

Undead 461

Chapter 461: One Item

Sixth floor of the Guilds Association building.

Each floor seemed to have a desk at the entrance and or further into the floor where logs and formal administrations were taken care of.

It usually depended on how much importance was placed on the floor and the level of additional security involved – this determined how much administrative staff was required.

In the case of the treasury, there was only a single reception individual required for the whole floor in addition to one guard at the doors that so openly depicted that they led to the treasury.

These doors were extremely thick and over them was a luminous glow that tainted their dark hue, giving them an archaic feel and visual.

Runes.

These were different from the ones found within the evaluation room.

These were more potent and they encircled the entirety of the floor in general though most could not be seen so as to give the illusion of vulnerability.

There was a distinct difference between arrays and runes, as arrays could only carry a lesser commands while taking up a large space while runes had a lot more authority to them in a condensed form that didn't waste the available space given.

Any Mage could learn how to form an array with practise but runecraft... it was a whole different game.

In the empty space that proceeded the lonely reception a few doors behind the three, Alaris stepped forward and placed his hand on the doors.

His mana sifted through from his hand and into the doors, a loud but short lived thrum echoing within the room like a tremor.

The evaluation officer then closed his eyes as he focused on the door's specific configurations.

Six runes with different vibrant colours that almost blinded Silrat showed, their order rotating and zipping around over the surface of the doors.

A green rune flashed over to place itself in front of Alaris' hand and with another loud thrum, it expanded over the surface of the doors, prompting them to creak open.

This showcase showed how much security was placed on the treasury, though Skullius who had been told by Silrat on their way here that the treasury was obviously guarded couldn't help but wonder, where this guard was.

His Koten and Machi didn't detect anyone besides the lonely receptionist.

As the doors opened, to Silrat and Skullius, was revealed a luminous swirling dark green image that the former Branch Head visually identified as a portal while Skullius identified it as such by feeling a sense of familiarity with the spatial properties he had tasted on the stout mountain in Fortune.

"Come," Alaris said as he walked through the green mass, shortly followed by the duo.

With a tickling feeling akin to being kissed in the sensitives, the trio were quickly transported into a dark room that stretched for tens of meters. Lights immediately came on when they appeared and Silrat took in deep breaths.

He wasn't used to this kind of travel.

Behind them, contrary to what most would expect, was nothing, as once an individual entered the treasury, the doors on the other side would be sealed once again.

The room itself resembled a narrow corridor with protrusions from the sides that held up the numerous artefacts.

Numerous was an understatement in all honesty.

Abundant was more accurate.

Swords, spears, staves, shields, halberds, glaives, polearms, armour, berserker armours, spiked gauntlets, capes, robes, axes, scrolls....

Scrolls!

Skullius' senses tingled.

"This is the first treasury. You are free to choose a single item from here," Alaris said. " Though I should say there isn't anything too impressive here. A few Unique and Legendary items of note is the best you'll find. Because of the shortage of Mages and other Energy Formers, most of this stuff remains without an owner."

The Hybrid Luman was barely listening.

While he was interested in the armours, robes and staves, the scrolls were a new addition to what he knew as established in this world.

He was curious as to what they held.

He hoped that they were something like the All Eater Scroll.

Only four could be seen and he was determined to see what they were, so much so that he hiddenly ignited Crude Vision.

As he turned his back to the two behind him, walking up to the items, his hands touching the scrolls, Alaris tilted his head in a bit of surprise.

"You've taken an interest in the Prompt Spells? Most people don't value them since they are one time usage items. At least the ones of this quality. Those ones are at the peak of the Unique rarity at most," Alaris said, informing Skullius to which Silrat gulped, hoping that wasn't enough to get him killed.

Thankfully, It was his duty to inform and his words conveyed just that. Unlike most evaluators, he wasn't biased enough to market a few items out of the treasury or to give advise to his favourites. He had seen enough talent to not be swayed so easily.

His perfunctory information dump didn't seem to get through to Skullius however, as with a slight tremble, the Hybrid Luman turned, his vision blank once again, but with an uncontrollable smile on his face.

Many thoughts were racing through his head right now as he processed them all quickly with [Beyond the Hype].

"I'll take this," Skullius said while raising his hand which held one of the scrolls. A beige coloured one tied with a dark string.

A strong scent of mana could be felt from it but Alaris could already tell that it was a Unique item.

"Are you sure this is what you want?" Alaris asked with a strict visage. There were no take backs.

"I'm sure," Skullius said.

Silrat didn't air out his view as he was getting used to the idea that the Hybrid Luman had a different outlook, a larger perspective and a grander goal.

He would trust him with this.

Although among the items here were Enriching gems of great value too, he didn't try to dissuade Skullius from his choice.

"Very well," Alaris said as he asked nothing further, motioning for the two follow him out.

He extended his hand in the open air and the green portal emerged once more, leading all three men outside.

"It seems so underwhelming to have come all this way for one item," Silrat said with a bitter look on his face.

"Well, you get to know the layout of the Association in the process," Alaris said with a smile.

"I appreciate that," Skullius said while suppressing the smile that sought to explode over his face.

What he had just casually gained was really more than he could have imagined.

And it was just the beginning.

If he could get all the other scrolls...and those in the second and third treasury...

The Penetrator would be so happy.

Chapter 462: Missions of Utmost Importance

Fortune.

"What is this creature doing here?" Bassbion said in an authoritative voice that lightly rattled Ferex.

She remained in her stone form, fitted within the hollow at the base of the statue of her master.

Her eyes settled on the figure of the large beast that looked at her and then at Yagrina, tendrils of Unliving Thread whipping over its bulk.

It was Ferex.

He was here for an important mission.

He quickly stood on his hind legs, his figure morphing into a humanoid form that stood in place cautiously.

"Well...?" Bassbion questioned, waiting for the creature to express its purpose.

Because of the communication barrier, Ferex had to resort to gesturing to get his points across.

The Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide quickly covered his entire figure, devouring the Unliving Thread over it.

Soon, Ferex vanished from sight but...

"What are you doing?" Bassbion angrily questioned.

Did this thing want to fight or something?

In the next moment however, Ferex reappeared and pointed at Bassbion with his claw.

"Huh?"

The Hound then punched himself in the face, and spread his arms out as if in confusion.

"What in the world is that supposed to mean?"

Seriously?

Ferex expelled a shot of heat from his nostrils in annoyance before performing the sequence of gestures once again - using the Hide to erase his existence, pointing it at Bassbion and then striking himself in the head.

Bassbion was about to angrily question Ferex once again what he meant when...

"Wait, Sister Bassbion," Yagrina said, cutting off Bassbion. "I think he's asking how we can see him even when he is invisible."

"What?"

"Don't you remember? You pummelled him when he was trying to defend that man back then. He seems to not be used to getting spotted in that form. Poor thing."

During the battle between Skullius and Bassbion, Ferex had attempted to sneak up on the guardian but was bashed easily as he had been seen despite his ability to erase every aspect of his presence.

Ferex of course couldn't understand what the two guardians were saying but he was hoping to get some insight.

"Do you honestly think I would remember that minor detail amidst all the crazy set of events that happened during the past few days? I hardly recall it," Bassbion said. "And why should I dignify this thing with a response?"

"Come now, Sister Bassbion. He is merely asking. Besides, he is an ally, is he not. We best accept that reality sooner or later."

"..."

Bassbion didn't offer a retort as coming to terms with all this was still a problem for her.

She preferred to have a master, a host, who was independent and dominant, just like their masters.

She was willing to follow such a host even if they took an even darker path that ended this world.

But this...?

"Hmmp. It's not like its some grand revelation. It's peculiar how his ability to escape any notice works but as spirits we see a whole lot more of the world than any others," Bassbion said before she turned to Ferex, realising something. "Can he even understand us?"

"I doubt it," Yagrina said as she looked at the Hound who didn't show any reaction to what they said at all.

