

Undead 561

Chapter 561: Special Bonus Random Upgrade!

With Skullius' plan to operate on a large scale, certain viewpoints had been made apparent to him, helping to extricate his stunted mind-set into a more flexible path.

As stated before, the Null Lifeform intended to find a way merge most of his skills, leaving himself with clear paths instead of a mound of wasted potential. The fact that he couldn't combine his skills the same way his Apostles could, limited him greatly after all.

This, however, wasn't the main concern for now.

Among the many paths he discovered to make his rise in power more substantial, upgrading aspects of himself with [Unbound] rose as a high priority option.

Not weapons.

Not skills.

Just his own stats.

As for why he had decided to do this while merged with Ferex, it was because [Unbound] couldn't be used on any sentient Lifeform other than himself. That was its current limit. Fortunately, affecting others seemed to be one of the many avenues for its growth because the skill was in fact upgradeable unlike [Static Limbo] and [Null Extraction], his other standard forms of Null Life skills.

As for [Unbound] itself, now that Skullius could handle more than 10,000 units of Null Life Essence, an additional option for Upgrade was unlocked.

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[1-99] – Null Life Essence Points-

Gives the option for basic upgrades to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity.

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[100] – Null Life Essence Points-

Gives the option [Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 1000 NLE increase the chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

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[1000] – Null Life Essence Points-

Gives the option [Permanent Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 10000 increase chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

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[10,000] – Null Life Essence Points-

Gives the option [Special Bonus Random Upgrade] to stats, weapons and skills from the vast connection to Serenity. Increments below 20,000 increase chances of drawing higher level upgrades.

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"Special Bonus Random Upgrade. I assume it's permanent too and with it being above Permanent Random Upgrade, I hope it does justice," Ogwulf said with a grin as he began the process.

Hopefully, both Skullius and Ferex would gain something from this.

[What would you like to upgrade with 'Unbound'?]

"My mana."

[12,000 Null Life Essence Points expended for Special Bonus Random Upgrade]

[Upgrade processing...]

[Special Bonus Random Upgrade decided]

With this notification came a burning sensation from within Ogwulf's body. Something was happening to his mana.

No.

To his mana core where it originated.

A bright glow suffused from his abdomen before it caused the air to grow still, bathing everything in a powerful authority that wasn't so easily recognisable.

'Hmmm... what is this? I feel my mana core...' Ogwulf wondered.

Deep within him, his mana code started to... split.

No!

Rather than split, it... reproduced, a terrifying amount of mana coursing through it to birth a second core within his body!

A second core that was vastly different from the old one!

This mana core hissed viciously, before it exploded with mana, a great amount of it causing a blinding light to display the sheer quality of the energy from beyond the raiment of the Penetrator!

[Random Upgrade Complete!]

[A new mana core, the 'Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core' has been forged in your body]

[A Special Bonus applies!]

[+500% to pure mana quantity production]

...!

With that, mana flooded from this new mana core, causing Ogwulf's floating body to fall to the ground!

SHHHH!

The winds shrieked, blowing over everything – the corpses, the broken carriages, the snow – fiercely, their unseen masses roiling with 'excitement' and zeal while rushing towards the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator!

Ogwulf felt it vividly.

The changes were told to him by [Greater Mana Crafter].

All around him, there seemed to be whispers, the natural elements and ambient mana in the atmosphere seeming to want to speak to Ogwulf in a favourable tone, as if to tell him things.

Unfortunately, he couldn't hear it.

'This is...new.'

As this took place...

[The mandatory effect known as RESET for Apostle '...' is about to apply]

[Because of your conjoined nature, this effect has been altered to accommodate the individual known as 'Skullius']

[Instead of wiping away all physical experience, accrued personality and cunning ideology adopted from the previous battle, the effect of RESET will now RESET all skill cooldowns belonging to the individual known as 'Skullius' and will resume its appropriate function on the Apostle '...']

"Stop!" Ogwulf commanded the guidance field.

The time limit for [Bringer of All] had been reached and with it came the effect of RESET that he wanted, which registered after he had been in an intense battle with the Knights captain through the man's subordinates.

Sadly, while that hurdle had been crossed, there was still the problem of the RESET's effect on Ferex.

No way his valued Apostle would lose all he had worked hard for.

There had to be a compromise.

"Cancel RESET for Ferex."

[Unable to cancel RESET for Apostle 'Ferex']

"Tsk! Of course it wouldn't be so easy," Ogwulf said with a frown that couldn't be seen because of his face. "Cancel RESET for Ferex."

[Unable to cancel RESET for Apostle 'Ferex']

[Insufficient authority for desired action]

[A fitting price must be paid as the individual known as 'Ogwulf' is one entity]

"Authority, huh?" Ogwulf said.

What was this? Was this because the skill [Bringer of All] was just too under levelled to handle something like this?

And this price...

"This is turning out to be pretty disadvantageous for the Ferex portion of myself. I have to pay a price to not RESET, which in itself is a risk that can bring the BoneTender whatever. Tsk!" Ogwulf thought.

Indeed this was disadvantageous.

Last time Skullius decided to ignore Ferex's RESET, he had lucked out but now... he wasn't sure if he would luck out again. This BoneTender seemed to be a really big deal. If that thing still showed up after all this trouble...

"Let's hear it. What's this price?" Ogwulf asked.

[As a result of your conjoined nature, the recently acquired 'Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core' was to be split between your two selves upon separation. However, the price to reject a full RESET for Apostle 'Ferex' dictates that this benefit be stripped from said individual]

[Do you accept?]

"Fantastic," Ogwulf said while floating over to where he had left his weapon – Cross Pyre – and pulled it out, the giant greatsword leaving the ground.

The guidance field wanted to take away what had been Skullius' intent, giving Ferex what he needed. Additional mana to power the Spells within his scales.

That was one of the reasons he chose to test [Unbound] with mana first.

Sadly...

It turned out to be all for naught.

"Fine," he agreed.

This wasn't much of a problem. There were other ways for Ferex to get more mana anyway.

Now, it was the moment of truth.

Since [Bringer of All] had timed out, Ogwulf began to split, forming the figures of Skullius and Ferex.

The Limitless Body Null Demon Hound looked a bit depressed while Skullius anxiously looked at the Apostle, hoping for the love of all that was holy, that the Apostle wouldn't transform into this famed Null Terror.

Honestly, he didn't even know what would happen exactly but he dreaded it.

One second passed.

Then three seconds.

Six seconds.

Nothing.

"Did it work?!" Skullius asked himself, his blindingly bright sockets dimming with anxiety.

Truly!

He was spared again!

Atrocious luck turned to the side!

"Hahahahaha! Can you believe this Ferex? We dodged it again!" Skullius said with enthusiasm.

To be fair, the description for Ferex's Flaw did say 'there was a chance', meaning it wasn't absolute but still...!

Ferex looked quite bitter about having the benefit stripped from him. He was supposed to half of this mana core but unfortunately, Direction was too cruel.

"Don't worry bro. We are going to slaughter millions of Cluster beasts together after this and get you to rise up the Tiers, alright? You'll get as much mana as you want," Skullius said to comfort Ferex.

And he meant it.

There needed to be hard grind to get the Apostle stronger as the only way to overcome his Flaw, as Skullius was starting to discover, was to become so strong that no fight would considered tough.

The Apostle nodded.

"Yes, master. I trust I will," he said.

"Good boy, I mean good bro."

About this core though, since there wasn't a split, Skullius had gotten all of it to himself and on his guidance field...

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[Mana : 29,400]

