

Undead 301

Chapter 301: Evidence

Next day.

The phenomenon that had happened within the Harem Guild's territory found its way to people's ears in a very short time as tales of the dead rising with blinding red lights and family heirlooms and rusted old treasures flying in the sky were spread everywhere.

Of course, there were not that many casualties but the incident sparked massive waves of unrest as many were left traumatised and in despair, failing to go about their daily lives.

Tulnas had to spend half the day dealing with this as he did his best to give people comfort and reassurance, a trait he was quite gifted in as soon enough he managed to convince the majority that this threat had been dealt with.

The scattered corpses all over had also been a major source of disturbance and rightfully so, as bits of human and beast corpses and bones weren't what people would normally want to see.

Fortunately, Tulnas had managed to deal with much of this with his Guild, giving his people peace of mind.

Unfortunately, those outside of Tulnas' reach spread rumours about the Green Neolists starting large scale movements, connecting this event to the one that was publicised a few days ago, which was the one in Eofel which caused great unrest around the entire region, the tension bleeding into Inhone City where a meeting was under way.

"Why am I not surprised?" Damilla said with an ugly expression while staring daggers at Tulnas who sat comfortably on his seat while rubbing his temples.

Erkus, Silrat and Terian were also in the room, with the old Mage having a complicated expression.

"Did you really not help Festos escape?" Terian said with a sharp voice.

Tulnas sighed deeply, his dark shirt rising as he took in a breath.

"I did not, old man. Do you really think I'd stage something like that when my entire Territory is in chaos right now?" Tulnas asked, shooting back with an aggravated voice.

"Then why won't you let me divine you?" Damilla asked with a creased brow.

"Because... I've already made it clear that I don't want you grubby hands touching me or my soul dammit," Tulnas said as his body flared with mana for a moment. "And shouldn't you be focusing more on the possibility of a blue Cluster that I've just told you about?"

"We can only move on to that after we've verified your account!"

"Calm down," Erkus intervened as he sat up.

He had heard enough for him to pitch in.

He turned to Tulnas whom he sensed a very tense atmosphere from.

The man genuinely upset.

"You mentioned the entire event to us. The Evenfall with their strange formation that funnelled peculiar energies to construct many Clusters. I could believe that, but you said the Evenfall and the Green Neolists may be working together?" Erkus said.

"City Lord, you make it sound like I said that with uncertainty. I'm sure of it. An extremely powerful masked man appeared to save the cultists that we had captured and from there, that's when the true CHAOS began," Tulnas said, stressing the word 'chaos' as he simply couldn't forget the presence of that masked man, much less that terrifying thing.

However, Tulnas being Tulnas had not told the full detail.

He did not talk about the green skeleton, nor did he talk about how it was after Skullius.

This wouldn't sound good and neither would it help his case.

Thus, he had laid forth a different claim.

"So in the fight against this... masked man, you lost sight of Festos and couldn't even find his remains in the event that he died?" Damilla inquired with a disbelieving voice. "Say this is true. Perhaps there truly was some showdown, instead of just an attack by the Green Neolists happening somewhere far from where you were conducting your operation. Would you presume Festos to be dead?"

"No."

This time, it was Silrat who responded, his calm visage hiding the tumultuous emotions he had been feeling since Tulnas told him the entire series of events.

Yes.

Tulnas had told him the whole story including everything pertaining to the green skeleton chasing after Skullius before this meeting.

The man had distressed about his investment possibly becoming a volatile variable but after accounting for certain things, he had calmed down.

"How on Aigas would you know that?" Damilla questioned with her harsh expression turning to the Guilds Association Branch head.

"Because Festos and I are engaged in a Tie of Exchange," Silrat said with a carefree expression.

...!

Erkus and Damilla were confused by this, waiting for an elaboration of this concept which was new to them but Terian...

The old man's brows shot up!

"Impossible! You did such a thing? How do you even know of that?!" he asked with immense suspicion, his mind immediately hurrying to believe.

"All I can say is the Association is different from your Capital arrangement. Old information can be acquired with high enough achievements," Silrat replied with a sly smile.

"What is this Ti—"

"I'll explain later," Terian promptly cut off Damilla.

"Long story short, if Festos was dead, then Silrat would know," Tulnas said as he placed one leg over the other. "Also, if you doubt my account of the whole thing, go ask the Temple Priests if the man I just described isn't a famous figure wanted by the Purity already."

"You reported this to the Purity before this meeting?" Erkus asked as he sighed in resignation.

"I did indeed. I need some artefacts from them to help settle things in my territory and thus, I had to give them a full account," Tulnas said, giving an appropriate response to Erkus who understood the sentiment.

In truth, Tulnas had gone to return the Seed of Quintess' Eye which he had borrowed before anything else.

He then told them about the involvement of the Green Neolists with the Evenfall which he advised the Priest to report to the Higher Order Priests immediately.

This had earned him a whole lot of brownie points when he found that this man with the green and white mask was a problem the Purity had wanted information on.

"This still doesn't settle your situation with Festos. As he was in your custody, you needed to bring him back alive and because of this, I feel that there is something you're not telling us. Punishment for failing to hold up to what you bargained is severe. Your territory will be on the line along with all your assets, Tulnas.

So I advise you to start spilling the whole story," Damilla said as she rose and faced Tulnas with a vicious expression, refusing to back down this time. "The blue Cluster theory of yours also hangs

on how much of the truth you can tell us to prompt us into action, otherwise, the casualties that arise from it will be on you."

Erkus sighed for the umpteenth time during this meeting before supporting Damilla's point.

"It's true. While I value you more than anyone else in this room, it is true that not being able to produce definitive evidence to Festos' participation and involvement in helping you solve this case as well as even verifying the veracity of your story warrants punishment. Confiscation of your assets will be the base punishment. If you have anymore to say to support your case, now would be the time."

The room fell silent for quite some time as Tulnas closed his eyes to think.

He had to liberate Skullius, who Silrat was convinced would be returning as long as he was in one piece, from his crimes as he and Silrat had arranged by proving that he had helped solve a national crisis, without being divined.

This would have been easier if things hadn't turned south back then.

Tulnas opened his eyes to look at Damilla for a brief moment.

'She's sorta sharp. Of course she is. She finds answers for a living,' Tulnas thought, but this wasn't enough to corner him. He had other cards to play.

"My dear City Lord. Old man. I think you're misunderstanding something. I'm not only responsible for dealing with the threat of the continuous Clusters as of yesterday. I'm also responsible for deploying my Guild to help clear the already emerged Clusters, most of which they dealt with.

I asked for nothing in return despite the huge undertaking as this was a trying time and given the chaotic state of the Association of late, I'd say I carried a heck of a burden for you all whether or not you want to consider this as a planned strategy on my part," Tulnas said with chilling confidence.

"You cannot debate the facts and I don't think what I've earned through this is such a punishment."

No one could refute.

The evidence was there.

The Harem Guild had saved many lives from the constantly appearing Clusters and frankly, if it truly was as he said that he had dealt with the actual source...

"And well... If you want someone to extract the evidence and information from then..."

Tulnas waved his hand, his storage ring spitting out a large spherical mass of sand that was wrapped in dark chains.

The Complete Sand Coffin!

"You'll find him inside here."

Chapter 302: The First Trial

18 hours ago.

Blue flames surged with strength as they blazed, ignited within the sockets of the Fulgurant Bone Penetrator.

Traces of an element akin to lightning ran over the dark blue skeletal body of the Null Life spawned entity as clarity returned to his vision.

Notification prompts vanished from his sight as they signified that he had only now just had the [Flesh It Like You Mean It] skill time out, which was a very fortunate thing it seemed, as he had 'unconscious' before this.

The first thing Skullius saw was Red Rage, seated nude beside him.

The Pelvis Boar-Man's armour was laid by the side, looking to be nothing more than molten and cooled chunks.

Even over Red Rage's body, Skullius could see dark patches over his silvery bones, a testament to the damage he had received.

The Apostle leaned in and patted Skullius' shoulder.

This gesture made Skullius' socket flames flare with emotion as he recalled that his fate had been about to devolve into atrocity.

Somanda.

"That sockethole..." Skullius said in the deep voice of his Penetrator form that contrasted the one from his Discount Human form.

Red Rage sent comforting thoughts to his master as he saw his lingering distress but Skullius immediately stopped the Apostle.

He grabbed the Pelvis Boar-Man's shoulder just like he had done.

"It's alright, Red bro. I'm fine. I don't know how that bastard came here but... believe me, I'm doing better than you think. Besides it was only thanks to you that I managed to come out on top," Skullius said.

'That and... a strange twist of Direction.'

It was true.

Skullius had been frozen stiff when the Arch-Lich spread his hand to grab onto him but Red Rage coming between him and such a terrible foe had rejuvenated his courage.

Perhaps the term Apostle wasn't a stand-in but one having a meaning yet to be revealed.

