

# Undead 591

## Chapter 591: Convincing A Hidden Legend

In the same building where a loss was being handled with heavy hearts, high up into the exclusive floors, a very important meeting was taking place.

Silrat had managed to catch Alaris with a bit of free time and right now, he was making a very unexpected plea.

"It's hardly been a month, hasn't it? What makes you think Festos already requires a re-evaluation?" Alaris asked curiously.

His topaz blue eyes had an inquisitive sheen about them that made them seem like a sea in the night, his handlebar moustache crafted entirely of caramel coloured hairs exposing wisps of wisdom that made Silrat all the more nervous about the results to what he was requesting.

The two sat on a bench opposite the ever-present cubicle of Rist, the receptionist to all executives and other special persons beginning from this floor.

"Festos grows rather quickly, you see. You wouldn't believe how much he's grown in the past few days alone. I guarantee you won't regret it," Silrat tried to convince with a confident smile.

Alaris folded his arms, his thick, well contoured muscles showing from the short sleeved shirt he wore.

The black greaves he always sank his legs into each day, clanked against the pristine, clean floor as he shifted them in thought.

"When you came looking for me, I thought you wanted to discuss the matter of Festos' trial. Isn't that more important? Or perhaps my instincts are correct in giving me the idea that you asking for a re-evaluation for this gentleman... is your way of trying to foil the repercussions of Festos' careless actions?" Alaris asked with another sharp glint in his eyes.

"What if it is as your instincts say? I am someone who works on instincts and hunches too, you know?" Silrat launched a question posing as an answer.

Alaris was amused.

"I can tell that you attaining this post wasn't by chance. You seem to have calculated the risks and benefits thoroughly. I know a motivated man when I see one," he said. "However, IF I agree to this, there's something you should know about ranks among the exclusive mercenaries. Perhaps you already know, but I must stress it.

To be considered among the ranks 1 to 3, one must truly be extraordinary and their presence is often desired anywhere, anytime."

The top 3 ranks for exclusive mercenaries were not just given to anyone.

The general rankings, as mentioned before, were governed by strength and arguably most important of all, potential. If the Association was going to funnel resources into an individual, they had to be sure said individual had room to grow.

Skullius' rank 4 had been given by Alaris because he did show that he had potential but his showing when it came to skill was rather lacking. The power was there to back it up, both physical and all, but the rest was too unrefined to even come close to being considered rank 3 material.

"As you can see, you hardly ever see the other exclusive mercenaries because of missions. And to earn their ranks they either had incredible feats of strength, powerful connections in the Association itself or both. I can tell you now, I don't see Festos reaching that level as soon as you want me to believe. He can, but not yet. Be patient," Alaris advised.

Silrat could understand what Alaris was saying.

He knew about the rankings and how strict they were – he researched thoroughly after Skullius was given rank 4.

Part of him wanted to just follow the experienced combatant's advice, but that wouldn't fly.

Besides, after all he had been shown and told about Skullius that day when many things were revealed to him about the Hybrid Luman that would shock most, he grew confident.

If Skullius could show a sliver of that to Alaris instead of holding back like he did during the first evaluation...

"I'd be fool not to trust your words. Sadly that is what I am," Silrat said with dull chuckle. "May I ask, Alaris? When you gained the title of Bloodless Steel Phantom, was it because you were patient, or because you let loose the very peak of your strength in one single instance, claiming both victory and glory?" .

Alaris was a bit taken aback.

"I know. Many within this very city have written you off as a myth. Heck, most of the mercenaries in this very building don't know your legends from seventy years ago and beyond. Pardon me but I do have a gift for extracting information," the former Association Branch Head flexed hidden truths that he knew.

Alaris.

This man was mostly respected by those in high places.

Higher Families, higher authorities.

Though Alaris himself didn't like the attention and had since stopped making flashy movements, records of his feats were still in the world.

How he slaughtered an escaped Cluster General from a purple-blue Cluster with a single, barely perceptible swing of his sword from half a mile away without killing any of the people who had been between him and the monster...

How he had once gotten into a spat with an Incandescent Stage expert from a rich Family, fought him and lived to tell the tale – though with a body full of deep gashes...

How he had gained enough favour from the legendary blacksmith Bozar Menu just by showing one fluid swing with a twig instead of a sword, this feat allowing him to walk away with a Mythical grade sword personally forged by that mysterious man....

Silrat had managed to gather such details in his time in the Association so far.

Such a man...

He didn't have any right to be talking about patience and taking it slow when he had taken the world by storm, right?

Silrat had to get close to him, and not in the pretentious way he had done when he first saw him. Back then, he had viewed Alaris as a common evaluation officer with a bit of repute.

To get what he wanted, this was one of the ways to do it.

To provoke the inner vigour within this legend.

"Bloodless Steel..." Alaris said. "I rejected such an on the nose name. The fact that you even know this name means your prying was done on very specific individuals that I happen to know."

"I guessed as much," Silrat confirmed Alaris' thoughts. "What I'm trying to say is, please spare Festos one chance to show you his growth. You and no one else. It won't simply be enough. It will surprise you."

Alaris' eyes lazily turned to Silrat.

This man didn't want anyone else to evaluate Skullius but him for this reason, huh?

To impress him?

Such persistence...

"When I talked about motivation earlier... Hmm. You strike me as someone with a heavy ambition. This isn't simply about Festos, is it?" he asked.

Silrat didn't see any reason to deny it. It was all but obvious.

"That's true."

Alaris nodded, his eyes keenly searching for something in Silrat's focused sight.

He found it.

"Hmmm. Good. I'll do it. Just a single chance though," he said with a smile.

Silrat sighed in relief.

"Thank you."

"Don't pat yourself too much on the back. I've always been curious about how a Mage, as you said this Festos was, could Class Branch to the extent that he seems more like a jack of all trades in terms of Classes," Alaris said with a chuckle.

"That's our mysterious young MAGE for you," Silrat gave an exaggerated smile.

He too had wondered the same thing.

Thank goodness for the correction.

If this manoeuvre of his were to succeed, Silrat fully expected much more than just Skullius having his rank re-evaluated.

No.

That was too shallow.

Now that he could help Skullius without the threat of dying a horrendous death, he aimed to make full use of his skills at gathering information, leadership and scouting talent to steadily rise in order to achieve his goal.

A goal that he hadn't told anyone.

The only person who had known the entire objective that Silrat was after had died without seeing what Silrat had accomplished so far, much to the former Branch Head's dissatisfaction.

It was his father.

Silrat shook his head.

No need to dwell on the past.

All he needed now was to carve a clear path.

In terms of position, evaluation officers and the post that Silrat had now as a scout were at the same level authority wise.

Alaris was an exception as he could literally become whatever he wanted with his reputation but had not gone that route because he wanted to keep his heart alight by constantly meeting new, strong talents in the Association.

After this level came the Supervising Overseers.

An example of such was the stern man with the formal get up whom Skullius had met the day he got his identification.

Their job was to oversee scouts and the exclusive mercenaries they represented.

Above the Overseers was the General Board of the Association, governed by the Branch Head and a number of corresponding members.

'There wasn't such an intricate structure in Inhone City,' Silrat lamented inwardly. 'But here, the clearly defined hierarchy makes it easy for me to rise step by step.'

Chapter 592: Beauty and The Luman

Five hours after reverting back to normal, Skullius was walking among the humans freely again, entering Genhuis in the depths of the night without the trouble of meeting resistance at the gate this time.

He momentarily stopped what had been his practice with gathering Aura in his body – the chillingly dark Aura that he could produce which wasn't the same as the others he had seen.

He could produce lumps of it, not nearly enough to form a Full Body Aura but just enough for him to practise combining the skills in his body.

It was no easy task.

With enough focus, he could sense all his skills etched into his body but fusing them by attaching one lump of Aura to one skill and then stretching said lump to another skill placed a distance away from the first one was... agitating.

He had had outbursts of pure rage on the way here that even he was shocked by.

It was maddening.

'This is ridiculous. If it's this hard then no wonder it happens naturally for everyone. Why bother do it manually?' Skullius thought, the remnants of his fury registering on his skin which turned a bit red.

No matter.

He would get there eventually. As long as he kept up the grind, he would have a Full Body Aura in no time and his finesse when merging skills would only continue to increase.

That was the best attitude to adopt otherwise he would go insane before Doom Factor 2 struck.

