out loud at Damilla who simply ignored.

Terian narrowed his gaze.

Divining would sometimes connect to the soul of the victim to gain a clearer image as it was a better anchor than the flesh body. This was why Skullius felt the prickling sensations at his soul.

Gazing at specific points was the way in which Divining was used on normal people, as excessive force could potentially damage the victim.

Therefore, limiting their reach was all in the name of safety.

The old man knew exactly how much Skullius was suffering but the Discount Human's reaction seemed a bit... excessive.

A desperation was noticeable in his eyes as if there was a specific doom he could feel at the moment, which made him even more curious in this character.

None of them in the room believed Skullius' account about the curse entirely, but the information about Eofel which had been verified spoke up for the Discount Human.

Skullius' eyes shot towards Damilla whose finger remained on his forehead and he bellowed in anger and pain as he gnashed his teeth.

The pain seemed to soar by a few notches, reaching another stage soon enough.

[...17%]

"STOP IT! YOU'LL ... GET ME KILLED!" Skullius roared as saliva spat from his mouth.

"That's enough, Damilla," Terian commanded.

The Diviner reluctantly stopped, her vicious energy dying down as she then breathed out a sigh and removed her thumb from Skullius and looked at him with disdain.

The pain that shot through Skullius didn't recede.

His vision started to crack, splitting as if it had been slashed apart by a sword multiple times and what followed was a distorted image where parts of the room were as they were before while the others looked like they were covered in snow!

'This again!' Skullius fumed in his mind.

Things were getting messed up.

The 10% mark had screwed him over hard and just now, he had nearly reached 20% which he didn't doubt held much more surprises that he didn't even wish to think about.

This was all thanks to that... that...BITCH!

The word finally came to Skullius and he didn't bother to question where it had come from or what it was!

It had been a while since he had truly felt so angry with someone!

So infuriated!

The last two people he hated that much were Dezrael who challenged his fundamental ideals and choice, as well as the first female he had met this this world, Denille.

Skullius' eyes locked onto Damilla who drew back and stood beside Terian as she looked at Skullius with a stubborn gaze.

Terian noticed the tension and sighed.

He then turned to Erkus who nodded at him and faced Skullius.

"Your account has brought to our knowledge information that we probably wouldn't have known for a while. I'm glad you shared it. However, your other statement about having this...creature that follows you around hasn't yet or rather, doesn't justify your acts of genocide, whether you were coerced or did it of your own free will," he said.

Skullius turned to Erkus with a hard gaze. He couldn't even produce the words to add to his statement as the pain and the split vision made it very hard for him to continue as per normal.

"If you were any other individual with even the slightest bit less of value, I would have ordered your execution but.. for the time being, I'll have you imprisoned for further questioning and verification," Erkus said.

"He has quite the amount of resources in his spatial storage ring too. Perhaps we can gather more from them," Damilla advised.

"That's right," Terian said as with the coil of his index. He had obviously noticed that Skullius had a spatial storage ring before.

Skullius felt his finger move, the second ring that was supposed to belong to Red Rage sliding off!

It flew through the flames and reached Terian who analysed it with interest.

Skullius hung his head as he gnashed his teeth.

Red Rage's actions were showing their fruits.

The hidden ring wasn't noticed at all.

Still, though, even with this, Skullius didn't feel much better as he was still rattled with the current happenings.

His vision started to get murky, his eyes drooping as a deadly sense of heaviness assaulted him.

'Dam..n... it....' he thought before his vision turned dark.

Terian's blazing energy receded, the flames in the room dying down.

He walked up to Skullius and laid his hand on the unconscious Discount Human's forehead, his mana gushing into the young man.

It only took a few seconds before he retrieved his hand and faced Damilla.

"Hmmm. I'm unsure if you're the one who put the boy's soul in such a state, but whatever the reason, Festos will need time to recover before you do anymore of your Divining on him," said Terian with a warning glance.

"Fine," said Damilla with a harrumph.

"Did you find anything new?"

"<Sigh>. Unfortunately no. No matter how much effort I put, I can't seem to find out what's most important. Worse yet, the images keep getting cut. Something powerful is interfering. Surely you see how shady this man is.

Especially when we account for the issue with this girl I saw..."

"We still don't know the full story," said Terian. "Let's wait until then."

"Where should Festos be imprisoned? If you consider him an indispensable individual despite the atrocity he has committed, I doubt you will throw him in a lowly jail in the city," the old man said as he turned to the City Lord.

Erkus shook his head.

"No. I will have special prison erected for him."

"If I may interject," Silrat finally spoke, the smile he had on growing wider. "I have a better recommendation when it comes to this man."

Chapter 223: A Smiling Saviour?

"Uh..." the young man opened his eyes with a groan.

He found himself feeling incredibly heavy, his cosmetic flesh weighing him down like... heavy weights.

He lay on the cold floor of a small room that had plain dark walls which made it clear that he was a captive.

As he looked at himself, he saw that nothing had changed, much to his relief.

He had simply been dumped here after he went unconscious.

Skullius looked ahead and saw not another wall but closely stacked iron bars that restricted both entry and exit. They had a silver lustre with glowing runes on their surfaces that whispered of mystery.

"Great," he said to himself as he tried to stand.

The tumultuous pain he had felt before had stopped and now, he could see everything without the mysterious divide.

"That damn woman!" Skullius remembered who had caused this whole ordeal that he was now left with.

A full 17% in Doom Factor 2.

How had she been able to see the young girl that always seemed to appear whenever he was assaulted by soul damage anyway?

That was different from an actual occurrence in his life, right?

Skullius was under the impression that Diviners could only see his actions in the real world. Not memories or illusions he experienced.

Perhaps that was a wrong view.

'Could she have accessed my soul and seen the girl from there? HNGH!' Skullius grumbled in rage.

Is this what his victims felt like when he used [Basic Evil Invasion] on them?

If it was... that still didn't mean he would stop using the skill. What he had experienced was too much of an invasion, regardless of how hypocritical that sounded.

The Discount Human sat up straight and checked the full condition of his body.

Fortunately, he could manipulate mana freely now contrary to his expectations. His white core surged and coughed up gusts of mana without any problems.

'I guess I'm not that much of a threat that they would cut off my mana. And sure enough, I guess against that old man alone...' Skullius said while thinking of Terian in his head.

Indeed. A battle between him and that guy probably wouldn't last even ten seconds.

'What now, though? Are they just going to keep me here forever?' Skullius thought.

Suddenly, a set of footsteps echoed from outside the room and soon, a familiar face emerged with a sly smile on its face.

"I never would have figured that you were that much of a menace, kid," the individual behind the bars said.

When Skullius saw this individual, he sighed helplessly.