Red Rage's own socket flames flared wildly as the Apostle gave Skullius a thumbs up.

Skullius... raised his hand and gave one back to the Pelvis Boar-Man.

The fearless bastard had earned it.

"How did you survive that attack anyway?" Skullius asked.

That dark flame had one shot the masked man who looked to be stronger than all of them combined at that time but Red Rage had survived it with minimal damage.

Skullius received his mental response.

"Oh. You used all of yours and my reserves of Null Life Essence to wrap around you? Hmm. I really need to learn how to use this stuff," Skullius said.

It was no surprise that Red Rage could use his reserves of Null Life Essence too as back then in the Tremur when he transferred his Exp, it became abundantly clear that he and the Apostle were closely linked.

Skullius was glad that such a thing, was a thing.

He had a bro to count every time.

As for why Skullius said he truly was fine.

He really was.

Naturally he had been terrified then and was apprehensive of the consequences of that encounter with Somanda but he felt good.

Because he had gotten a win over the Arch-Lich!

After learning that his thoughts of Somanda being a simple Lich when he was in Deadmanland were wrong through Serenity, Skullius hadn't been sure on how to proceed with saving himself.

How to deal with Doom Factor 2 specifically.

Was beating Somanda something he could do?

Could he even grow to such an extent?

Was he even smart enough to concoct an adequate plan for it?

These thoughts had plagued the Penetrator but after attaining one small victory... he felt confidence.

At least a semblance of it.

He didn't get an inflated skull because of this, but the esteem and morale did wonders for him.

Furthermore...

"My soul," he said to himself. "At least I now know what it looks like. That talk about me being patched up and having different colours... I thought Somanda was just trying to insult me but... it turned out to be true."

The Penetrator had seen his soul in that moment when Somanda pulled it out.

Seen was a bad word actually.

He experienced it.

Because he had been in the [Perfect Night Domain] purely constructed through his Projected Form and not a skill, he had been aware of everything happening within it. Most things at least, barring Somanda.

Its state left Skullius flabbergasted.

It was patched up with gold and purple, the purple being more evident.

The cracks over its glowing stature were extensive and as Skullius thought of this, he pulled up his status, and saw what he dreaded the most.

"40%... Doom Factor 2.." he mumbled with a solemn voice.

He didn't know what this entailed yet as he felt fine for now but... he knew it was going to be an unforgiving son of a...

Hmmm, he couldn't finish the thought.

"Let's focus on something else," Skullius thought. "Can I view the status for my Discount Human form?"

As he stated this, his status shifted to the Discount Human's, showing all the stats, oddities and even things like the core colour.

"Oh. This doesn't show when I use my guidance field in my human form. Hmm, is it because my Penetrator form has evolved and my Discount Human form is still at the Foundation Stage?"

It was an interesting thought.

Without getting an answer, Skullius checked what he had intended after scrolling through everything on the status.

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[ Name : Festos Dawn ]

[ Level : 10 ]

[ Experience : 0/800,000; <Trial Pending> ]

[ Class : Insurgent Magnus ]

[ Race : Discount Human ]

[ Inv. Status : Still doomed ×2, Cursed ]

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[ Stats ]

[ Strength : 345 ]

[Agility : 225 ]

[ Intelligence : 70 ]

[ Endurance : 265 ]

[ Luck : Atrocious? ]

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[ Health : 625/625 ]

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[ Mana : 540/540+(250) ]

-----

[ Null Life Essence : 0/6000 ]

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[ Skills ]

[ Elevated Mana Manipulation | Lv.21 ]

[ Greater Communication (I) | Lv.7 ]

[ Flesh It Like You Mean It | Lv.9 ]

[ Revenant Flames of Ecstasy | Lv.4 ]

[ Artless Dodger | Lv.2 ]

[ Manassault | Lv.1 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Guard Light | Lv.3 ]

[ Mana Force | Lv.2 ]

[ Flash Flicker | Lv.3 ]

[ Raw Impact | Lv.4 ]

[ Great Rush (I) | Lv.5 ]

[ Untouched | Lv.2 ]

[ Basic Combat Arts | Lv.5 ]

[ Swindling Death Dance (Incomplete) ]

[<Class>]

[ Advanced Evil Weaving | Lv.11 ]

[ Advanced Evil Production | Lv.13 ]

[ Basic Evil Invasion | Lv.2 ]

[ Basic Evil Sanction (Special) | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Light Production | Lv.4 ]

[ Crude World Projection ]

[ Bead of Malevolence | Lv. 3 ]

[ Perfect Night Domain | Lv. 4 ]

[<Arts>]

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration (1%) ]

[<Oddities>]

[ Luminant Seed (Dormant) ]

[ Binds of Fukal ]

[ Fruit of World Myths ]

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[<Affinities>]

[ Evil Darkness - B ]

[ Just Light ]

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Quite the bit of growth but it was still weak compared to his current strength as the Penetrator.

Skullius wanted to revel in the fact that he was now level 10 and a step closer towards the Advancement Stage though.

After the Tasks came a Trial or in some instances known as a Challenge that decided whether or not he would be entering the next stage according to Frock.

The name itself depicted a level of difficulty above Tasks, but Skullius wasn't focused on that.

All he thought about was how he would be able to use his own Full Body Aura soon!

Tktktkt!

Skullius dispelled the tension before with a laugh as he focused on the aspect of the status.

Then...

"This is... a joke...right?" Skullius said with his sockets dimming to become mere dots of blue light.

No way.

How was this even fair?!!

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Exp: 0/800,000

First Trial:

Find a LIVING subordinate from any of three dominant races in Aigas, who will be bound to your service, to help you without question, without proposed benefits to them besides from that you will. One who will commit to your demands for their lifetime until you release them from service.

Chapter 303: Tomatoes...?

Absolute garbage!

Trash!

Doodoo butter!

These were the terms that Skullius would have used if he actually knew them.

However, nothing could discount the feeling of hopelessness that he felt in this moment.

"Seriously...? I have to find a... Ah..." Skullius gaped as his four sockets resumed burning with blue flames.

He slumped and laid down his body on the hard ground.

Once again.

What was this?

Atrocious luck?

On one hand, he seemed to breeze through tough situations, with a staggering level of difficulty no doubt, but going through nonetheless.

On the other hand, there were situations like these, where he was firmly held down with little to no hope of escape.

"UNCoddled won't allow me to have something like this. I'm sure finding some non-socketholes would be easy enough but..." Skullius thought, his inferences swimming in his skull.

Red Rage saw Skullius' once 'better' enthusiasm plummet and thought to how to make his master feel better.

It was once more, time for the Pelvis Boar-Man to cheer up the Penetrator.

The Pelvis Boar-Man inserted mana into his ring, on the ground appearing something that almost made Skullius leap up!

"GAAAAH!"

Skullius screamed.

This was...

It was...

It was...

The remains of the above legendary grade treasure SoSei!

The cracked structure of the treasure laid before Skullius and it was only after Red Rage expressed to him that it was not functional anymore that the Penetrator relaxed.

Its image with the broken skull and limbs was still terrifying to Skullius who had seen this thing as it harboured Somanda's will, a fact that he wasn't exactly privy to until now when Red Rage told him some of the finer details.

Apparently, it was a treasure and not an actual undead.

The material it had was not exclusively bone.

Of course, Red Rage could confirm it.

"Oh..." Skullius said as he took a closer look. "You retrieved this? So that means that Somanda was here? Not exactly, at least."

He remembered that they had been far above at a dangerous height and if he fell, then this treasure must have been falling too.

Skullius felt a bit more relieved with this detail. He hadn't thought that Somanda could show up as he pleased, but he had been pretty apprehensive of that.

This gave him a bigger chunk of peace as well as a great appreciation of the fact that [Pseudo Evil Veneration] had activated in that moment.

Now that Skullius thought about it all...

"Where's.."

The Penetrator was cut off as his armour, the Fleeting Ghoul's Adornment and his [Demion's Dance] fell out of Red Rage's spatial ring.

"Thank you," Skullius said. He had thought he had lost these, especially the sword which he had tried to fling at his body to kill himself.

He then refocused on the green bones.

"What can we even do with this?"

Skullius used his guidance field to try and acquire more information about this thing, but most of it was marred with <???

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[SoSei]

- Legendary+ -

???

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"Of course..." Skullius remarked as he saw the lack of detail derived. He then turned to Red Rage.  
"You keep it for now. I hope it's as you said. If it does anything, tell me."

In this moment, it was sad that the Fulgorant Bone Penetrator didn't know how grand a thread of Direction would be born from this treasure in the future.

Skullius watched his Apostle the damn thing when...

"WHAT ATROCITY HAVE I BEEN AWAKENED INTO?!! AAAARRRRRRRGHHHHHH!!!" a loud voice called with nerve wrecking intensity!

...!

Skullius leapt up and struck against the ceiling of the hidden space he and Red Rage were currently in!