No show of understanding.

No nod.

Nothing.

The creature scratched its head as it then turned to the two with a new request.

On its clawed hand, it formed the image of a long sword with Unliving Thread and then pointed at Bassbion again, gesturing for the guardian to give it to him.

"My sword?" Bassbion said as her body started to emerge from the hollow in the statue. She attained vibrant colour as she came out, instead of the rigid creaking, her movement becoming smooth while her gaze focused on the Hound who actually stepped forward to meet her fearlessly.

The guardian was surprised to see Ferex requesting the same thing, repeating it over and over like a machine without considering the threat from Bassbion.

"Just give it to him, Sister Bassbion. He can't use it anyway and he isn't fast enough to escape you from close range. If worse comes to worst I'll even intervene," Yagrina said.

Bassbion wasn't too accepting of this idea.

For her, just thinking about this creature before her being a lackey of Skullius shut off any kind of compassion she could possibly feel.

Yet, she was pretty curious.

What did this beast want with her sword?

"Here you go Mister Festos," Rist said with a smile.

She was in charge of all formalities regarding evaluation officers and executive mercenaries on the fifth floor and while trapped in her cube, she dished out an identification card for Skullius from the slot aligned with the top of the desk.

The identification card was designed with small reflective cubes that alternated their colouration between blue and gold as one turned them to different positions from the light.

Over it, was Skullius' name, class and Rank which were sculpted in with the intent to show that the Hybrid Luman was in fact, special.

It had to be known that he was different from the rest.

"Thank you," Silrat claimed the card and handed it to Skullius behind him, along with a pouch that had the 100 Plasma coins.

He turned back to Rist and politely asked, "Could we see the mandatory missions available for exclusive mercenaries?"

Rist smiled politely before shuffling a few files and documents within her shelf and pushing them out to Silrat through the slot.

The former Branch Head then turned back to Skullius as the two sat down and shuffled through the missions.

"Some of these are pretty dangerous. You are allowed to start a Guild without paying the fees that most other Guilds have to pay, you know?" Silrat informed.

"You already mentioned that but that's not what I need right now," Skullius said as he set his eyes on the missions.

There were six of them with general descriptions over location, the situation and hazard level in addition to the rewards one would get when they finished it.

They seemed to be ranked according to the grading system for exclusive mercenaries, the ones Skullius had been given ranging from Rank 4 and below in terms of difficulty.

Generally, Rank 4 would be more or less equal to the lowest B ranked mercenary, by this Branches standard, so Skullius was intrigued.

Among the six missions, three caught Skullius' eye in terms of reward and general description.

The first was to venture to a famous tourist sighting at a place known as Creeping Chill, a hill said to have been sanctified by a Priest from old times. An abnormally large blue Cluster had appeared there and it seemed it had roughly two days before it was estimated to open according to what was known about Clusters.

The reward was 200 Plasma coins along with the two items. One Unique and Legendary, both of which were the choice of the mercenary.

The second was a mission to travel to the Belvion Union, a group of four towns that formed a haven for the people of that part of the region. A notorious group of bandits named the Ascendant Hunters were threatening the peace there and they were a rather elusive bunch.

The reward was 500 Plasma coins along with an item said to only be disclosed when the mission was completed.

The last one involved a Cluster as well but the beasts within it had already escaped and were occupying a large woodland to the South of Genhuis City, claiming it as their territory.

The reward was 280 Plasma coins along with something called the Simmering Cloud. It was identified as an artefact and Skullius was interested to see what it was.

All of these missions were intriguing.

Skullius looked up and called for Rist without turning to Silrat.

"I'll take these three," he said with determination, hints of urgency noticeable in his blank eyes.

Chapter 463: Chasing A Scent

In the carriage outside the Association, Terese, Daggs and the guards were eagerly waiting for the return of the two who had remained in the building.

At first it had been silent, but soon, Terese started yammering Skullius' praises, going on and on about how cool he was, easily fighting against the might of the Association's evaluation officers and defeating them as if they were nothing.

Her indifference and apparent dislike towards Skullius had turned into infatuation so quickly, her mind completely erasing the memory of Skullius' 'exchange' with Alaris which ended in total defeat.

The guards wanted to discuss the matter too but unfortunately while on duty, they weren't allowed to gossip and giggle like little girls.

While they were trained professionals, they couldn't compare to what they had seen Skullius do. Most of them were mid-level fighters that Stylla and her brother insisted on taking while leaving much of the entire Family force back at the estate.

They had decent strengths of their own and only needed a few guards and the ones that were left for Terese were the majority.

Besides, there were Capital Service appointed to protect them within the City as well, though a few of them who insisted on moving with Stylla and her brother.

"I always knew that young man had potential! It turns out I was right! We've recruited a powerful man into the Family!" Terese said while laughing, this foresight of hers which she claimed to have gotten making everyone in the carriage nervous.

Young man, she said.

Always knew, she said!

We, she said!

The guards as well as Daggs swallowed the hypocrisy Terese was dishing out.

She was a child, they might as well let her revel in her spoiled nature.

Daggs sighed for the umpteenth.

He was genuinely scared of facing Skullius again.

Had he known that the man he had been escorting was even more terrifying than he thought, he would have declined Silrat's order to go pick him up.

By nature, he was a very fidgety person though he was willing to push through rough situations for good causes and no—

"Damn it!" Daggs almost ducked away from the window of the carriage before realising where he was.

"What is it?" Terese frowned as she gazed at him, clearly not appreciative of these continuous jump scares.

"Nothing, at all, Lady Terese," Daggs said in a hushed tone. "It's just that Master Festos and Master Silrat are coming out now."

Terese hurried to the window, her eyes bulging as she took in the figure of Skullius that descended down the steps to the entrance.

In her view, he looked much too cool and her young heart burned with the passion of infatuation.

She watched as Skullius and Silrat stopped at the base of the Guilds Association building, the Hybrids Luman saying something to Silrat as he then turned and walked away in the opposite direction with his hands in his pockets.

"Huh! Where...where is he going?! Why isn't he coming here?!" Terese cried out as Silrat approached the carriage and boarded.

She crawled over to the former Association Branch on the seat and shook him with her eyes bulging out in desperation.

"Where is Mister Festos going?! Why are you letting him walk off like that?!"

Silrat was taken aback by this attitude change. Was she really fawning over Festos now after seeing his display?

He sighed.

Just now Skullius had expressed haste. After inquiring from Rist what a Simmering Cloud was, the reward for the third mission he chose and without getting an answer as the lady had stated that information was not hers to divulge, Skullius had promptly asked Silrat to leave.

The former Branch Head wanted to tell Skullius to first get to know the many details attached to his new title including how many of his peers they were but Skullius was in a hurry.

Frustrating.

As tense he was now, the last thing he wanted was another problem.

Silrat gazed at the child beside him.

'You were a perfect....sockethole, as Festos puts it. Now I have to protect you too. Tsk.'

Skullius walked from within the crowds while following the trail that the carriage had come from before. He turned down multiple roads filled with many people going about their varied business, sensing their airs and mana types as he went.

The bright sun in the sky did not cease to light up all things. To ordinary people it barely had any effect and the little they could feel from it was all but positive.

For people like Skullius who were sensitive to minute changes in mana and energies, it felt like constantly being watched.

It was annoying.

'It shouldn't be a problem right? Alaris makes it clear that Mages do all kinds of crazy in this city, so this should be that strange,' Skullius thought as he entered into a crowded bar.

The name of the bar perfectly encapsulated the mood within, a plaque which hung from not having enough support to stand proud depicting it in a semi-pleasing font style, the words 'ALL DAY LONG' showing.

The commotion and hubbub within this establishment masked much of the micro activity happening within and this was exactly what Skullius was hoping for.

However, he did wonder how long all these people had been here. They looked tired but happy.

The party seemed to never end.