"Jac..."

The burly man still donned his large armour as he went on to lean against the walls and looked down at Skullius who sat down in his cage through the iron bars.

Skullius walked over to the bars to talk to Jac at closer proximity but he suddenly felt all his strength leave his body the closer he got to the bars.

THUD!

The Discount Human fell flat on his face in shock, not knowing what had hit him. He glared at Jac from his low position while gnashing his teeth.

"Woo, there. This isn't a simple cell you're stuck in. You'll lose your strength because of the runes etched on these bars, you know. I don't know the full story behind you but if you look at me like that I might just label you a serial killer for real."

"Like I care what you call me," Skullius said as he turned his face to the side.

"Come on, don't say that. I put in some effort to really figure if it was you they were talking about, you know? It really hurt me when I had to tell them you had returned from your mission."

At first, Skullius didn't fully take in what Jac said but he then turned to the man who kept his sly smile.

"What?" he asked with a disgruntled expression.

"Oh. You were under the impression that you were not under suspicion already? I see. Their acting must have been convincing then."

Skullius frowned.

What was this man trying to say?

Those guys already had some evidence that tied him as the one who burnt the library before this?

"Apparently, your identity as the new Mage and as the only living suspect who witnessed the main details of the incident at the Collge of the Esteemed clashed, causing Silrat and the city lord to investigate you.

Naturally, as the one who did the evaluation for your application, I was interrogated on your abilities without being told the full context along with anyone else who had seen you in action. A certain redhead you know was also interrogated the moment she returned."

"Stylla?!" Skullius exclaimed.

"Bingo!"

Dammit! Stylla had seen the [Revenant Flames Of Ecstasy] multiple times. That was probably the only thing that his identity as the Mage and as the unknown criminal shared!

Naturally, Stylla would have described his abilities to Terian and Damilla as without them telling her that he was being suspected of a crime, she didn't think it was a bad thing to share his strength and promote him.

"Great.." Skullius beat himself up.

It didn't seem like the mini-council arranged for him was made to simply punish him from the start, but to verify if it really was him.

Now Skullius understood why Damilla was so extra.

She probably already believed that he did it after questioning everyone they did.

"My poor little girl had even dropped off some coin for you as your share for the whole party up. I'd hate to be in your shoes right," Jac said as he tossed a coin pouch up and down.

Another set of footsteps echoed, with another face that Skullius was familiar with appearing.

It was Silrat.

He wore a slight smile as always, a he then went on to signal for Jac to leave, the bulky man turning to walk away.

"I'm glad you seem to be more alive than dead. I reckoned taking so much soul damage would be exceedingly painful but you're powering through it without much of a problem," Silrat said while his eyes roamed all over Skullius.

"..."

The Discount Human rendered no response as he simply kept looking at the man with rage-filled eyes.

"I understand that you are not happy with your current circumstances but believe me, they are much better than the alternatives. I arranged this set-up in order to keep you close. I see value in a man like you. If you play your cards right, I can help you walk away scot-free, with a charge of course."

"And I'm supposed to believe you after what you just put me through?" Skullius asked as he squirmed backwards, with the more distance he put between himself and the bars granting him more of his strength back.

"Believe it or not, I had a different perspective but Erkus and those Energy Formers have a righteous standard about them cultivated by their positions as the Capital service. Chivalry, honour, profound morals and such. I have to play along with my meagre position. I am different. I follow profit and gains. That's what a mercenary does, is it not?"

If this organisation was based on benevolence alone it wouldn't have lasted this long."

Skullius thought through the man's words.

When Skullius thought about Jac, he didn't see a kind soul, to be honest.

As an example of a mercenary, Jac was outstanding.

Silrat's words made sense but Skullius' will of distrust forced him to not be swayed so easily.

"You have a few lives lost to your name and an entire College that will want to wring your neck for the damage you caused. If I had let Erkus have you, you'd be in a rather precarious situation. Perhaps the most pressing thing I should mention is that while you're being exempt from Divining right now, it will be brought up again if you refuse to comply.

To that end, I think you should work with me as I will rely on no such means other than diplomatic dialogue. At the very least give me some more detail to work with, after all, your account is still incomplete."

Silrat had had a long discussion with Erkus about giving him up to the custody of the Guilds Association and he would get more information from the Mage.

Skullius remained silent for a while.

His thoughts whirled as he considered these words from all angles of thought.

In all truth, spilling the beans would probably be a double-edged sword. Equal proportions of either effect could happen.

However, when he thought about Damilla going all psycho with her Divination on him again...

He already intended on sharing this half-lie half-truth anyway.

"What would you like to know?"

Silrat grinned.

"For starters. You mentioned the curse that follows you and that peculiar creature that appears. Please describe what it does in detail."

Chapter 224: Sweet Deal!

A lengthy explanation finally concluded to which Silrat's face had turned into a few different expressions of distraught throughout.

He honestly hadn't expected to hear such a tale. The fact that there were so many victims already was rather disturbing (Skullius lied) with the case of the Paladin Champion offering her help to Skullius causing her to keel over shocking him to his core.

When he had heard this account before, he had pictured something different.

Killing a Paladin Champion wasn't a joke. After all, they were peak fighting forces that were rarely deployed.

Ultimately, his opinion over this curse that Skullius described was... very concerning.

The details were rather specific but that made it even more menacing as the effects, as explained by Skullius, seemed to be sure-fire and extremely deadly even to victims at higher stages of power.

"So... you mean to tell me that everyone who helps you, with only your benefit in mind, will all die without exception?" Silrat asked with a troubled expression.

"Yes," Skullius gave a succinct reply.

"And this creature you mentioned, is the one that causes this if you do not heed its instructions?"

"Yes."

"I see. That is rather troublesome."

Silrat had begun to wonder if he would fall to the curse since he had the intent to assist Skullius but the Discount Human had reassured him that obviously this wasn't true as both parties were privy to the fact that they were in for their own benefit.

Silrat had made it clear that his help required something in return.

"I can now understand why you resorted to such drastic actions without batting an eyelid if this is what you're dealing with. However, you must understand that your follow-up feat of lying to Terian and Damilla back then has sowed some seeds of distrust to your later actions. The ways in which I can help you are limited, especially when it comes to the City Lord's authority.

I would have to use external factors... like a particular talented young man," said Silrat as he stroked his chin.

'Huh?' Skullius raised a brow in confusion.

Who would that be?

Silrat shook his head lightly as if dispelling his current thoughts.

"Now. Before we move on to the next item of discussion, I would like to know one last thing. How did you come to learn magecraft?"

"Huh?"