What the hell?!

Skullius looked this way and that in confusion, his blue flames scouring everywhere!

Red Rage looked at him confusedly.

"You didn't hear that?!" Skullius asked with a high pitched voice.

Red Rage shook his head.

"Bro, someone just yelled right now? How didn't you hear it?!"

"OF COURSE I JUST YELLED YOU UNDEAD BASTARD! WHY AM I HERE?! WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME? WHO... WAIT?! ARE YOU THE ONE WHO THREW THE TOMATOES?!"  
the voice once again blared loudly.

"Huh?!!" Skullius' gaped as he questioned what the flesh was going on.

"OH HHHH NO! I'M DOOMED! IT'S YOU! I REMEMBER! YOU TRULY ARE THE ONE WITH THE TOMATOES! I WASN'T DREAMING!

YOU REALLY KILLED ME! YOU WERE AN UNDEAD?! HOW THIS WORLD HAS FALLEN!  
KILL ME DEAR QUINTESS FOR I HAVE BECOME AN ABOMINATION! OR BETTER YET,  
LET ME TAKE THIS EVIL WITH ME!"

"Bro, why are you shouting?! First of all, who and where the hell are you?! Second of all, where are you?! And lastly, I'm not an undead!!!"

"OH PLEASE, YOU TOMATO FLINGER! I CAN SEE IT RIGHT NOW! YOU FELLING SOME SICKLY, INNOCENT STRANGER AFTER CHANGING YOUR FORM INTO UNATTRACTIVE MAN! DECEIVER! TO THINK YOU UNDEAD WERE CAPABLE OF SUCH! VILE TOMATO FLINGER!"

Skullius was about to open his mouth to angrily retort when his memory churned.

'Wait. Is... is this guy... in my head?! Also... I killed an innocent stranger.... after I changed my...

Bro, is this guy talking about Eobald?! Is he seeing my memories?!" Skullius thought in a panic.

This was the only scenario that made sense when he properly thought of it all. While this voice seemed to speak in his ear, he felt a slight reverberation within him!

On top of all this.

Tomatoes?

Tomato.

Where had he heard this before?!

There was definitely someone who kept accusing him of this many times over in the past!

Someone he had killed before.

Someone bound.

Someone who...

...!

The Labyrinth!

"You're the Tower General whatever!" Skullius yelled in realisation.

"IT'S SILA, THE GREAT TOWER GENERAL, YOU IDIOT! WAIT, WHERE IS THE VISION I WAS SEEING?! IT'S GONE! WHAT DID YOU DO, TOMATO FLINGER?!"

Skullius was immensely confused.

'Vision? Is he talking about the memories?'

Hearing this voice now start to also sound confused and mention that it couldn't see what it was seeing before made Skullius a bit relieved as he quickly thought of multiple hypothesis.

He started to gather his thoughts. It was obvious that conversing with this guy was impossible so he decided to retrace his steps while Red Rage looked at him with atrocious incredulity.

'This guy was like the others, right? Tied to that thing made of [Evil Darkness]. I remember he was the first one that I killed. Then what happened...' Skullius thought.

"I CAN HEAR YOU, YOU KNOW!" Sila growled.

'Right! I gained his soul as a reward and ate it!' Skullius continued with his thread of thought.

"TOMATO FLINGER!"

That's right!

Under the Labyrinth's rules, he had managed to kill the guy with evil darkness and absorbed his soul.

But then... why was he suddenly hearing his voice?

Hold on!

Skullius' socket flames flared!

Did this mean that he could potentially start hearing Dezrael's voice too?!

Unlike Sila, Skullius remembered that guy very well!

If that was to happen?

'No...!' Skullius thought as he raised his skull, ignoring the noise in the background that was polluting his mind. 'I think I know why...'

First of all, this tied in pretty well with something he had seen quite recently.

His soul!

It had patches of gold and purple, with the purple ones being very prevalent!

Secondly...

'I remember. I used this guy's soul for something else back then. At least the guidance field did...'

Indeed.

After entering the Hall of Fulgardt, Skullius had commandeered the body of Eldris via [Basic Evil Invasion] which ended up getting killed within him still in it, causing him soul damage!

As a result, the guidance field had used portions of Sila's soul in order to cover for the damage which had been extensive!

As Skullius' thoughts reached this point, he realised that the purple patches of his soul were probably from Sila's own soul!

"HEY! ANSWER ME WILL YOU?!" Sila's voice rang out.

Skullius' socket flames burned lightly.

Even that sliver of fortune from back then had repercussions it seemed.

The question of why this guy only awakened now was still upon Skullius though and he needed to have a discussion with this guy.

"I hear you, alright bro?!" Skullius said as he emitted a burst of mana from his mouth.

He needed to know the full story.

"First, answer me this. How are you talking to me just now?"

"..."

Chapter 304: Let Us Waste No More Time!

...

Silence.

A reply seemed to not come.

"Well?"

"HMM? SO NOW YOU WANT TO TALK TO ME TOMATO FLINGER?!! I SHALL NOT TELL YOU ANYTHING! WHY WOULD I? YOU'RE A VILE UNDEAD! MY LIPS ARE SEALED!"  
Sila yelled.

"Arghh..." Skullius grumbled.

Seriously?!

This was so annoying!

Would he really have to live with this guy for all his Null Life?

It seemed like it wasn't a matter of the body too.

He had killed Sila while in his Discount Human form but the bastard had spawned even in Penetrator form.

It seemed like a matter of the soul as Skullius only had one.

"HAHAHAHAHA! I CAN SENSE YOUR DISTRESS! GOOD, GOOD, TOMATO FLINGER! QUINTESS WOULD BE GLAD THAT THE GREAT TOWER GENERAL SILA HAS AT LEAST SERVED TO PUT THE ENEMY INTO A STATE OF MENTAL TURMOIL!"

Dammit! That loud voice!

The whole situation gave Skullius little hope as he had discovered that this guy was literally a part of him now.

He was sort of keeping his soul steady and patching up chips from the construct.

As if the Penetrator didn't have enough to deal with already!

"Gah, can you at least shut up! I can't think straight with your noise in my head! Don't you have your own side of my soul or something, bro?!"

"YOU TO—"

Suddenly, Sila's voice was cut off and all Skullius heard were greatly muffled noises in the background that barely shook his mind.

'Hmm? Wait a minute...' he thought.

"You can talk..." Skullius said.

"DON'T YOU DARE SHUT ME OFF AGAIN, TOMATO FLINGER! THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I WARNED MY WIFE ABOUT! YOU—"

"Shut up."

Silence.

'Ah~.'

Skullius instantly felt relieved.

He could shut up this bastard if he wanted to!

That was convenient.

At least he could live in peace even with this annoying oddity.

With more time to think, Skullius began gathering all the thoughts from that time.

He still couldn't get rid of the lingering thought that Dezrael could also awaken within him even if he had worked up a theory that that might not be the case.

That wouldn't be a pleasant experience as he had some really bad conflict with the bastard.

However, as the Penetrator thought to this point, he realised that he might really not have to worry about this solely because of something else that happened back then.

'Unlike Sila, Dezrael's soul was used for something other than just giving me stat points. Some of it was used to form the Luminant Seed that needs me to reach the Advancement Stage to activate. So... maybe, the parts that remain are not strong enough to awaken...'

At this point, Skullius was made to recognise the incredible power that Fulgardt had. To toy with life, death and souls like this...

And this Luminant Seed.

He had been looking forward to using it but couldn't help but grow anxious now.

However, he had already taken it into himself, which was, well... anxiety inducing.

"Just how many of these people are in the Labyrinth? They must all have been powerful experts and for them to remain alive until now..."

They must all have been significantly powerful.

...!

The Penetrator suddenly straightened his spine as his mind reached another conclusion!

Jeez, was his Penetrator form that much smarter than his Discount Human form?!

He immediately willed for Sila to be able to speak again and the mouthful he got was tremendous!

"YOU VIIIILE UNDEAD, TOMATO FLINGER! YOU DARE HOLD ME IN THIS CRAMPED BUBBLE?! LET ME OUT! I'LL FIND YOU, AND I WILL KILL YOU!"

"Bro, you live in my body!" Skullius said with an annoyed flicker of his four sockets flames. "I have an idea. If you're willing to listen, we can both benefit from it."

"HA! AS IF I'D EVER LISTEN TO WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY! FIRST CLEAN UP MY TOWER OF THOSE TOMATOES YOU THREW AND BOW SIX TIMES, THEN I MIGHT LISTEN! HEHEH!"

"Really?" Skullius said slyly. "Even if I tell you that I can give bring you back to life?"

"...."

"Not so annoying anymore now, bro? Kek."

He had him!

There was no way this bodiless bastard could resist!

"HMMM! YOU WON'T FOOL ME, TOMATO FLINGER! HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY DO THAT?! I WON'T BELIEVE YOUR LIES!"

Oh.