He blended within the drunk and drinking men and women, pulled out the Elimparidis Stone Staff and shot a milky ray that flashed for a brief second as it called upon the figure of a lime green haired girl who looked around confusedly.

"Huh? HUH?! Where am I?!" Yuyui called as she spun around before Skullius grasped her head.

"Where are you looking, you sockethole?" he said, garnering Yuyui's attention.

The girl looked pleased to see Skullius, at least in this form. Her opinion that her master was nicer when he looked human remained unchanged as she wore a big smile as she saw him.

Skullius grimaced as he pushed the girl through the crowd and exited the bar.

"What are you smiling for?"

"Oh nothing, Master. Why did you call me out?" Yuyui asked as the two walked.

Skullius narrowed his unseeing eyes as he looked down the street they had travelled when coming to the Association.

That presence he had sensed....

He hadn't been in the Association building for long so he hoped that he could find that man again.

He couldn't recognise which shop he had entered but if he hadn't gone to far, catching a whiff of his deadly presence should be possible with [Koten Machi].

This, he didn't share with Yuyui however as instead, he spilled what the glutton wanted to hear.

"Your plan worked. Let's get your appetite sated," Skullius said, not believing his own words.

Chapter 464: Dreams and Meat

Skullius and Yuyui entered into an eatery with the latter having a big smile on her face.

She looked at the immaculate arrangement of hardwood tables where many people sitting in twos, threes and fours were dining on a variety of dishes from expensive to cheap.

Yuyui couldn't help but lick her lips.

She couldn't wait!

She hadn't eaten anything except for perhaps the many fruits from the trees in the forest in Fortune which had peculiar tastes that she wasn't used to.

This was evidently different though.

She had the opportunity to eat her fill without pause and to entertain NONE of the vegetable and fruit crap.

This wasn't about nutrition!

This was about living to eat!

As the two entered, a man approached them with an amiable smile but Skullius hurriedly pushed Yuyui to the front.

The lime haired already knew why.

"Hello my dear guests, would you like to dine in the Grubby Hands this afternoon?" the man asked as his eyes alternated their focus between Skullius and Yuyui.

He was evidently a waiter.

The Pinnacle Occuluthon smiled deeply and took a step forward as she answered.

"Yes we would."

"For you and your..." the man said, glancing at Skullius who didn't spare him even his blank gaze.

"Yes. For me and my... friend," Yuyui said as she made sure she was in the waiter's line of sight, blocking the view of Skullius.

"Right away," the man said as he briskly turned and motioned for the two to follow him. He showed the duo to a free table and waited for them to sit down.

"What would you like to eat?" the man naturally asked the most vibrant of the two, Yuyui.

"Ummm....what do you have when it comes to your meats?" Yuyui asked enthusiastically while clapping her hands.

The waiter stated all the various meats they had according to their pricing per apportionment, with each statement he said, Yuyui's eye darting over to Skullius who didn't seem to be focusing on the interaction at all.

She wanted to know whether money really wasn't an object but given how Skullius had already confirmed that he would spoil her for her 'service', she loosened up... and ordered.

"Can we have a full portion of every type of meat you have?"

The waiter stiffened.

What now?

A full portion of... every meat?

That was...

"Is this to carry back home? We have packages designated for that sor—"

"No. I.. ahem... we need to eat it all now," Yuyui said, correcting herself.

The waiter tried to stir his mind, thinking that perhaps there was something he was missing but, that didn't seem to be the case at all.

"But... some of these...portions may not even fit at the table..."

"Oh. Then bring the portions that can fit in as many plates as the table can hold. Oh! We can even borrow another table!"

The waiter's brow started to pump out sweat as he could only relent. Yuyui ironed out some of the more intricate details with him as she placed a few more orders for drinks as well.

The man walked away as he went to bring the orders.

Thankfully, no one had heard the discussion here or at least no one who could hear it paid it any mind. This wasn't a fancy establishment after all, so strange fetishes were acceptable.

Skullius didn't show any reaction to the scene that had been happening before him.

At this moment, he had [Koten Machi] active as he searched for that dangerous presence once again but a portion of his focus remained on all the details of the Guilds Association that he had chosen not to indulge in for now.

His mind had been so set on taking on the missions he had chosen that he didn't bother with most of the other details. At least for now.

He hadn't even bothered to ask who that sharply dressed man was as soon after Alaris had been tasked with having him choose anything he wanted from the first treasury, such thoughts had been packed to the back of his mind.

With only two days, excluding this one, remaining before the Premium Age Royale began, Skullius wanted every assurance he could get from any kind of situation he was going to get himself involved in during this event.

Enough strength for flexibility.

He could check everything else he had left behind later.

At this moment, he wanted to kill two birds with one stone, feeding his glutton while searching for this individual he was drawn to. He didn't have much hope but it was worth a try.

"Master, the food is here!" Yuyui said as she tapped Skullius' forehead while leaning over the table.

'That's bold,' Skullius thought while reeling in his mind from the several facets it was sinking itself into.

Several individuals brought about multiple plates chock full of nothing but meat!

Braised, roasted, stewed, grilled...

Bitter smiles could be seen over the individuals serving this food.

Some of them had been under the impression that perhaps a rather large noble had suddenly emerged to try their cuisine but.. all they could see was a twig with colourful hair and an attractive man who betrayed their expectations with how gluttonous he seemed to be.

The drinks were served later, the idea of taking another table to accommodate all the dishes having firmly been denied by the owner of the eatery who peeked at these customers from a distance.

As the servers departed, Skullius confirmed with the waiter who had come before that yes... yes, he could pay for all of this.

"I have full faith that you'll want to eat somewhere else after this so do make it quick," Skullius said as he only took something to drink from the food pile.

Yuyui smiled as she dug in.

It made her feel much better to know that Skullius understood her very well.

Her body digested food at an atrocious rate. It was as if it was trying to compensate for that century and some of starvation!

It wasn't that she wouldn't get full after this meal.

She would but she could eat more!

Yuyui began to eat, her rate of swallowing... no, devouring everything in the dozens of plates causing a spectacle that drew the attention of everyone in the eatery.

Skullius ground his teeth.

He didn't think there would be eyes on him as well, some of them clearly asking for him to stop Yuyui. To save this poor girl before she killed herself!

Yet he completely ignored.

After six minutes and forty-three seconds, the final bone struck the plate as nothing that could be called flesh remained.

Skullius immediately stood up as Yuyui was clearing her mouth.

He called for the waiter who remained dazed for a few moments before answering his call, bringing the bill which Skullius swiftly paid with the gold coins he had looted from some of the bandits he came across.

He wouldn't use Plasma coins for this.

The two left the joint under perplexed and horrified eyes, Skullius leading the enthusiastic glutton down the street as he searched for the powerful presence again.

After ten minutes, he went with Yuyui into another eatery, one that specialised in baked goods. Confectioneries.

The lime haired girl walked with a skip in her step as she placed another dreadful order that made the servers turn pale.

Another cycle of food mowing ensued along with a flabbergasted audience who watched it all happen.

This cycle kept going on for two hours, with Yuyui continuously finding something new to sink her teeth into while Skullius was left to sigh as he couldn't find what he wanted.

Seeing that time was running out as he wanted to get on with his missions starting today, Skullius only allowed Yuyui one more stop. He intended to have her go back to the mansion as right now, she wasn't that useful.

As they sat down, Yuyui didn't ask for another outrageous amount of food. She asked for a somewhat normal portion that she sat down to.

She had begun to eat when Skullius asked her a question.

"Do you have an other goals besides stuffing your face?"

The lime haired girl who shockingly looked the same despite eating hundreds of people worth of feed, looked into Skullius' blank eyes and puckered her lips.

"Well..." she replied. "I don't really remember what I wanted to do before I got trapped but now... I did develop three simple dreams in that horrible place."