"I mean to say that I have a fair share of experience with Mages and all of them, despite having quirky personalities and odd behaviours, they tend to have vast wells of knowledge along with a stable mana core of blue or higher that already has a Reflective Sigil Matrix. You lack both of these things. Terian noticed and so did I.

Which is why I ask, how did you come to learn Magecraft without the basics?"

Skullius was utterly confused.

Reflective what?

Vast wells of knowledge?

Well...

"Hmmm," Silrat hummed as a big grin etched itself deeper into his face. "You're a natural Mage aren't you?"

Skullius was stunned.

That was one way to put it.

All things considered, he really was a natural Mage... with a cheat that allowed him to learn skills more than 10 times faster than everyone else and more.

There was no way he could pose as a true Mage under experienced gazes it seemed.

Just how many requirements were needed for one to become a Mage?

"Uhm... yes?"

"Ha! I knew it! You're the catch of the century! I'm glad I battled those fools to have you under my custody! To think they'd let you go after having assumed this fact!" Silrat exclaimed.

Indeed, Terian had actually thought about bringing Skullius under his wing if the latter was proven to be innocent. The reason he had entertained this thought was because he had seen that Skullius had but a mere white core and a crude foundation which when combined still worked for him to do some impressive things.

However, having a disciple who was convicted of multiple crimes, including murder would be a stain on his record.

'This is a strange situation...' Skullius thought.

He was entertaining the idea of potentially partnering with Silrat, IF, what the man needed him for wasn't too outlandish because he had no choice.

It was either that or death by Doom Factor 2 at the hands of that... that...bitch...yes, bitch, Damilla.

The choice was relatively easy.

"What exactly do you want from me exactly?" Skullius asked.

"In all truth, there is a wide variety of benefits that come with nurturing someone like you. One is to have you owe me big time while giving you enough resources to consolidate your strength as a Mage. Or I could simply send you off to a big city with a larger branch of the Guilds Association which would also bear its own perks for me including protection from the repercussions of your crimes.

Those are only the more obvious benefits. I am yet to decide," Silrat replied as he stroked his hands like a villain.

"Alright. And what do I get?"

"I can tell you what you can't get, well.. that's easier to identify. Freedom is out of the picture for now, even though I'll give you a sufficient amount of privacy with no surveillance. That will be a different situation when the Capital service goons come to question you though."

Only freedom was barred.

This meant that Skullius could ask for anything else?

That was quite a heavy declaration.

"I always make do on my promises. This isn't a charity, young man. Its a trade. I can even arrange for you to get your money's worth with the lessons you had paid for at the College of Battle Arts. You could continue with your sword lessons, as you had before... weird as that may be for someone like you."

"Oh... that doesn't sound bad at all. But still... how will you keep your word?" Skullius asked.

"What better way than the old fashioned one?" Silrat said as he smiled.

"A Tie of Exchange of course."

Chapter 225: Prospects For A Bright Future

The Tie of Exchange.

An old technique which was now used to get into contracts where loyalty and trust were not guaranteed.

Its practise was no longer common in Feinheath or rather in Pelian because of the extreme nature of the punishment for not keeping your end of the bargain as the instigator.

The Tie of Exchange was said to originate from the giants, being a technique first created with the intention of assuring one's life in a disadvantageous situation by offering to give something valuable to the opposite party.

The user of the Tie of Exchange was usually the one with much to lose as after giving up something of theirs to the opposite party, in some cases, they could be summoned for inquiries on delivery of agreed upon items while the opposite party was to ensure that they kept their end of the deal which was usually something meagre.

Why this technique was abandoned was because it hailed from the crust of Aigas. From the very body of the Deity Quintess which meant that it had an immense authority.

The punishment that resulted was said to be extremely odd and dangerous but the records never specified what it was.

The human records at least.

Skullius nodded to Silrat's words as he remembered that he had one Tie of Exchange pending as well, with Sause's fingernail still being in his storage.

'I should probably check in with that guy soon,' he thought.

"Alright, seeing as you have no problems with it, let us first stipulate the terms in detail," Silrat said as he removed a lock of his crushed garnet coloured hair and held it towards Skullius behind the bars.

The Discount Human was confused by this gesture.

Sauce had to remove his fingernail, so why did this guy just use his hair?

"From you, I require your services for missions pertaining to the Guilds Association as well as your continued and permanent allegiance. You cannot become tied in any permanent contracts outside of the Association and are barred from associating with enemies as well as potential enemies of the organisation.

All this, is in exchange for any demands that are within my means and those of the Association, excluding freedom," Silrat declared, his satin grey eyes gleaming with enthusiasm.

The middle aged man had a certain confidence about him that rattled Skullius as if he felt that everything was in his control.

'Damn, bro,' Skullius thought. 'Allegiance. That doesn't feel good at all. I guess this is where this guy really planned to hook me in. I'll forever be a piece he can call to his aid if I agree to this...'  
Skullius thought.

He gazed at Silrat, the man wearing a cheery smile that emphasised that the allegiance part was probably non-negotiable, which was fair.

Skullius had no other choice. This was the most leniency he could get and it came with perks.

As someone who worked under the Association, he was also bound to be rewarded handsomely, right?

Fantastic.

Solo events were going to be problematic in the future.

Or not, since he had told Silrat about the curse.

He probably couldn't change the fiber details as the gleam in Silrat's eyes told him much about the value he placed on him. The fact that he was using a ToE was also proof enough.

Sigh.

"Fine," Skullius said.

This felt weird.

He felt like he had met a similar circumstance and outright refused similar conditions in favour of acting alone. The hard way.

Now, it had changed.

He was gambling on this chance.

On the bright side, he would abuse this privilege.

"I agree to those terms. As for what I want. I want knowledge and power. Any resource that has basic and advanced knowledge. I want it. From books, to Enriching gems to equipment and other things you know.

I also want special treatment that others don't get, like specifying how I move for certain missions you want."

"How ambitious," said Silrat with a cunning smile. "Of course I agree to these, however, we have a limited supply because of the mass usage and trade that is going on because of the mass appearance of Clusters and the political situation. I must also stress that Inhone is a flawed template of a city.

Security, wealth and such are lackluster compared to other cities and as a result, the same is true for this branch of the Guilds Association. We lack of lot of things that the other branches have but rest assured, I will deliver."

"The quantity in terms of Enriching gems might be really low but I do have a few things that you might like from equipment and treasures."

"Treasures?!" Skullius asked with an excited voice. He had read about natural treasures and was really interested in them.

"Yes. Before you get to enjoy our collection, let's finalise the Tie of Exchange."

"I agree to the terms if you full agree to mine," Skullius said.