Skullius grinned inwardly still.

"Oh, but I can. You see, the same powers that kept you alive in the Labyrinth are mine now. I can use them to bind your soul to a body and get you back to living again."

"HMMMM.....LIES! LIES, THE LOT OF THEM! WHY SHOULD I COLLUDE WITH YOU OVER SUCH A THING?! MY LIFE MEANS NOTHING! IT WAS ONLY GIVEN PURPOSE BY QUINTESS HIMSELF! I SHALL NEVER BETRAY HIM!

YOU SHALL NOT FOOL ME, TOMATO FLINGER! I REFUSE!"

Sila was adamant. His decision seemed final as he even took a pause after his loud reply.

However, Skullius wasn't done.

"Oh interesting. You know, this humble tomato flinger would be glad to do the same for your wife. Wouldn't that make you happy?"

...!

'Heheh...!' Skullius grinned internally as he felt the tumultuous shock from the freeloader in his body. Well technically, Sila wasn't a freeloader as he truly was earning his keep but still.

Skullius had decided to play by this man's rules. He used the man's words against him to reach what he wanted.

He wasn't sure what a wife was but it seemed to be a person. An important person to this guy.

As for why he was trying to rope this guy in, it was a simple matter.

'This guy is very old. I remember when I killed him, he gave me more than a million Exp! He must have been strong too and I bet I could get him to help me!'

As simple as that.

"HEY, TOMATO FLINGER..." Sila said with a chilling voice. "THIS IS MY WIFE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT..."

There was a lengthy silence, but Skullius was patient.

He knew that the art of Talk no Bullshit Jutsu required one to be sufficiently opportunistic and calm.

One needed to let the facts sink in before telling his victim some more.

"MY WIFE... CAN YOU REALLY...?"

"Of course! But you see, I'm not that strong yet and I need ways to grow stronger faster. If I could reach a higher stage of power, I could do what Fulgardt did with his powers to help you and your wife. Fulgardt denied you death and gave you life. I can do the same with your help."

"..."

Another stretch of silence.

Sila seemed to be contemplating.

Twenty minutes passed before Sila gave a response and the silence almost made Skullius think that the bastard had vanished from his body.

Then...

"HOW IS IT THAT YOU HAVE FULGARDT'S POWERS?! ARE THEY NOT FOR HUMANS ONLY?! YOU'RE AN UNDEAD!"

"Like I said before. I'm not an undead. And like you said before, I'm a deceiver. How do you think I managed to get out of that place... alive?" Skullius said.

"...."

Sila took another leave of verbal absence.

The truth was, he was no longer hopelessly trying to annoy Skullius now that there was possible opportunity to be revived even if it still needed verification.

And for that...

"If you doubt me. Take a look for yourself..." Skullius said.

He was going gamble.

His confidence from earlier forward.

He was slowly starting to understand the intricacies of the hold he had over his soul. The fact he could freely control what Sila could see and when he could speak.

Since he had been able to cut off the bastard from seeing his memories, he could do the opposite.

What was the harm when the man was practically part of him?

The benefits of roping him in were immense, though Skullius didn't know if this would be considered by UNCoddled.

Probably not.

WHOOSH!

Sila saw the 'vision' of Skullius' journey with Benzard, Denille, Irlen and Reon through the Tremur and into the Labyrinth along with all the events leading to him exiting it.

All the details were laid bare.

Then it was all cut off.

"Well...?" Skullius asked with a confident voice.

This had to convince the bastard, right?

There was another bout of silence as Sila absorbed this information.

"HMMM. A DANGEROUS EXISTENCE YOU ARE. YOU ARE EVEN ALLIGNED WITH A GIANT?! HMMM...."

"BUT! FOR HER I SHALL OBLIGE... RAAAAH! TO THE UNDER WITH QUINTESS! AS IF THAT BASTARD EVER DID ANYTHING FOR ME! TELL ME, UNDEAD TOMATO FLINGER!

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?!"

Bingo!

Skullius was relieved.

"First, keep your voice down!" the Penetrator growled, making Red Rage take a few steps back.

"I SEE! Ahem. I mean, I see... what do I have to do?! Tell me! Let us not waste anymore time.

The sooner I revive, the better!"

Skullius grinned. He had this guy where he wanted him.

"Alright. As a starter, I guess I need to know the fastest way to get a blue core..."

Chapter 305: Tapping Into Dangerous Powers

"HMMM.... a blue core?" Sila's voice echoed in Skullius' mind. "Ah... you truly lack one, indeed!"

"Yes I do. How do I get one?" Skullius asked with an annoyed tone.

Sila paused as he seemed to be contemplating.

"Blue cores, my dear tomato flinger, are formed when an individual compounds the mana in their core repeatedly without letting even an ounce of it leak out during a session. A constant cycle of generation and compounding within the core is required over the course of two or three decades for the average person to eventually see the tinge of blue form over the white," Sila explained.

"Wait, what?! Isn't that like.... 20 to 30 years?!" Skullius exclaimed in genuine shock.

"Indeed, tomato flinger, it is. The duration is entirely dependent on the quality of mana that one is born with. You can't possibly expect those from high Families and Houses to compare to the footed pieces of garbage everywhere would you? Heheh!"

Skullius ignored much of what Sila had just said as he contemplated.

He couldn't afford to spend years trying to get a blue core, he would be done for before he could even achieve it!

The Penetrator grumbled as he sank into more thought.

He had used [Depths of Core] some time ago to attempt to get a blue core, but that had failed with the long cooldown of the skill taking effect which effectively guaranteed that for his Penetrator form, it would probably take time to achieve his goal with the use of this skill alone.

[The Doom Factor 'Disowned' has caught up]

[You have failed-]

Skullius immediately fed the damn thing adequate mana, gaining a brief reprieve from the constant pursuit by the Doom Factor.

He had managed to deal with it over the seven day period of training montage.

"What was that?! What's that thing?!" Sila asked in confusion. This was his first experience with the guidance field and it greatly perturbed him.

"You'll learn with time, bro," Skullius said with a sigh as he went on to continue thinking about the blue mana core.

Sila also took some time to digest the sight of the bright screen that had appeared before Skullius and then shook his head, bringing his mentality back to the subject at hand.

"RIGHT! HOWEVER...!" Sila suddenly shouted, making Skullius shudder. "You could acquire a blue core the same way I acquired one!"

"Hmm? How?" Skullius asked.

"Whether or not I tell you depends on whether you're willing to take on the great risk that comes with it or not," Sila said sounding excited which made Skullius suspicious. "It's especially dangerous.

The Penetrator narrowed his socket flames.

"If you get me killed, you'll be doomed too, you know? Unlike what you think, me dying is much more horrifying than whatever you experience," the Penetrator pointed out. "I could show you right now."

Sila vaguely felt threatened.

"...of course. I wasn't thinking of anything bad, tomato flinger..." Sila said with a strangely low voice.

"Really? Now that I think about it, you haven't answered my first question. How did you just suddenly awaken?" Skullius asked.

"It's not anything to do with me, tomato flinger! For some reason. I just found myself shaking an hour ago. I think it had something to do with your own soul that was quivering like a boiled tomato. I only gained the full ability to speak and think a few minutes ago, alright?!" Sila answered with a strangely determined boom.

Skullius cocked back his skull.

'Is it related to what I was feeling when in Somanda's presence? Of course, that would make sense if his own soul woke up because of it,' Skullius thought.

"I can hear you, tomato flinger!"

"Right, I have to consciously block you," Skullius said with a shake of his head. "Your story checks out for the most part, I guess. Now, tell me. How did you get your blue core?"

Sila went silent for a moment. This was slowly turning disadvantageous for him, but for now, he didn't have a choice.

"It's a place. A dangerous place. Under an Eximo tree where a grand pool rests, vibrant waters seated still as they gain a visage akin to that of crystal. Ah, the memory," Sila said with voice saturated with ecstatic reminiscence.

"A place?" Skullius asked. "Where is it?"

"It is within a Sacred Forest in a far off region. We'd have to travel that distance..."

"Hmm? A Sacred Forest?" Skullius thoughts rolled over to harsh memories.

....

Inhone City.

Present time.

Five people stood in front of a small, cube-like cell with iron bars.

Within the cell, a ball of cracked ice could be seen, housing the lone figure of man who was curled up in a stationary position.

The cell itself was marked with numerous runes whose effect on space could be visibly traced. It was no secret that they greatly constricted the prisoner's ability to manipulate their powers.

The large block of ice was still emitting a nasty chill, one of the five figures who was Tulnas having removed the Complete Sand Coffin from it to unseal Guissepo.

What was left was the water his doubles had frozen to trap the explosive bastard.

Naturally it wasn't normal ice as even Terian felt the massive amounts of mana infused within it to give it an insane sturdiness and an absurdly low temperature.

For Guissepo to have survived this, it was a testament to his body's resistance.