That said, it seemed that only similar skills could be merged together reasonably. At the very least, skills with a similar level could be merged. For instance, normal skills that hadn't evolved would probably be the easiest to merge with the difficulty ramping up when merging Special skills.

When it came to fusing a Special skill and normal one... that was likely impossible.

That much Skullius could understand on his own.

Additionally, as Skullius saw it, it was likely impossible to merge his class skills with normal skills. He couldn't understand how that would even work.

How would [Basic Evil Sanction] merge with [Great Rush I] for instance? Not only where they different, but no matter what skill it was, they were completely incompatible with his Insurgent Magnus skill series.

Also, withholding the issue of skill, higher levels skills probably used up a lot of Aura to merge, which meant this wasn't going to be a quick process. The Hybrid Luman intended on creating powerful skills too, so there was no way he was going to half ass this.

'Thank goodness I have Replicus. Between focusing on attaining high level concepts, merging skills, creating new skills with [Unbound], looking into the Severed Union and all that... I'd waste the limited time I have left,' Skullius thought.

'That said, I guess I should try to put levelling up [Brisk Storm Avatar] higher on my priority list but... Special skills aren't the easiest to level up.'

Thinking about these things brought a lot of conflicting emotions from Skullius.

Mostly stress.

He couldn't afford to be downcast right now but he couldn't help it.

There was just so much bullshit!

Speaking of stress...

The Hybrid Luman pulled out Demion's Dance from his storage.

At this point, he had passed the general business areas and was closing in on the largely spaced sets of mansions built for the Families within Genhuis City.

The area was less populated, especially in the night and the activity therefore, was limited.

The green bladed curved sword Skullius held had several cracks on it and with a quick look through the guidance field, Skullius saw that its durability had plummeted hard.

Back in Inhone, he had gotten it partially mended by HammerDown Gruff, and since then, he had forgotten that it wasn't quite whole yet. Some of its skills were not as effective still.

The blacksmith had already made him aware of that.

'I completely forgot about it,' Skullius thought as he caressed the blade's surface. 'Just when you had acknowledged me as your wielder too...'

Now that the Hybrid Luman wasn't in a pinch, he could fully appreciate the notification he had seen.

He felt a close bond with the sword now, but through that bond, he could tell that the sword was weak.

During his fight with Bassbion, the technique inlaid within the sword, the [Swindling Death's Dance] had crept its dark red clutch on his heart, making him feel like if he didn't perform each slash with everything he had, he would die.

When his body was reforged, this dark clutch had forged the <CURSED HEART> and his <CURSED BLOOD>, things he was sure were not yet living up to their fullest potential.

Now, with the sword cracking, Skullius felt like he was a bit far from seeing that potential being realised, however it was supposed to. He needed a really good blacksmith.

"You hold that sword as if it were a lover. Is it?" a voice asked from a short distance.

Skullius' senses flared and he hurriedly tried to discern the shape of this person.

When he did...

'Oh come on!' Skullius complained in his mind and he didn't have the decency to hide his discomfort at meeting this person either.

It was a very shapely woman walking a few steps behind him.

Her long, navy blue hair and breath-taking gaze made her easily recognisable, her skimpy but stylish clothing that revealed a little too much making her stand out.

Since Skullius had to rely on tracing shapes, he was smacked right in face with a cold reality when this woman was so close to him for a change.

He might have missed other finer details about her but...

Damn, she was well carved!

He didn't have any particular ability to savour a woman's body and was practically immune to getting charmed but sheesh!

"Don't look sooo excited to see me," the woman said with charming sarcasm.

She was Vali Kinn, a woman Skullius was wary of.

The Hybrid Luman sighed.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Vali chuckled.

"Come on, I wrote to you didn't I? And sadly I got the feeling you didn't intend to meet with me for a chat," she said with an unintentionally seductive smile, her gaze towards Skullius, if it had been directed to any 'feeling' man, absolutely dominating.

"I didn't," Skullius said bluntly as he stopped and turned to stare at her with his blind eyes. "So you decided to stalk me instead?"

"Oh no, no. This is simply a chance meeting. I enjoy lonely walks through the city at night. It just so happens to be the most REAL time of any day."

Skullius wasn't convinced.

Either she was stalking or his atrocious luck was getting a good sense of humour.

Yesterday, the Hybrid Luman had decided to meet with Darwel, who had sent out her desire to speak to him in writing as well, but the person he had decided not to meet at all was the one he was looking at right now.

She seemed happy about it too.

Vali took steps to reach Skullius, the two now standing face to face with their similar heights allowing for an aligned gaze.

Not that it mattered.

Skullius relented.

Might as well get this over with.

"Just tell me what you want from me?" he asked with apparent annoyance.

Vali backpedalled and sat on a rock behind her, her eyes never leaving Skullius' face.

"Want is a strong word but it fits. You know exactly what I want," she replied with the cute tilt of her head that flung bits of her blue hair to the side.

"Right. You want to use me to get to the Bryne Family?" Skullius recited what Vali had said in her letter.

"That's a bit oversimplified but yes. I'm taking a page out of the EverSword's book. Rallying Families under mine for mutual benefit. The Bryne Family isn't exactly better off, is it? Besides, such a talented man like yourself would do so much better with me."

Skullius sent out a hard breath.

"Well aren't you very forward and honest," he said while also sitting down. 'Looking' down at the seated Vali wasn't exactly pleasant.

"As I should be. Women should be transparent while men should be the tough, hard nuts they were meant to be. That's how I see it," Vali said while drawing a circle playfully in the air. "When you're that tough, you appear immovable and the more you withhold, the less weaknesses you appear to have. Now that's a man."

Skullius twisted his lips.

What an outlook.

"And me? Do I somehow fit that standard of yours for a man?" he asked curiously.

Vali's smile grew wider, her mana slightly spiking

She had an outrageous amount of it.

Its quantity was incredibly abnormal when stacked even against Mages!

"I always admire a man who has secrets, who is decisive, hides many of their cards and has a knack for flare. I saw all that in that one battle of yours. It was genuine and arousing."

Vali's eyes showed a feverish desire.

She set one leg on top of the other while taking smooth breaths to calm her heart.

Skullius got the desire to run away.

Lady, are you alright?

"I'm interested in you, Festos. I haven't met a man like you in a long time. I understand the human body pretty well. Flesh, bone, mana and all. Every aspect about I've seen and expedience is drawing me to you. Even now I feel that you're repulsed by me unlike most.

You've been feeling over me voraciously but you feel nothing but wariness. The reason for that, among other things intrigues me. I'd assume you've heard more bad things about me than the good but still..."

'I've heard no good things about you, lady,' Skullius replied inwardly.

He was growing more and more uncomfortable by the minute.

"I'll have to refuse your offer. I'm quiet happy with where I am," Skullius said as he stood, preparing to walk away.

Vali grew even more excited. She remained seated and swung her legs like a little girl.

"Hmmm..." she hummed to herself as she let Skullius go on his way.

She didn't stop him.

Best not to obsess.

The many generations of lesser men she had seen drove away her interest by doing the same thing. They too wouldn't like the treatment.

Vali giggled.

Her eyes twinkled as she engraved Skullius' figure into her mind.

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Skullius sighed without end as he entered the Bryne Family Residence.

What an uncomfortable encounter.

If he were any lesser of a man – than he already was, literally – he would have fallen for Vali's charm.

The worst part was, he couldn't tell what her true intentions were. Her words were like a honey trap and most likely this woman could use his interests to capture him if he didn't stay cautious.

One thing he was sure of though, was that some people were hard to fool.

People like Vali could read even hidden aspects of him like a book.

Tsk.

How annoying.

Chapter 593: Stylla's Hesitation

Thankfully, it just so happened that one of the best people to engage Skullius on matters such as these, Silrat, was home right now.

The Hybrid Luman headed to where he was immediately, having been directed to his finer whereabouts in the mansion by maidservants.

In the same study he had last seen Silrat in, the man with the long, crushed garnet hair and grey eyes looked to be engaging himself with the scribbled, subjective ramblings stocked within stacks of papers and old books, his attention absorbed wholly by them.

When the Hybrid Luman walked in, Silrat was genuinely surprised, almost jerking back into his chair.

"You're already back?!"

"Yes. The visit to the Bryne Family Estate wasn't exactly... eventful in the normal way," Skullius said as he sat down.

"Hmm? What happened?"

How eventful could it have been then?