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[Mana^ : 60,000]

~~~

...!

The two mana cores within Skullius' body registered on the guidance field and this new had a total of 60,000 mana!

"Well damn!" Skullius thought. He looked at his abdomen, pulling away the robes he wore to find two cores, one floating on top of the other just below his ribcage!

Furthermore, the second one was... different.

As Skullius had forged a mana core from scratch before, he could tell. By using [Greater Mana Crafter], he delved deep into this core and found that his thoughts were true.

This new core's Centre had been anchored to his soul too, but it was extremely different from his original, and even the one from the core belonging to his Hybrid Luman body which was the strongest one he had prior to this.

The pure mana it produced was extremely refined, sifting softly into the Refinery with class and serene quality!

As the mana seeped into the Refinery which dictated whether or not an individual could utilize special types of abilities and powers, the Penetrator discovered something even more shocking!

"N-no! No way!" he exclaimed as he plopped to the ground.

Within his Refinery, there was an exceedingly complex mana pattern that constantly shifted into an innumerable range of other patterns!

Patterns that he couldn't identify.

All he could tell that one pattern he saw, would never be repeated again!

That was...

This was unlike anything Skullius had seen before!

A core was supposed to have one fixed pattern.

Either it formed a generic pattern that could only produce mana which could perform basic forms of utility or it was forged with a complex one that would work well special abilities, like how children were groomed within Families that had specialised techniques!

But this one...

Didn't this mean...?

"This mana core is adaptable... It can conform to ...anything?" Skullius wondered incredulously as all around him, the winds, the cold and all seemed to whisper to him, wanting to tell him several mysteries...

Chapter 562: Vivid Firmament Canvas!

Skullius was stunned.

This Nature-Bound Malleable Form Core was ridiculous!

He even wondered if perhaps, his thinking was too shallow!

The longer he stayed here, the more he felt the elements try to invade his mana core!

Was this natural?

Did this ever happen to other beings?

With his Null Life powers, Skullius could extract skills and all, performing many variations of phenomena seamlessly but there was definitely going to be a limit. His normal core wasn't going to be able to act upon very complicated techniques which he extracted with his Nullmancer traits. Of this, he was sure.

This very limitations was the reason he had forged his other core with specific ties to the concept of gravity after discovering the existence of the Centre, the Refinery and Shell of a code after all.

Was this new core the answer to his problems?

"Thinking about this now isn't going to help. I'll need professional advice with this," Skullius said as he stood up.

This core was an unexpected boon though.

"The power of the Special Bonus Random Upgrade is amazing! I guess the bonus for this was the additional mana which raised the mana core output from 10,000 to 60,000. It must happens every time you use this, but with different variations," Skullius said with intrigue.

It was likely that there could have been different forms of effects with his use of the Special Bonus Random Upgrade just now and he grew more excited just by thinking about it.

The last bits of his thought process towards this subject ended here however.

It was time for the main event... again!

Now, with all the cooldowns for all his skills cancelled, Skullius activated [Depths of Core].

He delved into his first mana core.

He would loved to use [Depths of the Core] on his new mana core but sadly, one usage wouldn't allow it to reach blue.

His old mana core was only a step away from reaching that stage because he had used [Depths of the Core] on it twice, with the last time he used it leaving him just a bit shy from where he intended.

As was the skill's effect to produce a series of lines that Skullius had to join together to eventually form a higher stage core, the Penetrator was forced to play the game of connecting the dots once again.

With each connection of the white lines, he felt himself draw closer and closer to the goal.

The [Epiphany] boosted [Depths of the Core]'s worked like a charm, leaving the process less harsh and with the time afforded much more abundant!

Midway through this process, Skullius thought about [Epiphany]'s effect on [Unbound].

There didn't seem to be any.

The skill remained the same even with [Unbound] and even [Bringer of All] didn't seem to have any changes attached to it when he used it.

Did the passive boost of [Epiphany] have some sort of limit?

It was likely.

If 90% efficiency was applied to [Bringer of All], Skullius would be bullying everyone and he had hoped for that, dammit!

No matter.

The Penetrator pressed on for about an hour, his focus deepening with every passing moment.

With his current attainments and knowledge which far exceeded those he had when he last used [Depths of the Core], Skullius managed to achieve his goal rather quickly.

A dull blue glow shone from his previously white core, replacing its normalcy and weakness while building up its stability as well as power!

Additionally, the mana core shrunk in size as the numerical value for the mana was reduced significantly because of how the qualitative shift of mana points from white to blue worked – mana points from a blue core being more valuable.

"Finally. I might not have as much mana as with my Luman form but this is a start. I can increase the amount of mana points with [Unbound] later on. Hopefully the costs are manageable," Skullius mumbled to himself, relieved that he had finally stepped into the next stage with his core.

Unsurprisingly, certain changes arose around his body.

The dark clouds that constantly emerged around him grew at least thrice as thick, and thrice as dark, the bursts of Levin they produced silently but dangerously flashing with split second luminance that hid Skullius' figure with the absurd auroral glow!

The Penetrator's body could hardly be seen among these clouds and glaring flashes!

He looked like a god without even moving, the four sockets behind the thickets of clouds, under the hood of the robes he wore being capable of making anyone submit in fear!

Skullius also felt his bones grow thick and powerful, surging Levin consolidating them from within. Even his physique wouldn't be one to mess with!

"Ah..."

He was satisfied.

This was good.

Since there was still a bit of time left with [Depths of the core], Skullius managed to witness a new network of lines appearing over this blue mana core!

Blue lines.

The number of them didn't inflate or anything but they were thicker.

Skullius could pretty much guess that joining two of these lines together would form a purple line as the path towards a purple core would begin with a nasty, unforgiving bang!

Just to sample out the difficulty, Skullius' consciousness grabbed a hold of two thick blue lines.

With moderate effort, he pulled.

It was a joke. The lines didn't even budge.

'I knew it.'

With his maximum effort, drawing the lines at full power.

It was still a joke. They merely wobbled!

'Flesh you,' Skullius thought with a bony bitterness.

This was an abysmal result to say the least.

To get these lines to move even by a little bit, Skullius needed to level up [Epiphany] and [Depths of the Core], something that wasn't going to be easy as for the latter, he had to wait for [Bringer of All]'s cooldown while for the former, he had to start using [Epiphany]'s active effects.

"That's too depressing to think about," Skullius said as he cancelled [Depths of the Core]. There was no point in struggling with this for the remainder of the duration.

Instead, the Penetrator checked his new status to lift his spirits even higher.

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[ Name : Skullius ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Level : 1 ]

[ EXP : 0/200 ]

[ Core : Blue ]

[ Class : Vehement Bone Nullmancer ]

[ Race : Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator ]

[ Inv. Status : Doomed ×2 ]

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[<Stats>]

[ STRENGTH (I) : 565 ]

[ AGILITY (I) : 889 ]

[ INTELLIGENCE (I) : 712 ]

[ ENDURANCE (I): Infinite ]

[ LUCK : Atrocious? ]

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[ Health : 10,700/10,700 ]

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[ MANA (I) : 2,510/2,510 ]

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[ Mana^ : 60,000/60,000 ]

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

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[<Skills>]

[ Greater Mana Crafter | Lv.10 ]

[ Great Saint's Invigoration | Lv.12 ]

[ High Cosmetic Body | Lv.4 ]

[ Ungodly Passion of Debauchery | Lv.5 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Unbound ]

[ Static Limbo ]

[ Koten Machi | Lv.9 ]

[ Guard Light | Lv.7 ]

[ Compact Mana | Lv.24 ]

[ Wrath of the False god | Lv.1 ]

[ Serration Zone: Baneful Edge | Lv.1 ]

[ Flash Flicker | Lv.9 ]

[ Raw Impact | Lv.10 ]

[ Great Rush (I) | Lv.14 ]

[ Revered | Lv.1 ]

[ Basic Combat Arts | Lv.8 ]

[ Basic Sword Mastery | Lv.2 ]

[<Class>]

[ Apostle Summon | Lv.3 ]

[ Apostle Armament | Lv.3 ]

[ Depths of Core | Lv.5 ]

[ Bringer of All | Lv.4 ]

[ Epiphany | Lv.2 ]

[ Defiant Raiment of Perversion | Lv.2 ]

[<Racial>]

[ Storm Rider | Lv.1 ]

[ Brisk Storm Avatar (Special) | Lv.1]

[ Levin Dominance: Veil Storm Lance | Lv.1]

[ Vivid Firmament Canvas (Special) | Lv.1 ]

[ Silent Revelation of the Bright King | Lv.1 ]

[ Ful Discharge | Lv.1 ]

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[<Attachments>]

2/2

[<Marked Spots>]

None

[<Counsel>]

...

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Skullius' stats had been divided tenfold and some numerically, but their value far exceeded what they had been before. It would be as simple as multiplying them by 10.

This was amazing!

"Come on, Ferex," Skullius said as he lead his Apostle back to where he had stashed the unconscious Yuyui.

For what followed, he couldn't afford to leave her behind.

Upon reaching the spot, the duo found Yuyui awake, sitting on the snow while hugging her body.

She hung her head as if she was in deep, depressing thought, her slender form rocking back and forth.

When she saw the two, she became slightly cheerful.

"Where had you gone, Master?" she asked with a solemn tone.

"Oh, you know. Killing," Skullius replied before looking up in a bit of realisation and... shame.

"Oh, I see," Yuyui said hollowly.

'That might have been a bit insensitive,' Skullius rebuked himself.

He could repair that moment of foolishness with a spectacle though.

The two skills he wanted could now be used, after all and if they weren't flashy, nothing was.

First was...

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[Vivid Firmament Canvas (Special) | Lv.1]

The user becomes a massive storm cloud brimming with highly condensed Levin, the optimal form for an Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator. In this form, the user's skills obtain a 350% increase in power and range, while the user themselves becomes completely immune to physical attacks.

The user's awareness is also bolstered by a large degree, making them conscious of everything within double the range of their attacks.

Mana Requirements: 1000 (I) Mana Points, 100 (I) every day skill remains active.

Duration: ---

Cooldown: 3 days

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Indeed.

The Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator was truly a menace.

In fact, Skullius was happy he got an evolutionary choice that was higher up the chain as this was what allowed this ridiculously powerful skill to cost a little less than he expected for activation.

1000 mana points from a blue core were necessary for activation – thus the (I) – while 100 points were required each day to keep this form active!

For what the skill offered, this was tame, in Skullius' opinion.

In any case, he wasn't complaining.

"Yuyui, take my hand," he said, in his voice a lot of enthusiasm.

The Penetrator had a feeling that this form was even more exciting to play around with than how it was described and Yuyui would be the one to witness it first hand.

"Uh, okay," Yuyui said, consenting.

She grabbed ahold of Skullius' hand, the Penetrator's blinding socket flames burning intensely as he then called in a light but powerful voice.

"Vivid Firmament Canvas."