"Are you ready?" Tulnas asked Terian who promptly nodded with a hard gaze.

The ice began to rupture under Tulnas' tamed beast's will, while at the same time, Terian raised his hand, extending it to the ball of ice as under the spherical object, a scorching heat began to emanate, melting the chunks that fell off gradually.

Soon, a creature made of flame rose, its wide open maw encompassing the entirety of the breaking apart chunks of ice as it then went to chomp on Guissepo who had been released from the frosty setup!

The creature, a shark, held Guissepo in place, having half his body in its mouth while the rest hung limp as he was yet to awaken, his body soaking wet from the melting ice.

"So this is the man you faced?" Erkus asked with serious gaze. "I can sense incredible power from him."

"Hmmm. In terms of power, I'd say he is as strong as you, Terian," Silrat said with a sly smile.

The old man kept his focus on the limb body of Guissepo, ignoring Silrat's remark.

However, he couldn't help but wonder, as from the creature that held down the cultist holding the man down and passing to him information, it did seem like this man could challenge him to a degree.

"You're going to want to strengthen your hold over this bastard. He's not just some shrub at the Master Stage, he also has a blessing. A powerful one at that," Tulnas pointed out.

Terian nodded.

Silrat paid more attention to the man who seemed to start coming to as his thoughts spawned to what he had had to do to after being told the full information concerning the Evenfall cultists prior to the meeting they had been having.

He and Tulnas had made detailed reports for what to look for in different areas for the Guild members engaging in the operations as it seemed that most wouldn't be as apparent as Tulnas' case.

They had also made note of what to expect if they spotted the huddled cultists as per Tulnas' experience.

'Hopefully it works. If even one case is found and dealt with, then we'll have won our case,' Silrat thought.

As Guissepo raised his head, regaining consciousness, he looked before him with a soft gaze that didn't have any trepidation or anxiety whatsoever.

"...What an extravagant outcome..." he said as he looked to Tulnas who waved with a smile.

The Tamer then turned to Damilla.

"That's your cue," Tulnas said to the woman who then grumbled before walking forward.

"Ah... your extravagant wish to know everything. To divine me. It could get you killed, you know?" Guissepo said with a wry smile.

Unfortunately for him, Damilla was quite eager for the answers.

She especially hated how the Capital Service was undermined by a small branch of the Association.

Silrat waved his hand over the bars to the cell, the objects rising up to sink into the hard ceiling above, allowing the Diviner entry.

"Be careful. Holding down someone at my level is quite difficult. Divining someone a stage above you even more so," Terian warned as his mana bubbled to make sure his grip on Guissepo didn't slip.

Damilla nodded before walking up to the cultist and laying her hands over his forehead.

Immediately, her eyes rolled as she began to discern things about him.

She held herself from wholly making use of his soul, as this man was stronger than her with ties to high powers.

But she was eager for the truth despite everything.

Scenes played out in her vision as she tried to anchor her sight onto the events of the day before and...

She saw it!

A group of figures seated around a strange formation!

Furthermore, several scenes of conflict bashed against her vision though with a lack of clarity.

She decided to touch Guissepo's soul a bit to gain more information.

The link was like an instant electric sensation over her body which enhanced her vision into the occurrences before her.

For a brief moment, she saw the entire scape and when she set to explore further...

"Damilla!" Terian called with a voice full of caution.

Chapter 306: Uncanny Beliefs

Damilla's eyes shot open upon hearing Terian's voice. Its urgency prompted her to quickly tear herself from Guissepo and retreat to a safe distance as from her wealthy well of experience, she knew to heed cautious warning.

As she fully came to, returning to reality from the constant whirls of visions, she found that the old man was looking at her with a hard expression that showed both seriousness and concern.

He was looking at her face specifically and this made Damilla a lot more self-conscious.

She felt something slide down her nose and she immediately touched her face to discover blood flowing excessively from the facial organ!

Her eyes were bloodshot and it was only now that the Diviner discovered a feeling of irritation in her head that constantly dipped jabs of pain, as she then went on to clutch her dome while wincing.

"It's funny how some extravagantly arrogant people fail to heed simple advice. That's what I hate about you heathens with your overconfidence," Guissepo said, even though he too didn't look too well.

He was sweating while taking deep breaths to calm himself.

He wasn't used to Divination and it wasn't like Damilla bothered to be careful.

Terian increased the pressure he applied with the flame shark, which caused Guissepo to grunt in pain as he felt himself continuously lose all sensations to be point where he felt like would not ever be able to walk again.

He looked down languidly, to see fierce shark that radiated a firey glow that reflected over his face.

'Hmph.'

Even in this predicament though, he started to cackle as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"Hahahahaha! Even now, you all seem to think that we're some small time group with meaningless resolve and goals! How extravagantly typical of those born under the graces of the three Deities..." Guissepo yelled with fervour. "Nothing you do to me will ever make me despair anymore! Mine and all my companions' death are not in vain!

Even if you take my life, I'll happily continue it in extravagance by his side! By Master Boron's side!"

Guissepo expressed his firm beliefs.

In this one outrageous burst alone, he expressed why he was not remorseful over the deaths of his fellow cultists.

For they had taken the lead in going to what they deemed paradise.

Yet, for him, he felt like he hadn't achieved enough. He still hadn't gained the recognition he desired.

He would have loved to gain it at least once but it was denied him!

Damilla walked out of the cell as she leaned against the wall, trying to recover.

She hadn't even felt anything happening to her when she was tapping into Guissepo's soul which was strange and terrifying.

She wiped her nose and tried to detect what was wrong with her.

Guissepo noticed her actions and scoffed.

Pitiful.

The cultist continued to spout his belief.

"Have you all any idea the extent of Master Boron's extravagant rage! Being unrightfully imprisoned by his own! Left to breed creatures that can never see the luminance of the sun! He passes this rage unto us, his followers, it instantly manifesting as full fledged blessings for which we shall use to punish this world! What makes you think you can brush it off oh, so nonchalantly?!"

Damilla was alarmed at these words but the one to calm her racing heart was unexpectedly Tulnas.

"Relax. What can he do but try to exalt himself and his so called 'Master.' We cut down a lot of them and nothing came to us as retribution or anything. He's bluffing," Tulnas said confidently.

After another bout of examination on Damilla's part, she didn't see anything else that could be fatal or become a lingering threat which affirmed Tulnas' words.

Guissepo looked Tulnas in the eye with a mysterious glint.

"Says the young and extravagantly talented one, blessed by your false gods," the older cultist spoke before slumping his head and saying nothing else.

He had said his piece.

If he was to die, he would at least do so after making sure they all knew his resolve was firm.

Terian turned to Damilla.

"What did you find?"

The Diviner took a few moments to collect herself before answering.

"I saw... something like a magic formation and some battles that involved...him," she said as she looked at Tulnas. "It's true that... they had some form of conflict but from the scenes prior, I couldn't make out what they were saying."

Erkus nodded.

"I see. Hold off on divining him for more information. It would be more beneficial to inform the Purity about this. They could have safer methods of extracting information from him."

"Agreed," Tulnas said. "You could even share some of the credit, City Lord. I wouldn't mind."

Erkus sighed in resignation.

"I'll consider it."

"This doesn't set Festos off the hook still," Damilla said with a hard expression, egging the City Lord to not be persuaded otherwise. "I haven't seen anything that remotely resembles his participation in my visions."

Tulnas rolled his eyes.

"Of course you'd say that," Tulnas said with a sigh noting that Erkus didn't deny this as well.

It seemed the College of the Esteemed was still on his back about this and while he was giving the Mage a grace period, his patience was likely to run out soon.

One issue was on its way to be solved, while another remained up in the air.

Tulnas clicked his tongue as he wondered where that damned Mage was.

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College of Battle Arts.

A certain old man hung over Oliviana like a cloud as she walked within the College of Battle Arts. She had long given up on leaving him behind as he always seemed to just saunter back, annoying the living ghost within her.

At the moment, she was trying to certify some paperwork that she needed in preparation of her future plans which had become shaky in light of recent events.

As she walked to and fro within the College where a significantly higher number of new students were being led by other instructors, she could only grit her teeth as she heard the old man's voice in her ear.

"Are you sure you don't want to learn the Regret Technique, Oliviana? It would be perfect for you, I guarantee it."

"Oh, have you really decided to leave your current job as a gardener to teach martial arts now? I thought you'd remain with the weeds until you were needed. Wasn't that your 'vow' to the Deities?" Oliviana said as she sifted through her documents.

"..."

"I will always be a gardener in my lifetime. I'm bound to do this much but the essence of Regret in me is just too much! I need to share it with someone. I could die without ever teaching anyone my technique!"

Oliviana laughed.

"You're quite something old man. I have no regrets so I don't want to learn your technique. My agreement with Silrat makes it so that I don't have to worry about staying in this city anymore much like you have to," Oliviana said with a smile as her short figure trotted by.