As he said so, a notification appeared, confirming that the deed was done.

~~~

[Tie of Exchange: Lock of hair from Silrat Veins]

The individual known as Silrat Veins has pledged a lock of hair as a medium for the exchange. He is the prime attendant and is bound to not break his word after offering it.

With this item, the lesser attendant CANNOT summon Silrat to pay the favour he owes for the exchange.

The individual Festos Dawn is yet to pledge anything as a medium of exchange. Would you like to pledge?

~~~

Silrat waved his hand, the runes on the bars dimming somewhat.

He then passed on the lock of hair to Skullius who took it and injected mana into it.

With that, Skullius felt himself tied to the lock of hair which he held closely.

He wouldn't want to store it in his ring and let Silrat know that he had another storage space.

'Ah... so he really does know about the Tie of Exchange. Curious,' thought Silrat. It was strange for someone who demonstrated such a lack of knowledge on basics to know something so old and uncommon.

He put this thought to the back of his mind though and focused his mind onto something else.

"With that, I will deliver the things you requested and prepare to have a brutal struggle with Erkus when he finds out about the support I'll be giving you," Silrat said as turned to leave.

He stopped however and turned back to Skullius.

"By the way, it's suspected that you are in possession of a bunch of books from the College. Where did you put them?"

"Ah... that's hard to explain and I'd rather not talk about it. The Tie of Exchange doesn't require me to be entirely truthful right?" Skullius replied.

Silrat flashed a toothy smile.

"Indeed. Very well. I'll make it up then. Those two Energy Formers won't be bothering you for a few days after I have given my report. There's no surveillance here so feel free to do what you want."

Silrat then left, Skullius being left to the silence where he subconsciously breathed out and slumped down.

'I hope that doesn't come back to bite me too much,' he thought.

If there was something that made him suspicious, it would be the fact that this ToE was different from the one he engaged with Sause.

For one thing, he couldn't summon Silrat anytime he wanted.

Was there some loophole he was unaware of?

Skullius didn't know. He waited for a few minutes and tried to verify if he really wasn't being watched.

Unfortunately it was hard to verify this and he eventually gave up. He couldn't just sit on his butt and waste time anyway.

He pulled up his status and reviewed his Task.

~~~

Exp: 64,000/64,000

Eighth Task: Elevated any class skill to the next Tier

~~~

"That should be fairly easy," Skullius said. "And since I have all this free time, I might as well finally check out what [Evil Darkness] can do now and then finish the Task by evolving [Basic Evil Production]."

Skullius immediately delved deep within as his mana surged, bits of darkness starting to leak out slowly...

Chapter 226: Templates For Absurd Growth!

At the moment when a darkness that seemed too dark to belong in this world appeared, Skullius was further reminded that this power he had taken from the Labyrinth of the Yoke wasn't ordinary in the slightest.

The conjecture about where the power had come from struck his mind again as he recalled from Elita's narration back then.

Apparently, Fulgardt claimed that this power of his came from a being who predated the Deities. A being who made presumably even made them and knew of their pasts.

Was this true?

Skullius wasn't that familiar with much about the Deities because of his restriction from interacting with everything Blessing oriented from the Binds of Fukal.

Yet, all this was but a thought as when the new [Evil Darkness] surged and covered him, Skullius felt and saw a huge difference between this and the darkness he had used before.

A deep set feeling of comfort overwhelmed him in the darkness as he felt free, as if his binds and limits were loosened, his being sinking into the depths of a predetermined pride!

No sound came through from the outside, which first shocked him but when he willed to hear what was happening outside, he felt the dull sounds lost in the silence reach his ear!

He could see what was outside the cloud of darkness he had conjured but with how dark it was, he was sure that this wasn't true for anyone looking from the outside.

As the [Evil Darkness] spread, Skullius saw that everywhere it went, inches around it there would be discoloured spaces, clear images turning into disfigured lines as if reality itself was being disturbed by the existence of the darkness!

'Woow.... this does seem like something I'll enjoy using,' Skullius thought as he stood up within the encasing of darkness.

He wanted to see if there were any notable boosts to the basic functions of the cloud of darkness.

What was different, functionally speaking?

Skullius focused intently and raised his leg to stomp on the ground with all his might!

BOOM!

A thunderous noise rocked the room as Skullius foot shot down and clashed with the cold floor! A low rumble was emitted, with bits of dust falling from above!

Within a fraction of a second, Skullius had felt the ripples of darkness around him rush to his leg before it met the floor, amplifying his strength!

Another loud reverberation rushed from where Skullius stomped after the initial shock, which was quite odd.

Skullius' eyes widened in surprise.

That wasn't right.

This room was definitely fortified with some weird stuff he didn't know as he was assumed to be a criminal. The Discount Human was sure that he wouldn't be able to make even a small impact with his 150 points of strength!

It was impossible!

Just how much of a boost was he granted by this darkness?!

On top of this, there was a second impact that came after the first when he stomped!

He cocked his hand back and threw it forward in a punch, his fist darting forward in a quick motion that barely registered in his own vision!

FSSH!

He merely saw a light flash ahead without leaving much of a trace after and then...

FSHHHSHHHH!

Another light darted from where he punched, blitzing through the darkness!

Skullius shuddered in excitement.

There really was double impact with every move he made in the darkness!

And top of this, the physical enhancement he noticed to his speed and strength...!

If he was to estimate how much he was augmented by the darkness, then it would be by roughly 80% at a conservative estimate!

This was a massive improvement from the 15% he had enjoyed initially!

And this was just the basics!

Skullius didn't even know how to test the other functions as well as the supposed true nature of [Evil Darkness] that had been partially awakened.

For now, he was very satisfied with this as he knew that there was probably more that he would discover when he went in-depth during the following days.

He had had a basic template for his power growth prior to the party up with Stylla.

First was to master the thing he wished to do with [Evil Darkness]. A specific skill he wanted to create.

Second, was to take back [Demion's Dance] from HammerDown and supplement the technique side of his growth because of what the skill imbedded in the sword could do.

The last item came to him just hours before when he was in the Association's building.

To defend himself, Skullius had combined [Mana Shield] and [Mana Force] into a quick but powerful attack which knocked that blabbermouth from the EdgeKings Guild who had attacked him on his ass.

Thoughts on building up on this had already started to travel in his mind when he saw the results, though then interrupted by what happened next.

He now planned to add other skills like [Great Rush], [Brawn] and [Quick Strike] to the mix.

Maybe, just like with [Skill Amalgamation], he could do that through repetition, combining these skills into something ridiculous!

It would be a lot of work as he would want to level up and possibly evolve some of the skills but still, it would definitely be worth it.

"Heh. Now, let me finally give this my time," Skullius said. He had neglected it for too long and just like he had thought about, it was time to invest in it.

