

Undead 631

Chapter 631: Stalkers

Lo and behold, people Skullius had attached the moniker of 'stalker' to had finally caught up to him despite his efforts to keep his activity hidden. For the past six weeks, Skullius had gone under the radars of many including these three.

Until now.

"Don't look so excited to see us," Darwel said sarcastically with a dazzling smile. She was adorned in a beautiful, transparent silver dress that exposed the shorter white one underneath it.

On both her sides were the figures of her loyal guards Viccil and Seville who bowed to Skullius respectfully.

"It has been a long time, Lord Luminant Festos," they both said in unison, much to Skullius' cringing funny bones.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

"You do know that if I truly wanted to impose on you without regarding your opinion I could have, right? I have the Governor's son seeking my glance at any and all costs and he in turn has a wide array of means to track anyone," Darwel said as she took steps to reach closer to Skullius.

Right.

She wasn't wrong.

At the end of the day, Skullius' means of hiding weren't extraordinary. They mainly relied on the fact that he wasn't all too well known. No one really cared for what he was doing except for a select few individuals.

Perhaps the illusion of Darwel not dropping by the Bryne Family Residence every day or so after the first couple of times made him think his basic incognito utilities were actually working!

Damn it.

"You've made your point. Now, what do you want? I have plenty of things to do here," Skullius said in a harsh and blunt tone.

"Could you be any more tactless? I just wanted to see what you were up to. You've had your fun going about your business alone for now. Let us tag along."

Skullius deflated even further.

"Well, I was just on my way back to Genhuis City," he said.

"Didn't you just say you had plenty of things to do here?"

"I was being too optimistic."

Skullius began strutting in a completely different direction than the one he had intended to go in before, the manner in which he made his motions making Darwel giggle.

"There goes all the dignity I attached to the name Luminant. You definitely aren't what my parents will be expecting," the El Sif said.

"I don't think I've ever presented myself with dignity," Skullius defended his dishonour. "And, I don't think I'd like to present myself to your parents."

Darwel began laughing. If there was anything beside Skullius' hidden bloodline that amused and fascinated her, it would be his personality. She discovered how much she enjoyed talking to such an eccentric character like Skullius after the first few times she did as she had promised – barging in on him within the Bryne Family Residence only to be kicked out minutes later by the Hybrid Luman.

His tone, his temperament and random inclusions of words like sockethole, flesh and bones where they did not fit grew on her especially.

"I don't think either of us have a choice in that matter. Though, I was actually thinking about introducing you to my parents as a lawfully wedded husband the first time I go with back to Opungale. The look on their faces would be hilarious!" Darwel pitched with a devious smile.

Sevill and Viccil felt a chill run up their spines. As did Skullius.

If that were to happen, Skullius would be dead before Darwel even had the time to explain herself!

"Your Highness..." Viccil began.

"It's a joke, Viccil."

"Mas-, Ahem...Sir Festos. I'll be going back to my post," Red Rage who felt like the odd one out here suddenly said.

Everyone turned to him.

"Ah, I barely noticed you there," Darwel said with a dismissive glance.

'LIES!' Red Rage hissed in his mind.

He had been introduced as a devout follower of Skullius during the first time that Darwel and her crew intruded into the Bryne Family Residence.

As such, he hadn't been taken as a key character, especially with fact that in open areas, Red Rage usually kept his long cape hidden, as he had done after leaving the Cluster just now.

"You can go," Skullius said to which the Pelvic Arbiter responded by weaving through the trees of the woodland they were passing through at a rapid speed, disappearing from sight.

This wasn't a tactic retreat.

It was a desperate escape.

Just like Skullius, Red Rage did not wish to become a well known figure.

To ensure that the subject did not hang on his Apostle, Skullius quickly introduced a new topic.

"Since we're already at this point, please tell me you know other methods for me to get to use [Son of Luserus]," Skullius asked.

Darwel wore a baffled look.

"Wow. That's all you have to say? I told you how to visualise and you up and skipped our mandatory meet ups thinking it would be easy to use that ability with just that. Now that it hasn't worked, clearly... You are VERY bold."

"Thanks for the compliment."

"It's really not," Darwel shook her head with an exhausted smirk.

"In any case, I was going to drop by to speak about this eventually so what's the problem here?"

Skullius once again began defending his dishonour while Viccil and Seville silently followed them as they trekked through the woodland.

That was until Seville stopped, her long ears twitching.