The glaring luminosity that spawned every other split second around Skullius suddenly engulfed everything within a mile's radius, creating a white scape so bright that it would permanently blind any normal human who looked at it directly from close by!

Then came a shrieking explosion of unadulterated might that cascaded in all directions while burning up the snow, as a massive, lustrous bolt of white Levin sprinkled with fading colour shot upwards with a glorious brilliance!

It soared.

It soared high.

From hundreds of miles away, many who had not yet retired for the night could see it – a super bright trail that launched itself beyond the veil of grey and white clouds within the span of a heartbeat, disappearing into the beauty of the inverted horizon!

No one could hear it but Yuyui screamed as loudly as she could while tucked within this pillar of Levin which did her no harm.

She had not expected her Master to suddenly do something so crazy!

She felt them pass through the thick of storm clouds that seemed to go on forever before emerging on the other side, where the air was thinner and the skies clearer.

It was beautiful!

They were so high up!

As soon as they appeared, an unnerving silence took over, as if to introduce a level of dramatic flair!

Then, at that very moment, the Levin Yuyui was riding exploded out with a mute shriek, but the air was not dumb. It rang out noisily as it was blown away, making way for an expansive black, grey and purple storm cloud that covered a five mile range in an instant, its mass decorated with beautiful arcs of Levin that swam within its entirety like fish!

It was gorgeous!

It was mighty!

It was powerful!

As it finished unfurling itself fully, a glow of Levin outlined it before releasing a series of bolts that collided fiercely, hurtling through its cloudy make up to reach the centre!

These bolts gathered violently and forged a simple image of Skullius that floated, bathed in terribly menacing Levin, the Penetrator's arms stretched out as he gazed up at the unusual space above...

Chapter 563: Brisk Storm Avatar! (1)

The skies above Aigas were unique.

It was difficult to tell whether the darkness that overcame all light had stars reflected in it or whether the truth was simple light spots dotted over the large black space .

Skullius couldn't comprehend it.

His form as he floated above the massive body of clustered storm clouds was pristine, arcs of Levin creating a bright white humanoid form with simple limbs and a blank face.

This changed moments later as upon this figure of Skullius, a thick coat made of dark storm clouds appeared!

Every clumped cloud inched in a different direction every second, the collective mass having scooped itself up from the main, five mile body and fashioned itself into this ragged piece of clothing clothing, soft and full of racing Levin as it was.

On Skullius' face, slanted indentations appeared, within them a powerful darkness that reigned supreme before being fought off by blue flames that formed circular orbs which acted as the irises.

A nose and a mouth also appeared but they could barely be seen on this strikingly bright face.

Strings of Levin kept Skullius afloat over the river of black, grey and purple clouds, buzzing incessantly between his feet and the surface of the cloud body every time he shifted his position.

"Interesting," Skullius said as he looked at his own hands.

This form... it wasn't his actual body. It was a sort of proxy that he could use for convenience.

He could sense that if he wished, given the 350% increase in range and double the amount when it came to his awareness offered by [Vivid Firmament Canvas]... If he so wished, he could transport this form to the ground below instead of descending as massive cloud to perform his interactions!

Hell, he could even attack from this distance provided that he shifted adequately within the skies!

"This is something..." Skullius murmured, admiring himself.

The more he discovered about the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, the more his idea that this was the perfect choice for his ventures was reinforced.

"Uhm...M-master..."

Skullius turned to the source of the frightened and stammering voice.

It was Yuyui.

She was kneeling amidst the clouds with the incarnation of terror running through her face.

Under her four limbs, wisps of bright Levin supported her body so that she wouldn't pass through the clouds seamlessly, but their existence were not easy to spot. Yuyui was under the impression that she was actually standing on clouds, which was a terrifying thing for her think about.

In her mind, all she could picture was the clouds giving out and...

Well, a new way to die would be added to her list.

This was weird.

"Master... this is too strange for me," she said as she gazed at Skullius with fear and a teensy bit of excitement. The Penetrator floated over to her sweat leaking figure.

"Relax. Just stand," Skullius said as he offered her his hand.

Funny.

Seeing the arcs of Levin around Skullius' body didn't make the lime haired girl eager to accept the extended hand at all. Could she survive touching the amassed layers of Levin?

Was this a joke?

"Uh... you see... I'm not in the mood for..." Yuyui began when Skullius saw through what was wrong.

He emitted a sigh and jolted up the paranoid girl with a short burst of Levin to her delicate behind which worked like charm. Yuyui yelped as she stood up quickly, rubbing her buttocks as if they were plagued by an awesome itch.

"What do you think?" Skullius asked her after she was done giving him a look of disapproval. Even in Yuyui's mind that was inappropriate.

The lime haired girl looked around.

It was beautiful, there was no denying it.

These five miles of nothing but silent storm cloud were like heaven in a way.

"It's really nice. What is it?" she asked.

"Why don't you use your guidance field?" Skullius asked her.

"Oh, right!" Yuyui said as she appraised the cloud.

The information that appeared, was not what she expected.

She wore a dumbfounded face before turning to the version of Skullius standing before her.

"It's... you?"

"Yes it is," Skullius said proudly before twiddling his fingers, this simple motion stirring the clouds to form a simple chair behind Yuyui that sparked endlessly with Levin!

Yuyui looked at it in awe... then concern... then dread.

"Just sit on it, will you?! You won't get burnt unless I want you to?" Skullius said with an annoyed tone.

That didn't really assure Yuyui. She was still biased against Skullius' true form.

However, since she could have sworn she saw a throbbing vein shaped bolt of Levin that appeared on Skullius' temple as he spoke, she obliged.

"Alright! Alright!" she said as she slowly took her seat.

"Oh..."

There was... a strange sense of comfort.

Somehow, the clouds created a soft bounce when melded with the Levin which made for an extremely comfortable seat!

Skullius conjured himself a bigger, taller chair and sat on it as well, his robe fluttering in as he sat. Then he waited for a review.

"Well...?"

"It's... it's really good!" Yuyui said as she rubbed her bum on the chair, causing it to flexibly shift to accommodate the movement. "I could sit here forever!"

"Hey! Hey! Don't get too comfortable. My senses are annoyingly high so I can feel all the...details. Stop that!" Skullius barked.

On the side...

"Master..."

Skullius found Ferex standing by.

The voice of the Apostle had torn him from his fixation towards Yuyui and how she felt as she... was more genuine. Shockingly, as a servant, she was actually more blunt than one would expect, with her unconscious trigger, expectations, being the only thing that made her more servant-like.

This had lead Skullius to almost ignore Ferex whom he now accommodated into the conversation.

"What do you think, bro? Isn't it nice?" he asked the Apostle.

"Yes. It is sublime, Master. Majestic even! The servant cannot possibly hope to fully describe how this new form of yours is!" Ferex replied.

'Of course,' his master thought, a bit disappointed.

"Naturally. Now let's get to the other good stuff," Skullius said as his body surged with mana, preparing to cast the second skill he had been unable to cast.

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[Brisk Storm Avatar (Special) | Lv.1]

An unlimited range copy of the user is created, bearing the same energy signature as that the original and a convincing authentic copy of the original's soul that can go through changes just as well.

The only thing that can be shared between the original and the copy without any barrier form – distance or space – is EXP and Null Life Essence, with things such as skill progress, skill attainment and evolutions only capable of being shared once the two come into contact.

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-Caution-

- The copy, upon emergence, is equipped with only half of the original's stats.
- The copy is incapable of casting complex class related skills while in 'Hybrid Luman' form.
- A chain reaction will ensue when a large disparity exists between the original and copy at the moment of contact/fusion, creating a cataclysmic butterfly effect of gains if said disparity is wide enough.

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-Caution-

Current limit – 0/1

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Mana Requirements : 1200 (I) Mana Points, 150 (I) Mana Points a day to keep active

Duration : ---

Cooldown : None

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This was a wondrous skill with quite the number of technicalities, most of which were inspired by its low level!

The benefits of using this skill were massive.

There was no range limit. The copy kept all of Skullius' Penetrator skills and could supply him with EXP and Null Life Essence regardless of distance, which was fantastic.

Among the downsides, there was the issue of distances between himself and the clone which came with a collapse in communication.

The copy had halved stats and because of the complex extension brought by the [High Cosmetic Body], Skullius wouldn't be able to use all the complex techniques that came with his Hybrid Luman form, which, he assumed meant he could only his basic darkness and light abilities for his class.

"Let's create this copy then and see what exactly we're dealing with," Skullius said as he activated the skill.

As one would expect, massive bursts of Levin shot from every direction on the [Vivid Firmament Canvas], wriggling massively as soon it reached the area before Skullius!

Yuyui leapt away in fright while Ferex's dark eyes expressed an intense manner of awe.

The Levin spun wildly as it began to take shape, its brightness showing that the most condensed form of the energy was being used to sculpt the Brisk Storm Avatar!

Slowly and surely, an image was formed.

It donned the [Defiant Raiment of Perversion] over its dark bones, scores of dark thunderclouds simmered around while flashing wildly with power to further conceal its true form!

Two cores emerged briefly before being completely hidden on its body and wild air swirled around this creature.

Only when this avatar fully appeared did Skullius understand something.

The effect of [Epiphany] was acting over his [Vivid Firmament Canvas] and [Brisk Storm Avatar]!

It was easy to overlook this because there was never a notification that told of the silent intervention of this skill that was always there... always watching!

'I definitely did well getting that skill, otherwise this avatar might have been weaker than I could have ever imagined,' Skullius mused in his mind.

Half the stats? That was brilliant!

Who would take that for granted when this was the offer from a Lv.1 skill?!

"Bro..." a voice leaked from the Brisk Storm Avatar when it fully formed, its sockets set ablaze by ferocious, blinding flame!

"My bro...?" Skullius, in his white form draped in the coat of clouds said.

There was a moment of silence as the avatar kept staring at the original while clenching its fist, the atmosphere somehow become heavy and a bit...hostile.

Yuyui shook while alternating her gaze between the convincing copy, her hands whipping the clouds her way so that she could hide herself with bulged eyes keeping watch.

'Crap! What's about to happen?! I wish I had something crunchy to eat right about now! Oh dear!' she thought.

Ferex got ready for any... unexpected action as that seemed like where the river of events was going.

Something monumental was about to happen!

"Hey..." one of the two said Levin covered creatures said.

"What?" the other replied with the same, rough voice.

...

"YOU FLESHING LOOK GOOD, SOCKETHOLE!" the two Skulliuses yelled with enthusiasm!

Chapter 564: Brisk Storm Avatar! (2)

The two Skulliuses walked around each other. Rather one walked while the other floated, gazing closely at the other with continuous nods that spoke to his satisfaction at the authenticity.