The old man behind her grumbled. His frail body looked to almost topple over and this brought a twinge of guilt to Oliviana who stood and gazed at him as he sulked.

"That... is another one of my regrets," the old man said as his lips trembled.

"Don't beat yourself up too much. At least you have tens of thousands who remember to depend on you in this city. I'm one of them," the short lady said with a bright smile.

#### Chapter 307: Remnants of The Evenfall Activity

One day later.

A few events had happened within Inhone following the conclusion of Tulnas' mission.

Or rather missions.

An observation was made which concluded that surely, there was no longer the constant appearance of many Clusters in wide range as compared to before!

After a full day of work, with mercenaries dealing with the last of the numerous Clusters, it turned out that Tulnas had truly resolved the issue with his little excursion, something that was publicly announced by the City Lord to the residents of Inhone City.

His hypothesis had been right.

Those left with doubt could only believe it as another badge of credit also had to be handed to the rest of the Harem Guild for its service to all the areas in the region that required assistance.

Many came to the city to give thanks for the timely response of the ladies that came to save them from the emerged Clusters, giving them peace of mind.

Of course, this caused some Guilds to turn sour towards the Harem Guild, as while the result was overall favourable for everyone, much of the work had had stolen which meant most Guilds barely got to do anything at all.

The other two large Guilds, the EdgeKings and Ravenclad Guild couldn't help but complain that they could have deployed their human resources too but the Harem Guild greedily took much of the requests.

This was supported even more by the other smaller Guilds which asserted that this was simply unfair.

As for Tulnas' response to these qualms, the Tamer had it all planned out with the remuneration his Guild was supposed to receive from clearing the Clusters.

He calculated all total of the reward coin his Guild had accumulated with all the cleared Clusters which he had chosen not to take and asked the Guilds Association to share it among all the smaller Guilds!

The sum was quite bountiful and it covered for all these entities as this also included the higher level Clusters that had been cleared in the process and the portion of Enriching gems that the Harem Guild would have collected, most of which they wouldn't need.

As a result, Tulnas cooled off some of the heat and left the larger Guilds as they were because from his perspective, they simply had no real reason to complain.

Another event which took place was contacting the Purity through the Temple in Inhone City to inform them that a member of the Evenfall had been captured, along with sharing detailed information about the possible collusion between said group and the Green Neolists.

Such information was met with an instant response as several Purity Knights were dispatched and said to arrive today to collect Guissepo so as to send him back to a higher branch of the Purity for interrogation.

This earned Inhone and the Harem Guild better repute with the Purity, which worked well for both parties, especially Tulnas who knew he had opened up a window to ask for more stuff in the future.

That said, Tulnas consistently reminded the City Lord of the large Cluster which could potentially appear within the region.

It was possible that it had already appeared for a while given that they didn't know the exact time that the Evenfall had begun their activities.

Search parties were sent out by the Capital service and the Guilds Association gave out requests to search for the Cluster which was presumed to at least be blue.

So far, no notable results had been dug up and over the course of yesterday and today, the anxiety from this had begun to die down.

Perhaps this had had a baseless worry.

In spite of these good instances of fortune over the past day however, a problem still remained.

For Tulnas and Silrat at least.

Festos was still missing.

He hadn't returned still.

Silrat had confirmed that the Mage was still alive but since his Tie of Exchange with the young man had no further traits, it was impossible to tell where he was.

Tulnas grew anxious as this meant that it was possible for him to lose his assets and authority of the area under his Guild as he couldn't be exempted from aiding a murderer who was yet to redeem himself even with his achievements.

Rather it was possible for him to benefit from the Guilds Association headquarters but he didn't want to lose what he had here.

For Silrat, it was possible that instead of gaining a portion of the great reputation that came with identifying as being part of the operation that ultimately solved the national crisis, he could be charged with supporting a criminal instead.

If only the damned Discount Human would return.

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Deep below the ground, in a rocky area away from most settlements, the stoney crust above suddenly ruptured as a bluish purple glow erupted and rose into the sky in the form of a distorted flame!

It carried with it a massively terrifying pressured effect that blew out the surface and made room for itself and by room, this referred to a space of over to twelve meters in width!

Dark fumes rose as the bluish purple glow then went on to vanish, the crackling of burnt rock and dirt around the extensive hole that had been created noisily announcing the destruction that had unfolded.

It was dark within the hole that led to deep underground, yet something could vaguely be detected at the very bottom from the surface.

A crack in space that danced with a blue hue, tainted by a swirl of purple which forever marked this Cluster as one beyond the scales of normal mercenaries or combatants.

There was hardly any space within this hole to accommodate the structure as it grew in a cone shaped figure to the surface but the rising glow had been caused by a single creature that popped out of the Cluster that seemed to be uncomfortable with this.

It had been three days since this Cluster had appeared and without anyone being able to see it, there was no longer anything to hold back the Cluster beasts that had been nurtured within from escaping.

The beast that appeared from the Cluster was annoyed by the cramped space.

It looked up, the harsh afternoon light that spilled from upwards illuminating its figure.

It was a tall, grey creature, its body covered by what looked like white boils over its slimy skin.

It had upward slanted yellow eyes that had purple lateral slits which acted as its pupils, its head like an blown bubble, inflating and deflating with a bubbling quality as if that was where its lungs resided, much like a squid.

It lacked a nose and below its eyes, very long tentacles protruded and draping over beyond where its thick human-like legs were as they acted like robes which covered its entirety!

The creature bent its legs as it then went on to exert an incredible force on the ground and leap up into the air!

It soared at immense speed, the air releasing a tumultuous shudder with its flight and exited the hole it had made, comfortably setting its feet on the surface where a runner grass pervaded.

The creature turned this way and that, its narrow eyes seeing way beyond the horizons on all sides.

It emitted a sound like wheezing as it took in a massive amount of air, so much so that the area looked staved of it, small grasses and rocks being pulled along with the suction!

It was one mere breathe however, as after the creature was done, there was a notable difference to the atmosphere.

Something was lacking and everything remained still.

The beast revealed something that hadn't been visible on its person before.

A long staff.

It was reddish brown with a shiny sheen and smooth texture that revealed it to be made of something akin to amethyst in an unrefined shape.

It had a sharp end, and over its other end, rings of another type of stone which had a dark hue could be seen, barely visible arcs of energy sifting over it as atop this, a diamond shaped white gem settled, fitted over the staff.

Unlike the rings of dark stone around the edge of the staff, this white stone which had a rough texture like granite had apparent waves of overwhelming energy, its surface looking like it was made of designs of fire in the same white hue.

The creature pointed its staff below, within the hole, a streak of bright white light darting within as it promptly reached the Cluster below and penetrated it!

The Cluster began to quiver as the stream of energy continuously pulsed within with a sound akin to an earthquake resounding!

The stream of energy then retreated from the Cluster and shot back to the staff!

Surprisingly, what followed was a phenomenon that only appeared when a Cluster lost its General.

The crack in space collapsed as the Cluster vanished entirely, the ground where the construct had been, trembling from the phenomenon.

The creature above grunted as it continued to wheeze.

Over the diamond-like gem upon its staff, the design of white fire was replaced with the blurry image of a vast and expansive world that held a myriad of living and non-livings.

This was a singular ability of this natural treasure that easily scaled up to the Legendary level.

Chapter 308: Finally!

Guilds Association building.

"We sure got a sweet deal from the Harem Guild. All that gold and the Enriching gems! Haha, we'll be set for a while."

"Why are you so excited? It was clearly all planned to shut us up."

"And we did, didn't we? That was the point. We practically earned benefits without working for them. To be honest I'm happy with this result. At we didn't have to risk anything."

"I'm fine with it too. Even if the Harem Guild hadn't intervened, we would have been stuck with white Clusters and silvers all the way. Now we get gold coins!"

"<Sigh>."

The Guild's Association was lively as things seemed to start settling within the region, except for certain parts that had experienced the flashy transcendent powers of Somanda.

It was business as usual with requests still tricking in, even though at a very slow pace.

Jac at this moment was talking to another one of the evaluators of the Association. He seemed to have had been on leave, until the chaotic Cluster situation started that is.

"I could have earned a few more gold coins just by being here," the man said as he clicked his tongue, his build which was leaner yet just as big as Jac's going over to lean by the wall as he shook his head.

Jac merely laughed at the older man's words.

"So that little brat Tulnas solved all this? You're one lucky son of a fruity bugger," the man said as he sighed, blowing the hairs that made up his greying stubble.

"Heheh. You're dying of jealousy only now when you're at the end of your bitter life? Don't worry, you'll have plenty of time to find other talents when I'm gone," Jac said, offering no form of consolation.

The man shook his head and then narrowed his eyes as he seemed to recall something.

"That's right. I heard you managed to find another gem in the ocean of subpar rough. A Mage was it?"

Jac instantly wore a complicated expression.

"Kind of," he said as the young man was a topic he wasn't sure how to react to anymore when people tied him to the murderous bugger.