Her eyes suddenly shot towards her left, her focus reining in on a particular spot.

Viccil after noticing Seville's halted movement also stopped and wordlessly lowered her stance.

Skullius and Darwel saw the grave reaction from the two and raised their guard.

What was going on?

Sevill could hardly call what she had sensed just now a threat or even a sentient creature watching them. She couldn't confirm what it was as it had only showed itself for a fraction of a moment, not enough time to appraise it.

However, as someone trained to always be on high alert, she wouldn't disregard anything that she perceived, even if it was just a passing wisp of malice.

A few minutes passed like this.

No one made any movements.

Even Skullius held himself back.

If Sevill and Viccil had noticed something that even he couldn't then that meant it was probably out of his league one way or another. Besides, they were far stronger than him, so he might as well let them handle the situation.

"It's gone," Sevill said as she turned to Darwel. "I've scoured a ten mile radius from where we are. Whatever it was that I felt is gone."

Darwel nodded while relaxing from the tension she felt.

She had faith her guards and in the fact that they took her sensitive identity just as seriously as she did.

Even leaving the city without informing anyone hours before had been after Darwel tussled with the two.

Skullius on the other hand was left shocked by the simple sentence Sevill had uttered just now.

'I've scoured a time mile radius from where we are...'

What the flesh was that supposed to mean?

Was it a matter of semantics?

No. That couldn't be it.

For people as dedicated to keeping Darwel safe as as these two...

'Is she trying to say that this whole time... she was...' Skullius found this hard this hard believe.

He had his senses stretched out for miles and he didn't sense Seville move at all!

Still, he kept his cool and took a breath.

What mattered was that the situation at hand was settled. Sort of. If Seville said the threat was gone, then it was probably gone.

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Hidden unnaturally within a partially leaning tree 13 miles away from the group of four, a rather tall woman dressed up in the thick fur of white ice bear shifted uncomfortably.

"Too keen. That confirms it then. I can't carelessly advance. Opungale has growing its strengths too it seems. <Sigh>. I have already dragged this on for too long.

I hope the First Horn won't have my head for this," this woman said to herself while crawling out of her hiding space.

With nimble movements, she followed her targets from this outrageous distance while making sure not to let out even a sliver of her presence.

Chapter 632: A MUST In Time!

Genhuis City.

Governor's Manor.

Two gentleman sat in a large room with a rigid air revolving around them. From the looks of their faces alone, the contrast in detail – stern with slight wrinkles of fury against relaxed skin and a carefree smile, one could already discern that the topic being discussed called no small amount of tension.

The guards and servants who had been stationed in this room had been extremely grateful to be excused as a glimpse of the proceedings had told them that the already unfriendly relationship between these two was going to shoot up several degree in that same dark direction.

"Rearren, whatever it is that you are planning.... It ends now. The Premium Age Royale must be cancelled," the Governor made his case with aged wrinkles building on his forehead to support his stance visually.

He finally made his move after some lengthy deliberation.

The reason for this was partially because there was a building suspicion that he was made known to by his subordinates and partly due to the fact that there was civil unrest that he could already see on his own.

Something ugly was taking hold.

Rearren EverSword upon hearing this wore a deeper, less dignified smile while his eyes narrowed in amusement.

"Why the sudden call to end the event of the century?" he asked calmly.

"Don't play me for a fool, Rearren. I know full well that you walked through the doors to my manor expecting this. Cut the pretence!" the Governor shot.

The EverSword House head took a moment before responding.

"Fair enough. What has driven you to act finally? You have been against this since the beginning," he said.

The Governor scoffed in disgust.

"For you to act like you don't know that more than 10,000 people have died since the beginning of your little event is disturbing. Every single one of these people had the Control Seal you introduced for the Royale! You'd be a fool if you thought the world would chalk it up to a mere coincidence!"

"People die everyday, common folk especially. Why should it mean something more profound when they just happen to have the seal? It's been a growing trend all over, has it not? There are tens of millions of excited people attending the Royale now," Rearren gave his answer with a low voice.

The man seated opposite him clutched the bridge of his nose.

Shameless!

This wasn't denial!

The Governor had wanted to believe that something else was at play but no.

That didn't seem to be the case.

He slumped back into his seat and kept his serious gaze on this man.

"I know a little about Creeds, Rearren. Incandescent Stage monsters like you can impart strange conditions on anything in the world in exchange for restrictions. The Royale rules, the lavish venue and this seal. There are a lot of Creeds used to make this whole thing possible, right? I underestimated your goals. You're as conniving as I've imagined.