This copy looked legit!

Casting aside the fact that there was a disparity in stats, it was hard to tell apart the difference between it and his original form.

The skill description didn't lie.

Skullius was willing to bet it would be difficult for anyone in this world to tell them apart unless they understood the intricacies of his power.

That aside...

"You have all my memories, right?"

"Of course bro. I'm you and you're me," the copy with its four sockets ablaze in excitement said, its bony hand extended towards the projected Penetrator.

The original extended his hand also and the two shook over no particular reason.

As they did so, small sparks tingled around their hands.

Clearly, any form of contact between them had an effect.

"I don't suppose you suddenly got some information about everything to do with the skill I just used?"

"Actually, I did," the copy said with a hiss coming from its sockets.

"Oh? Tell me!"

"Well, I can't use [Brisk Storm Avatar] to create another copy. That's the only skill I don't have access to from the Null Life side. Saw that coming right?"

"Of course I did. That would be too easy and too convenient wouldn't it? Besides, the Flaw we have limits us to only 5 copies regardless of how [Brisk Storm Avar] levels and evolves. That in itself means we won't be getting a chance for another copy easily."

"Sounds about right, bro. But that's not too important. If we're going to have our strength increase dramatically, we need to use my special trait to its fullest," the copy said.

With a wiggle of its bony fingers, it conjured up a chair for itself to sit on.

"You mean that weird thing that happens when we fuse or touch?" the original Skullius asked, sitting back on his chair.

"Let's just call it contact. As we were thinking before, once I go my way, I'll have to grow my strength in a different way to how you will be handling your own. The more differences there are the next time we make contact, like in skills, stats and all, the bigger the effect. It's like a sudden multiplier after a humble addition. Hmmm, I like that phrase," the copy said.

The original Skullius scratched his bright chin.

"A multiplier, huh?"

On the other side, Yuyui couldn't get used to this at all.

There were two Skulliuses!

Two Masters.

The fact that they didn't even take much time to dwell on their separate existences, cutting the simple chatter off to go straight to business made it even more strange. Sure they were one individual but... it was still weird.

They were having a small meeting for crying out loud!

Ferex decided not to interfere. He kept his awe and amazement stashed away in his chest while listening to the two discuss. Still, even he was a bit bewildered.

"Alright. I get it. Since we are going to be moving and acting separately, let's clearly divide duties. We hadn't finalised everything after all," the original Skullius said as with his finger, he pulled up two clouds and shaped them into two humanoid figures.

"That's right. I'm supposed to meet up with Kenno and his group as we instructed him. I'll use him as my first connection into this... Severed Union and figure out more from there," the copy said.

With his finger producing wisps of Levin, he wrote next to one of the floating clouds images short notes on this particular duty of his, the words made of thin, erect Levin sticking to the image.

"Ah! It's also better if I'm the one to work on getting those high level concepts, right?" he added.

"Hmmm. I guess so. I'll have to split the stout mountain from Fortune though, won't I? If the Galemonger could do it, so can I," the original Skullius said, prompting the copy to scribble some more. "On the other hand, I should take care of our close quarters combat, swordsmanship and basic applications of mana with the new adaptable core. This could be something the both of us handle though."

"I don't have a problem with that. Right, since I don't have anything complex with the Insurgent Magnus powers, I can also take up increasing our affinity with them and getting in touch with the true essence of what they can do. When we fuse back, we should be able to forge at least one of the PHANTASMIC RETAINERS detailed on those plaques.

The PHANTASMIC RETAINERS.

These were the blueprints with prescribed proportions of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] that were forged some pretty destructive relics which Fulgardt had used millenia ago. Their exact details were on the plaques that Skullius had been able to read after merging with the WILL of UNDERSTANDING from Fulgardt.

They required greater affinity with the two elements and the copy saw it fit for him to be the one to focus on raising the ranks of the elemengs.

"As for the last and possibly most important mission, that falls to me as well, right?"

"No need to ask what you know, bro," the original Skullius said with a chuckle.

The 'living' solutions Skullius had mentioned back then.

These could only be found back in the Labyrinth of the Yoke.

Whatever the result of the Premium Age Royale was going to be, Skullius was sure it would be problematic at the very least.

However, there were powerhouses locked up in that Labyrinth, forced to live and celebrate the death of Fulgardt for all eternity!

With better control of [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light], Skullius could free them and have them do his bidding.

Though it was a more endgame type of mission as it required extraordinarily high affinities with [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light].

"<Sigh>.I still wish you could produce just one other copy. We'd have an easier time with this," the copy said, a bit exasperated.

"I do too. However, Special skills are not at all easy to level up. Look at [Basic Evil Sanction]! It barely budged! The latest Task made me realise how tough these skills are to evolve," the original said, his voice also infected with agitation. "Speaking of Tasks, I trust you won't bother with them much, right?"

Travelling as the Penetrator is more convenient at this point. We might as well rush to Tier 4 while we're at it."

"Yep. Just leave that to me," the copy said proudly before turning to Yuyui and Ferex. "Now the split?"

"Yep. Now, the split."

Yuyui and the Apostle confusedly looked at the two with worry.

What did these two mean by split?

What were they splitting?

"Should I tell them or should you?" the copy asked with a 'respectful' bow.

"Be my guest."

The four sockets on the copy lit bright in twisted expectation. He then gazed at Yuyui specifically.

"You and Ferex will be coming with me. From tonight, you'll never see Genhuis City again."

Chapter 565: The Split

"Huh?" Yuyui wore a dumb face with imaginary question marks dancing over her head.

"I don't... I don't understand..." she said but Skullius' copy had already moved on, talking to the original about the arrangement and apportionment of other things.

Ferex didn't seem averse to it.

Both of the Penetrators he saw were his master, after all. It was easy for him to recognise.

For Yuyui, it was a bit strange. As dumb as it looked, she was still yet to come to terms with the fact that her master was actually two individuals right now.

As she flusteredly called for more details to be explained to her, the original Skullius had begun laying everything on the table.

When he had taken Ferex before they went to the Temple hours ago, he had also grabbed the Elimparidis Stone Staff in preparation for this.

Now, he brought it out of storage and expelled the valuables within it as well as those in the storage ring, laying them all on his thick cloudy body where they were all held up by the sparks within.

The clusters of recently retrieved pieces of armour glowed collectively between the two Skulliuses.

Fulgardt's chest, the three plaques, the Incandescent Breath – the crown taken from the Grand Flame Bringer – the All Eater Scroll, the Brilliant Dent, the Prompt Spells, the potions, the coins, the Voiding Key, among many other things could be seen.

"First off, this is just for distinction purposes. For me it's weird to call you, myself, Skullius. How about a separate name for you to help distinguish us?" the original Skullius said.

"Sure. What do you have in mind?"

"I don't know. How about something simple like.... uh... Replicus."

"...You're kidding, right? That's an awful name."

"It is but it makes me feel a bit more comfortable. Besides, it's just between you and me. You can call yourself whatever you want outside of our little, intimate circle, alright?"

The copy sighed hard.

This wasn't very important anyway.

Why not?

Replicus it was!

Yuyui kept trying to find a way to squeeze herself into the conversation but unfortunately, it was air tight. Skullius and... Replicus began hard planning once again.

"Since it's risky for me to carry anything belonging to the Purity, I'll give you the Brilliant Dent – the storage pouch – as storage space. Living things can survive within it so it can accommodate whoever you want," Skullius said to which Replicus nodded and grabbed the pouch which had belonged to the Grand Priest.

Skullius then held the Elimparidis Stone Staff.

"Get ready," he said.

Replicus opened the pouch wide and looked up.

A milky white ray of light shot out from the gem atop the Elimparidis Stone Staff and flew into the sky above the two. The ray shone bright when it reached an appropriate height, its brilliance dying down to be replaced by a massive chunk of land!

Bits rocks and soil fell from it as it temporarily floated, casting a large shadow on Skullius' cloud body and everything on it.

On this large piece of land, there were four mountains, a chill resting on all their surfaces. Three of them were very tall and imposing, the only exception being a short and stout one among them that had a great deal of mystery as well as power easily recognisable on it.

Additionally, a certain Temple could be spotted, perched over one of the more normal mountains.

Replicus willed the pouch to take in the falling landmass and as he wished, a sharp drawing sensation aided in its effect by sprinkles of bright golden energy moving in to devour the target whole!

With a distorted warp that skewed the landmass into a tragic shape, the massive thing was sucked into the Brilliant Dent.

"That should do for a start, right?" Skullius said. "You'll need the Kindling Heath and so will the eggs on it."

"Right," Replicus nodded before pointing the pouch at the piles of Legendary grade equipment, taking them all for himself.

He also took the Voiding Key – the key from the Labyrinth of the Yoke that allowed one to go where they wished within it – the Incalescent Breath, the potions and several other things.

"That's everything?"

"That's everything."

"Master!" Yuyui finally burst their planning spree apart.

Skullius and Replicus turned to her.

"Will I really have to move away?" she asked while shrinking between the two.

Guilt was palpable in her voice and in her eyes.

"It's like I told you before," Skullius said while floating her way, Replicus standing from his seat and following too. "I never intended for you to stay in Genhuis City. You're more suited to an environment that doesn't have too many rules and authorities that we can't act against. Besides, for you to grow, you need more than a sheltered life in the city and acting as my support in the Royale."

Yuyui knew Skullius was right.

Her existence, if exposed could be a problem.

It wasn't that she had a Hidden Class.

It was the fact that her Hidden Class was special even among other Hidden Classes.

Someone who couldn't be killed permanently by conventional methods was dangerous and would definitely have a target on their back.

This wasn't good for the lime haired girl before she matured.

The Grand Priest had mistaken her powers for evil, which showed another possible danger she could run into if things remained the same.

"What about the Temple and the Purity? Won't they still go after you? If they can't find me then..." Yuyui said with worry, her fingers fiddling against themselves endlessly.

"I know. I'll find a way," Skullius said. "Throw away that guilt will you? Your contribution is making this possible. I'm glad you went mad when you did."

Yuyui didn't know how to feel about that last statement but she accepted everything else.

She did do a good job, didn't she?

"If you're worried about me getting found out, in my experience, Divination shouldn't be as effective on us because of both Null Life and Insurgency. Maybe Damilla was just weak but I'm sure SKULLIUS... will be fine," Replicus said, putting emphasis on the name.

His socket flames told the tale of how he thought this conversation between Skullius and Yuyui made everything he would and could say to the lime haired girl....redundant.