"Basic Light Production!" Skullius called, a small burst of golden-white light beginning to gather in his hand. It was relatively weak and extraordinarily hard to manipulate.

"<Sigh>. It's been a long time since I even tried to manipulate [Just Light]. Thankfully, I have a loophole that I will be abusing for the next few days," Skullius said as he thought about what how he would be cheating after raising [Basic Evil Production] up a Tier with this supposed loophole.

This loophole was...

"Crude World Projection!"

Skullius felt himself rise, a sense of omnipotence gushing with his activation of this aspect of the Fruit of World Myths!

Shockingly, when he appeared in his dark form, it wasn't an undetailed floating humanoid with thick, rising swirls of darkness, but a well-shaped robust human body!

It was taller than his Discount Human body, but it did have smooth features and vague outlines of facial muscles and organs.

There were no longer any rising swirls of darkness and this figure was a few shades lighter.

"This feels different," Skullius said, his vision in the signature black, grey white.

Without wasting any more time, Skullius focused on the small flash of light he had conjured with [Basic Light Production], stretching his hand over as he started trying to give it a more robust form like he usually did with darkness.

The light started flickering, alternating between a bright shade and a dull one but its quantity remained the same.

The room lit up and darkened multiple times as Skullius found to his frustration, that this thing wasn't following his will!

'Why isn't it working? I thought that it would bend to me like [Evil Darkness]! I even got a higher affinity when I used [Crude World Projection] for the first time!' Skullius thought.

After a full two minutes of wrestling with the light, Skullius finally came to a realisation.

'Oh.. now that I think about it, I don't have a skill that allows me to manipulate [Just Light], like [Basic Evil Weaving]. But why?'

This detail strained the Discount Human's mind until he decided to return to his body.

When he settled, he found that he wasn't fatigued at all. Feeling as fresh as when he decided to dive out.

'Then I guess for now I should focus on [Just Light Production] until I figure out how to manipulate it properly,' Skullius decided.

With this plot for the future set, Skullius turned back to practicing with his [Basic Evil Production] so as to complete the Task ahead of him.

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Next day.

The Discount Human couldn't tell the time since he was in the dark and gloomy space of the cell, however, he didn't complain.

He had gotten some food to replenish his needy flesh while he ground his skills.

He had a intriguing grind, watching the beautiful bursts of darkness that had explosively increased in quantity as he got close to raising [Basic Evil Production] to the next Tier.

Some hours ago, he had finally managed to evolve the skill and it became [Advanced Evil Production]!

The Discount Human had found the amount of darkness he could produce could now cover a radius of almost eight meters with only two fifths of his total mana!

This was a huge improvement and when he thought about utilising it the same way he did before, with restricting opponents while bolstering his physical capabilities, he could only grin.

He had also levelled up, reaching level 8, as only two Tasks remained on top of a Trial before he reached the Advancement Stage.

Now, the Discount Human was inserting his mana into a spatial storage that he had received a few minutes ago, peeking at the objects within.

Within it, was something that made Skullius grin even further.

"Heh heh! Not bad. Not bad at all," he said.

Four hundred and thirty-two Enriching gems sat within the ring, most of them being purple-red while forty of them were completely red!

Red!

The purple gems increased constitution by 0.1 while the purple-red ones increased it by 0.5. Skullius couldn't wait to see what value he would get from the red gems was.

Generally, when the value for constitution reached 100, an increase would then happen.

What were the limits for gems other than purple were. Where they the same?

"I can't wait to see how much I can grow with all this," Skullius said.

Before he did anything else, he heard a step of footsteps come from the side and he tensed up.

He looked up and a face he hadn't expected to see appeared, making him relax.

A particularly annoyed looking woman stood, staring down at him as he sat down.

It was Oliviana.

Her short stature with her large dark eyes made the entire ordeal look comical as she didn't have to look too low to gaze at the Discount Human.

"I can't believe I still have to tutor you even in this state," she said with a frown.

"I'm getting my money's worth," Skullius said with a sly smile, courtesy of Jac.

'Silrat sure works fast,' Skullius thought. He hadn't expected that matter to be dealt with so quickly and it even looked like Oliviana knew his situation.

How the heck was she convinced to still work with him?

"Yeah, well... it's just a job, I guess. Get off your ass and let's go. You will be having me for more than half the day each day," Oliviana said as she turned, her slender body covered in leather armour seemingly teasing Skullius. "I won't be going easy on you."

"Wouldn't have it any other way," Skullius said as bits of darkness streamed from his auburn hair. The perfect candidate for him to test out some of his templates as well as evolve his skills had arrived...

Chapter 227: Feinheath Over Seven Days (1)

Seven days later.

It finally happened!

Within the first half of this seven-day stretch of time, the announcement was finally made as to what the final decision was pertaining to the discussions between the Pelian Royal Family and the Sif High Family.

A notice was plastered in every major city mentioning that henceforth, Opungale was in a close-knit relationship with Pelian, grand ties which would lead to great things already in motion!

This news rocked the entirety of Feinheath in many diffident ways.

Shock, rage, sadness, joy and anxiety.

From here on out, the Sif could move into Pelian and establish their own permanent settlements while bringing with them their culture and knowledge. The same was true for the citizens of Pelian but most didn't see this as a possibility worth mentioning.

Granted, there had always been peace between Feinheath and Opungale with visits from Sif merchants and others from different lines of work but nothing too obvious. This move by the Pelian Royal Family, however, was about to change this.

To some, seeing their home flooded with long-eared humanoids was a huge blow while to some it wasn't all that bad.

A certain community concurred.

Debates were had between many groups on this topic as each had their own opinions.

The talks for this had concluded way before the long wait that many had to endure but the timing for the release of this news was probably strategic.

It was no secret that the Pelian Royal Family were an unorthodox ruling party who preferred to stay hidden and have little to no interaction with their kingdom, but they were no fools. At least logically speaking

They probably wanted to delay the chaos as best as they could, probably long enough for their backup strategies against the repercussions that would inevitably follow were settled.

A common sentiment among the masses was that the Royal Family should have brought to light how demeaning the Sif were even in the discussions.

Word somehow got around that it was not someone of equal status to the King and Queen who came to discuss the terms, but rather one of the daughters of the High Family, the ruling entity in Opungale!

Such disrespect!

It enraged the masses, but the Pelian Royal Family had not even considered or responded to this any way, shape or form.

What was agreed upon in these diplomatic talks? No one knew.

What would the benefits for the humans in Pelian be? No one knew.

Yet, people found their minds shifting to other perilous consequences of this bold action.

Those who had heard Erlton the Reader's ballad were now turning to the hills beyond the horizon, where a fearsome nation stood.