Proud. Arrogant. But if you think I'll let these deaths go, you have another think coming."

Rearren gave a short laugh.

"Proud and arrogant? I'll take it. As for my goals, you couldn't possibly fathom what an idea from someone like me would look like. I am not preoccupied with mourning the deaths of defenceless commonfolk who die miserably by stumbling to a fall in the road or from catching a cold. Only someone like you would read too much into it," he said, his fist supporting his cheek on the armrest.

"The Premium Age Royale will not stop. In fact, the second Preliminary Round will end quicker than the first since 97 individuals out of the 234 were disqualified. Before long, the true event will start and end before you know it. Why don't you be patient?"

The past month and a half had seen a rapid progression in the Premium Age Royale. Some contenders died, some conceded and some were swallowed by others in more ways than one.

By disqualified, Rearren moreso alluded to the last group, contenders taken forcefully taken out of the event by one woman than anything else.

Vali Kinn.

A lot of the lower level contenders had withdrawn because of the deals she had been offering which to Rearren wasn't exactly a problem since he wanted to weed out the weak with the Preliminaries anyway and the process was quickly ramping up.

In the Royale, contenders who were disqualified would have the Control Seal removed and they could go about their lives normally, which stressed the fact that the combatants were safe.

With 137 contenders left, some of them being Vali's thralls who would only be surrendering without a fight so that they could leave the Royale, the second Preliminary Round was going to be a dull 28 day stretch with a measly 10 match days.

The same was not true for the witnesses though. They could not withdraw from participating and fulfilling their role, an aspect of this whole thing that made many suspicious... behind the fact that many of these witnesses were dying outside the event in ridiculous ways of course.

"Patience? If you continue to be stubborn, I'll have to request the assistance of the Purity or the Royale Family. They wouldn't turn a blind eye to this," the Governor said with unyielding resolve.

"Go ahead. No one is stopping you. My defence will be the exact same if I'm ever faced with them. Besides, the Control Seals are set to continue the routine transportation to the venue even without the intervention of the Game Master. I can't stop them. You'd have that to deal with that even if you rally sizable support," Rearren said while leisurely setting one leg on top of the other.

The problem THAT MAN had told him to prepare for was finally rising, but he was sure, nothing would stop whatever was coming.

The Purity Headquarters.

The triangular space situated in an undisclosed location once again welcomed the union of seven distinguished figures who sat behind seven small netted doors that were distributed at different heights on one wall.

At this time, an unusual guest had visited, but without nearly as little tact as the last lute strumming guest.

"Your request for an audience truly surprised us, Helda. A Diviner from the first generation of the Seer's Height like you need not walk the distance to speak to us," a voice came from the topmost door, directing a scarcely seen level of respect to the old woman standing in the middle of the room.

"This matter is sensitive and in need of closed doors. Yet I feel you may already have an inkling of it," the old woman said.

She was one of the seven Diviners in Genhuis. The oldest one of the Diviners of the Seer's Height, the same whom Ruhrees had asked for help when a Grand Priest was murdered in the Temple.

"I have seen a treacherous chaos ahead. It is murky and thick. The array of colours and storms it will cause are... are greater than any of us can comprehend. The folds of the past will twist backwards and the opposite will also come to pass. I do not know what to make of it," she said with a distressed face that genuinely showed anxiety.

"When your young Paladin came to me seeking assistance with the death of a mere priest, I thought you may have your backsides too relaxed so I came to warn and seek enlightenment myself. What do the Deities say of this? Have you heard?"

A chilling silence crept within the hollow space after this old woman, Helda, had introduced her case.

She was clearly disturbed.

"We know."

A reply came from the same voice that spoke last time.

"Erlton the Reader beat you to it," another said.

"He warned that a coming disaster that cannot be prevented will swallow the world but we are to sit on our hands. All of us. Those that do not know must remain in the dark until it comes to pass," another voice added.

Helda frowned.

"The Reader? He is not a bumbling fool after all?" she said quizzically. "Why must we not do anything?"

Another silence ensued.

This time, it was of hesitation.

An unnerving answer then came.

"Apparently, just as with the Ashing of Time spurned by Jiggorrhax the Abiding Madness, what is to come MUST happen and nothing can stop it."

Chapter 633: Congested Evils

Maqi.