"What are those?" Skullius asked with a brow raised. Did this meathead actually have an honourable set of ideals and goals?

"Instead of dying of hunger, I...I want to die from eating too much!

Instead of living in that stale... maddening silence and loneliness, I want to die by laughing too hard because I'm happy!

Instead of feeling so scared that I can't even close my eyes, I want to find so much comfort that I will... I will sleep to death!

These are my dreams Master!"

Yuyui said them with firm resolve, her serious face only being distorted by the swelling of her cheek as she chewed the food from her plate.

Skullius was stunned.

He couldn't really call her dreams stupid.

He could identify with her loneliness at least.

It was like having a different variant of the conversation he had had with the dolphin Fuwin.

The Hybrid Luman folded his arms.

"It's fine to want to explore pleasure but do you have to do while dying?" Skullius said with the 34th sigh of the day. "It's not the time to be too relaxed. There's danger everywhere. For someone like you, it's best to grow your strength first."

Yuyui shrank a bit.

Skullius wasn't wrong.

She didn't know much about what was happening in the world so she tended to relax because everything was spoon-fed to her by Skullius.

Instruction.

Food.

But...

His words...

'There's danger everywhere....it's best to grow your strength first...

'There's danger everywhere...it's best to grow...'

These words...

They were oddly familiar...

Someone in her past that was unclear had said something like this...

What was it...?

A not-so-distant memory was pulled from her mind because of Skullius' words, a memory from a dangerous time...

Chapter 465: Bitter Memory

"Yuyui, is this really what you want to do?"

"Yes mother."

"Are you sure? These are dangerous times. Evil lurks everywhere. Music won't save you. Why don't you learn something? Anything to defend yourself?"

"Father..."

A scrawny man sat by Yuyui on her bed. His eyes showed nothing but love and concern as he embraced his girl who had now grown up. His soft black hair which was pushed back by the tides of balding from the forehead up, made his face clearer to the girl, his words more meaningful.

The woman who remained standing, looked at the father and daughter duo and almost wept.

Their good-natured child, too good for scolding or whipping had just announced that she wanted to journey to the Belvion Union to find a renown musician she had heard about and follow in her footsteps.

Such a relaxed dream.

All she wanted was to bring melody to the world.

"I'm not good at fighting father. Singing and... strumming a lute or playing a flute is all I can do. And it's all I want. I mean... even the Deities think so.

I'm a Bard and... it may not be much but...I like it," she said as he puckered her lips and gazed intently at her father.

The man buckled under his daughter's gaze.

She had never disobeyed him. Or at least his bias which rose as his little girl grew up into a kind-hearted angel clouded his mind from all the bits of mischief she had committed in her earlier youth.

Still...

"I know my dear," Yuyui's father stroked her chin softly while brushing away the tears she was about to spill. "Your music is bliss. To me and your mother. The whole town thrives on it. But... out there, without status or strength, everywhere you go, they'll be nothing but evil that wants to consume you."

"At least wait until the rain blows over, then we'll organise a carriage to go on a safe travel route. Alright?"

Yuyui had been gripped by the passion of youth to explore everything she could. To travel to all the towns and cities while playing her songs.

It was simplistic but it meant the world to her.

A visit to the local Temple had revealed her Direction to be tied to music.

Even now, Yuyui recalled the aged priest's words.

'Your Direction will tremble and spill a dramatic change in your path when you sing a song from the heart. A song of great pain. A song of great happiness. A song of great triumph. It may be in this order, it may not, but the Deities Listafelle will be with you.'

Yuyui favoured the Deity Listafelle of the waters.

She dreamed of travelling across the seas one day to which she hoped Listafelle would protect her on her journey.

That was a distant goal though.

As her parents insisted that she stay the night, a plea made with nothing but love and care, Yuyui relented.

To ensure her parents didn't think she was upset, she helped her mother cook a lovely meal. It was rather fun with the downpour outside that gave a cool and noisy aesthetic which beat away the boring silence of the evening.

The two giggled as they cooked, with Yuyui asking her mother, "Mother, have you remembered why our hair is green yet? I want to tell some epic story to Lalliana when we meet. She'll definitely ask why I have such unusual hair."

Yuyui's mother wore a cheeky smile.

Unlike Yuyui's lime green hair, hers was a lot darker, being a forest green colour that seemed a bit more natural.

"I still don't remember, Yuyui. Your grandmother once told me but I don't quite remember. It was beautiful tale but sadly, your mother didn't take it to heart."

"That's not what you said last time! This is a different excuse! You're lying!" Yuyui pouted.

"No its not!" her mother defended herself as she teased Yuyui with a big hug.

The rest of this night ended with smiles after a hearty meal and when the morning came... sadly the rain did not cease.

Yuyui was a bit distraught.

She had thought by today, the rain would allow a window for her leave as per her parents' request but it seemed that was not possible.

Yuyui didn't want to upset her parents by insisting on leaving again so she decided to just wait it out.

The rain wouldn't pour forever.

It wouldn't.

It certainly wouldn't.

Yuyui was lost in a torrent of memory that spun chaotically in her mind.

It had been smooth sailing to recall a bit of everything that had happened but now, her memory got jumbled.

Mother.

Father.

Home.

She remembered this but...

Huff! Huff!

Yuyui started to breath heavily as she huffed in air, her emotions running amok under Skullius' gaze.

The Hybrid Luman was alerted to Yuyui's sudden shift through his senses, his focus getting drawn to her as he wondered what was happening.

The lime haired girl puckered her lips as flashes of memories that she vaguely remembered sparked in her vision.

That day.

That morning.

It wasn't just the rain.

No.

There was something more.

She remembered the sky turning dark.

She remembered the town getting wrecked.

Screams, gurgles, screeches.

Rope tied on people's necks as some were taken, some killed.

This...

This chaos..

Yuyui's eyes started to water as the figures she had just now remembered...

Mother.

Father.

She saw them.

They were with her.

Urging her to run through the pouring rain as they fled...

As they bled...

But...

In the end, she ended up alone.

What happened?!

What caused this?!

She couldn't find them.

These two most important people in her life?!

Where was the rest of this?

Where was all of it?!

Yuyui felt a rush of rage, a burden of sorrow and a swelling in her chest that dragged down the tears that had started to brew in her eyes.

"Yuyui... what's wrong?" Skullius asked.

The girl in question shut her eyes, one of which was always covered by the bangs to mask its secret.

Her face swelled and moulded together around her features as she clutched her chest and exhaled a deep mourn, tears streaming from her eyes.

"Yuyui!" Skullius lightly called as he rose and clutched her shoulder.

The moment he did, Yuyui felt a sense of relief, as she was brought back to the living reality.

But the sorrow didn't go away.

She felt the skin on her forehead hurt from the bitter face she made, her inner pain drawing her to lean in on Skullius.

As she did so, with grief painting over her formerly cheerful face, the skin on Yuyui's forehead split, making way for something Skullius hadn't expected at all while the lime-haired girl seemed oblivious to it!

An eye popped up within the fleshy space that emerged, its pupil turning to the nearest individual around!

...!

Skullius felt a sweeping wind that blew over him from the sharp gaze of this eye, this wind shredding something on him effortlessly like dust being carried away in a storm!

...!!!!

What in the world?!

This something that was blown away...

What was it..?

What was...

"Oh shit bro..." Skullius murmured to himself in shock.

The Penetrator stood tall within the fine eatery.

Chapter 466: Dispersion!

Two seconds.

It took two seconds.

As the Hybrid Luman was unceremoniously replaced with the Penetrator, the VergeRider's first set catering for the dramatic change in size and shape, Skullius both expressed and swallowed his shock!

The ice blue iris and dark pupil that gazed at him firmly, releasing a surge of wind-like force that only he could feel barrelling against his figure was definitely the cause of this!

[High Cosmetic Body] was still a few hours from its time out and the sensation that he felt, a reaction from [Epiphany] as a result of this phenomenon that bore down against him, prompted him to realise that the unique ability of this eye was utterly ridiculous!