A nation that believed in upholding racial honour and detaching from the dependence on other races.

What would be their next move?

War.

This was everyone's first thought.

That was the most likely thing to rise from this.

And worse yet, what of Emeradis. How would they respond?

They were a relatively silent nation that rarely did anything that could be pegged as impactful, keeping to themselves if matters concerning trade were not involved.

It was possible for all the services and goods Pelian enjoyed to be cut off instantly by these two nations as a first portion of the torment that would ensue.

However, no one knew for sure.

As if this wasn't news enough, another shocking reveal rocked the continent of Feinheath a day later.

Clusters.

They appeared en masse in all three of the countries, much of them being the lower ranked ones but higher and more dangerous versions popping up from time to time!

Village heads, Town leaders, City Lords and Governors gathered around to discuss the best courses of action in protecting the lives under their jurisdictions and dealing with the stronger Clusters.

The world seemed too busy for a time as despaired thoughts occupied the minds of the most common of civilians to the strongest of warriors.

Smaller stories plagued the ears of the lot, including those of the incidents in the Isise and the one in Eofel which were tracked to be caused by the same notorious group that many had dismissed over the years.

The Green Neolists.

When had they become a threat? What motivated them to go from being a side project for the Capital Service to deal with, to a national threat that even the Purity had to respond to as the news of the defeat and kidnapping of one of the top five Paladin Champions was released.

So many stories.

So much to wrap the head around.

What in the world was going on in this continent?

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Maqi.

A thin man stood still while taking in relaxed breaths as he enjoyed the scene around him.

Thousands of corpses lay around him in a vast space that spanned on for miles, yet each spot of the reddish ground was covered by the body of a dead beast that still dripped of fresh blood.

Giant monsters with a flabby flesh covered by a greenish, rough layer of skin, four thick limbs being located under their bulk lay sprawled in silent death, their four meter tall carcasses laying lifelessly on the ground.

A large one had just breathed its last, its thirty meter tall body not doing anything to allow it to last more than five seconds against the thin man before it.

This man donned nothing on his upper body but below, a pair of dark pants with furry edges that tickled his toned abs denoting their design fashioned from a rather hairy creature along with a small painted skull as some kind of buckle at the centre top part covered him with a tight fit.

His robust muscles showed despite his stature being thin and over his skin, continuous pulses of rings made of illusory light ran underneath. It looked like his skin was akin to that of a chameleon as one could get lost in this constant whirl of rings that originated from the skin on his chest and outwards.

The sheer might being released from these rings that glowed in his skin made the ground underneath him quake and shatter with each pulse, cracking noises plaguing the entire place that looked like a dessert.

As it did, a swarm of colours emerged, representing the destruction of the edge of the Cluster to which the man moved away.

"I've had enough for today. 391 cleared isn't too bad," he said before he exited the Cluster.

The scenery before him pleased his eyes, bringing a smile to his youthful face.

This was his nation after all. A land rich in vegetation and wildlife, all sacred but free for the taking to the strongest of them all.

"Ode of the First Horn. I have news of the relations in Pelian," a woman at his side with a height and stature that surpassed his said as she bowed. Her muscles bulged from the revealing clothing which she wore which supported her movement.

"Let me render a guess. Those fools took up the deal?" the man said as a grin etched itself over his face.

"It is as you say, Ode."

"Great! It seems a visit to our neighbour is in order. Let's go and have a chat with father about this."

Chapter 228: Feinheath Over Seven Days (2)

(A/N: Please read to the very end. Major plot details ahead)

A gorgeous sky blue carriage with four wings planted at its sides moved along while being pulled by four powerful horses.

Despite the ragged ground, it didn't tumble and jumble along like a typical vehicle would but mystically maintained its smooth flow.

Within it, a lady with long cheery hair that flowered around her long ears and settled on her shoulders continuously sighed and grumbled in annoyance while leaning against the comfy seats.

She was Darwel, the third daughter of the Sif High family.

"So those two really sent me here just to suffer those fools in their stead? Unbelievable! I never imagined humans to be so careless. Yes man the lot of them! The books said that humans that hailed from royalty were supposed to be smart and strong. Those idiots barely look like royalty.

If flaunting gold was all it took to be called a royal, then everyone with a thousand bags of coin would be an heir!" the woman complained, her crimson-gold eyes staring at her two guards, their faces hidden under veils displaying grimaces.

"Indeed, your Highness. Those humans did lack tact. However, please do remember that it was Her Majesty's intention to appeal to the nation," one of the guards sitting opposite this lady said. "Besides, the tales of the olden humans were much stronger, bred by constant battle. As were we."

"I'm aware, but wouldn't allying ourselves with one of the stronger nations be to our benefit instead of playing this in such a roundabout fashion?"

"Her Majesty knows what she is doing, your Highness. Please be patient," the second guard said.

The Darwel sighed in exasperation, simply letting the matter go for now.

"Shall we return to the Wonderfall Torrents, Your Highness?" asked her guard.

"No. I'd like to see more of this nation. I'm upset with my parents right now, I'd rather not see them so soon or by Listafelle I'll burn the entirety of the Wicker Forests. Take me to one of the larger cities."

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"I'm sorry," Valis said as he sat on the chair, looking at Elita's face which was partially hidden by her flowing hair which draped over her face as her head hung.

She sat on her bed in silence for a while as her mind churned, her thoughts banging against each other in a messy tangle.

Seriously?

Valis' face showed nothing but deep pain as it grew harder with each second.

The silence was unbearable. He would much rather have Elita shout at him for failing to protect her friend than continue to wait for her to return from her state of shock.

"You know... when I found Revia, I told her that everything that had ever happened in her life was meant to happen. <Sigh>. Back then, I never considered the heavy burden those words could bring to me or her.

I told a 16 year old girl that her mother, father and brother's death were all so that she could work for old fogeys like me who go about teaching people about the doctrine of the Purity or in the most likely cases, teach nothing at all."

Valis said as his gaze fell to the furnished floor. His own words collapsed on his chest, making it heavy, emotion stirring within him like a whirlpool.

"I've always regretted that decision. I thought her being deprived of a family would be a way for her to reach out to the Purity and treat it as her own family, grow within it and... find happiness but..."

"I saw how she was a hollow husk, left without a purpose even after I had tried my best to guide her but I didn't act. I was convinced that I heard the voice of the Deities calling to her and that I was being used to draw her in..."

Valis stopped talking for a while as he recalled the scenes which he saw. That man who had abilities that he couldn't fathom.

His cunning and unique attitude as he fought was enough to throw many off.

He had even called himself the leader of the Green Neolists.

Just what in the world was this old man supposed to believe anymore?