"Amusing. You mean to tell me that she cannot find a chance to assassinate a single sheltered Sif?" a kingly figure, a beast of a man with a huge, frightening frame said with a powerful voice. "Is this not too much err to allow?"

"Please do not take it as this, First Horn," a stout old man with a wise looking face pleaded with a bow. "My disciple is a perfectionist. She prefers to take her time and strike only when she feels that her move will deal the most fatal blow possible but without anyone figuring it out the who, how and why."

The giant man seated on a very beautiful and rather artistic throne scoffed, a stream of mana leaving his nostrils.

Such paltry reasoning.

"Am I to excuse the habits of a failure masked as sharpened expertise?" he uttered.

"No, First Horn, but I believe out of all our forces, she is the best one for this specific job. She may not be the strongest but the plan was to kill the Sif princess in a way that gives the illusion that Pelian did it, sparking a war between the newly established allies, and she can perform something like that perfectly."

"Your manner of speaking spells to me that her habits are not the only reason for this disgraceful delay. Spill it. What else is the problem?"

The stout man grimaced.

"First Horn, it appears that the Sif princess has not been leaving the city she is living in often. Said city is guarded by a powerful Incandescent Stage expert, has the presence of a Paladin Champion and in addition to this, she has two extremely dangerous guards that follow her everywhere."

The man seated on the throne paused in thought.

"Should we have employed the assistance of the Mages from Emeradis then? They are the ones who sculpted this round about way of creating the desired conflict. Perhaps their magics would assist," he said but in a strange tone of voice, as if testing to see what the man he was addressing would say.

"No, First Horn. We have no need of their aid with something so trivial. Please, give my disciple more time. She would rather commit suicide than to fail at her area of specialty. Besides, this added time gives us some more room for preparation. Warring with Opungale will be no easy task," the stout man tried to convince.

The passive gaze of the First Horn lingered over his face for a while.

In his mind, he had already begun to think that perhaps sending a Shamanic Mage would have been better instead. Perhaps discarding this little play-around would have been an option too but he wasn't that hasty.

"If she fails to do it within the next two weeks, I will have YOU kill her," the large man declared with a straight face.

"Thank you for your consideration, First Horn," the old, stout man prostrated with a silent sigh of relief.

Guissepo sat on the white platform silently, the absolute silence around him with a dash of shudders from the chained Cluster General outside the stadium being a soothing melody that he had involuntarily grown to enjoy since being imprisoned here.

Sure, this was definitely a horrendously boring part to play in the grand scheme of things, but the sacrifice was what empowered the functions of what was intended for the Premium Age Royale.

He breathed out a sigh.

His grumbling stomach which hadn't tasted food in a while made way for memories that actually made him smile.

Extravagance.

The very thought of how shallow he had been when he joined the Evenfall made him laugh.

Sleeping on an empty stomach all those times while others who lived close-by didn't see a lack of anything – ointment for the skin, food for the belly and sustainable shelter – had birthed a hideous devil within him that cast blame and responsibility on people who didn't have the mandate to better society.

The actions of those in charge could be questioned but those who were simply well off but weren't willing to share? They could only be judged from afar and scorned inwardly but not struck down openly.

It wasn't their duty.

A hunger-fuelled rage didn't give Guissepo much opportunity to think that way back then.

He cursed those who lived and flaunted their extravagance.

He loathed them.

He hoped they would die gruesome deaths and meet him and others like him in a collective afterlife where the hurt or blessing was the same.

"Hehe," Guissepo laughed.

He stood up and paced along the platform.

His motivation had grown.

He wasn't the same nor was his motivation.

At least that was what he thought.

Now he looked forward to a LIFE where the hurt and the blessing was the same!

'If its extravagance that is to be had, let it be for all. If it is misery, let it be for all. Even with three gods present, this world has never known extravagantly rich peace for all. Even a fourth god won't guarantee it, but in that time where chaos reins, everyone will be wallowing in the same suffering,' he thought with a bright smile.

This was his advanced ideal.

This was what he was yearning to see.

Petty? Perhaps it was but a dog from a ruined society wouldn't be a complex mastermind. Guissepo didn't need to be.

And perhaps Boron saw that too.

The memory was still vivid in the Game Master's mind.

When that dreadful creature, the Galemonger, had come to rescue him when he was imprisoned in Inhone City, it had shared a vision with him that was soaked in the Primus burning from the eye it manifested.

Primus that he and the other cultists had been funnelling into Clusters, producing empowered monsters!