Skullius sighed and explained everything that happened to Silrat right down to the proposal he had made to Stylla.

The former Branch Head had his fair share of surprise when listening to the chaotic events one by one but he didn't react as vibrantly as most would to the finer details, like the attack portion.

What surprised him most was the part about Setkh exclusively.

"So he was in on it? I wouldn't have pinned it on him in my wildest dreams. Even now I can't imagine that he would do that to his own father," he said with a grimace.

"It was a shock to me too but he didn't have a good relationship with these people. He was forced into this, it seems. No that it matters," Skullius said.

The more he thought about Setkh and how he had escaped, the more he thought about how he had given Stylla assurance that her brother wouldn't escape.

And yet...

Tsk.

It bothered him.

It really bothered him.

Why was he so affected?

It wasn't like he promised or something!

'Argh,' Skullius grunted inwardly.

"Who cares about the details? I'm sure Stylla won't care about the how. Even I'm not sure I do," Silrat said as he sank into his seat and folded his arms.

Some might argue that Setkh had no choice but this whole ordeal brought into question how he had encountered these people to begin with.

Had they already known about the Harmonic Ember or was he the one to tell them?

The answer wouldn't make anyone feel any better.

Stylla's words made it clear that the crystal was a Family secret.

"These men..." Silrat said. "You said it looked he summoned them?"

"Yes. They just spawned from the ring he was wearing."

"I see..."

Silrat went deep into thought, collecting all this information to sew up some form of conclusion.

Opposite him, Skullius wondered about this, debating on whether he should ask or not.

"Do you know about the Severed Union?" he decided to come out with it in the middle of the contemplative silence.

Silrat's eyes dashed to the Hybrid Luman.

"It's hardly a secret. The only problem is that since its existence is mostly held up by claims and words, it's become a myth. Yet only the Deities know how hard the whole of Aigas has tried to find this haven for criminals," Silrat said with a bit of disgruntled visage. "Why do you ask?"

Oh.

Skullius instantly became torn about the subject.

He had wanted to tell Silrat more about his... findings but this reaction discouraged it.

The funny part about this subject was while Skullius had Replicus search for the Severed Union, his memories drawn from many bandits only gave him clues. It was like everyone connected to this organisation had a protective network around their minds that gave as little as possible when probing occurred.

Weird.

Skullius would have wanted to let Silrat on the investigation but...

'Let's hold off on that,' he thought.

Instead, he shifted the topic.

"I was just curious. I extracted a few memories about it but it's hard to make out. Anyway, you said you had strategy about getting me off that thing with the special mountain I blew up?"

Silrat chuckled.

Special mountain, he said.

It was an important tourist site with a town on it that he had blown up!

"Your hearing won't be for another few days. It's been undecided for a while since the Association is planning on hosting some sort of event. The Supervising Overseers are busy with that so they can hardly tolerate having to facilitate your case right now."

"Wait? What event?"

"Don't know. Information hasn't been officially passed to people like me yet. All this to say, I hope you have a few other things to do as you wait for the hearing."

"I do actually. <Sigh>. I have to go see that Sif woman, Darwel. She wants to meet me for whatever reason. I was planning to drop by tomorrow."

"Right, right! Stylla said something about that before you left. What have you been doing to garner so much attention, Festos?! And that woman from the Kinn Family wanted to meet with you too, didn't she?"

"I already met her just now and NO I don't want to talk about it," Skullius said as he extended his palm to Silrat's face.

The recipient of this palm held in a laugh as he shifted the subject back on track.

"Alright, alright. Anyway, about your question on how to deal with the hearing and that pompous Kurtish..." Silrat began to feed Skullius his plan.

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Next day.

On the way back to Genhuis City, Stylla had taken the few important men with her and left the still undecided members of the workforce that had served her Family for years.

As she had promised, she had paid them coin enough to last them and their families for lifetimes but that wasn't satisfying for those who viewed the Bryne Family estate as their home. They had grown attached.

Stylla saw the dangers they may fall prey to however and decided to let them off. If things went south, she couldn't bear the guilt.

Right now, she had taken all the Family treasures and heirlooms and packed them into multiple secure storage objects secured in one of the two carriages guarded on all sides by the remainder of the guards loyal to the Family.

Additionally, undoubtedly the most precious cargo that was being transported, was her father.

The carriage he was in was large so as to cater for the bed that was surrounded by the cylindrical glow of protective runes. Stylla had been unwilling to deactivate the bed's function as she wanted her father to remain safe in the event of any mishap.

Though the size of the carriage could garner the attention of curious criminals, she had stationed Ed with him.

If that wasn't enough...

"It's funny you should say that, Miss Stylla. I consider my cape a little overbearing at times but it has a very useful utility."

Stylla smiled with a nod.

"I see."

She along with Head Maid Arisa were seated in the front most carriage with Red Rage, a surprisingly chatty individual!

Admittedly, his stories and tales kept the atmosphere lively and for stretches of time, Stylla had been led to forget the contents of her inner conflict.

There was something about the armoured figure sitting opposite her that made her... smile.

Even Arisa had taken a liking to this person and would freely talk to him, giggling at his words that were meant to ease the air.

"What was that creature that finally put down that man when we were underground, Mr Prisma?" Stylla asked.

This was the name Red Rage had made a formal introduction of himself with.

Prisma Avaris.

He removed the last part of the entire name for convenience and these two seemed to work just fine as a proper name.

A proper, exotic name.

"I am so glad you asked, Miss Stylla! That was one of my children. The beasts I've raised since they hatched a while ago. His name is Killin 0. Hmm. Talented that one.

His body managed to learn how to secrete a very deadly poison since he was only days old. Ah, I can't help but be proud," Red Rage answered with a cheery voice.

"You raise beasts? That's uncommon. Most people prefer to only engage with any kind of creatures when their class demands it," Stylla said.

"Not for me. I saw it as a duty. Beasts are no different from man if taught well enough. Oh, should you meet Killin 0 again, don't mind his appearance, he's a sweet boy in conversation."

Red Rage said this but he hid the details of how he had actually tested out a tiny bit of a special poison he had only used once before. That one instance was against the Evenfall cultist Tomin weeks ago.

He had only decided to risk this so as to create different variants among the young beasts, giving them more options for defending themselves.

Red Rage was careful with the entire process, going step by step and surely, one of the small creatures he had hatched developed a very powerful poison related ability similar to the one he had used.

The procedure he did was carried out after he had done extensive research with the young ones, discovering that their ability to adapt was overwhelming, thus the gamble!

This was all in the name of love.

The subject was entertaining and fascinating for the two ladies and one couldn't help but ask more questions about this 'delicate' man.

Arisa had asked to see one of these creatures but Red Rage politely declined, claiming that they were very shy.

What a pity it was... for it was true.

The laid back chat continued for a while until Stylla no longer participated.

Her mind drifted back into sullen thought.

Her rage and bloodlust for Setkh's head only grew stronger. Facing her father now reconceptualised his condition and served to make her more ambitious towards taking her time to build an image of herself that would suffice for the future, whatever that future was.

Was it one where her goal was for vengeance?

Was it one where she was forced to bury her father and her Family name as well?

Was it of prosperity?

Who knew?

Beyond this, there was the matter of what Skullius had proposed.

If he truly wasn't cursed anymore, maybe they could help each other indeed.

But... there was an issue about Skullius that wasn't yet resolved in Stylla's mind.

The Divination she had heard from that old man, an acquaintance of her father...

What did it mean?

Word for word, the old man had said:

'You.. Oh.. I see you and that man...oh Quintess! I see a... a... magisterial creature behind you...!

A...a King... is about to descend! I...I do not understand... but... it is a King... one...

with no renown of this world! I see it! Through this man you have invited... a... a King! A king that will descend!'

A king? Who was this so-called king?

Was this good news or bad news?

Skullius was in the centre of it all, that much was an absolute known but the rest?

What did it mean?

This variable is what made her hesitate.

Chapter 594: A Meeting With Darwel (1)

The late morning sun burst through the window, providing a vibrant shade of orange over the furniture set neatly inside the expansive guestroom where a certain Sif was seated over her bed, reading a book.

She wore a loose dress, the designs over its beige, soft entirety looking to have been made with patient strokes of green colouring that depicted a forest, one that was dense from the base of the dress, thinning out as it reached her shoulders.

Her cherry coloured hair was tied into a side pony that rested over her shoulder, bits of the strands reaching down to tickle the corner of the page she was reading.