"You're right," Elita's voice suddenly called as she raised her head, wiping away the tears from her face as she gazed intently at Valis with reddened eyes. "I've never been one to doubt in our doctrines. I have cherished them and taught them to people while hoping that I can make some semblance of a difference. And I still do. But..."

Elita sniffled.

The rage in her eyes was impossible to conceal and Valis could only look below, avoiding it entirely.

"You and all those High Order Priests are what have corrupted the Purity, leaving it in shambles. Have you any idea from which depths I had to drag Revia's soul out of? The pain and the guilt she felt. You rendered it all meaningless by making her believe she was born to fight for a cause she never truly believed in! A cause YOU couldn't make her believe it!

I don't doubt the Deities one bit, but I don't think they would cast such a cruel fate on Revia, or on all of us."

Valis took Elita's words without retorting. He very much knew the ins and outs of the higher society in the Purity and couldn't deny that not all were in favour of the doctrine.

"I kept my mouth shut even when I was stripped of my rank unjustly. When I did my utmost to save many lives and let an innocent man go. But I warned you all and told you take this seriously! Instead, you chose the cheaper way out and one of own suffered for it," Elita said before she took a deep breath.

The old man grimaced.

"And well Valis, you can tell the higher ups that I refuse to be reinstated as a Paladin Knight. I won't be used to replace Revia and cover up their mistakes. I'll either sit here and wait or they'll have to let me go," she said before she sat on the other side of the bed, gazing away from Valis who only expected this response.

While some would take up the offer he had come with of her reinstatement as a Paladin Knight after announcing to Elita Revia's defeat with an intense vigour, Valis knew Elita was different.

She was open-minded, mature and altruistic in nature.

For the greater good, was her motto.

She could be the most humble of all the Paladin Knights.

He was only a messenger but he never believed Elita would take up the offer anyway.

Seeing as Elita needed time to settle her emotions, the old man stood up from his seat.

"I... am glad you honour Revia even now. She is blessed to have someone like you. The higher ups said they will arrange for Revia to be found. Rest assured," he said before turning to leave.

Elita heard the door close and grimaced, clutching her face.

Her heart beat faster and faster from both pain and rage.

The news had shattered her upon hearing it. She considered Revia a younger sister, that much was no secret. It broke her to see that the girl she had helped find her path was now lost again.

What had made this all worse was that she was only told of this several days after it had already happened, which meant that Valis had come to tell him of Revia's fate of his own accord while also carrying a message from the higher ups that had probably coincided with his visit.

She was an afterthought to the higher ups and the more she thought about it, she almost broke down.

But...

She couldn't afford to idle by while Revia could still be alive out there.

Her message for the higher ups which she passed to Valis was going to either be ignored or voided.

The higher ups would never let her go. They'd rather keep her imprisoned, which is why, she finally decided to take steps that she should have a long time ago.

"Guidance field," she called, a light blue transparent screen appearing before her, showing lines of text that filled it to the borders. "Maximise."

The light blue screen moved away from Elita and expanded to become as tall as the height of the space in the room!

"Switch to navigation map and pinpoint the targets I've marked."

Over the blue transparent screen, a hazy grid with geographic icons and names of settlements appeared with a dark blue hue so as to distinguish them from the background.

Over the map, two dots of light could be seen in different directions, one being light blue and the other being gold.

Elita breathed out as she saw the distance between them.

She then turned away from the map, looking to be thinking deeply before she showed a look of resolution.

"Hidden Storage. Give it to me, I can't put my petty ideals over my duty anymore. I'll use it."

With that, a bright flash of light shot from the blue screen for but a microsecond, something popping up simultaneously.

It landed in Elita's hand.

A book with a dull red glow nested in the Champion's grip, finally about to be used after so many years of constant rejection.

A new Direction bloomed with this one action.

Chapter 229: Feinheath Over Seven Days (3)

Runecraft and Alchemy.

These were integral arts to development and improvement that focused on enhancing the functions of living things and those of non-living things.

Asides from the paths to power that sentient and evolved beings in Aigas depended on, these two areas of focus were also considered important.

Naturally, it could be pointed out that these two resulted from one of the paths to power.

Classes.

Blacksmiths could advance their classes, getting to become practitioners of runecraft, where they inscribed runes that gave objects different effects, both utilitarian, defensive and offensive.

The same was true for Mages and Healers who could use gain the speciality of runecraft with advances in their class, though the runes would differ massively from each other and bear different effects according to the advanced class.

Alchemy was also like this with but one difference.

It only applied to Mages.

Concocting chemicals that could be used to enhance performance in living things with little to no side-effects was something only those who could interact with energies on a scale that exceeded basic utilisation could hope to achieve.

This was vastly different from strong medicinal concoction.

This ability to specialise in something as potent as alchemy added to the value that Mages had even above other class users in the Energy Forming category.

Why were these details important?

Well, because the object that Elita held was fashioned using an extremely advanced form of runecraft that fastened instructions so intricate to an object, that it would be capable of breaking apart any existence, restructuring their body, soul and even Direction.

In other portions of reality, many would call it, a Book of Alignment.

Elita gazed at it, feeling very apprehensive, as she did on the day she received it.

The very day when she saw a screen that told her she had been acknowledged by an entity called the Voice of Worlds.

Along with this entity, came the flash of light that threw upon her this red book with a cover that held interlocking lines of small text that ran along its thick figure which radiated a cold aura.

Elita breathed out slowly.

She had no idea what this was, but it gave her the feeling that this was a crucial moment in her life.

Her choice would change her entire existence.

Her current agenda was to go out and find Revia as she believed the young lady to still be alive. Perhaps it was a lie that she told herself to keep from breaking.

Who knew?

She didn't know for sure.

What she did know, was that she needed to try.

She couldn't trust the Purity to prioritise her rescue what with all that was happening in Feinheath.

And so, this was her best bet.

The object she had ignored for almost ten years just because she didn't know where it would lead her.

The Voice of Worlds was a mysterious entity on its own and it never told her any specific details. Neither did she had any actual interactions with it.

And now, the very same prompt that appeared when she had held the book for the first time, appeared.

[Would you accept the call of the power hidden within the Book of Alignment?]

A Book of Alignment.

'I...I... I need more strength. Even with the guidance field helping me boost my stats faster than everyone else and learn skills quicker, I'm still no match for the raw talents of this world. Maybe... maybe with this then...I can make a difference...An actual difference,' she thought, sweat appearing over her dark skin.

Soon, she firmed her resolve and...

"Yes..."

She affirmed.

Immediately after she spoke, a raging tide of energy burst from the red book and flooded into Elita like a river of illusory blood!