The fact that it could forcibly cancel out [High Cosmetic Body] which was a Supreme skill, spoke volumes about its power!

The only time this had ever happened was with the man known as Remos, back in the Labyrinth of the Yoke!

Another anomaly, Skullius was sure.

Skullius didn't have too much time to speculate as in the two seconds it took for him to make out what the flesh was happening and sense that escaping this gaze was probably the solution, he flashed behind Yuyui, denying this dark eye a victory.

Surely, as soon as Skullius got out of the eye's line of sight, the gust which blew against him vanished and his skin was reforged, his body returning to normal!

The Hybrid Luman's <CURSED HEART> beat pretty fast as many horrendous ideas passed through his brain but he cast them away.

Fortunately, the fact that he had been in a situation like this before helped him react accordingly as he knew...

"Dear Quintess! What...what was that?!"

"Eeek! I could have sworn...!"

"Whooah!"

Several people in the establishment exclaimed, grew pale or fell from their seats!

Even if it had only been for two seconds, Skullius knew that he was bound to have been seen.

Yuyui didn't put all this happening around her in her sights as she continued to weep while wincing slightly from the pain the eye on her forehead caused.

It started to bleed profusely as it moved rapidly, as if searching for Skullius, but there was no other extraordinary phenomenon for it to DISPERSE.

Skullius quickly struck the back of Yuyui's neck, the girl being knocked out.

With his speed, he grabbed the girl and exited the establishment faster than anyone there could blink, his figure in addition to the mule's appearing in a corner of a shop full of people.

It seemed like some sort of hardware shop for vehicle parts and horse accessories.

Skullius' swift appearance didn't alert anyone and the moment he stopped moving, he whipped out the Elimparidis Stone Staff and sent Yuyui back to Fortune.

As soon as this was done, he focused his senses on the outside, trying to figure out if there were any changes.

Not in the establishment he had just left, but in the sky.

Changes in the second son!

'Could something like that have been noticed?' he thought.

It was hard to tell how this sun worked.

How powerful did the individual who created it have to be to see every single thing happening in the city, if he ever could?

Surely he didn't notice something as minute as this, right?

It seemed so.

After a few minutes, Skullius didn't notice anything strange.

Nothing at all.

"No change," he said as he stepped out of the shop and started to walk slowly through the street while exercising caution.

'What the hell happened to Yuyui? She unlocked another eye just by crying, or...perhaps she just remember something important?' Skullius thought.

This sure seemed like a stroke of fortune, but that could have ended badly if he was slow to act.

He didn't know how this eye worked. For all he knew, it could permanently cancel out [High Cosmetic Body] for the rest of the day!

That would be... disastrous.

'Hmm... I should probably take her with me. I'll find out what this is all about when I'm out of the city,' Skullius said as he calmed himself down.

Part of his newly established mind-set was to accept misfortunes as they came to forge ahead when and if he was still breathing after any mishap.

Since he successfully escaped much suspicion, as not everyone had seen the glimpse of his true self, there was no way this incident would develop the same way as the one at the College of the Esteemed did.

'Well... I'll leave it up to Direction or whatever when it comes to meeting that person. Whatever is drawing me to them... will eventually lead me where it wants ,' Skullius thought as he rushed towards the gates to Genhuis City.

....

Within Fortune, Yuyui's regained focus to her surroundings.

For now, she had digested the grief and pain, ploughing it into something she could handle.

She saw that she was back in Fortune, which didn't surprise her as while she didn't know what exactly happened, she could feel that something bad had occurred.

On her forehead, something felt cool as it was lightly beaten by the wind.

It winked, its vertically placed mass looking around.

The ice blue iris and the black that surrounded it took in all that was around - forest, sea and mountain range - without ceasing to dart to and fro, this rapid movement tickling Yuyui, but she didn't laugh.

Something else took the bulk of focus.

Her flesh shifted uncomfortably, as if maggots were squirming under her skin, yet the result of this was astounding.

Her skin grew rich and her wilted body grew fuller, her limbs growing to look healthy as overall, her stature no longer looking pitiful.

Her normal eye turned vibrant, as if an additional spark of life was added to her body and reflected through it.

Yuyui felt stronger.

Physically and even mentally.

She took in a deep breath and mana started to slowly bleed out from her body as it rose.

Even this was changing.

Bryne Residence, Genhuis City.

Stylla entered the mansion while escorted by her guards along with a Capital Knight decked in silver armour, a cape following after him.

He wore a strict face that showed his determination to duty, even though he hadn't slept for two days while catering for Stylla's trips to some rather unsafe places in the city.

The redhead looked tuckered out as a lot was fed to her within the span of a day and a half.

She sat down on the comfortable seat while massaging her temples and shortly, the figure of Daggs briskly appearing to greet her.

"Where is everyone? Did Festos arrive?" Stylla asked with a dull visage that featured bags under her eyes.

"Yes, Master Festos safely arrived but he has left the city, according to Master Silrat. He has taken up missions from the Association," Daggs explained.

"I take it that means his Evaluation Test went well then?" Stylla asked.

"Yes, Lady Stylla. It went... very well..." Daggs said while thinking back to the dreadful power he had witnessed.

"Good then. I won't count on anyone to keep me company. Frankly I'd rather be alone right now," Stylla said while dismissing Daggs with her hand.

However...

"Uhhh....Lady Stylla..." Daggs began, but he couldn't find the words to express himself well enough.

"What is it?"

The attendant intended on warning Stylla... but how could he do it tactfully?

"Don't bother hiding it, Daggs old pal. It's no mystery that there's bad, bad blood between me and my sister now is it?" a voice came from the stairs as another redhead scaled down.

Stylla's forehead wrinkled.

She really didn't want this right now.

"It seems big ol' sister has been running around the city trying to make a few final touches for Premium Age Royale. How cute," the man to appear said with a smirk on his face as he sauntered over to Stylla.

The look on Stylla's face as she turned her sharp eyes to him spoke volumes of her feelings.

There was no sibling bond between these two.

Chapter 467: The List

"Sss.... its so fucking cold. More blankets here," a rather pale man with long white hair with blue streaks on both sides of his head said in annoyance while holding a large cup of piping hot tea.

On the table placed over his lap as he sat in bed, wrapped in thick blankets like a giant worm, was a plate full of treats – biscuits, muffins, hard chocolates among other stuffs.

The man gracefully picked up one of these at a time and expressed class while eating them with his tea, profanities following afterwards as he complained about the ungodly weather.

"It is sir," a formally dressed lady said while sitting on a chair at the side of the bed. "At least for you."

"You don't need to retort every time. I'm perfectly fine grumbling to myself," the man said.

The woman seated at the side of his bed shook her head, the brown, braided hair of hers that was tied into a bun shaking as well to emphasise how she thought about her master's words.

"Instead of insisting on murmuring to the obvious, shall we review the list you asked me to compile, Master Aurolio?" the woman suggested.

"Only after you add another blanket, Idline," the man identified as Aurolio said while pointing a shaky finger at the woman who was named Idline.

A sigh and a set of footsteps later, another thick blanket covered Aurolio from the head to the shoulders and back. The white haired man expressed some semblance of relief that was replaced by a light quivering once again.

"Go on," he said to Idline.

The woman nodded as she pulled out a sheet from what seemed like a flat file, many texts being methodically written along with symbols used to distinguish each point.

"Of the individuals I have verified, to some degree, to surely be participating in the Premium Age Royale, I have noted eight figures, three of which you know, rest you do not," Idline said.

"Start with those that I know."

"Very well. At the top of the list is Vali Kinn of the Kinn Family."

Aurolio continued to sip his tea before adding another spoon of sugar to it.