Guissepo had seen a stream of events through that eye. Visions that led to a certain point.

What he was striving for right now.

So far, nothing had stopped the course to his goal and that was confirmation to him that nothing would ever going stop what was coming.

Why this was shared to him, Guissepo didn't know.

Perhaps he was just motivated enough.

Perhaps a simple mind was what Boron, the Traitorous Deity of the Under sought.

Regardless of what the reason was...

"I cannot wait to see the fourth HERALD rise. This will be more extravagant than the Grand Wars!"

Chapter 634: The Definitive Status!

The group of three approached Genhuis City gates before the sun even contemplated to follow its routine dip into the horizon.

It had been quite the long and chatty journey for Skullius and as he felt the city grow near, he was a little relieved. Finally, perhaps he'd get to leave this mostly unwanted company soon. He had a lot of things to do and confirm after all.

Besides that, he was really getting uncomfortable because of two additional members to their group that kept speaking in muffled voices that only he could hear.

Viccil and Seville's swords.

With [Unmatched Sword Sense], Skullius had started to hear these two weapons which were at the Mythical grade level speak from time to time, distracting him immensely. They weren't fluent in their speaking or even coherent but they did. Since Skullius didn't talk to them, they were oblivious to the fact that they could be heard, which honestly made for a freaky experience.

This unusual ability wasn't the limit of [Unmatched Sword Sense] though, surprisingly.

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[Unmatched Sword Sense (Special) | Lv.40]

You attain a passive extreme understanding of any sword. How to wield it, how to care for it, how to hear its LIVING SOUL and how to swing it. In addition, you gain the active ability to bring out 200% of any sword's potential, even if its durability is gone.

Mana Requirements: 1000 (I) Mana Points, 100 (I) Mana Points every minute

Durability: ---

Cooldown: None

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The fact that these weapons could speak meant that they weren't forged in a normal way – they didn't have a normal history – but weren't special enough to be on the same level as the Bashful Abomination, shockingly, even though their grade was higher.

The fact that Skullius owned two extraordinary swords whose traits went above the norm and tickled upon the level these ones were brought no small amount of anxiety to Skullius.

Was his luck truly standing for this?

"We're going to have to split up here," Darwel suddenly said while turning to Skullius. "I can't let people know I was out of the city."

Skullius wore a solemn look.

"Is this how you usually are back home?" he asked.

"I wish," the El Sif replied with a cheeky smile, her twinkling eyes going on to stare at the Hybrid Luman as if looking for something hidden within his white sclera.

She then summoned a rolled up piece of parchment and gave it to Skullius who handled it with unsureness.

"What is this?" he asked.

"Since our brainstorming may and may not help with getting you to find out how to find your true form, I wrote down everything I know about Luminants and Elf Sif by extension. Some of it, at least," she said.

"Some of it?"

"If I give you everything I know, you'll probably start trying to run away from me again. I might as well keep the rest as a bargaining chip."

"That's underhanded."

"Is it? Is it, really?" Darwel asked while getting a bit too close to Skullius who drew away. "I'd be willing to give you all the information you need if you make visits to my quarters VOLUNTARILY, you know?"

"That phrasing sounds... wrong," Skullius pointed out.

"It's perfect as it is," Darwel defended herself with the swish of her cherry hair aside. "But I know you probably want to avoid me, hahaha."

"I'm trying to escape the attention."

"But Lord Luminant, we can protect you from any danger on this continent. Please trust in us," Seville said sincerely, prompting the Hybrid Luman to turn to her.

'Protect me? I don't think anyone in this world can,' Skullius thought.

"For now, I'd feel better off if we limited contact. This world is every bit as dangerous as what you consider to be your greatest threats."

With that, Skullius didn't look to want to continue having this constant persuasion fest. The three understood it and let go of the matter.

Even though none of them had mentioned it, Skullius had grown by a massive degree since the last time they had met. It was hard to believe that he was the same individual from a month ago really.

This is what put Darwel, Seville and Viccil at mild ease and also confirmed that despite being part human, Skullius was definitely a Luminant.

"Fine, but if you are in trouble, don't hesitate to call us. We'll help out within anything you want," Darwel said as she took steps back, Viccil and Seville doing the same with bows of respect.

In the next moment, the three disappeared into thin air.

Phewww.

Skullius took a deep breath.

Finally.

Some silence.