The silence in the room was music to Darwel's ears, even though it was engineered through magical means.

There was no way the noise and clamour coming from the masses waddling from the distance would fail to reach even the Governor's Manor where she was currently being hosted. Thus, one of her guards had used a spell to block out the noise.

Darwel had enjoyed the stretch of peace for over three hours when one of her guards, from the silky veil that draped over her face, voiced.

"Should I still not contact your father and mother, Your Highness Darwel? They must be worried sick."

Darwel exhaustedly dropped her book to her thighs and gave the female guard an exasperated look.

"Nomatter how differently you phrase it everyday, my answer will remain the same. I think the question you should be asking is, what kind of parents don't even send a dove with a note to their daughter who is in a foreign land for their sake. That... is true crime," Darwel said as she raised her book, continuing to read again.

The female guard grimaced.

"Besides, I'm tired of seeing those crusty trees all day. They should have known I would take my time here once I was given to rare chance to 'leave'. Hmph. And if I get assassinated somehow, they'll probably learn a bit of a lesson."

The light within the room faded as the guard sitting opposite Darwel flared with a malicious fury.

"WHO WOULD DARE?!" the guard growled in an inhuman voice, her figure cancelling out even the direct sunlight from the window.

"Relax, you idiot. It was a hypothetical scenario," Darwel said with the casual wave of her fair hand.

The light was restored as the guard calmed down, looking a bit embarrassed with herself.

"You know what? I could send a letter home with the false news that I have been killed and see how they react! That would be hilarious!" Darwel said with a giggle.

The guard turned pale under her veil.

"That would be... very unwise, Your Highness," the guard discouraged with a shaky voice.

"It's a joke, Viccil. You're too stiff for you own good."

"Oh..." the guard said with a sigh of relief.

Her heart was too vigilant for the princess' playful nature.

Darwel was always so... cheeky when she wasn't in the presence of dignified company. That was a testament to how expectations pushed aside her true character.

Suddenly, the doors to Darwel's room were opened, another one of her two veiled guards coming in.

"Your Highness, the man you sent for the other day has come to see you," she reported.

Darwel promptly closed her book and shot up from her seat.

"Finally! I thought he wouldn't show!" she said with an expectant smile.

"HE WOULDN'T DARE!" the guard seated opposite Darwel flared again.

"Stop that!"

\*

Skullius whistled.

He hadn't thought he had seen all the beauty in the world but the Governor's mansion was far and above what he thought was the limit for grandiose settings.

Be it the various pieces of architecture employed in the compound, or the exquisitely maintained greenery that existed before and around the mansion...

All of it was inspiring to say the least.

'I should build something like this,' Skullius thought.

As far as security went, Skullius was happy to say it fit what he expected.

The amount of questioning he had to go through just from setting foot in this different area that was detached from the norm of the wide city was staggering, as was the procedure to relay the information and have it verified as to if he truly was invited by Her Highness Darwel.

From there, Skullius was escorted by two powerful and well equipped Capital Order Knights to the grand manor that outscaled the Bryne Family mansion in size.

Even the six surrounding buildings had better designs than Stylla's home and were all surrounded by sophisticatedly sculpted bushes.

The security was heavy.

Patrols. Patrols. Patrols.

There were no blinds spots to allow any shady activity at all.

Not that Skullius would ever attempt something so stupid as trying to sneak in.

There were super powerful Knights everywhere.

Upon entering the Grand Manor, Skullius was met with a formal space devoid of chatter or casual displays.

Everything here needed to be here.

Sadly, there was no chance meeting with anyone important as he was led directly to Lady Darwel's quarters.

Up a clean and carpeted flight of stairs that led into absurdly wide halls that split into four paths, one of which leading to another more absurd hall with no other furniture or accompanying rooms save for one distant set double doors - that was the way.

Who would forget that?

After these twists and turns to this place, Skullius was finally left off by the two Capital Order Knights fifteen meters away from the golden red double doors.

A single guard stood in front of the doors, her face unseen because of a silky veil.

Somehow, this turned more serious than it needed to be.

'Is all this necessary?' Skullius thought as the shadow of a droplet of sweat ran down his temple.

For a solid five minutes, he remained still. As someone in tune with the slightest shift in the air because of his physique, he could hear its 'voice' as it swam from the guard he faced, telling him...

'Don't move a muscle.'

And so he didn't.

It was abundantly clear that if he did not adhere to this... he might die right there.

Or worse... have to be imprisoned or something.

"Move forward."

The guard finally spoke to him.

Skullius obliged.

He took careful steps forward until he reached the doors.

The guard drew close to him and leaned in, reaching her lips to his ear.

"Tread carefully and mind how you speak. Your life can be just as fragile as glass to me if Her Highness wills it," she said.

Skullius gave a light smile.

"Sure."

Intimidation antics like this wouldn't work on him anymore. He'd met a hostile god rather recently and lived to tell the tale!

This sort of thing was a bargain sale type of tactic to him.

The guard narrowed her eyes and opened the doors, revealing the massive space within.

Skullius held back the desire to marvel in awe at the beauty.

This place was large enough to be the setting for a large house!

'Oh boy.'

Skullius' wandering senses were detected and met with a hostile blockade of what felt like Aura from another of the guards who was stationed inside this room.

She gestured to the right where a large table could be seen, set grandly so as to give the person sitting on its lengthy end an imposing presence.

'This is the part where I give a respectful greeting right?' Skullius thought and gave a short bow.

He was about to speak when...

"Cut the useless niceties. Your name is Festos, right? I'd rather we get straight to the point of all this,' Darwel who sat with a dignified posture, lazily resting on her chair said before making a demand.

"Lets see it from your back."

...

"Uh, what?" Skullius asked, alarmed at this request.

"Don't play dumb with me. I want to see it. I want to see your Wing of Embrace."

Chapter 595: A Meeting With Darwel (2)

Wait. What?

The Hybrid Luman was lost for words.

See his Wing of Embrace wha...

Then it dawned him.

The shift in his facial expression was not lost to Darwel. She took it as further affirmation to what, as she thought, was already a given.

She trusted her senses.

"You realised something, didn't you?" Darwel said, bringing her torso to the edge of the table where her slender arms rested over its shiny surface.

Skullius grimaced inwardly but kept up a poker face.

Well, shit!

It looked like he wasn't as discreet as he imagined himself to be.

That one instance where he had used his [Wing of Embrace] to escape Kurtish's barrier had been noticed by someone who somehow knew about it.

But how?

Wasn't this something exclusive to him?

Besides, he had been hidden by the barrier when he used it so... why?

That was too unexpected!

What to say.

What to do.

Suddenly, the point of a sword pinched Skullius' back.

"You would dare take your time in front of the daughter of the High Family?" the voice of the guard stormed from behind him, bearing a weight on the air that nearly forced Skullius to his knees!

'Great! These circumstances really like me, don't they?' Skullius thought with a hidden grunt.

"Quit that, Viccil. Let him think," Darwel ordered while waving her hands dismissively. Her crimson gold gaze then focused on Skullius' eyes. "I'm a rather optimistic person by nature, so I'll first give myself up to the belief that you have some form of convincing explanation as to how you have a Wing of Embrace. Is it some kind of artefact you have? That would be suspiciously specific?"

Are you a Sif? That's highly unlikely. I would have sensed that by now. So... why don't you just show me."

A cool smile graced Darwel's round, unblemished face.

The Hybrid Luman was torn.

Should he show it?

He had made a big deal about hiding anything to do with his Insurgent Magnus powers even if it was just the [Wing of Embrace], or in his case a [Wing of the Just] but... a lot of good that did!

Why was Darwel so interested in it?

Was this really something that already existed in this world?!

'<Sigh>' Skullius breathed out.

He relented.

Oh well.

He wasn't willing to die for something like this.

"Fine," he said before the thick of hostility grew even more from behind him.

Darwel's radiant smile grew brighter.

The guard behind Skullius took a few steps back and waited.

Could this human truly possess a Wing of Embrace somehow?

Unless it was used through some dirty means that served to further show how vile humanity was, especially in the eyes of the Sif...

CHING!

Her sword was ready.

Skullius heard this ring of steel.

These two guards he had met were deadly. Unlike with Gillewart the City Guardian, he couldn't even discern whether or not these two were Incandescent Stage experts or something even more fearsome.

The tension grew.

'If things go south...'Skullius thought.