"She already announced her interest in the game a while ago. Glad to know she hasn't changed her mind. I have no interest in that nasty freak unless... Wait. She can't be the one that fucking swindler, could she? He likes gender bending in his predictions to confuse people, doesn't he?" Aurolio asked Idline with a light frown.

"I highly doubt it, though I wish she had been the one. When was the last time you even entertained the idea of a woman in your bed, Master Aurolio?" Idline said with a teasing tone on her stern face.

"Don't start with me, Idline. I'll fuck you up this time and take away your PRIVILEGES," Aurolio said while narrowing his eyes.

Idline smiled and continued her report.

"Very well. The next one on the list is Nexius Oldd of the Oldd Family. My sources confirmed that he intends to join the Premium Age Royale to impress his fiancé with his... incredible prowess."

"If it weren't for our alliance, I would have killed that womanising fuck. Am I the only one who sees that you lot are severely overrated?" Aurolio said while munching on another biscuit.

Idline sighed and ignored Aurolio's last question.

"The last one you should know is...." Idline paused. "...him."

"Right. Multiple rumours said that he confirmed that he would join if this Royale was real, right? He's somewhat interesting but I doubt it could be him either," Aurolio remarked while yawning, his tongue cleaning the sugar from his teeth.

"He signed himself to a wealthy Family from the East. Don't know its name yet. He's been on a rather excessive killing spree though. Six fairly large families from the south were wiped out in one hour as soon as a bounty was setup for their heads. Apparently these Families were created by several bands of bandits for the Royale and someone didn't like it.

I heard everyone there died the same way, a deep laceration from the shoulder to the side. Men, women, children and all."

"That's a killer for you. He hates wasting time. I like that about him. And the ones I don't know?"

"Well, it seems someone from the Academy has also signed a contract with a Family to participate in the Royale. A Mage."

"Ha. Didn't expect that," Aurolio said with a short laugh which made Idline smile for a brief moment.

When this man wasn't having panic attacks, he really reeked of confidence.

"The rest are Maxim Flatbed from the Flatbed Family.

Bonoli Fisher from the Fisher Family..."

....

EverSword Estate.

"The Venue is ready right?"

"Yes. It is ready. Everything has been prepared.

"The beast is secured? Firmly?"

"Yes. The beast is firmly held down and gagged."

"Good. Nothing must go wrong."

A man with a look of pride on his face said.

He dismissed his steward after getting the details to the finalisation of the elements surrounding the Venue.

Many problems could arise from this, namely scrutiny by the Capital Service and the Purity.

A Paladin Champion had been placed in Genhuis City to aid the Capital Service against possible attacks from the Green Neolists and Evenfall.

This could be problematic, but Actuass had told him to be at ease.

He knew the risks.

Divination and Divine intervention itself.

No one knew for sure if perhaps the Deities would intervene, but most people had lost faith. They only believed in the system and not these gods themselves.

This man, the head of the EverSword House remained standing, staring intently at a mural that was on the wall.

It was large, its height being 4,5 meters while its width was roughly half of that.

It depicted the image of a land that was ruptured, releasing a blood red glow like molten lava while a sea of green flame poured down from a sky untainted by clouds.

In between these two was the vague image of a man floating between the two eerie depictions.

Surprisingly detailed it was, showing not a distraught face but one of... gratefulness.

Chapter 468: First Mission Site

Fortune.

The ever bright lands of Fortune shone on Skullius who was in his Penetrator form, his four sockets gazing down upon Yuyui who didn't shy away from his luminous flames.

The Limitless Body Null Demon Hound, Ferex, rested its large body behind Skullius as it watched the two.

They all sat on the free patch of land that could be found away from the forest, sea and mountain range, a silence having persisted around them for a while.

That was until Skullius spoke.

"You probably should have taken the test seriously then," Skullius said as he rested his bone arm over his knee. "You would have been stronger by now."

Yuyui puckered her lips as she sat with her legs crossed.

It had been quite a shocker for Skullius when upon reaching the destination for his first mission, he was greeted with a different Yuyui.

The scrawny Yuyui had gained some mass, her figure looking more feminine and healthy.

If not for the facial features, as well as the hair that remained the same, Skullius would have thought that an intruder had invaded.

Yuyui had narrated the changes she had gone through to Skullius, to which he had noticed, among other things that Yuyui's mana had spiked up.

A quick look with his guidance had him realise that her physical stats had increased three fold, and the second eye which she had awakened earlier, the one that came close to dispelling his [High Cosmetic Body], was called the Eye of Dispersal.

At this moment, it was dormant, the vertical slit on Yuyui's forehead where it spawned from closed up, leaving a thin line.

"I wasn't... really thinking about that Master. I didn't even know there was a test," Yuyui said with a hollow expression. "I'm just not a fighter..."

The lime haired girl wanted someone to tell what she had just remembered but as she saw the Penetrator, she felt a great distance, keeping to herself.

She wasn't some orphan taken in by a new father, after all.

"Is that right?" Skullius said, his socket flames burning viciously.

Not a fighter, huh?

"What do you think being a fighter is?"

Yuyui didn't know the purpose of this question but she gave her own interpretation of the word.

"Doesn't it mean having the courage to fight against your enemies?" she answered.

"Hmmm," Skullius hummed.

How shallow, was Skullius' thought of such a definition.

An enemy.

That was a very broad term.

He had recently realised that there was more to the word enemy than meets the eye. It wasn't simply a tangible person hindering your path. It wasn't simply an antagonist, but an antagonistic force.

Skullius unknowingly overcoming his fear of death and his overthinking of what his atrocious luck might do, what any wrong move he did could lead him to and so on, had lead him to learn that he had never been weak at all.

He had the capacity to exceed his limits.

It was the same with Yuyui.

Repression.

She had a powerful Hidden Class, something objectively known as something that could make someone stand at the top of Aigas, but she hadn't used it.

She wasn't using it.

'Perhaps she just hasn't been in as many life threatening situations as I have,' Skullius said. 'For her though, death isn't really the threat. It's a pastime. That's where we differ maybe.'

The Penetrator shifted the point of the conversation at this juncture.

"Can you use this... Eye of Dispersal as much as you want?"

Yuyui shook her head.

"After that time, it just closed up. It hasn't opened since," she said while wearing her disappointment on sleeve.

Her father's words echoed in her mind again.

These were dangerous times indeed.

Skullius was also disappointed as he thought this eye was very useful.

Its description on the guidance field, as with the one for the Inhumane Eye, was '?', but he knew part of its effects.

"Hmm. Well, I'll take that chance. We're already at our destination," Skullius said as he stood. Even if Yuyui didn't know how to use her new eye, he would take her along.

"Let us out."

As Skullius said those words, he, Yuyui and Ferex appeared in the snowy lands of this region, a vicious cold whipping Yuyui who shivered.

Upon discovering that the Elimparidis Stone Staff reacted according to his will back when he was forging his mana core, Skullius had discovered additional benefits which he earned because of this right.

For instance, instead of having to walk to his destination, he could simply teleport there as he wished without using any of the charges in the Staff.

This was something he only discovered on the day he reached Genhuis City though.

The three saw a unique geographical feature with a small town built over it.

The Creeping Chill.

It was akin to a large mountain that was cut in half, the litter of houses that made up a town running roughly from a mile away from the peak going downwards.

The flat surface of this halved mountain was the place that many came to see, an extensive stretch of ice so hard and pure that it looked like diamond.

It was said that only someone with strength at the peak of the Master Stage could shatter a piece of this the size of a fist but most believed it was a cringey tale crafted by some random non-combatant.

At the base of the mountain, a thick white fog rose softly from what many would call a cold geyser, or rather a collection of them, carrying a crackling sound as it beat against the flat mountain surface.

Thick spikes emerged on the surface of the mountain here at the base, the fog continuously licking it.

The generation of these spikes was so fast that by the time Yuyui commented on the beauty of this structure, four large human sized spikes had been formed.