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It didn't take the Hybrid Luman long to enter the city. With his sporadic goings in and out of the city, he had grown to become well-known at the gate by the different shifts and his high rank as a mercenary gave him more leeway than before.

Still, he remained a more vaguely recognised figure as what he did when he went out remained a mystery to most.

As soon as he stepped into the city, Skullius coated his body with a layer of Null Life Essence.

With some tutelage from Red Rage, his control over Null Life Essence had improved, but it was still nowhere near his proficiency in mana, thus he didn't rely on it for combat.

Because of the Null beast he had summoned back in the Fire Breeder Cluster, he knew that Null Life Essence could be used for defence but he was still lacking in this. He had only increased his mastery to be able to adhere to what Red Rage had surmised – that Null Life Essence deterred Divination.

Since no one else could see it, Skullius wore a layer of it openly when entering Genhuis City to guard against the prying of the seven Diviners. He hoped there was actually some effect to it.

While heading home and thinking that he would submit the carcasses and evidence for his excursion to the Guilds Association later, Skullius checked his status to familiarise himself again with everything he had earned.

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[ Name : Festos Dawn ]

[ Level : 18 ]

[ EXP : 100,565/741,150 ; <Task Pending> ]

[ Core : Blue ]

[ Class : Insurgent Magnus ]

[ Race : Hybrid Luman ]

[ Inv. Status : Still doomed ×2 ]

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[ Stats ]

[ STRENGTH (I) : 28,970 ]

[ AGILITY (I) : 28,762 ]

[ INTELLIGENCE (I) : 42,851 ]

[ ENDURANCE (I) : 28,968 ]

[ LUCK : Atrocious? ]

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[ HEALTH : 70,995/70,995 ]

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[ MANA (I) : 103,200 ]

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

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[ Skills ]

[ Greatest Mana Crafter | Lv.89 ]

[ Great Celestial Counterfeit | Lv.1 ]

[ Celestial Hack | None ]

[ Ungodly Flames of Debauchery | Lv.19 ]

[ Null Extraction ]

[ Static Limbo ]

[ Null Life Aura | Lv.8 ]

[ Graceless Hunter (Special) | Lv.4 ]

[ Instant Blaze Charge (Special) | Lv.28 ]

[ Bombardier Bangster Fist Art (Special) | Lv.34 ]

[ Greatest Mana Attraction | Lv.15 ]

[ Elite Combat Arts (Special) | Lv.5 ]

[ Elite Swordplay (Special) | Lv.2 ]

[ Parting Wave | Lv.9 ]

[ Primal Caution (Special) | Lv.22 ]

[ Undaunted Calamity (Special) | Lv.23 ]

[ Beyond the Hype | None ]

[ Swindling Death Dance (Incomplete) ]

[ Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art (Special) | Lv.45 ]

[ Swordmaster's Quiescence (Special) | Lv.30 ]

[ Unmatched Sword Sense (Special) | Lv.40 ]

[ Lesser Gravel Rune Mastery (Special) | Lv.20 ]

[ Rune Assimilation (Special) | Lv.10 ]

[ Advanced Potion Making (Special) | Lv.12 ]

[<Class>]

[ Evil Darkness Meshing (Special) | Lv.50 ]

[ Evil Darkness Creation (Special) | Lv.43 ]

[ Immoral Authority (Special) | Lv.10 ]

[ Just Light Creation (Special) | Lv.67 ]

[ Just Light Meshing (Special) | Lv.49 ]

[ Boundless Evil (Special) | Lv.25 ]

[ Saint Lumis' Benign Arc (Special) | Lv.11 ]

[ Destined Warp Steps (Special) | Lv.55 ]

[ Crude World Projection ]

[ Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge ]

[ Bead of Malevolence | Lv.10 (Max) ]

[ Perfect Night Domain | Lv.7 ]

[ Wing of the Just ]

[<Racial>]

[ Son of Luserus (Special) | Lv.1 ]

[<Arts>]

[ Pseudo Evil Veneration (1%) ]

[<Oddities>]

[ Binds of Fukal ]

[ Fruit of World Myths ]

[ Omniscient Thought Cracker ]

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[<Affinities>]

[ Evil Darkness - B ]

[ Just Light - D ]

[ Distorted Gravity ]

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Looking at the long list of skills brought a smile to Skullius' face. This was the definitive arsenal that he wanted to keep as it wasn't riddled with meaningless and useless abilities any longer. With the addition of the skills he had just gotten from the two Cluster Generals, the Hybrid Luman felt that discovering how to fuse skills was probably one of the best things he had learned to do.