'Leave some for me will you?!'

"That's the optimistic approach, haha."

On the matter of everything within Genhuis City, the truth was that Skullius was already considering the worst case scenarios.

The fact that his abnormal existence could have already been noticed by the Diviners or the man behind the second sun in Genhuis City.

That the Temple was already searching for him.

That he may have endangered the Bryne Family.

All of it was possible but he wasn't distraught.

Skullius patted Yuyui's head.

"Instead of worrying about me, worry more about how you will make the most of this situation. For someone with so much potential, the next time we meet should show your incredible growth," he said.

Yuyui wore a semi forced smile.

She nodded.

"I'll do my best."

Skullius nodded to her as well and called for Ferex.

The Apostle gave a short bow.

"I probably don't need to say anything to you. You seem to understand that the situation hasn't changed much more than—"

"More that servant? Of course, Master," Ferex proudly intercepted Skullius' sentence.

"...Right." the projection of the Penetrator said. He then turned to Replicus. "Between the here, on the ground and Genhuis City shouldn't be too great of a distance to hinder communication right?"

"Right. You intend to see the Mage Stylla talked about, don't you? About how to combine skills?"

"Yes. Before then, stay close," Skullius instructed.

His body began to rumble as sparks of Levin began to chaotically coil around.

It was time for the dual adventure of the Penetrator to begin.

"Grind hard, bro," Skullius said.

"You too. Don't die in the Royale, otherwise..."

"I get it."

Replicus grabbed Ferex and Yuyui who shed a tear as if she losing a loved one. She even waved at Skullius who shook his head and reciprocated anyway.

Shortly after, Replicus turned into a streak of Levin that shot up while engulfing his company and then stormed down, zipping to and from the normal clouds beneath the [Vivid Firmament Canvas] with the skill [Storm Rider].

Chapter 566: Ever-Crashing Tides

The giant sat down next to a man with havana brown hair, releasing a harsh sigh of relief as he did. What he had gone through was still fresh in his mind. If he had been a second later, even he who was the most prodigious among all of his race would have been dealt quite a troublesome hand.

Trying to resolve the issue afterwards was probably impossible.

The two men of different sizes overlooked a river that extended for miles, passing by terrifying, extraordinary heights – mountains, hills as well as trees.

Near and far from these heights, vast cities could be seen, the scales of their infrastructure built with such exaggerated proportions that a normal human would be spooked, a cultured human impressed and a powerful human terrified.

Yet even with the sizes of the buildings and walls, the vast, surrounding landscape and its features beat the cities in terms of visual beauty and grandiosity.

They were simply marvellous to behold, a product of being kept well.

"I feel like I ask this a bit too much but where had you gone this time? And what was that dreadful presence? If I didn't know any better I'd think it was-"

"Undead," Sause said, cutting off Benzard who sat at his side, his eyes narrowing in suspicion.

"That's an understatement. There's more to it, isn't there? I could swear that presence exceeds that of nearly everything I've encountered so far," Benzard said before airing his true theory. "Was it coming from you?"

"Ahaha, come now. Let's not fuss over it, shall we? It was merely an Arch-Lich practising its treachery. Albeit an Arch-Lich that transcended beyond the limits of normalcy but no harm done, ahaha," Sause said with a chuckle. "Crafty one though. Almost took a piece of my soul."

Benzard gaze pierced Sause like a pin.

Merely, huh?

This giant bastard was the one who usually stressed that undead of that level were quite dangerous.

In another world he would probably be singing praises above and declaring how lucky he was that the Scaled Elder was present always, his overwhelming power sufficient to guard Edagon and its inhabitants.

"When are you and the Elder going to act on what I told you? I passed on the information just as Eobald said. The undead have an elaborate plan for this world. It has humans pulling the strings for something horrific. Why not stop it?" Benzard asked Sause with a bitter visage.

It was a few days when Sause had taken him to see the Scaled Elder for the first time and even while smitten with awe, Benzard had told the exalted being what his old friend Eobald had told him.

Yet...

The giant laughed while rubbing his chest as if to subdue the pain ringing from an old wound.

"The Elder can't stop it, Benzard."

The brown haired man frowned.

"You're lying," he said.

"I'm not, ahaha," Sause defended himself with another laugh leaving his mouth. "If that were the case, many tragedies would have been avoided but that simply cannot be done."

"The reasoning?"

"The reasoning? Hmmm. The Elder is the last of beings with the natural ability to rule concepts with merely their breath even before they fully mature. His reasoning is 'for the greater good'. If he chooses not to act, it's to prevent an even worse eventuality.

If you doubt that..." Sause said as he picked up a rock and threw it across the river, watching it bounce over the surface of it for hundreds of meters before it finally sank.

"...then you might as well head to Feinheath and stop the coming chaos yourself."

Genhuis City.

Within one of the lean, tall towers sprinkled around the city, a man in a uniquely distinct armour that had the symbol of a three point star on its chestplate sat down opposite a very old woman.

The room the two were currently in was rather old and decrepit but both were not bothered by it in the slightest.

In fact, this was how the room was supposed to look.

"The Purity would be in your debt if you grant us this favour. Surely the murder of a Grand Priest warrants your contribution, however little it may be?" the Paladin Champion Ruhrees said while leaning forward as if that would increase his chances of successfully persuading this old woman.

It could be seen in his eyes that he was trying very hard to keep his very annoyed and furious mood under wraps. When it came to negotiation, both of these did not garner any positives from the opposite party.

The old woman he sat with licked her lips, the short-lived sequence showing through a small gap between her lips the absence of several teeth. This was astonishing for someone of her level. It spoke volumes about how much older she was than any of old geezers in the other six towers.

She was different.

Ruhrees could feel an invisible thread growing tighter and tighter as even though unseen, the tension rose quickly along with it.

The old woman whose eyes were barely open hunched into the large cloak she wore a bit more.

"I have no interest in what the Purity can offer. None of you have anything I want. Hmph. The death of a Grand Priest? There are more pressing events going on within this city, in this world, hidden from your open eyes and dull noses. Even the city's dog cannot see them," she said with condescending grunt.

"I understand, however this still remains a matter of utmost importance to me and the Purity. You would understand if you were in my position. We do not need much from you. With your specialised skill—"

"Hahahahahaha! Specialised? Say it once more! Let me hear it! Therein lies my answer! I am far too old and specialised to meddle in pitiable cases such as the death of a young Priest!

Furthermore, you dared to interrupt my rest. The night is particularly good for sleep, boy!"

Ruhrees face hardened.

This was hopeless.

The Diviners of Genhuis City were hard to crack.

What made them so annoying to deal with was their background.

Even the Royal Family would not intrude on matters having to do with them in this region.

This old woman was said to be among the first of an ancient group of Diviners that called themselves the Seers' Height, a clan of sorts that was formed several centuries ago. They had special traditional means of Divination that grew to be renown within Pelian, their special traits sought after by many.

Years ago, when the Royal Family advocated for the building of more great cities, they made a deal with the Diviners of the Seers' Height who had settled in this region for a long time.

'Seven of you shall remain here. Everything you desire shall be provided. No tasks are to be forced onto you and your whims are yours to appeal to freely. However, should the city have dire need of aid, give it without complaint.'

These were the agreed upon terms.

The other Diviners of the Seers' Height who were willing were also moved to the other great cities where they operated in a similar way.

Their whims were theirs to appeal to and no one could force them into doing anything.

When dealing with people like this...

"Can I provide anything to allow you to meddle then?" Ruhrees asked.

"Oh. I would say you are a smart one but seeing as it took you decades to figure out how to speak the right way, I can only label you a fool. Your faction truly is only full of the entitled," the old woman said as she reached into her cloak and pulled out a root that she began to suck on.

"Nothing you can produce would interests me. Your collection is tiringly boring. Still, perhaps I can feed you crumbs for the sake of peace. Small but potentially useful crumbs."

Harifrast Town.

"Hmmm. It changed again," a man leisurely laying on a bed half naked said as he sniffed excessively, as if to catch an accurate whiff of the cold air in his room.

His long hair slid off his back smoothly, brushing it seductively.

He had been silent for a full fifteen minutes as there was a constant change in the scent he had been following for the past week.

Following was an overstatement. For this man who enjoyed travelling and taking detours in order to fully enjoy the feeling of having flesh, taking his time was everything. He had gotten himself side-tracked in this beautiful town and all its frosty sights.

"Maybe I've been procrastinating a bit too much of late," the man said as he sipped on a hot beverage and sat up.

He sniffed once more and recounted to himself the changes he had smelt over the past dozen and some minutes.

First, the stench he had been following – leisurely as his pace may be – had suddenly been overcome by a thicker stench that had made him grimace for a full ten minutes.

It was strange.

Especially strange.

Then, in another twist of events, from a vast range detached from the main scent he had been tracking, three other scents with a similar rough odour had appeared miraculously.

He could still smell them even now.

'Now which one do I follow? Is a Lich seeding little by little in this world?' the man asked himself.

After a bit of deliberation, he rose hurriedly, grabbed the sword sheath he usually carried and donned his shirt which had a texture like that of mithril.

He was about to leave the room when he heard the strumming of a lute on his bed.

It was soothing.

It was calming.

It stripped away all urgency.

This long haired man who had been about to leave his temporary lodging turned to find exactly who he expected after hearing the thrumming of a musical instrument.

It was him.

The mysterious bard.

"That's some impeccable timing you have. I was just about to leave," the man said as he clutched the strap of his sheath slung over his shoulder tighter.

This was no coincidence.

"I know very well, what you wish to do~

Yet mine words I tell, they fall to you~

Sit with me a little longer, for I wish to dine~

Sad soul I beg, there's so much time."

The man with the flowing hair hardened his visage.

Of course.

This truly was no coincidence.

Something was cooking.

Chapter 567: Signs of The Shift

"You there! Stop!" a Capital Knight by the gate said while pointing towards a man with light auburn hair who had just entered the city.

On this night, human traffic into the city was rather harsh along with the search and verification process, thus for most people it was aggravating to have to be called after waiting in the long queues.

It wasn't different for Skullius who knew what the clamour and chaos was about.

'No need to show off, you glorified bad luck,' Skullius thought in annoyance.

There were hundreds of people entering the city from the massively wide entrance but somehow, Skullius was the only one being called at this moment in time.

He had finally passed the atrociously thorough process of checking back in the city but now...

'Perhaps that item Sause used on me was keeping the atrocious luck at bay. I never faced anything like this since coming to Genhuis City,' Skullius had another thought which was accompanied by a deep sigh.