Well... he had a few plans that would likely work for a while before burning miserably.

'Heh,' he chuckled inwardly.

Contrary to what Darwel and the guard expected, Skullius didn't reach into a spatial storage or pull something from his clothing.

He didn't say an incantation or do something heinous as they suspected.

Instead, he simply activated his racial ability, the [Wing of the Just] and immediately, a lengthy wing of light stretched out from his back, its origin being detached from Skullius' flesh!

...!!!

Its golden white hue was beautiful and as it appeared, unfurling with a straight length as if being pulled taut by a divine being, glitters began to show on Skullius' skin, the mana all around being sucked onto him in a breath!

The Hybrid Luman's strength spiked fivefold and he took a single moment to revel in it.

"Dear Listafelle...!" Darwel gaped in utter shock.

The guard behind Skullius was even more so shaken by this showing, her hand trembling as she fell on her knees.

Even though it couldn't be seen, a visage of utter horror showed on her face as her mind whirled violently, her blood screaming from within!

Then, she began to think...

She actually dared to point her sword at an El-Sif!

Her hand dared to threaten the life of...

Great mercies!

The doors to the room were swung open violently with heavy force, the other of the two guards breathing heavily as she had felt just now... the fully exposed power of a...

...!

She collapsed to the ground in terror.

Dear sacred light!

As her body shrieked in fear, she began to wonder...

She had dared to call this man glass she could shatter on a whim!

But she didn't know! He did not expose himself!

No!

That didn't matter!

'What the actual flesh is going on now?!' Skullius thought, getting genuinely scared about this unforeseen development.

Why were these two trembling?

Why were they scared all of a sudden?

"Impossible!" Darwel muttered with fiercely appalled eyes. "How can...? No! How do you have a Wing of an Embrace... coming from your flesh?! Who are you?!"

"Uhhh...." Skullius couldn't find the words to reply to this.

'You already know my name, lady!'

Darwel stumbled her way towards him and clutched his clothes. She ran her hands through the sparkling glitter orbiting around him.

It was genuine.

It was real!

She caressed his face and brought it awfully close to hers.

As they were like this, she could feel his unusually spaced breaths and almost taste his skin.

He wasn't a Sif but he... Now that she could feel his existence... he wasn't quite human either.

...!

To her shock when she felt the mixed blood within him, she could tell that it was undoubtedly 'purer' than hers!

Darwel gazed at his Wing of Embrace... It was quite dull and it was only one.

Yet...

"I can't believe it..." she said, almost choking on her words with teary eyes. "Are you a... <sniff>? Are you really...?"

Darwel began to sob, her head pressed against Skullius' chest.

"..."

Skullius' wires were short circuiting.

'I should have spent some more time with Vali instead,' he thought.

.....

Ten minutes later.

Skullius was seated at the table, anxiously waiting for someone to say something.

He had tucked back in his [Wing of the Just] as he couldn't maintain it for too long.

Darwel sat by his side, her eyes curiously gawking at him, his hand permanently locked within hers over her thighs.

This wasn't even the thick of it!

The two guards were bowing before him on his other side, their bodies still trembling in fear.

Alright!

Seeing as no one wanted to speak, Skullius decided to break the personal space invading ice!

"Can someone please tell me what the flesh is going on?!" he boomed.

The guards shivered at his outburst.

Darwel also seemed to come back to her senses, her firm grip on Skullius' hand loosening.

"My apologies. It's just that... It's too unreal," she said with her eyes sparkling bright at the Hybrid Luman.

"What is?" Skullius asked with a frown.

"Please forgive us!" one of the guards, Viccil, mustered the courage to say.

"We were ignorant! We could not tell who you were! Pardon our folly! Let us earn your forgiveness... we implore you!" the other, Sevil, pleaded.

Skullius turned to the two and back to Darwel.

"And... who am I?" he asked while pointing at himself.

Darwel wore a sheepish smile.

"I had the thought from the moment we sat down that you don't even realise who... what you are," she said.

"From the looks of it, I really don't," Skullius said with emphasis on his ignorance.

Darwel nodded sagely.

"Before I speak, I beg of you, please pardon Viccil and Seville. Their duty is to keep me safe. They only say what they say and do what they do on my behalf."

Oh.

Well that wasn't too hard.

Frankly, Skullius would prefer to not have to deal with this.

He turned to the two.

"We're good. You're forgiven, I guess," he said to which the guards stood up and bowed deeply.

"Thank you, Your Highness!" they said in unison.

'Highness?!' Skullius panicked a bit. 'BACK THE FLESH UP!'

He turned to Darwel and she wore another sheepish smile.

"The traditions, culture and history of all Sif is uncommon territory for all humans. I understand how you wouldn't know. It's a miracle that one from a long lost line of my people had offspring secretly," she said, her gaze never leaving Skullius' eyes.

She studied the Hybrid Luman's reaction.

"There is royalty among elves, as it is among humans. However, for us, being royalty is not only in name. Royalty can be spotted with the naked eye most times and for those like me, royalty, there are traits we possess."

Darwel stood as she said these words.

From behind her back, two streams of light appeared, their lengths stretching erect behind her. They produced a fierce peach glow before revealing that they were bright wings with sophisticated marks over them!

Hints of glitter then showed over body and the whole scene, a fierce rise in her power was left.

Skullius was smacked right in the face with wild awe!

She too could...?!

She was...!

'Now way!' he thought in a mix of shock and horror.

Darwel took a deep breath.

"Royalty among the Sif is given the name El-Sif. I am such. As are my mother and father, the rest of the High Family the same," she said. "You are similar but far beyond us in purity, beauty and power. My very blood tells me this. I almost mistook you for a mere cousin in foolishness."

"You are possibly the last of the most proud moments of my people's history and may very well be the only one who remains connected to those who came to Opungale with both mystery and fortune, taking refuge among the Sif."

Ba-dum!

Skullius' heart beat fast.

This...!

"You are... a Luminant."

Chapter 597: A Meeting With Darwel (4)

Skullius did indeed have a skill called [Son of Luserus]. It was the last of his racial skills; the two being [Wing of the Just] and [Son of Luserus].

The fact that he had this skill pretty much confirmed what Darwel was talking about. If El-Sif didn't have an ability like this then he was probably a Luminant. Or more aptly, more Luminant than he was El-Sif.

The guidance field seemed to be more accurate with its description of him.

He was a Hybrid. Part Discount Human, part Luminant and part whatever the dark red hue of death made him, though it was probably the least of the mix he had.

Darwel assumed said last part was suppressing his powers but Skullius was sure that she was actually wrong.

But why correct her?

This was an unexpected benefit.

The only problem though was...

"Yes, I do have the ability [Son of Luserus] but it's... complicated. I can't just use it. There seems to be some prerequisites that are needed," he explained to Darwel.

The princess smiled delightfully though hints of disappointment registered on her face. She had wanted to see a finished product.

"I expected as much. There's no doubt that you are a Luminant now," she said with a mature giggle. "As far as I know, the wings on the Luminants were a mere shadow of this particular power that, as I have read, 'brought out their true selves'."

"The Luminants were very secretive about their entire history, even with their Sif lovers but they did share a fair bit provided the circumstances were correct. Apparently, Luserus is a foreign divine figure who awakened the true essence of their being. What we saw were only the casual forms of the Luminants.

Some books say it got harder for the Luminants to awaken or use this ability after they arrived in Aigas as they were too far away from their home. That's probably why it's hard for you to."

'Luserus, huh?' Skullius thought.

A Divine being.

Skullius' mind instantly strode to a more obvious line of thought.

Was Luserus... a Deity from a foreign land?

From the looks of it, the Sif probably thought the same at one point but since none of them, even the El-Sif, had this ability, the discussion around the subject sank deeper and deeper into obscurity.

'Wait. That brings up another question,' Skullius thought.

If this skill had to do with the Deities, would the Binds of Fukal let him use it?

They could, considering that the Binds seemed to be targeted towards the Deities of Aigas specifically.

But who knew?

"How do I use it? That ability, I mean?" Skullius asked Darwel.

The princess smiled with another disappointed glint flashing in her eyes. She then drew on Skullius' arm.

"It's not any easy process. I only have text book knowledge so we might not even succeed in helping you use it but the key is consistency. That's why, I propose to that you come and stay here with me," she said.

...!

Skullius nearly choked on his own saliva.

Live with Darwel in the Governor's Manor?