It truly was derailing into uncharted and unplanned territory with this particular topic.

Jac who had been smiling sheepishly as he thought up a response suddenly looked past the man he was conversing with as something caught his eye.

"Festos?" he uttered in disbelief.

"Hmm? Yes, that's the name I heard. Quite the odd name I say. I mea—"

"No that dammit!" Jac bellowed as he pushed away the man and rushed towards the door where a certain young man was just entering.

The other evaluator turned and followed.

The entrance of this familiar figure through Association building doors attracted quite the bit of attention as his figure which had grown different in stature caused some to raise their brows while hushed chatter began as others recognised him.

The new Mage had been out of the public eye for a while and as his crimes had not yet been addressed to the public, most were pleased to see him.

Yes.

It was indeed the Discount Human.

He donned his Fleeting Ghoul's Adornment which had several damaged portions and holes in it from the attacks of the carp and the Devouring Lantern Alpha Wolf.

However, this was all covered by something that was attracting the attention of the onlookers.

Something akin to robe that covered him.

It had a dark bluish black hue while seemed transparent, yet with the full ability to hide everything it covered.

A good set of words to describe it would be partially ethereal.

It lightly draped over the ground with Skullius' movement, its seemingly torn edges making it look like a poor wanderer's garment.

It gave everyone the sense that it was some kind of extremely expensive magical item, this not being a far fetched assumption when one took Skullius' supposed class into account, yet, no one sensed anything from it.

Nothing at all.

It seemed like a regular robe.

Where was this guy coming from then?

A journey of self discovery? Some kind of magical retreat?

Jac approached Skullius who looked vastly different from when he last saw him and also wondered about this getup.

He was a little perturbed when he saw the neck of the robe move a bit on its own, tightening as if it was a living thing.

The burly man decided to dispense with the friendly greetings and express his concerns but with a hushed voice that only Skullius could hear.

"You have some guts to only appear now when things were getting bad for your benefactors."

Skullius turned to the crowds that were gazing at him instead of rendering a response at first.

"Well, with how things look here, I don't think I'm too late," Skullius said without his usual vigorous tone. "Am I?"

Jac was a little confused when hearing and seeing Skullius' posture and tone of voice.

The Discount Human seemed a bit...bolder than usual in temperament.

If he were in his shoes, he would be rushing to meet up with the two people that wanted to help him.

"Thankfully you're right. Follow me. You'll want to see Silrat first," Jac said as he sighed.

A weight was taken off of his chest as well.

While he wasn't exactly the face of the deal that Silrat and Tulnas had made, he was involved.

If it were to flop, he would have to waddle in shame for all the preparations he had made.

\*

Silrat was sitting anxiously at his desk, many plans and theories squirming in his mind when the door suddenly opened.

He shot his head up and body up as fortunately, his luck practically presented to him with what he desperately needed the most.

The Mage he had been waiting for appeared before his eyes along with Jac.

The man withheld his rage filled words as he went on to take six full breaths to calm himself before wearing his signature sly smile.

"I'd like to say welcome back, but our current circumstances require quite a bit of haste. Where on Aigas were you? Seeing your state right now tells me that you were well enough to return right?" Silrat sat as he sat back down with a heavy slump.

Skullius took a seat before answering, this gesture becoming a norm to him.

"Yes, that's true. But, I can tell you that whatever Tulnas told you was far from the real deal. If you had faced what I did, you'd be dead," Skullius said with a strangely excited and confident voice.

This was quite different from his previous demeanour.

Silrat wasn't opposed to this however.

"Interesting. I'll hold off on asking for further details about that. For now, we'll need to convene with Tulnas about everything else. Your charges are still set and all our livelihoods depend on it. I'd

blame my greed that led to this but we are way past that point. I'll brief you on how we are going to play this," Silrat said.

Skullius nodded.

"I have an idea on how to free myself of my crimes though. If yours fails, mine probably won't," Skullius said as he wore an unsettling grin.

What he had been doing for the past days had been in preparation for this and of things to come.

### Chapter 309: Pending Concerns, Known and Unknown

Towns were abundant in Pelian and the overall population they held was quite large.

They were normally used as points to buy and sell goods for other people in different establishments, which was their general purpose in most settings anyway.

These days, however, there seemed to be quite the bit of congestion as people had developed the notion that it would be best to stock up on essentials in case something like the crisis which had almost destroyed their livelihoods before occurred again.

It was a reasonable assumption as during the mass Clusters, travel was quite difficult as one tended to see more than one Cluster either close up or from a distance on the way.

The uncertainty of whether it would rupture and reveal the creatures it hid or not made it hard for normal people to remain composed and most found themselves staying home.

At this time, in this town called Noseye, there was bountiful activity in and outside of it as established stalls, stores and mini stalls were bought from rather quickly.

At the entrance where many were going in and out in a clustered manner, a couple that was walking in the direction of the town through the dry and dirt ridden ground suddenly stopped.

It was actually the man who held his lover's hand tight as he then pulled her to a halt her movement.

"Dear? What's wrong?" the woman asked with the cute tilt of her head.

"Uh..." the man stammered as he started to backtrack. "Look over... there."

The man pointed with a shaky figure to his right where someone... something was approaching.

He wasn't the only one who saw this, however, as one of the Capital Knights that were ensuring fluid motion by the town entrance had sensed this oddity's presence first.

As the figure approached, the sun bearing down against its figure, everyone who was prompted to turn their heads to see where the Knight was going to, saw that the thing which approached, was not human!

It was a tall creature, squid like in its appearance.

Extra long tentacles that stemmed from its head seemed to be what it wore to cover itself, its slimy skin marred with boils, creeping the freak out of the masses that immediately began to run away as the Knight called for his companions!

Screams were heard as many rushed back into the town as they cocked up dust with their mass retreat while others ran away from it, not wishing to be trapped inside in case things went wrong!

Ten Knights rushed from the city, going towards the slow moving figure of the creature that held a strange looking staff.

"Prepare yourselves men!" a man who looked like the leader of this arrangement of Knights said as he immediately activated his Full Body Aura!

It was extremely clear to him and his fellow knights who mimicked his action that this creature which had suddenly spawned out of nowhere was a terrifying enemy!

They couldn't even tell the full extent of its powers as the tentacles that covered its body, seemed to also mask the bulk of its presence!

"Charge!" the leading Knight said as he dashed forward with fervour, giving his companions the courage to launch their attack as well.

In response to their charge, the Cluster beast however did not move an inch to defend or counter. Instead...

WHEEEZE...

A raspy bout of breathing was heard as its tentacles squirmed, somewhere under them, an organ taking in a vast amount of air.

A vast, vast amount of it.

The Knights felt the peculiar sensation of the atmosphere being starved of air in the next moment, as terrifyingly all the oxygen was drained out of it!

CLINK!

The leading Knight's sword fell to the ground as he felt a terrible set of effects from the creature's breaths which caused him to lose his burning will to fight and in the process, his life.

No!

It wasn't only the atmosphere that was robbed of oxygen from the mere breath of the tentacled Cluster beast!

Even the air in the Knight's lungs had been forcefully withdrawn, leaving him to gasp as his face turned unsightly!

Furthermore, this wasn't the only thing that had been robbed, as all the mana he had generated in his body was also stolen through his pores!

The Knight along with the others gripped their necks as they buckled down, their eyes turning bloodshot as their skins changed colour!

Sadly, this reality fell upon anyone who was within 400 meters of the Cluster beast as the bodies of thousands who had been running far, could be seen on the ground, dead, while only a few who were already a distance away had managed to escape.

Fortunately for them, this creature had no intent to pursue.

The vast amount of air and mana it had pulled within itself visibly danced and twisted around its figure, its tentacles gaining bits of bright white that released popping noises as they became saturated with power.

The Cluster beast looked at the town with its lateral slits and determined that there were thousands remaining within it.

However, they lacked the quality that it desired and were too few in number.

The creature turned its head as its eyes honed in on another location where it both saw and felt a larger setup.

A bigger establishment.

A richer atmosphere with millions of waddling humans, many strong ones sprinkled within it.

This was tens of miles of away yet it still sensed it all.

That is what it desired.

It raised its staff with the white gem atop, and pointed in the direction of the town.

A stream of white coloured energy, like a continuous river of milk poured from the gem at the tip which looked to reflect a vast world!

A misty fog began to appear where the streak of energy landed as within this fog which contrasted the white colour of the pouring energy in a starkly dark grey, figures that looked like this Cluster beast began to emerge!

Hundreds and then thousands.

The waves of mana they produced in their collective appearance caused the buildings in the town to begin to crumble as they simply exceeded the norm!

The tentacled Cluster beast's eyes turned into crescents as it held very high hopes for its unbound future.