With these skills that all had purpose, he felt more... intact.

The only downside he could think of was the fact the stronger skills were claimed by his Insurgent Magnus powers that were starting to be more active. Abilities like [Boundless Evil], [Destined Warp Steps] and the likes were now included as Class skills instead of normal ones, meaning that they stronger but couldn't be accessed in his Penetrator form.

Slowly, his two forms were growing more and more apart.

'Hmmm. I'm getting closer and closer to the Second Trial. Only two more levels left and I'll be entering the Master Stage,' Skullius thought, remembering the gruelling Tasks he had received from Level 11 up till now.

They were all related to his Class and they got progressive harder, which was why his [Evil Darkness] and [Just Light] abilities had grown so quickly. He had been forced to level them up with constant use.

That said, with a bit of research though, the Hybrid Luman had found out something unnerving. Something that reminded him that his existence was truly... odd.

Apparently, Tasks continued to vary for everyone else. While they did get specialised as one got stronger, they still had a wide range. For Skullius, he found that the variety only got more and more stunted, which led him to ask himself...

Where were these Tasks really coming from?

Everyone else received Tasks from the Deities but Skullius... since he couldn't be blessed by these gods had to have a different being behind him, creating these Tasks for him.

At first he thought it was VOW bro, but his line of thinking shifted.

'It's probably Fulgardt. A piece of his will is attached to me and the Class I got when I received his legacy. When I got stronger last time, the guidance field showed me that this will gives me a bit more of his powers with each major leap I get in strength. The bro reached Divinity and with how his corpse moved on its own in the Labyrinth of the Yoke... he's probably not dead in the mortal sense...'

This was how Skullius viewed it.

It wasn't something amusing to think about by any means but it was best to attach his mind to this theory. It kept him vigilant.

In any case, Skullius was happy about the gains. He couldn't wait to experiment with the large cauldron and the Bashful Abomination.

His growth still reflected even now as every time he met someone with a sword, he felt a light ringing from it that singed vague emotion and thought, all of which was blasted towards his mind.

This simple fact made the Hybrid Luman quicken his pace to the Bryne Family Residence.

On arriving he found Daggs sitting on the couch and enjoying his tea.

As soon as the attendant saw him, he shot up from his seat to greet him respectfully but Skullius quickly stopped him in his speedy tracks.

"Don't be so jumpy."

"Ah... right. Welcome back, Sir Festos," Daggs said shakily with a horrible smile.

"It's good to be back," Skullius replied. "Where's Stylla?"

Daggs' nervous smile turned into a grim one, his face turning to a more sombre shade.

Skullius instantly understood from the drop in the attendant's enthusiasm.

Chapter 635: Be Real With Me

Stylla, since that day at the Bryne Family Estate, had never been the same. She had brought back from the tragic event a figure full of rage, determination and negativity that couldn't be dispelled.

Worse yet, this mix of dreadful malice only continued to brew as the days went by, especially after the match days in the Premium Age Royale where she was forced to see Setkh's face again.

Each time, it was as if she had been forced to swallow spoonfuls of a horrid reality mixed in with a 'Screw you' from the universe that kept her mood down in the slumps.

Slowly, dark bags started to form under her eyes as she worked tirelessly, her frame shrinking as she barely ate and spent more and more time with her unconscious father in his bedroom. No one could pull away Stylla from this road she was treading.

Not Skullius, not Silrat, not Ed, not even her own sister Terese who grew increasingly worried.

It was a sad sight.

Skullius knocked on the door to a lavish guestroom and waited a few seconds for a response.

There was bout of silence with no reply for a while, until a sickly voice, raspy and full of reverse cheer whispered a hollow 'Come in.'

Skullius entered the room with the squeak of the door and found the view he expected.

Beside a large bed where a handsome man lay enshrined in a pristine light created by clustered runes, the figure of Stylla could be seen staring unblinkingly onto it.

Her red hair had long forgotten the taste of a comb and grown sick of the simple rinse of water as well as the uncaring drying from a towel. Her once fair skin was losing its healthy sheen and the rosy tinge of heat was lost from her face that looked as apathetic and pitiful as could be.

One could rightfully ask if this truly was Stylla at all after comparing her now to what she had looked like before.

"Stylla..." Skullius voiced with a serious visage.

The red head didn't show a reaction.

Skullius sighed.