She gaped, her eyes opening wide as the power seeped into her mouth and eyes relentlessly, holding back her screams from the sheer amount of pain she felt during the sudden process which gave no prelude!

Elita's body started to emit a red glow, then... the glow changed, turning purple as it encased her figure as she twitched from the flying red energy.

A full thirty seconds passed as the energy started to slowly die down, another prompt appearing afterwards when Elita slumped to her knees.

[Congratulations, you have evolved and begun anew on the path of 'Voided Death']

[Congratulations, you have successfully evolved into a standard 'Voided Deathform']

Elita opened her eyes and felt her body to be vastly different.

She felt as if...she wasn't all there. As if she did not exist.

Weird.

What a peculiar feeling.

Amidst the confusion, she saw an emerging flash of purple light that almost blinded her for a moment.

From this light, a purple flame emerged, caused the room to emit a low rumble from its wondrous energy.

"Come," a stern voice leaked from the flame, leaving Elita gaping again at this additional change which she hadn't seen coming at all.

And with the coming of the voice that called to her, Elita's body became dyed in a purple light that wrapped around her tightly, glowing brighter as in the next moment, she and the flame that spoke were gone.

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In the thick crusts of the world to the East of Inhone City, a few miles from the settlement, a change occurred.

One that would cause a disturbance.

Energy surged furiously underground, a mash of powers colliding wildly in a disorderly fashion.

The process happened too deep underground for there to be any noticeable change on the surface but one thing was for sure, not three but four powers were clashing, three already existing in this place while a fourth seemed to draw in from further East, complicating the mess even further.

A loud hum continuously thrummed with a vague reverberation, burning and crumpling the ground with a shocking intensity until finally...

A crack appeared.

Not a crack on the hard ground, but a crack in the very fabric of space.

A dark blue tint appeared around the crack, swirls of purple then dancing around the crack's mouth like smoke as this phenomenon began to continue spreading while the influx of this mysterious energy from the East continued to gush out, fueling the crack incessantly...

Chapter 230: Festos After A Day Plus Six: Knowledge

Many records detailed Aigas' past.

Its history.

This did not include the very makings of the world as that had been explored countless times over, by the teachings from the Purity covering that in great and excruciating detail.

What Aigas' history entailed was the age after the various creatures of Aigas were formed.

This was said to be 90,000 years ago.

Some records say that the first living things to gain advanced intelligence were the Dragons.

These were the mighty creatures that were said to have been the previous dwellers of the land in the North, Edagon where the giants now resided.

The connection between the Dragons and Giants was not fully understood, especially not to humans but the giant humanoids were said to have been the superior race, better than both the Sif and the humans in all aspects after the great flying creatures that preceded them.

They were the first to completely recognise the will of the Deities, in particular Quintess who they loved instinctively.

The crust of Aigas itself.

They did not shun the other Deities, except for Boron, and taught these among themselves, building shrines to pay respects to the Deities.

To the other two Deities, each week.

To Quintess, each day.

Their population, flourished, gaining strength and continued knowledge through a channel that no human knew until one day, the giants decided to travel from Edagon and descend South to where the other continents were positioned to share this profound knowledge.

They reached Opungale first, which was closest from the long stretch of distance to Edagon.

They arrived with their bulks, sharing peacefully and educating the Sif about the Deities and propounding the knowledge that it was Listafelle who made them, the Deity who became the vast waters themselves.

The Sif who were naturally drawn to nature were pleased with this knowledge, offering themselves to the blessing of Listafelle, whom they saw as the Great Mother and detaching themselves from the revering of the forests which they had dedicated their Deities. Yet, they still loved them.

The giants were pleased that the message of the Deities was so easily accepted by the Sif and they moved further South to Feinheath after leaving some of their own to continue guiding the Sif.

Unlike in Opungale, the giants were met with resistance from the humans who had all manner of beliefs that they clung to.

However, because of their natural authority stemming from their origin, the giants managed to suppress the humans without committing much harm, teaching these creatures that it was Quintess and Listafelle who made them.

It was in this time that the Known Language was created by the Giants and taught to the Sif and the humans so that all three races could associate.

It took quite some time for the humans to adapt, but many eventually accepted, with others being so enthralled by this that they began a new movement to further consolidate the belief.

A movement called the Purity.

The giants nodded, seeing as the humans had fully accepted the message they gave and they journeyed, once more leaving some of their own while the rest went to the last stop.

Amanas.

This continent remained mysterious even until today.

As they approached, they faced resistance.

A massive barrier that surrounded the entire continent refused them passage.

The giants tried their best to break through it with their power, but it became clear that even the combined assault of their entire race wouldn't even make a dent in this barrier.

It took years of relentless trials for the giants to finally give up as entry into Amanas was proven to be simply impossible.

For a time, 8,000 years to be exact, there was nothing but peace on all three continents with the giants roaming over them, and teaching things about their Deities and mana.

How to manipulate it, how it permeated through many bodies and caused a change.

It was all profound.

Inevitably though, the peace was eventually broken.

The sole reason for this was, the Sif and the humans noticed that the giants, did not intend to leave.

With each passing year, they brought in things from their continent, settling over in their lands and breeding as they multiplied, taking up space which was once theirs.

Of course, one would wonder why it took over 8,000 years for these races to notice that the Giants were settling permanently.

The reason was simple.

The giants had never been that many to begin with.

Only a few hundred had only existed in the beginning, and reproduction among giants took more than a hundred years with a high possibility of miscarriage.

They steadily multiplied until they inserted themselves into the systems of these races and then turned to trying to bend them according to their will.

This, the humans and the Sif could not accept.

And yet, the giants refused to leave as they claimed credit for gracing the humans and Sif with knowledge they may have never come to know.

With this point reached, the First Grand War was waged.

The humans fought against the Giants on Feinheath and the Sif fought against the Giants on Opungale.

The hidden brutality and callous nature of the Giants was finally revealed as they used their immense powers to stomp over the 'lesser' races they had taught.

Ungrateful worms, they called them.

In this War, which continued for 200 years, special humans and Sif arose, bearing forth new techniques to wield mana that were exclusive to them.

Unique expressions of power.

This was when Advanced and Hidden classes were born.

It was only with these that humans and Sif gained a foothold in the war, pushing away the Giants from their continents.

It was only one of the first victories but it was a cause for celebration.

Mighty heroes emerged among the humans.

One of them being a certain man by the name Fulgardt, of the nation of Maqi.

Unfortunately, this was only half of the story related to the history of Aigas. As the fighting did not end with the First Grand War.

Why was this entire history important? Why was this exposition even necessary?

Well...

Because a certain Discount Human had read it in its entirety over seven days, gaining a fundamental appreciation of the world in which he resided.

As for the strength he had amassed in this time...