"Woow..." Yuyui said as she looked at this marvel. "It's beautiful."

"Look beyond that," Skullius said as his sockets flared, to which Yuyui tried looking past the fog of cold.

"Oh..."

A vast crack could be seen behind the billowing fog, its large, dark blue coloured stretch which spanned for almost three hundred meters over the spiky base of split mountain up, placed diagonally.

A dense energy signature was masked by the horrendous cold that licked Skullius even from this distance, but that didn't detract from how unusual this Cluster was.

"We're going to be entering that?" Yuyui asked with hints of fear smothering her face.

"Of course," Skullius said with barely hidden enthusiasm.

The town was completely deserted, the civilians having been evacuated on account of the imminent danger, something Skullius had confirmed with Ferex's help.

This had lead him to wonder what the reason and judgement for leaving such threats untended to was?

The Cluster was just left here and he even had a mission that required him to dispatch Cluster beasts that had escaped a Cluster and nested in a woodland.

How was all this decided?

Wasn't it dangerous to leave things in this state?

Oh well.

This wasn't the time to think about this.

"Come on, we're going in!" Skullius said as he pulled Yuyui to himself and wielded the Elimparidis Stone Staff.

Ferex miniaturised leapt up to sit on his bald head.

"What are we—"

Before Yuyui could express her concerns about how they were going to enter the Cluster, she and Skullius vanished from the spot!

The three appeared in mid-air, about 500 meters near the split mountain with all its glory, the cold from the fog that kept rising past this height instantly beginning to act on them as they started to freeze!

"Master...!" Yuyui called as she saw Skullius' bony image turn white with heavy frost!

She too experienced the same fate as she froze over in a few seconds!

Skullius' sockets burned bright as he gazed at the massive tear on the mountain that was the Cluster, much larger now that he was closer, its staggering presence bearing on him in full force.

"There's definitely something atrocious in there! Let's go meet it!" Skullius said as he forced his right arm in the opposite direction and used [Mana Force], a large chunk of his mana being expelled from his body in a white streak that caused the fog to part, his figure being propelled towards the Cluster rapidly!

The three individuals, all frozen, sank into the diagonal streak on the mountain wall!

Chapter 469: The Penetrator Dominates! (1)

PCHT!

PCHHT!

Ice fell to the rather dry ground with a pulse of mana.

Skullius who had just appeared within a different space broke apart the white ice that had accumulated over his bones with a burst of mana, his figure shaking to vacate the rest of the pieces from his bony surface.

The ice barely lasted a second though, as it seemed even if he left it, it would have been removed from his, Ferex's and Yuyui's person.

A terrifying heat blasted his body, the Penetrator noticing his bones turning wet then dry within the same breath's worth of time.

It was so hot here that the air couldn't afford to stay still. It was constantly burnt, its shape twisting as between two objects, the imagery was distorted.

Yuyui and Ferex's ice was molten off rather quickly and before they could feel the sensation of being wet, this little moisture they gained was stripped by the scorching atmosphere!

The lime haired girl grimaced as she felt the uncomfortable heat, her blue core powered body being able to survive the high temperatures but her clothes... not so much!

They immediately burst into flame leaving the girl her naked!

Yuyui was surprised but she didn't try to cover herself. The sense of decency had yet to return to her fully after all those years of solitude and besides that, she knew Skullius was uninterested in what riled up most men.

The Penetrator turned to her and threw her the VergeRider.

"Is it alright for me to wear this?" Yuyui asked as she carefully handled the form shifting first set of the armour.

"Of course it is. I don't have any use for the first two sets which I can use right now. I also can't unlock the others since I don't have much Null Life Essence," Skullius said.

He was going into this bare boned and he was confident in winning still.

Yuyui hesitated only for a second as she then wore the first set of the VergeRider, its form growing to fit her figure well.

Skullius scouted this new place.

Behind him was a hazy, small crack that they couldn't get through until the Cluster was cleared while before him was a vast...world.

It looked like the inside of a volcano, a massive cavern-like space with dark soils where streams and rivers of orange-pink coloured magma flowed everywhere, the landscape turning down after a few hundred meters at a cliff as beyond this, was where an expansive, unique view began.

Skullius gazed at his staff, his guidance field telling him that the charges he had accumulated for [Jolt Ray], the milky blast released by the staff and [Jump], the teleportation skill he had used just now to appear in mid-air, were to be used only when truly necessary.

The Elimparidis Stone Staff used the energy it received from spaces absorbed into the white gem at its top to power [Jolt Ray] and [Jump].

When he had taken in the Temple of Unlusted Tears into Fortune, a small amount of charges had been generated for both skills, more specifically four for [Jump] and six for [Jolt Ray].

"Let's go," Skullius said while sending an order to Ferex.

The Hound increased its size with Skullius leaping to ride on its back, his hand grabbing onto Yuyui to bring her up as well.

The three walked up to reach the cliff against the scorching wind, the full view of this entire place emerging in their sight.

A blazing utopia appeared!

Right after the cliff, the massive descent below presented a large boiling pool of magma that spanned for roughly 600 meters. It was followed by a rocky, uneven land which was somehow merged with trees and shrubs that grew on literally everything!

These trees had dark barks, almost as dark as the black soils, the leaves on them being wisps of extremely hot flames that also had the orange-pink hue!

After this strange forest that featured over multiple spots within the miles worth of pure new world here, was a civilization!

Dome shaped houses made of black bricks with what looked like a chimney over each of them that spat out fumes.

As for the residents...

They were black scaled humanoid creatures with tall, skinny frames. Most had two or three off-white horns growing from their foreheads with pointed tails and a pair of webbed wings on their backs mainly featuring a blackish red hue.

These creatures were happy to live naked as their expansive settlements strewn over this world consisted of various sizes of their kind, those with some distinction donning burning armours which were made from carved rock.

"Bro... there's so many of them," Skullius remarked while Yuyui was utterly creeped out by these creatures.

At a rough estimate, there were over 300,000 of them!

In such situations, most mercenaries would focus on finding the Cluster General and killing it to collapse the Cluster which would be the most effective way to deal with such scenarios featuring high numbers but...

Skullius had a different plan in mind.

Since this was a blue Cluster, there were likely to be a large number of Tier 4 and higher monsters.

While most of them would most likely outclass him stat-wise, Skullius had a few tricks to spam that were going to give him the advantage.

Definitely.

"Alright, Ferex. Time to go with the Eat-Me-Up strategy again," Skullius said as he disembarked from Ferex along with Yuyui who looked quizzically at the Penetrator.

"What's the Eat-Me-Up strategy?" she asked.

The Penetrator's sockets flared as he emitted a chuckle.

He didn't answer as instead, he looked to Ferex who immediately followed his master's order, his size building up as he grew over five meters tall, the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide covering his Unliving Thread.

The Hide released light bursts of smoke but didn't burn away fortunately.

Skullius jumped into Ferex's maw which was opened wide while dragging Yuyui who was once again dumbfounded at the things her master casually did.

Soon, Ferex disappeared, his unseen figure scaling down the cliff silently.

Within the pool of scalding hot magma below, roughly twenty of the dark scaled creatures could be spotted, swimming leisurely as they seemed to have a high tolerance to extreme heat.

They chatted in their own language, some playing games as young and old among them could be differentiated by height and the growth of the horns.

Two of these creatures who seemed to be having a swimming contest around the pool swam past the others with great fervour and joy on their faces.

They went arc after arc as they splashed magma over themselves for several minutes, some of the other fellow Cluster beasts watching them while the rest went about their business.

Then, it happened.

A long, thick black chain sprang up from somewhere on the dry grounds, wrapping around the neck of one of these two!

Immediately, the Cluster beast was pulled him over while gasping!

...!

The other Cluster beasts upon seeing this were alarmed, their eyes turning to their peer who had just been dragged across the dark soils over to a space a distance away where tangled shrubs and trees met, creating a cover!