"Please stand over there, sir," the Capital Knight who had called Skullius over said as he directed the Hybrid Luman to stand somewhere his interaction with him wouldn't disrupt any of the operations taking place.

The event that occurred this afternoon was indeed shocking, many considering it bold on the part of the culprit. The death of a Grand Priest was not something to be taken lightly, especially when all the Purity owned items in his possession were also stolen.

This was what sparked this treacherous operation to clearly search everyone entering the city, the Purity having requested assistance from the Capital Service under the leadership of Paladin Champion Ruhrees.

As serious as it was, some were taking it to the next level.

The Knight who had called Skullius started conducting his own search.

"May I see any storage items you have on your person?" the Knight said with a suspicious look on his face that leaked through his helm.

Skullius sighed and showed his spatial storage ring.

Thankfully, he had moved everything important into the storage gem on the Elimparidis Stone Staff which wasn't easy to spot as a storage item. Not for a swordsman at least.

The Capital Service was so short on Mages that they didn't humour them participating in mundane activities like these. They were usually replaced by tools that could accomplish the same thing.

For this search occurring privately, Skullius was asked to show everything he had within the ring, which was his staff.

The Knight he was standing with looked at him with even more suspicion, which was baffling for Skullius.

'What the hell is bothering you, sockethole? It's just a staff,' Skullius thought while secretly grinding his teeth.

The Knight stroked the staff, spinning it this way and that while checking for anything out of ordinary. No one but the Knight knew what he was searching for.

"Any problems here?" a Capital Order Knight walked over after noticing this separate search.

"I'm not sure captain. I just have this hunch," the Knight conducting the search said while narrowing his eyes at Skullius who shook his head.

"I'm in a bit of a hurry. If you don't have anything to pin on me, it would be in your best interest to release me," Skullius said. He retrieved his belongings and slotted his hands into his pockets afterwards, his foot tapping on the ground rapidly to show urgency.

"You're not going anywhere until I finish my investigation!" the Knight barked at him while releasing a bit of his Aura in an attempt to intimidate Skullius.

Unfortunately, the Luman wasn't fazed at all.

He even scoffed at the attempt.

The Capital Order Knight by the side ignored the tension and instead inquired about this vague detail that was drawing this Knight to this... blind man.

"Are you Class Branching into clairvoyance, Rihard or something? These hunches of yours that have been growing by the day could end up creating troublesome circumstances for us," he said.

"No captain. I just... Can you call over Sir Gillewart to at least confirm?" the Knight said with determination.

"Haha. That's bold. Are you that desperate for credit? You think the City Guardian would come down here for a mere hunch? His way of investigating is different from ours. Besides, there's—"

"A hunch, you say? I'm willing to listen," a voice carrying a heavy authority sounded from behind the Capital Order, a man with familiar and distinctive features appearing.

...!

He wore an amiable smile while giving a short greeting, his finger going towards his face to push up a monocle that sat in front of his eye. A dull glow could be seen behind it, emphasising who he was.

Every one of the Knights walking around this area seemed to stop and gaze at him with respect, some even giving short bows which the man waved off politely.

Skullius' face hardened.

For a brief moment, he felt suffocated.

[Greater Mana Crafter] which he used for his Koten grew unresponsive when this man showed up.

For just a little while, his true presence had leaked, causing Skullius to nearly shoot away in shock.

'Seriously?!' Skullius grumbled inwardly.

There's no doubt about it!

It was definitely his bad luck that had been kept at bay before!

There was no way something like this would be happening otherwise!

Even he knew who this man who had joined them was.

This was the man responsible for the second sun in the sky!

The City Guardian of Genhuis!

"The Purity is rather unhappy with how little there is to go off on regarding the incident this afternoon. Since this happened in daylight, I've become a target of... undesired comments. At this point, collecting suspects on hunches isn't a bad idea," this man, Gillewart said as his gaze turned to Skullius.

'Fantastic!' Skullius thought.

The Knight who 'caught' Skullius felt vindicated!

Right!

Perhaps he was right on the coin!

For this happen...

"Be at ease, young man. I am only collecting information to compare to a certain profile is all," Gillewart said, a low hum that contributed to the tense atmosphere, sounding for effect.

A profile?

Skullius and the two Knights were surprised by this information.

Naturally, Gillewart wouldn't divulge more just because the three openly showed curiosity and interest in this subject which he had hinted towards.

He did not need to tell anyone else that one of the seven Diviners of this City had passed on a profile to Ruhrees. One that was to be used not just for the city but for other cities as well!

This had many implications!

Skullius picked up on the subtle details in what Gillewart had just said and grew wary.

'By profile, does it mean that the Purity has somehow found clues on Yuyui?! No. If that was the case I wouldn't be a suspect. I'm male. This means, they have something more than just a clue!' Skullius thought.

Sadly, this line of thought was interrupted by a massive presence that swept over his body with a rough scratch over his skin.

It was coming from Gillewart.

With a lazy eye, he seemed to perfunctorily scan Skullius for things the Luman wasn't certain about.

What was this profile?

Depending on what it was, he might really be in trouble?!

"Gillewart? Even you are aiding in the detention of our mercenaries this night?"

...!

Skullius turned when he heard the familiar voice that spoke just now. It wouldn't do him much good to look but the habit was still fresh.

Thank goodness!

Someone had appeared to deliver him!

It was Alaris!

The examination officer who had led his testing into the exclusive circle of the Guilds Association that day!

Gillewart turned his focus to Alaris and several of his companions walking behind him with brisk steps that gave testaments to how they were all on a singular mission.

"Alaris..." Gillewart said with a shallow smile. "The Capital Service reserves the right to act accordingly when crimes of this scale have occurred. Even your mercenaries have to adhere to the rules."

"Of course they do," Alaris said with a chuckle. He reached Skullius' position and patted his shoulder while gazing fearlessly into Gillewart's eye. "However, our exclusive mercenaries reserve the right to be interrogated under the watchful eye of the Association."

That's right!

The perks of being an exclusive mercenaries ran this deep, defying the common boundaries that would usually swallow up most mercenaries in needlessly wasted time and resources.

Gillewart's expression didn't change but the look he gave Skullius did. There was wonder and mystery hidden within it.

"I assume you were done with Festos here, right?" Alaris asked while directing Skullius away, his question uncaring for an answer.

Such boldness.

Gillewart responded with a mere nod. He was indeed defeated on the matter.

The Knight who had brought Skullius had subtle hints of fury burning in his eyes and reddening on his cheeks. His hunch perhaps... was wrong.

Alaris drew Skullius into the city after instructing the people he had brought to the gate, among whom was Lemorine the Tamer who waved to Skullius with a cheery visage, to handle 'rescuing' more of their mercenaries from the pressing search.

"It's been a while, Festos," Alaris said. "You barely set foot in the Association, denying us the chance to interact."

"Yes well, with my participation in the Royale..."

"Ah, say no more. I understand. You should keep in touch though. You still have a lot of privileges that you don't understand, much that I could explain in detail personally."

Skullius smiled.

That would be great. He indeed was pressed for time with his part of the major act he and Replicus had arranged. Still, he intended to visit the Association soon for many things.

"I would be honoured," Skullius said.

Silrat had shared a great deal about Alaris in one of their conversations. He wasn't a simple man. This was better illustrated by how he had spoken to Gillearth without an ounce of fear despite the wide gap in their strength.

Naturally, even while Skullius hadn't really explored much about powers beyond the Master Stage, he could tell that Gillearth... was an Incandescent Stage expert.

The air he gave off may have been subdued but...

Skullius could tell.

That wasn't a man he could talk back to. That was why he hadn't. That was why he had remained still and compliant.

Luckily, it had all paid off.

"Good. By the way, I have fed Silrat several pressing matters that you might want to attend to soon. Dogs are barking for you to be put to trial but the Association has held them off. Unfortunately, as you are only Rank 4 in the exclusive circle, that is all the Association can do for you," Alaris said as he came to a halt.

Dogs?

What trouble was he in this time?

Skullius couldn't imagine what he had done. It obviously wasn't the matter with the Temple but something lesser, yet equally annoying.

Since Silrat had been fed the details, he would ask him later.

For now...

"Thank you for your help," Skullius said as he also stopped and turned to Alaris. "There's a subject I would like your... HELP... with as soon as possible. I understand it might be a very tall ask but after witnessing your skill that other day, I believe your instruction is just what I need."

The Hybrid Luman felt a bit emotional inside after saying this.

The breezy calm that remained after he actually requested help from someone and the follow-up of Alaris nodding and saying that he would gladly help if it was within his power was exhilarating.

Skullius almost felt like he could shed a tear, but he wouldn't.

This wasn't something to savour for too long, otherwise he might grow complacent.

This was simply the beginning of wondrous changes.

Chapter 568: Wanted

Bryne Family Residence.

Skullius reached the closed double doors to the mansion that were guarded by several guards. His distinctive facial features didn't give the guards a hard time and they allowed him to pass without issues.

When the Hybrid Luman reached the ever present, mostly empty lounge, he saw the lone figure of a small girl he hadn't seen in a long time. Frankly, he had forgotten she even existed.

It was Terese, the youngest of the Bryne siblings!

Her hair that was different from the fiery style which many had grown to expect since her older siblings had the same, made her seem disconnected from the Family and for a long time, she was.

The blonde pigtails did give her a distinct look however, but for Skullius, it was the energetic air the little girl had around her that made her easily recognisable.

This was especially so after her conversion.

Upon seeing Skullius, Terese shot up from her seat and eagerly rushed up to him with giggles of excitement!

"Sir Festos!" she yelled with enthusiasm while blocking his path.

"Hello..." Skullius said in an awkward voice. For some reason, he couldn't look at this girl whom he had deemed irritable before with the same annoyed visage he had anymore especially now that she looked at him with sparkling eyes. There was not even a reason to act cold with her or anyone else.

He was free to practise indifference sprinkled with granules of affability for a change.

"It's been a long time! I heard you fought brilliantly in the Premium Age Royale! I wish I could have been there! Big sister refused to let me get the thing... the uhm... the seal!

None of her reasons even made sense! After that she sent me away after that day at the Association! Ah, I wish I could see everything that's going on!" Terese rapid fired details that the Hybrid Luman had no interest in.

"I... see," Skullius said, pretending to care.

Beyond the bratty, entitled little girl he had met when he first came to Genhuis, there seemed to be... a clingy fan girl. What a revelation.

Of course, that wasn't too surprisingly since Terese had begun to look more favourably at Skullius since the day he had fought the examination officers. That was also the last day he had seen the brat as he went on to spend two days with the Fire Breeders.