That didn't sound like a good idea but it was to be expected. Of course she would propose this.

However, staying in this manor was a terrible flag.

Seeing his unwillingness, Darwel's eyes burned with determination.

"You are too precious to my people. I can't leave you out there among the swarms of greedy characters in this city. You'll be safer here," she tried to convince.

'Also, I get to rub this in mother and father's faces. I can even use this chance to bargain for more freedom!' Darwel thought inwardly.

Vicil and Sevill smote their armour with their fists.

"Please, entrust yourself to us. We will guard your life with our own," Sevill said with a powerful force in her voice that perfectly expressed her firm resolve.

"Indeed. No enemy will dare ever touch you. Not before my blade culls their life," Vicil said with a murderous air oozing from her.

These two were speaking genuinely, carrying the gleam of seriousness radiating from Darwel's eyes.

'So, it's still my choice?' Skullius asked himself.

In that case..

Skullius cleared his throat.

"I understand," he said, much to the trio's delight. "However, I can't just leave the people I'm living with. Some are genuine friends, some are acquaintances but they have helped me all the same. To consider leaving them to live here, will complicate things, especially on such short notice. I can't move here. I'm sorry."

Darwel looked a bit sullen but her face quickly changed to one of understanding.

The vivacious energy Viccil and Seville had shown died down.

Skullius grew wary.

Hopefully, this wouldn't cause big problems for him instead.

Darwel sighed.

"I see. I was being unreasonable. I projected my intentions on you quite a bit," she said. "But, I'm still going to have to impose my authority on this matter."

...!

Hey, hey!

What did that mean?!

Skullius grew tense.

What was she going to impose? Was she going to forcefully have him moved from the Bryne Family by the Governor?!

Darwel leaned in closer to Skullius, the Hybrid Luman doing the opposite.

"I'll visit your current residence. Frequently. And without warning as well. I'm forced to invade your privacy now."

Skullius breathed out a silent sigh of relief.

If it was only that, then GOOD!

It wasn't like he was always at the residence anyway!

'Good luck catching me lacking!'

Darwel didn't miss his subtle relaxed demeanour now that she had mentioned her motive and it gave her much to think about.

"You seem to be fine with that."

"Yes. I'm more comfortable with that approach."

"Good. Now would you mind telling me a little bit more about yourself. Your parents, if you have any. Siblings, cousins?" Darwel asked with a smile.

...

When Skullius heard the word parents... once again, his soul itched. He didn't know why, but this was enough to set his more or less calm mood into a bit of a sullen stretch.

His eye twitched and his overall frame slumped slightly.

Once again, Darwel didn't miss this reaction.

"Did I say something wrong?" she asked, her ever-high brows lowering.

"No. Not at all. It's just that..." Skullius halted mid sentence. "Actually, Princess, I have an errand to run. Please forgive me. There will be time for sharing such things, right?" Skullius said while forcefully retrieving his normal state of mind.

Darwel wasn't convinced. It seemed like something she said triggered Skullius but continuing to pry wouldn't do her any good.

"You're right. There will be time for all that," she said.

Skullius nodded and stood.

The two guards made way and accompanied him to the door silently.

All this happened under the changing gaze of Darwel. Her smile disappeared as she watched Skullius get escorted outside by Seville.

Vicil who remained behind turned to the Princess, now free to let out her exaggerated emotions and questions.

"Your Highness, how is this poss—"

"It's very irregular. As far as I know, all the Luminants passed on millennia ago. The fact that this man, Festos, possesses the blood of a Luminant, however limited and restrained it is, is very suspicious," Darwel said while walking over to her bed where she sat with a bounce.

Vicil was confused.

"You seemed so—"

"I know. My reaction was genuine. The more shallow part of me couldn't help but weep when feeling the resonance with old, special blood. I've always wanted to see a Luminant. But then again, he is part human. I chose to respond with a more..."

affable attitude instead of a hostile one to make him feel welcome. I could get the responses I needed that way. Sadly, I don't know if it worked or not. He's a peculiar man."

Viccil nodded, feeling slightly ashamed for losing herself unlike the princess.

"Don't be ashamed. A Sif like you with distant ties to an El-Sif wouldn't be able to resist the presence of a Luminant," Darwel tried to comfort the guard.

That said, without using his Wing of Embrace, this man, Festos, did not expose even a hint of his true racial powers, something truly... suspicious.

"We'll dig everything about him and discover the truth."

Chapter 598: What To Do With The Arbiter

"Parents... I don't know why that question made me feel that way," Skullius said while approaching the gate to the city.

His interaction with Darwel had left him with quite a lot to sort through. Well, this was the norm anyway. The Hybrid Luman could never catch a breather.

Beyond his strange emotions though, Skullius considered what it could all possibly mean?

That was pretty damn good fortune for him to be able to score like this.

He had to thank the ever-convenient, [Evil Veneration] for allowing him to kill Dezrael back then. The boons he got from that man, no, Arch-Luminant, were still showing even until now.

That said...

'I wonder how this relationship with the princess will develop though. If she's serious about randomly dropping in on me unannounced, I might get people paying more attention to me. In that way, this might not be as good of a thing as I may have thought,' Skullius began dissecting the effects of this development.

He then shook his head.

'No. I can't afford to think that way! This is a good thing. If anything, it encourages me to grow much quicker so that all the attention doesn't weigh me down.'

Yes.

That was more like it.

This was a boon.

He had to take it as such.

This was in complete contrast to how his talk with Vali had gone last night though. That woman seemed to have her mind set on sinking her fangs into him and for what?

People really did have different outlooks.

No.

Rather, some people saw value in hidden valuable things while others just didn't have the ability to do so.

Vali was like Silrat, now that he thought about it.

She didn't know much about him but could sense his value through other subtle means.

'Actually, if I think of it like that, I can't remove the possibility that Darwel has other motives as well. Wait! Of course she does! I have motives for her too! What's so shocking about it?!' Skullius ridiculed himself.

As he passed through the streets of Genhuis on this lovely day, he concluded his thoughts on these matters after seeing the distance to the gate shorten some more.

He sighed for the umpteenth time.

A little while after getting out of the Governor's Manor, he had felt a mental link prick his mind.

Red Rage was back, along with Stylla and the rest.

However, since he had told the Apostle to not enter the city and to wait for him outside, Red Rage had obliged and now it was time to figure this out.

After several minutes, Skullius found Red Rage standing on a small hill a distance from the city gates.

The Apostle just stood there, his freakishly long cape billowing in the serenely flowing winds while a glaring light obscured his image but also gave him an epic silhouette.

It was beautiful.

Red Rage said nothing but for some odd reason, it seemed like he was saying the most comforting words ever.

His figure was so... dependable.

Sadly, this was only for those who could actually see him.

"What are you doing?" Skullius asked.

The Apostle slowly turned, even this mundane movement turning out extravagant as his white armour obtained a certain piercing halo for a brief moment.

"Ah, Master," Red Rage said before looking at himself. "I'm not doing this of my own accord. It's a skill I have. A passive one. When I'm not engaging in any complex activity for long stretches of time, my body automatically starts forming these... poses.

The longer I can hold them, the longer I can charge its effect called Hero's Charm."

"Hero's charm?"

"Yes. Depending on how pure someone is, I can affect them positively through speech, gaze or touch for my benefit and theirs."

"...Riiiiight."

Skullius decided to re-check this damn Apostle's status.