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"I STILL CANNOT BELIEVE SOMEONE LIKE YOU WHO HAS INHERITED FULGARDT'S POWERS IS STILL BOUND BY SUCH PETTY CIVIL LAWS! YOU'RE BEING JUDGED FOR KILLING A FEW PEASANTS, TOMATO FLINGER?!"

'I told you to keep it down, you idiot! Of course I have to get this over with, I'm under a Tie of Exchange!' Skullius thought.

He didn't know the full repercussions of not adhering to the ToE but he figured he had enough pending issues that eagerly awaited him to slip so that they could devour him.

He wouldn't give them a chance.

This had been the other reason why he had rushed back to Inhone City as quickly as he did.

Mysteriously.

No one other than him understood how ridiculous the SPEED he had used to return truly was from where he had been, as from the perspective of the rest, it took Skullius days to return but in reality...

Kek.

"Right! Still... who are they to judge you?! To judge us?! We have a mission you, know, TOMATO FLINGER?! We have a mission!"

Skullius sighed as he looked ahead.

Three hours after his mysterious return, there was once more a gathering to decide his fate.

The same individuals who had been present before had gathered around now, with Skullius seated freely on a chair as he wore the casual clothing that had been handed to him by Silrat before.

He calmly looked at Erkus, Terian and Damilla who had just walked into the room, a practically tangible wave of tension ensuing while he was in an annoying conversation with his new mental inmate.

The City Lord took the time to address him, his no nonsense expression giving the weight to the situation that he desired.

"Greetings once again, Festos. I'm glad you decided to return to the city despite the unfortunate events that occurred during your excursion," Erkus said in a stern tone.

It had been made known to Skullius that his perfect condition of health, without the slightest depiction of him ever being roughed up at all didn't help their case at all by Silrat.

Skullius could only silently curse his [Luminous Healing] which had even done wonders for Ginie back then.

Now it looked like the bastard had been on holiday all along.

The Discount Human nodded while Silrat and Tulnas who were seated at the sides couldn't help but wear expressions of uncertainty.

What was going to happen next wasn't entirely of their own planning as Skullius had introduced to them his own plan for settling this situation once and for all.

"Good. Let us now formally begin, shall we?" Erkus said.

Chapter 310: Once and For All (1)

Tulnas and Silrat had had quite the lengthy discussion with Skullius before this meeting, with the Discount Human detailing what had happened to him on a minimal scale.

There was absolutely no way he would mention his ties to Undeath but it seemed that a story he had told before, during his first interrogation, about him and Elita fighting off the Cursed Knight, had already brought Tulnas to be suspicious.

At least on a level where he thought that Skullius had actually done more to earn the Green Neolists' wrath than he had testified to.

What was worth noting was Tulnas' reaction and thoughts towards this issue in general.

Unlike Silrat, he had been there when Somanda had appeared and the staggering amount of power that the being had shown had left him frozen stiff.

His initial thoughts when considering Skullius' fate were not that positive as he assumed that the Discount Human had probably been killed.

The thing was though, he had been told by Silrat about Skullius' testimony of how he had a scuffle with the Green Neolists so when he saw one after the other, Green Neolist related entities seeking Skullius (Actuass and Somanda), he assumed that it was because of this.

It honestly hadn't seemed like the Discount Human could survive an encounter with that terrifying creature but he had been proved wrong, his thoughts of Skullius' perhaps being captured instead being shattered when he saw the Mage here in good health.

One must remember that Silrat and Tulnas were under a contract that guaranteed benefits for both.

Benefits that they had never specified to Skullius.

However, for Silrat, the main object and propagator of his successive fortune was Skullius while in the beginning, Tulnas hadn't seen the Discount Human as anything but an object that the Guilds Association Branch head had an interest in.

The one that allowed him to earn the benefits he had agreed upon with Silrat.

After seeing his capabilities however, Tulnas had also developed interest in the Discount Human, even thinking of going against his agreement with Silrat to snatch the Discount Human on numerous occasions during the excursion to find the Evenfall cultists.

However, with the situation getting out of hand, Tulnas' mind had been set on pressing matters as his subsequent attempts at trying to find Skullius around the scene of the latest battle had produced no fruit.

Now, Silrat and Tulnas were anxiously seated as they heard Erkus say it was time to begin.

Damilla's eyes glared at Skullius who calmly gazed forward.

"I don't assume you'll let yourself be divined, just like Tulnas here?"

Do you have any convincing account that can lead us to believe that you actually helped in any way, or at the very least dissuade the City Lord from handing you over to the College of the Esteemed?" Damilla said as she narrowed her eyes, her expression showing that she expected the same defensive stance as the one she had seen from Tulnas.

Terian was looking forward to what this man had to say in response while Erkus wasn't sure he would hear anything worth his time.

Surprisingly, the reply they all got was unexpected.

"Actually, you're free to divine me and see how much I contributed," Skullius said with a rather innocent expression that didn't betray much emotion.

"What?" Damilla said in surprise.

Terian raised a brow while Erkus hummed in confusion.

All three had similar reactions as they couldn't believe that Skullius actually agreed.

This man simply agreed to getting divined when he shrieked during the last session he and Damilla had?

Terian's first thought was that Skullius had something up his sleeve that he wished to use, so he gave the Discount Human a thorough warning.

"If you intend to do anything funny, I advise against it. I'm sure you're aware already, but no magical fluctuations can escape my senses," Terian said with a stern pride that radiated outwards to express his confidence as a Mage.

"I know... bro," Skullius said as he kept his composed temperament.

Damilla turned to Tulnas, her eyes telling the Tamer that she was suspicious of him but he merely shrugged as he too didn't know much about what Skullius intended.

The plans that he and Silrat had crafted had become backups instead.

Damilla's sight fell on Silrat next, the man emitting a sigh and shaking his head, genuinely expressing that he knew nothing at all.

The Diviner stood and walked up to Skullius.

"I have permission, right?" she asked, her question not being directed at Skullius but at Erkus who promptly agreed.

Damilla looked down at the Discount Human as she raised her hand and placed it on his head.

Terian keenly spread his senses to ensure that Skullius wouldn't do anything to Damilla during this process.

As soon as the Discount Human had walked in, he had even stealthily scanned his body for any and all objects but he found none except his clothing.

At this point, it was obvious that he wasn't betting on any weapon or tool, right?

Then what?

Did he simply believe that what Damilla saw from him would be enough to clear his case?

Maybe.

Damilla activated her Divining abilities as soon, her eyes rolled as she started to discern things about Skullius.

She decided to play by the rules this time as she anchored her sight on things that happened a few days ago, her touch onto Skullius' soul being gentle.

Then...

....

Ten full minutes passed with Damilla placing her hold over Skullius' forehead in what would be called the most relaxed Divining session of all time!

In Inhone.

Both parties wore relaxed expressions as silence pervaded.

Erkus had looked over to Terian several times to infer whether everything was alright or not and the old man had confirmed that he had seen nothing suspicious.

Tulnas and Silrat had given each other glances as they too wondered what the heck was going on.

After an additional five minutes, Damilla finally removed her fingers from Skullius' forehead and turned to Erkus and Terian before releasing a loud sigh.

This was followed by a declaration that was... unusual.

"It seems that this man is truly innocent...no uhuhm... I mean, his story is truthful. He truly landed a hand to Toons and his Guild. So City Lord... I think you should...uhm pardon him of his crimes..." Damilla said with an exaggerated smile.

"..."

Huh?

Erkus raised a brow, this time with grand suspicion.

What was going on?

Terian also felt that something was off but there was nothing he could refer this to as he hadn't sensed anything wrong during the session!

There no mana fluctuations asides from Damilla's own and even Skullius' core had been perfectly still.

One thing was for sure though, Damilla didn't speak like this.

She was as formal as him when it came to speech and was fluid in her pattern.

This however, was not.

Tulnas and Silrat once again looked at each other, then at Skullius who looked like was holding in a fart.

"Damilla, are you alright?" Erkus asked.

"Oh yes, yes," she said with a smile as strangely, she went on to...

Fondle her own breasts for a moment before awkwardly standing aloof.

...?

This made everyone here a bit uncomfortable.

For a grown woman who was well past her forties to be... ahem.

An awkward silence ensued which was then dispelled by Damilla who continued to speak.

"With my Divining I was able to see the full evidence. You don't doubt me do you?! Hmm?! No one wanted to get closer to the truth than me, right?! I'm telling the truth!" Damilla suddenly had an outburst before calming herself.

Erkus turned his head to Skullius who wore an expression closer to one faced with shame than anything else.

At this point, Terian stood up and walked up to Damilla who slightly trembled when she met his piercing gaze.

The Mage released his mana as it went on to run over Damilla's entirety.

It took a few seconds for him to finish this process before he looked at Skullius with a hard gaze that clearly expressed that he hadn't found anything out of the ordinary, so he was referring to him now for answers.

"Well?" Erkus asked.

"There seems to be nothing outside the ordinary," Terian said.

What?!

Erkus couldn't believe this.

What on earth was going on?