"Nice story," Skullius said, brushing off the little girl's long list of pending tales in the name of urgency. "Is Stylla still awake?"

"Yes, I think so. She wanted to talk to you actually," Terese informed.

"Great. I also wanted the same," Skullius said as he skipped his way out of the lounge and rushed to Stylla's room.

With a quick knock, Skullius was allowed into the luxurious space that had furniture and features more lavish and organised than his own which he had shared with Yuyui.

Stylla was sitting on a comfy couch within the room while looking outside the wide windows that gave a broad view of the city.

The night looked particularly nice with the lights and movements that never seized from human bodies and otherwise. There were always those that didn't have the luxury to rest.

"Festos..." Stylla said with a sombre look on her face.

Skullius nodded and walked up to where she sat. He stood by the window she was gazing out of and let his senses give him the status of this fiery haired lady.

Stylla's mood since the end of the day's Preliminary matches hadn't changed. Something was still eating her up and it most likely had to do with her request that she join him on a trip to the Bryne estate along with her brother.

Something was meant to happen or was happening with the Family perhaps.

Stylla passed Skullius two envelopes that she had been carrying on her lap. Both had different insignias representing their different sources.

The Hybrid Luman held them.

Sigh.

His forced breath made Stylla smile sheepishly as she realised that the man couldn't read.

How embarrassing.

"I'm sorry. The way you move makes me forget that you are blind," she said in an apologetic tone. "Those letters are from two individuals expressing interest in the Family and you. One is from Vali Kinn and..."

Skullius' face had already hardened by the first name.

Vali Kinn? Why?

"...the other is from Her Highness Darwel, daughter of the High Family of Opungale."

...!

'You're kidding me,' Skullius thought.

For him to attract so much attention....

Was it his match against that pompous idiot?

But he lost. What did these two want?

Especially Darwel. What could she possibly...

"What do they want?" he asked.

"Both want to talk to you but their motives are different as far as I can tell. At least I understand Vali's. She seems to want a connection to the Family through you. She was rather open about it. As for Darwel, there's nothing to go off of. She simply wants to meet you."

Well...

Skullius was torn.

What exactly did wanting a connection the Bryne Family through him even mean?

He was a lesser member of the Family. What could he possibly have to offer?

This was strange.

"If it's Vali, I'd rather not approach her at all," Skullius said while scratching his chin.

Stylla expected such an answer. She was the one who had warned Skullius about her in the first place and in most cases, it was indeed dangerous to meet this slippery snake. However, for the Family's sake, Stylla was reconsidering.

"I would have wanted to learn what exactly that woman is up to but this is your choice. That aside, I strongly advise that you not brush off Darwel's request. I don't think she has any hostile intentions otherwise she would have used other means to approach you," Stylla said as she laid one leg on top of the other.

Skullius nodded.

He wasn't intending on ignoring the Princess. Seeing as she was living with the Governor, such a stupid move could be exploited by his atrocious luck.

"Alright. I'll meet with her, but only after we return from the trip to your estate," Skullius decided.

Stylla seemed to be lost for a moment before she waved her hand, remembering that she had indeed invited Skullius to accompany her.

"No. What I asked you before... you can forget that. I can handle it myself. You need to meet with Darwel as soon as possible. Perhaps even tomorrow," she insisted.

"I can't do that. I have something important planned for the next two days. I had just barely slipped time enough to accompany you to the Bryne Estate which I have to admit was only possible because it serves one of my objectives," Skullius said, countering Stylla's thoughts.

In short, he was willing to forgo meeting the Princess for just a bit.

His schedule was more important.

Since Darwel was a contender in the Royale, they had a lot of time ahead of them but for the Hybrid Luman, delaying his plans any further for what promised to be something... shocking he was sure, just didn't make any sense.

He had almost decided to cancel his trip with Stylla and Setkh when he realised that he could capitalise on it to accomplish another goal. A Replicus related goal.

"I see," Stylla voiced.

She couldn't argue with Skullius on this. He intended to meet Darwel in the end so there was no real problem. Besides, she regarded Skullius as someone with extreme awareness. Surely he wasn't taking any of this lightly.

"On that subject, I wanted the guarantee you gave me about this Mage whom you know. This was part of our deal," Skullius said while resting his back on the wall beside the windows.

"I remember," Stylla said as a glint sparked in her eyes. She stood and grabbed a neatly bordered parchment – clearly designed for formal messaging – which she began to write on. "The man you're looking for goes by the name Ryte. Arch-Mage Ryte. It's hard to meet him most times but this...should give you an easier time."

Stylla placed a seal on the parchment she had written on and rolled up before giving it to Skullius.

"My father had a lot of connections and hopefully, even in his current state, his favours and friendships can get you an audience with Ryte. They were... are close friends."

Skullius felt over the parchment.

"Are you sure this will be enough?" he asked with concern.

"I can't guarantee that. Mages are very strict. The Academy's policy is even more so. My guess is you may be strictly assessed before taking even a step into the Academy grounds. Or maybe not depending on who receives this first. Either way, use this chance wisely.

You probably won't get another chance."

Chapter 569: Reacher Academy

Next day.

Skullius had gotten up early and headed for the Academy immediately.

To skirt away from many possible chances at 'horribly gone wrong' instances, he figured arriving at his destination early would do him much good. Hopefully this applied to the Academy, which was his destination.

Within ten minutes of speedy travel by foot, Skullius had already arrived at the 300 meter tall, screw-shaped building adorned with diamond like glass all over it in a mesmerising, towering view.

Of course, Skullius still couldn't see it, however, now that he was within range of the entire Academy, he could sense that this building was merely the largest here and not the only one that made up this esteemed place.

From a distance, one, with functioning eyes, would be tempted to think that this was the only building representing the Academy's presence as most of the others would be hidden by other structures within the city, but that could not be more untrue.

Tens more artificial rises in the form of towers could be seen all around the Academy grounds, their designs a bit different from the screwy mass but with the same theme of design on their exteriors to emphasise uniformity. They were placed in strategic arrangements that apportioned them according to size as well as amount of mana and various other energies that could be contained within.

It was more than just this but no one outside of anyone attending the Academy knew the specifics.

The vast circular space that the entire Academy encompassed was split into four quadrants that had four tall towers in each, the rest of the inhabiting structures within being half the size or less.

Around the entire Academy premises, a circular, dull silver glow could be seen acting like a fence that cordoned off the Academy from the rest of the city, a large stone archway decorated beautifully with blue, gold and red lesser runes lined in a lovely sequence presenting itself at the only designated public entrance into this esteemed institution.

The Reacher Academy of Higher Magic Virtues.

Skullius felt the brimming, potent force of controlled energies breezing against his senses vividly. The glow around the Academy as well as that which came from the robes adorned by the numerous Mages as well as very few divergent Energy Formers – Tamers, Diviners among others – going in and out of the place gave him a powerful impression.

This place was definitely on a completely different plane from a mere college.

No wonder he had heard that barely anyone approached this place or dared to harass the Mages from this Academy.

He hadn't even entered the institution yet but that didn't discourage his internal alarms from telling him to play it safe.

Thus, with a humble visage and steady gait, Skullius approached the large archway at the entrance where a middle aged man donning black robes was standing, greeting those that belonged to the Academy with a friendly, dimply smile.

When this man's sharp eyes found Skullius standing before him however, his affable expression vanished, replaced by a strict and stern one that demanded formality.

"How may I help you?" the man asked Skullius with a deep voice.

"I was wondering if I could see Arch-Mage Ryte," Skullius replied promptly without skirting away to needless niceties.

"Unfortunately, the Arch-Mage is currently busy with an important task. Please come back later."

The reply that came to Skullius was equally as quick and as blunt as his request had been.

But it was bullshit!

That was the most evasively perfunctory 'get lost' he had ever heard!

It was clear now what Stylla had said. These guys were strict and would rather not have him enter the Academy at all.

Alright. If that was the case...

"I'm afraid what I need is urgent. Would this change anything?" Skullius said as he pulled out the rolled up parchment he had been given by Stylla.

The man guarding the entrance narrowed his eyes as he took the parchment and checked the seal on it.

It was the Bryne Family seal.

Contrary to what Skullius had thought, the man opened the parchment, breaking the seal without a care as he then read the contents written on the full item.

His face grew a tad bit softer before he rolled the parchment back and gave it back to Skullius.

"Very well," the man said before turning and calling one of the young Mage student passing by.

"Show him to the tower in the Transmutation Quadrant will you?"

The young Mage nodded without qualms and politely asked Skullius to follow him.

The Hybrid Luman was surprised.

Just like that?

No venom or fire?

No challenge?

Ah, of course maybe all that was waiting inside.

Phew... for a moment there, the Hybrid Luman almost thought he was lucky or something.

'Let's see who this Ryte is. If Arch-Mage has the same ring of respect as Arch-Lich then his person must be quite powerful,' Skullius thought.

The screw shaped tower at the centre of this Academy gave off a heavy, domineering presence, as if it was alive. The closer one went towards it, the more they would feel stifled and short of breath.

At least that was the case for Skullius.

The mana became heavy.

Too heavy.

It bore down on him and made even the air too thick to breathe!

He had use [Greater Mana Crafter] to prevent himself from taking up a hunched posture as he walked.

"Wow! You have decent mana manipulation skills sir! I was prepared to lend you my attire but you seem to be managing quite well. I'm sure you weren't told this but you need a custom robe to move around without trouble within the Academy. Luckily for you, we won't be following the path to the Wormworld Spiral," the Mage who was leading Skullius said with a polite smile.

'Decent, huh? I see,' Skullius thought with sweat dripping from his brow.

He nodded to the young Mage and followed, sensing the richly thick mana clinging to everything within this Academy; the well mowed lawns, the aligned bushes and thick trees within that Skullius could only assume were part of parks or private reading spaces within the large quadrants.

The heavy mana from the large tower, the Wormworld Spiral nourished everything above the bountiful mana already present.

All things considered this was the perfect place to train as a Mage or Energy Former in general.

Young and old Mages all around gave Skullius curious looks as he and his escort passed.

It was uncomfortable really.

With every look, the Hybrid Luman's pride was crushed quite a bit.

The young Mage's words gained more power in his mind the more he got strange gazes that made him feel out of place. It was almost like he was some idiot entering an intellectual haven for the privileged!