It seemed Red Rage had even more surprises than he had imagined. The price of brushing over this was too big!

~~~

[ Name : Red Rage ]

[ Tier : 2 ]

[ Apostle Trait : None ]

[ Rank : None ]

[ Level : 4 ]

[ EXP : 510/1800 ]

[ Core : Blue ]

[ Class : Tempered Skull Hegemon ]

[ Race : Juvenile Pelvic Arbiter ]

[ Inv. Status : Feeling heroically melancholic ]

-----

[ Stats ]

[ STRENGTH (I) : 1,016 ]

[ AGILITY (I) : 789 ]

[ INTELLIGENCE (I) : 1,560 ]

[ ENDURANCE (I) : Infinite ]

[ LUCK : 90 ]

-----

[ HEALTH (I) : 5,896/5,896 ]

-----

[ MANA (I) : 14,670/14,670 ]

-----

[ Null Life Essence : 3,000/6,000 ]

-----

[ Skills ]

[ Advanced Null Life Aura | Lv. 14 ]

[ Bull Charge | Lv. 45 ]

[ Serious Dead End | Lv. 56 ]

[ Quick Flick | Lv. 37 ]

[ Penetrate | Lv. 23 ]

[ Super Dash (Special) | Lv. 12 ]

[ Scale (Special) | Lv. 47 ]

[ Greater Bow Mastery | Lv.15 ]

[ River Dance Technique | Lv.5 ]

[ Solid Punch | Lv. 8 ]

[ Weaver | Lv. 6 ]

[ Guard Light | Lv. 14 ]

[ Advanced Mana Manipulation | Lv. 17 ]

[ Blessing of Serenity ]

<Racial>

[ Arbiting Warp (Special) | Lv.3 ]

[ Impregnable Balance Buckler | Lv.4 ]

[ Hero's Counter Sequence (Special) | Lv.9 ]

[ Executive Arbitration (Special) | Lv.5 ]

[ Arbiter's Stance (Special) | Lv. 7 ]

<Fusions>

[ Berserk Guardian of Golden Legends (Special) | Lv.1 ]

<Class>

[ Tempered Ascension | Lv.5 ]

[ Forged Steel Bones | Lv.2 ]

~~~

"Ridiculous as always," Skullius said with a fake smile and a nod. "Good job, bro."

"I did do a good job, didn't I, Master?" Red Rage said while sneakily patting Skullius' shoulder.

Skullius realised what he was trying to do immediately.

"That won't work on me," he said as he swiped away Red Rage's hand. "Besides, I don't think I qualify as pure."

Red Rage muttered parentally guided curses.

"So, what are we going to do about you getting into the city?" Skullius asked while scratching his chin.

"As I said before, Master. I don't think it's a problem at all. Null Life is 100% able to void Divination."

"You said it was a theory last time!"

"I... calculated and figured it might as well be true on my way here."

"It might as well?!"

"That was joke, Master. Seriously, I have confirmed it.... somewhat."

A vein throbbed on Skullius' forehead and Red Rage took a few steps back while asking his master to calm down.

"I have generally been watching and listening to everything you've been doing ever since you got here, Master and if there are seven Diviners in the city tasked with keeping it safe, I don't believe they would leave you be after knowing of your existence," Red Rage explained.

"That's too shallow of a reason. I've heard that those Diviners give divinations for assistance on a whim. Besides, they are powerful individuals, their divination should be the same," Skullius countered.

"That may be true, but do you remember when you were divined by Damilla, that Diviner from Inhone City?"

"What about her?"

"She couldn't see much to do with your Penetrator form or anything related to Null Life powers. The same was true for your other powers as well. If you manage to learn to use Null Life Essence to cover your body constantly, you will be able to hide your secrets. As will I."

Skullius took a moment to think it through.

The thing with Damilla was true. That hateful Diviner...

She truly hadn't been able to ascertain what Skullius' true form was like. Perhaps she was just weaker but this was proof enough still.

"Are you capable of teaching me?" Skullius asked with furrowed brows.

"Probably."

"Probably?!"

"I was just joking, Master. I am... quite sure."

"You've developed a sense of humour, huh?" Skullius said while shaking his head.

Well, everything aside, he did need someone to teach him how to properly use Null Life Essence in general and keeping Red Rage outside the city would be problematic for consistent learning. Not to mention when the fiasco with Darwel started and people started paying more attention to him, he would be scrutinised because of this 'Knight in white'.

Tsk.

It seemed there were only three options.

Send Red Rage to Replicus or keep him close within the city.

In all honesty, Skullius would prefer having Red Rage by his side. He somewhat missed having eccentric characters by his side all the time.

Reliable, eccentric characters.

Ferex and Yuyui played those parts well but they were gone now.

The Hybrid Luman sighed.

"Fine, you can stay with me. Hopefully we can fool that second sun too. If your plan doesn't work though, you're flying us out of Genhuis City a—"

"At godspeed!" Red Rage finished Skullius' sentence while shooting his hands to his hips and standing aloof, his cape fluttering without the need of any convenient wind.

"..."

"Whatever. Let's get going," Skullius said. "And by the way, can you lose the cape? It's a bit much."

Skullius knew the dangers that awaited at the gate. If Red Rage wore his cape, they would definitely be stopped and stripped bare for all their secrets.

With enough luck, which Red Rage had a lot of now, maybe, just maybe, they could both pass without a hard time.

Chapter 599: Sharp Contrast

Genhuis City Gate.

Skullius wore the facial incarnation of shock.

What he was seeing...

He had truly underestimated his Apostle's abilities.

He had thought the effects wouldn't be as potent since he was still a Tier 2 at the end of the day but no!

Of course not!

They had just had to be insane!

Damn that [Blessing of Serenity]!

He should have been the one to get it!

"<Sniff>, <sniff>," a male Capital Order Knight by the gate sniffled while wiping away his tears. He had taken off his helmet just so he could fully express himself without any regard for his image, as in the grand scheme of things, this was more important.

The other Knight by his side patted his back as a gesture to comfort him but both were ultimately looking to the figure decked in a white armour for fulfilling words.

"Don't worry, dear boy. Your mother is merely travelling to another world beyond this one. She carries with her all the memories you gave her and the memories you cherish about her to the next world.

Whatever it is she shall find, rest assured, the memory of her life with you and your sister will keep a smile on her face," the figure in white said as he wiped the tears from the Capital Order Knight away.

"Yes, sir... <sniff>. You're right. In fact, she said something similar before she passed," the Knight said.

"Indeed. Now wipe that sadness away, duty calls. I'm not going to search myself now, am I?" Red Rage said while slapping the Knight's shoulder lightly.

The man wore his helmet once more, feeling an invigorating pump of energy through the Apostle's touch!

When he took in all that Red Rage had done for him in the few minutes they had interacted...

"Kind sir, I cannot complicate this process for a man like you. I feel better just by having talked to you. To needlessly worry you with this would be a heavy offense for me," the Knight said as he offered Red Rage passage.

"No, no. There is protocol and I must follow. I Prisma, pride myself on following the rules!"

Skullius' eyes went wide when he heard this.

'Bro, are you insane?! He said you can go, so just fleshing go! You're carrying a high level spatial storage tool with hundreds of Cluster beasts and under that helmet, you're a skeleton!' he raged from within, his skin colour changing from the burning fury.

"Please sir. Take this as a token of my gratitude. I'll handle the consequences if anything happens. I swear by Quintess," the Capital Order Knight said with a smile.

"Yes, sir. Please, go in," the other Knight also encouraged.

"Well, if you insist..." Red Rage said before humbly passing between the two and several other Knights.

Since the Apostle had said he would be only be visiting, as Skullius had told him to say, there were no other strict procedures for him to follow.

After he passed, it was Skullius' turn. This was the problem with exiting the City even for a short while. When coming back, a verification would also be needed and with the constant switch in shifts by the Knights at the gate, there was little room to be recognised by someone he had seen before when leaving.

Worse yet, some of the Knights disregarded positions, rendering identifications from the Association or from low to middle level Families useless for trying to get past the verification and search process.

"Ah, who's this shady character?" the Capital Order Knight said while gazing at Skullius with a stern face devoid of the earlier emotion.

Skullius rolled his eyes.

Of course.

When it came to him...

"Pardon me. If it's not any trouble, can you let him pass as well? He's with me," Red Rage pulled back up to save Skullius.

The Knight's face showed delight when he saw Red Rage's figure but after hearing what he had to say, he turned back to Skullius with glaring suspicion.

"Him?" he asked. "Are you sure you have the right person?"

Skullius almost slapped his own face.

"Haha, I'm very sure. He looks like a handsome crook but he's a stand up citizen. I can vouch for him," Red Rage said.

'A crook, huh?' Skullius shook his head.

It was only after five seconds of scrutiny that the Knight finally let Skullius go.

Such a hassle.

When the two entered the city, Skullius warily looked up. He couldn't help it.

He felt exposed.

It was as if he was carrying loads of stolen cash in an open street... in broad daylight. It was just too uncomfortable.

Red Rage on the other hand greeted the people he saw on the way with an affable energy, receiving smiles from many within the crowd, though the opposite was true for the more shady looking individuals and a percentage of those who looked upright.

The contrast between Apostle and Master could not have been more apparent.

Both of them saw the world in different ways after all.

\*

Upon reaching the Bryne Family Mansion, Skullius was met with a sombre atmosphere that dripped from the closest room.