The moment this terrified creature seized being dragged about, the chains that kept strangling it having stopped pulling, a tall skeletal creature appeared in its sight, its four sockets burning fiercely with a blue flame!

....!

The creature tried to scream as a great sense of horror overcame it but Skullius didn't stop it from trying.

"I guess I was wrong. The chains still work well with my Penetrator form," he said with a chuckle, his hand resting over the abdomen of this Cluster beast he had captured as it brimmed with mana.

"Now let's see what kind of core you have."

Chapter 470: The Penetrator Dominates! (2)

It was true.

The Penetrator was leagues weaker than the Hybrid Luman.

In all truth, if Skullius was using the Hybrid Luman form, he could clear out this Cluster and its General easily before even running out of his natural reserves of mana.

Yet, as he had set out to do, Skullius decided to grow the Penetrator's strength through these three missions.

He wasn't up for making things easy for himself.

"Stall them for me. Both of you," Skullius commanded both Yuyui and Ferex.

The rushing footsteps and flapping of wings could already be heard as the twenty-some Cluster beasts who had been in the pool rushed to save their companion and see who was doing this.

Was it one of their own?

Was it some kind of invader?

They didn't know.

The Penetrator who started to sink into focus only needed a minute.

Just a minute and everything would be fine.

The scales would be shift dramatically!

As his bony palm rested on the captured creature's abdomen, the activation of a skill in progress, a terrific event was near the horizon.

Yuyui trembled at Skullius' words while Ferex immediately shot out from the bushes they were using as cover and went on to meet the enemies!

"But...what am I supposed to do? I can't fight" Yuyui asked with a distraught face.

"Just do anything you can," Skullius said before committing his focus to the creature he had bound by the Chains of Damnation.

With a quick appraisal using his guidance field, he saw the name of these creatures.

They were simply named the Fire Breeders.

The one Skullius had captured was pretty weak and was one of the few out of the bunch that had a white core, albeit a very bright one, which was why he had targeted it.

As was the passive effect of the Chains of Damnation around this Fire Breeder, this poor Cluster beast felt a tremendous amount of pain just from being in contact with the thick, black items.

It screamed and struggled but this did not hinder Skullius' work.

He activated a skill that was near its evolution.

One that he knew was going to create monumental opportunities for him.

[Elevated Mana Manipulation].

...

Ferex retained his invisibility but with the Pseudo Spirit Walker's Hide on, he could only exercise a limited degree of power and flexibility with the Unlimited thread.

Most of his enemies here had blue cores which meant regular attacks wouldn't work against them as their bodies were stronger.

But that was alright.

His duty was to stall.

The Fire Breeders shot in Skullius' direction, most of them flapping their blackish red webbed wings as they flew while the rest merely ran!

One of these Fire Breeders which were undoubtedly some of the weaker ones, puffed its cheeks, its face distorting – its red eyes getting smothered by its inflated cheeks which glowed a bright orange as it filled up with something hot!

The creature spat out a voluminous amount of boiling magma that flashed through the air as it hurtled towards Skullius who was utterly focused on his guinea pig's core!

He didn't move at all.

Ferex dispelled his invisibility, retracting the Hide of his body as he rushed up ahead, leapt into the air and let his Unliving Thread run wild, a massive, sturdy shield being formed that blocked the magma!

The shield held tens of tiny sparkling arrays that glowed blue, an additional boost to defence granted to the construct as a result!

Sadly, it was still burnt and Ferex's appearance caused the many different Fire Breeders to split, some going after Skullius while the rest rushed to the Hound while generating shots of magma within their bodies!

Ferex's glowing sockets flared with light as he dispelled the shield he had formed and manifested additional legs on his body before rushing in the opposite direction!

His speed was nothing to scoff at as he crossed a vast distance within seconds but the blue cored monsters he was facing against easily caught up and shot down at him, one of them landing a clean hit on the Apostle!

Its hand blazed with heat while turning red, fire spitting from its dark scales!

The punch it gave to Ferex sent him flying but midway through the air, another Fire Breeder caught the Hound and blasted at full speed towards the ground while yelling incomprehensible words!

The two pounded into the ground heavily, causing a shudder in the immediate surroundings!

At the same time, some of the Fire Breeders that rushed to Skullius were faced with Yuyui in their line sight.

In their minds, they had to get through her to reach Skullius but the Pinnacle Occuluthon was merely standing there while quivering!

She looked at the flying and running Cluster beasts that looked human, their mouths open as they hurled what one could safely assume were insults with angry visages!

They all barked aggressively and Yuyui was greatly affected.

She wasn't used to this.

She couldn't fight but..

"WAIT!" she called out in a loud voice while stretching out her hands.

Her face and gesture as she yelled prompted a reaction from the Fire Breeders. Given the universality of facial expressions and gestures that came with having arms, legs and similar facial structures, the Cluster Beasts halted for a bit.

In their minds, Yuyui was trying to negotiate or surrender.

Something always sparked amusement in all creatures when seeing a vulnerable face and these creatures were no exception.

"Um..." Yuyui said, shocked that her desperate attempt to fulfill her master's words worked.
"Uh...I..uh..."

The creatures got closer to Yuyui who swallowed gallons of saliva in fright.

"Do you...like music..?" she asked with a constipated smile, receiving no answer to her question as only aggression met her halfway.

This didn't stop her from assuming that her hostile audience in fact wanted to hear a song though, as she cleared her throat and began to sing in an awkward voice.

"The bowels that I know go round and round,

Round and round,

Round and round,

The bowels that I know go round and round,

All to the...uhm..."

Yuyui's flow was cut off by her immense fright...on top of how the reception to her song was terrible, to say the least.

One of the Fire Breeders grew impatient and angry. Unlike most of the others, it had two thick and long horns and was a full head taller.

Its large hand which had tough nails at the fingers darted forward and ripped into Yuyui's throat, gripping whatever it could as it then pulling it out!

Blood splattered everywhere as Yuyui's torn neck leaked 'function juice' everywhere.

The girl's eyes bulged as the atrocious pain caused her to fall, her mind losing focus of any goal she had at this moment.

Yuyui writhed on the ground before dying seconds later, the Fire Breeders she had been holding off chuckling or scoffing as they rushed to Skullius who was a few tens of meters ahead behind the shrubbery.

Was this an attempt at hiding?

How pitiful!

The Fire Breeders soon arrived behind the shrubbery to see the figure of a... a skeleton?!

A walking skeleton had captured their companion?!

What was this?!

Some of them drew back in caution and fright.

They may not know what an undead was, but a pile of walking bones in any culture wouldn't be considered anything good!

This skeleton was doing something to their peer!

What was it?

A vengeful spirit?

A angry and deceased father brought back by some ritual?

What?!

"WAIT, PLEASE!!!" a voice called from behind the Fire Breeders.

The Cluster beasts turned behind them, attracted by the familiarity of the sound when...

...!

Huh?!

They all looked at each other, then at the ground!

The corpse of the girl they had just killed was there!

Bruh...!

So...what in the Cluster...?

"It's...it's weird, I know," Yuyui said with a cheesy smile, obviously sympathising with the Cluster beasts' confusion.

They all lost the urgency they had in this moment as suddenly, everything was turning on its head.

None of this made a modicum of sense!

Fortunately for them, this confusion didn't last long.

VWOOOO....

...!

With a serene hold and casual overwhelming intensity, a sudden shift gripped everything within a mile's radius.

VWOOOOOOOO....

The flaming leaves on the trees and shrubs within this forest suddenly burned fiercely, giving the poorly lit world a bright saturation and highlight of sunset light!

VWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO.....

The air turned still, like one giant block of ice, battling the grip of breath from all living creatures
in this moment.

It rebelled.

It resisted.

FWUUUUUUUUUU...

All this was being caused by the mana.

Someone...had gripped ALL THE MANA that was within a mile's radius firmly....