He was talented too, dammit!

Soon, Skullius had arrived at his destination.

A tall tower with a girth of roughly 130 square meters and a height of 33 meters. The material it was made of was like bricks coated with black liquid diamond, giving it an absolutely gorgeous visage. There was a cone shaped roof above with jagged black tiles adding a dash of intimidating flair to the structure.

This was an Arch-Mage's tower.

At least one that was provided by the Academy.

"I'm guessing you want to see Arch-Mage RYTE or perhaps someone he works with right? You can enter and look for him. Don't be scared," the young Mage instructed politely.

'I'm not scared, dammit!' Skullius thought inwardly while nodding with an appreciative smile on the outside.

To show that he wasn't perturbed by the entire vibe of the Academy so far – which he was – he pushed open the door to the circular tower as his escort walked away.

On entering, he was met with a narrow winding corridor adorned with a red carpet on its floor. To the right, a circling staircase could be seen where the carpet dropped down from as it went its way towards the arc to Skullius' left.

'Uh, which way do I go?' Skullius thought with a confused long breath, his senses trying their best to navigate the upper floors.

Suddenly, the carpet he stood on started to tumble and shift and what looked like a large wrinkle... no, a mouth appeared from it!

...!

The wrinkled curled a bit before opening up, a voice leaking from it clearly.

"Good morning! Oh. You're not a student? How may I help you?"

A feminine voice that was so squeaky it was nearly impossible to hear what it was saying sounded.

Skullius hid his puzzlement over where, how and why. He took out the parchment to speed things up instead.

"I'm here for Arch-Mage RYTE. Can I see him? I have a letter from the Bryne Family," Skullius said.

"THEURIEN?! IS IT THEURIEN?!" a mighty voice burst from the carpet out of the blue, its gusto and nature vastly different from the one Skullius had heard before!

"HAS THEURIEN FINALLY WOKEN UP?! TELL ME, YOU DAWDLING FOOL! DON'T JUST STAND THERE LIKE A NITROS-INFUSED POSSY FLOWER WAITING FOR STUGGO ROOT ESSENCE TO FERTILISE IT IN THE OFFERNGRAL OSSICRIS!"

Skullius found himself nailed to the wall by the blast of sounds he couldn't comprehend!

What the hell?!

The what flower?!

Chapter 570: Class In Session

"Theurien? Who's Theurien?" Skullius voiced in absolute ignorance. He pushed away what he assumed was a long winded insult and decided to focus on what was important.

Given the fact that he had just mentioned he had a letter from the Bryne Family, it wasn't outlandish to assume that this name had to do with that right?

Stylla did mention that this Arch-Mage RYTE was friends with her father.

Could her father be Theurien then?

That made sense.

"ARE YOU JUST A MESSENGER?! GIVE ME THE BLOODY PARCHMENT THEN BOY!" the vicious voice that blasted from the carpet came once again, a intricately controlled suction force pulling on the parchment Skullius held!

Could the carpet be used to see as well?

The item rushed from the Luman's grip before being sucked into the wide and deep wrinkle in the carpet.

After this, the carpet squirmed, the 'mouth' on it wiggling as if mirroring the motion of someone high up in the tower as they mumbled to themselves the contents of the written message.

Skullius used this moment of silence to pull himself from the wall and calm himself.

How Stylla had encouraged him to make the most out of this situation produced a constant ring in his mind. He had to ensure he secured the information he needed at all costs. It wasn't like he needed much anyway.

"HUH?! IT'S JUST THEURIEN'S LITTLE BRAT?! HOW BOLD SHE IS!" the booming voice sounded again, causing a light tremor where Skullius stood. "IT'S ALWAYS FAVOURS THEY ASK! LIKE FATHER LIKE DAUGHTER! EVEN CHILDREN THINK THEY CAN ASK ANYTHING OF ME!"

Skullius sucked in a deep breath.

Come on.

Come on.

Don't just act dumb, own the moment!

"Please, Arch-Mage Ryte. I know I must be imposing on your busy schedule but what I need is only a few minutes of your time. I only want answers about a few things," Skullius requested in a humble tone, hoping his voice would reach wherever the one who was speaking – hopefully Arch-Mage Ryte – was.

There was a contemplative hum, its origin the carpet as always.

"A FEW MINUTES OF MY TIME HE SAYS. YOU'RE NOT A MAGE BUT YOU SAW IT FIT TO SEEK COUNSEL FROM AN ARCH-MAGE DIRECTLY? WHAT COULD BE THAT REQUIRES MY EXPERTISE EXACTLY? I CANNOT AID YOU WITH TWIDDLING A SWORD, BOY. GO FIND SOMEONE ELSE."

...!

As soon as Skullius heard this, he felt a familiar energy wash over him from the walls that emitted a faint light over which runes were carved into, a spatial simmering of energy applying over him!

It was powerful!

It was ridiculously powerful!

Even the spatial lightning he constantly felt on the stout mountain didn't compare!

'I'm about to be expelled from the tower!' Skullius pieced together this result.

Of course, after what he had just heard, he was painfully made aware of the fact that he wasn't welcome and Stylla's words hadn't swayed the man at all.

"WHEN YOU FIND THAT LITTLE BRYNE BRAT, TELL HER NOT TO TRY SOMETHING LIKE THIS AGAIN! WE DO NOT EVEN QUALIFY AS ACQUAINTANCES!"

'I'm not letting this chance pass!' the Hybrid Luman thought.

Skullius grit his teeth.

Right before he was transported to who knew where – most likely the Academy entrance – , he activated [Greater Mana Crafter] and with all the focus he concentration he could conjure, he tried as hard as he could to disrupt the mana and runic inscription he saw facilitating the spatial warping!

Because of [Beyond the Hype], Skullius processed everything twice as quickly, making what would have been an instantaneous thing, something hard for him to perceive, quite a bit discernible with the full effort of his senses!

The mana around was skewed, its thick and rich abundance that ran amok in the walls as well as the air twisting as Skullius contended with the Tower Master for its control!

For a brief millisecond, the spatial displacement that was supposed to affect Skullius was delayed as with his face looking constipated, he wrestled against what was quite literally mega tonnes of diverse and complex weavings of mana and a slew of other energies!

'Holy.... shit!' Skullius exclaimed internally.

The mana here wasn't easy to move even with [Greater Mana Crafter]!

He could feel it!

If it really was Arch-Mage Ryte controlling it, his mere casual grasp on all these energies transcended beyond his own skill at mana manipulation applying with 100% effort!

This struggle however...

This delay in of what was intended, prompted slight intrigue in the other party.

"HMMM? CURIOUS..." the voice from the carpet sounded.

Along with its echo in the corridor the precise apportionment of energies around Skullius waned.

Plop!

Skullius dropped to the floor.

His eyes were bulged in shock and... just a hint of terror!

"WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT..." the voice sounded again with a lighter tone.

Quite abruptly, Skullius felt his body stretched through unknowns for a partition of time that his [Beyond the Hype] couldn't help him articulate and in the next moment, he appeared in an spacious room, his body still kneeling on the ground.

"Huh...?" Skullius voiced with his sweaty face depicting a flabbergasted expression.

It would have been exciting if he was simply within a room where Arch-Mage Ryte was sitting down languidly on a chair, looking down at him with condescending eyes but...

That wasn't it.

There just had to be something else.

This spacious room was in fact... a large classroom?

Ten rows of spaced, lengthy benches and desks could be seen, their surfaces inhabited by 25 robed figures.

Apprentices.

Some of them looked at Skullius with surprise and others giggled at his dumbfounded face, expressing their unshakeable sense of superiority with their eyes.

'Where...? Am I still in the Tower? How come this room is so big? Is it like the spatial storage ring?' Skullius asked himself as his senses took in everything around him.

Aside from the benches and desks, various equipment was stashed all around this room neatly, most of it being beakers, tubes and herbs of different kinds.

"Ahem..." a voice sounded from the side, gathering Skullius' attention. He had already felt the vast presence but was distracted by this sudden turn of events.

Did he succeeded?

It seemed so.

A man who looked to be in his fifties stood by a large black board attached to the wall where everything he had written with chalk was moving mysteriously.

The man had downturned brown eyes and thick lips under his well groomed moustache, his button nose surrounded by a slightly wrinkled skin warping his image as an established adult. Very short strands of hair were perked on his head, their colour a pristine white but not from age. It was the hue of mana saturating every portion of the hair sublimely, a testament to his rank in Magecraft.

He held a parchment in his hand while looking at Skullius with a raised brow.

"Are you going to remain in that defeated pose all day? Stand up, boy!" the man shouted with a fierce tone that jolted Skullius up clumsily, much to audience's delight – deprecating laughter.

Skullius ignored the attention with only slight hints of annoyance.

"Arch-Mage RYTE?" he asked carefully. At this point it was obvious but... just to be sure Skullius asked.

"I think we are way beyond that point, boy. I have no time to waste with you. As you can see my students in Transmutation are awaiting my precious instruction," the Arch-Mage RYTE said while slapping the rolled up parchment on his other hand, a strangely intimidating action.

"I'll admit, I did not think someone like you could have such a decent mastery of mana. A bit more practise and your control would fit the prerequisite of becoming a First Year Apprentice."

...?

Skullius had a lot to say to this.

First Year Apprentice?

His [Greater Mana Crafter] which could immobilise his opponents when he grasped the mana in the air tight, absorb mana from hundreds of cores simultaneously among many other feats Skullius was proud of... was not even enough for one to be called an Apprentice?!

'I knew being a Mage was hard but...' Skullius thought with dread.

Arch-Mage RYTE detected his breaking self esteem and chuckled.

It was easy to see what bothered Skullius but he did not dwell on it as much as it would have been hilarious.

Skullius shook his head.

"Right... I... Thank you for giving me a chance. I just wanted to ask a few questions," Skullius repeated this request.

"Of course you do. I'm a little curious myself actually after that little show of yours. You seem to have a bit of an understanding of high level concepts. You managed to disrupt my runes by distorting the mana powering them but to do that, you needed to perceive the trans positioning about to take place. Which you seem to be capable of. I could call that genius for someone at your level.

What Class do you have?" Arch-Mage RYTE asked.

Skullius thought for a bit.

The reason why Stylla had decided to help him get counsel from a Mage was because Skullius had been playing Mage since Inhone City. Now, in the presence of a real Mage, he couldn't afford to lie foolishly, else it could end badly.

"I'm a Swordsman trying to Class Branch into simple forms of Magecraft," Skullius replied.

"Oh. How generic," Arch-Mage RYTE remarked with a bit of disappointment.

This was the best reply Skullius could think of. If he tried to present himself as an Energy Former, it could end badly if he was discovered to not have anything related to the class he said he had.

That's why he chose Swordsman. Technically, he was one.

"Still, I will humour your questions... with the use of my students."

Skullius' face darkened.

The Apprentices in the room sniggered at Skullius. Some of them looked younger than him – his Luman form's appearance – and couldn't wait to dump him all sorts of information that did one thing; prove that they were better while impressing their teacher.

One of the students, a young woman with long leather black hair raised her hand with a smug expression etched on her face. Arch-Mage Ryte gestured to her and she posed a question towards the Hybrid Luman.

"Sir. If you wish to Class Branch into Magecraft, I assume you know the very basics of it, correct? Its origins? Its facets? Its categories? Surely someone wishing to learn should respect the subject enough to learn that much right?" the young woman asked with her ego causing her head to rise.

Skullius clicked his tongue secretly.

This woman's voice...

She was the one who had spoke through the carpet first earlier.

'Tsk. Going by that she really must love to showoff.'