The lounge.

Several familiar figures were sitting on the couches, some standing as they all donned sullen expressions.

The maids, the guards, Daggs, whom Skullius hadn't seen in a while, Ed, Terese and Stylla.

The female red head had just finished summarising the new development at the estate, revealing what Setkh had done, the attack and all.

She paid particular focus to Terese as she spoke.

It was easy to overlook as a bystander, but Terese was actually closer to Setkh than she was to Stylla. She supported everything he said and did before this point, proving to have been the only one to view Setkh in a perfectly favourable light despite how he had abandoned the Family in such an unsavoury manner before.

She had welcomed him back with open arms and had been keen to know more about his candidate for the Premium Age Royale, Karrun.

Now...

The small girl sat with a downcast expression, not speaking a word.

Then, in a fit of whatever the spawn of rage, sorrow, despair and loneliness bore, she sped out of the room while sniffing softly.

No one made an effort to stop her.

She needed some space.

"Poor child," Red Rage said with sympathy.

"Welcome to the world outside hunting and killing," Skullius said as he took steps into the lounge, the Apostle following after him.

"I hope I'm not intruding."

Stylla gave a small smile as she saw him.

"No. I have just finished giving a briefing. I felt everyone deserved to know of this before going about the day," Stylla said.

Indeed. She couldn't bear to withhold this for too long since her arrival.

Her father being moved from the large carriage and into the house would have garnered questions away.

Daggs walked up to Skullius and gave him a warm greeting.

"It's good to see you, Master Festos."

"Good to see you too, Daggs," the Hybrid Luman gave a perfunctory reciprocal. He didn't have much of a relationship with the man but it was good to 'see' a familiar face.

Daggs smiled with a pleased visage. One would think he was about to break into tears.

After having been the accompanying companion to Terese since she was sent off by Stylla to now, he truly appreciated seeing people who wouldn't chew him out a whim.

Daggs was about to start a long, casual conversation with Skullius, asking about his wellbeing and all when...

He looked behind the Hybrid Luman.

"Master Festos. Who is this?" he asked.

"Ah, this?" Skullius voiced.

With that, a formal introduction was made.

Chapter 600: Sabotage Patterns

Next day.

Everyone was teleported into the venue for the Premium Age Royale. The noise and clamour instantly filled the stadium as the witnesses chattered endlessly, wondering what they were in for this time.

At any event one could think of, there were always the excited types, who would literally enjoy anything that tore them away from the boring reality that they were suffocated by every other day. These were the most common.

There were also those who enjoyed specific segments of said event that tended to their niche desires while giving a critical analysis of everything else. These were fewer in number.

"Hmm. Is it only me or does it seem like these Preliminaries are flowing in quite a strange pattern?"

"I feel the same way. There have been a few battles of note but the rest are pretty much, boring."

"I can see that but I feel like whoever is matching up opponents isn't making an effort to create stimulating battles. It's either a battle ends in one strike or it's just a brief clash that ends with the other dead. There's barely been opponents to even reach the two hour limit that a single fight is allowed to last."

"That's true. It is indeed strange. Almost as if..."

"Like someone wants more people to die?"

"No, that's not what I had in mind. More like someone wants the Preliminaries to end quickly so as to begin the actual royale."

"Oh. That makes a lot of sense. Unfortunately, we still have another round of Preliminaries after this one. Hopefully it passes fast. I can already tell who the main contenders will be for the royale and that's what I want to see."

As the speculations whirled around the subject of the Preliminaries and how they weren't captivating some of the witnesses, an aggressive tension was brimming several rows up the convex shaped rows of seats for witnesses.

Stylla did her best to hold in her rage.

As did everyone even remotely concerned with the internal Family matter.

Setkh.

He was seated beside Stylla, consistently bearing the piercing glare she gave him.

The male red head could only breathe out a faint sigh.

He glanced at Stylla's furious visage and wore a cheesy, pained smile.

"You can't kill me here," he said.

"Oh, yeah? Try me," Stylla threatened through her teeth, her blazing mana catching the attention of distinguished and otherwise persons sitting near them. "Your little rat isn't here to save you."

The bloodlust Stylla exuded was transparent, clearly shrieking of the intent she had to kill Setkh right now.

The recipient of this intent didn't flinch physically, but his heart was hurt. To see the person he loved the most want to kill him was heart-breaking, especially considering the trials he had to go through for her and the Family. They were mostly trials of his own making but still...

Couldn't he be rewarded just a little?

"I was going to have you spared you know? If the Family really fell after father was... I was going to flee with you and start anew. We'd cut blood ties and start our family in a quiet place. It would have been nice," Setkh said with a longing gaze directed at Stylla.

She couldn't believe what she was hearing.

What the heck was wrong with this man?

Was this what he was thinking all that time when she had actually contemplated forgiving him and convincing everyone else in the Family to do the same?

That to err was human and to forgive divine...

Stylla hand nearly caught fire as she swore, she would kill this bastard right here!

"Stylla, please don't," Silrat intervened, gripping the woman's hand firmly.

He sat a seat away from Stylla, between him and her being where Daggs sat.

The man had felt that it wasn't his place to intervene and rightfully so. He couldn't stop Stylla or provide a convincing enough 'voice' for something like that, thus he let someone else handle it.

"You'll tarnish the little you are trying to keep of the Bryne Family by making a scene like this. No one knows what's happening between you two. All they will see is an internal conflict that lessens your image," Silrat advised, hoping dearly that this woman wouldn't attract big fish to them with this stunt.

After all, predators loved to see collective weak prey.

Stylla pulled her hand away from his grasp, her lips twitching as she continued to glare into Setkh's face.

"Dammit!" Stylla cursed as she stood, gripped Silrat by the corner and forced him to swap seats with her.

The former Association Branch Head sighed as he plopped into the comfortable seat.

He had intended to separate the two so that an unplanned conflict wouldn't happen but... Stylla took care of that herself.

"I wouldn't mind having her stare me down with that fiery gaze, you know?" Setkh said, his heart calming down a bit.

"I'm sure you wouldn't," Silrat replied apathetically.

He couldn't be bothered with the drama.

He'd rather focus on the matches that...

"Hmmm?"

Silrat looked a seat away from Setkh and found a figure covering their face with a cloth.

The mystery of their identity was exposed by something exclusive only to them probably in the entire Genhuis city though.

Lime green hair.

"Yuyui?" Silrat voiced with a brow raised.

The girl yelped and turned to side hurriedly.

Operation 'Don't draw attention' had failed dismally.

\*

The Game Master sat on a large glass plane once more as he welcomed everyone and announced the commencement of the day's matches.

'Where does he go after facilitating the matches? Does anyone even know who he really is among the Families and all?' Skullius seated within the long tent wondered.

All that he and Silrat done to try and figure out a connection, or at the very least the slimmest reason behind the Premium Age Royale had turned out to be limited by speculations.

None of it was solid.

'To think this sockethole was once a prisoner in our grasp...' Skullius thought.

The ever smiling Guissepo brought the first contestants to the stage and a thrilling battle that lasted for nearly 25 minutes ensued, proving itself a magnificent start to the day!

It got everyone pumped for the next matches but sadly, they weren't what everyone expected.

In the second match, one of the opponents withdrew without even making an effort to fight his opponent.

In the third, both opponents fought half-heartedly until they reached the two hour limit of the match!

According to the rules, a draw like this would result in both contenders getting disqualified from the Royale entirely, which the two opponents seemed to accept without issue!

When the fourth match ended, some within the crowd started to see a pattern.

The latest contenders had both withdrawn at the same time, the Game Master judging them to be disqualified as well, as the result wasn't much different a draw.

Strangely, these participants didn't seem bothered by this at all. They welcomed it with nods and calm dispositions.

What was going on?!

This wasn't random, was it?

High up the stadium, Rearren EverSword narrowed his eyes, a smile blossoming on his face.

"Interesting. It's that woman isn't it? She's openly sabotaging the event by winning over small Families and having them withdraw from their fights," he said. "Perhaps instinct works better than I thought."

"She's a selfish manipulator with a decent amount of power. That is all. Her actions are not from instinct. I believe she is just insecure," Rias responded to his father's views.

"Oh?" Rearren voiced in surprise at his son's objection.

Insecure? An interesting take.

Following the uproar of dissatisfaction, the contenders for the next match were met with apprehension and a relatively silent crowd.

Were these two going to quit as well?