This presented the same thing he had grown to know from Stylla's new, gloomy mannerisms.

She wasn't in the mood for small talk or any talk for that matter.

But he could squeeze important stuff in.

"Were you uh... were you able to get them all to meet with us?" Skullius asked.

Stylla's body that had been hunched over in its seat sat up straight.

"Yes. You'll be able to meet them after the matches tomorrow," Stylla replied without turning her head.

"Great. You told them that we will meet at your Estate, right?"

"...Sure."

Skullius frowned.

'Hey, hey. What the flesh is that supposed to mean? It could mean anything. Sure, I did? Sure, I can set it up to that place instead? Sure, knock yourself out with a serrated bat?!

What did it mean?!' he raged internally.

"Will you be coming?" the Hybrid Luman asked, though he suspected a damp answer already.

As expected, Stylla grew silent for quite some time, probably to foreshadow that she was in fact, as Skullius guessed, not coming with him and Silrat.

The Hybrid Luman sighed again.

He had thought this would make Stylla get better, gradually. It was a huge undertaking and would require focus after all. Unfortunately, the opposite happened.

Skullius had told Stylla back at her Estate that he wanted them to cooperate. To build something together. Something similar to what Replicus was doing but in partnership form.

Stylla had agreed, which had led to him, her and Silrat brainstorming ideas over what kind of growth model to pursue.

The general idea Skullius had pitched when he asked for them to actually cooperate instead of use each other through convoluted means was for him to invest in the Bryne Family. If he and Stylla worked together, they could raise the Family to its feet again.

Skullius proposed this after revealing to Stylla that the Premium Age Royale wasn't as simple as it seemed, which forced her to take Skullius' deal seriously.

She eventually agreed and the three had gotten to trying to find ways to make the Bryne Family look attractive. Money, resources and exclusive objects of trade they could harness.

So far, these had been achieved.

Skullius had gone on a lot of exclusive missions for the Association along with handling his own private excursions.

The combination of these had earned him close to 100,000 Plasma Coins between the mission rewards, taking criminal loot for himself and selling off rare Cluster beast and Cluster General carcasses!

This amount was used to rebuild the Bryne Family main mansion and modify the Estate accordingly – improving the view as well as the infrastructure.

Those from the previous batch of servants serving in the Bryne Family who stayed, refusing to abandon the Family for any amount of gold were rehired to maintain the expanded farms, the new mansion and the renovated compounds while a new batch, one made of able Foundation Stage experts was employed to head the auxiliary personnel.

Silrat, with his information gathering sought and found Advancement Stage and a few Master Stage experts who were added to the total number of guards in the Family, after Skullius formed contracts with them of course.

Resources such as armour, spatial storage, carriages, tools, clothing, livestock and more were procured by Silrat largely, while Skullius brought a bit more from his unexplored means.

In a month and a half, the Bryne Family Estate had changed so much that the locals were surprised, a bit frightened even. The thick, but beautiful wall erected around it, making it seem like some kind of impenetrable fortress intimidated the inhabitants of the lands under the Bryne Family.

All this said, Stylla's gloom was not fazed as even now when the most important phase of their growth plan was afoot, the red head refused to participate.

"Why don't you want to come?" Skullius asked the forlorn Stylla.

She heaved in a breath and finally turned to stare at the Hybrid Luman with lost eyes.

"Haven't I done enough?" she said with a feeble voice.

"Enough? When we're just getting started?"

Stylla shook her head and gazed out the window.

"I've been thinking... Ever since Setkh left the Family to do whatever he wanted to do so long ago, I leapt at the chance to take the reins to the Family. Soon after, I discovered that the weight crushed me and I couldn't handle it alone. There was no reward there.

Even after Setkh returned, I found that the small relief it gave that at least I wasn't alone, even if I didn't trust him, was never going to last," she said.

"But here I am. Trying. I can't get rid of this anger in me. It's the only thing keeping me going. Setkh... I'm trying to keep together everything he ruined for this Family but...

can I even do it? Will this work with me at the helm again? I am too weak for this. I'm nothing like father. I'm afraid of making mistakes again and not seeing things I should be able to see if I'm to run the Family. And...

I can't stand with you tomorrow. I'd rather stay in the shadows."

Skullius leaned against the wall and tilted his head.

Weakness? Anger? Mistakes?

Really?

This was what was keeping Stylla holed up and afraid to act?

A nerve was struck.

A chuckle came out of Skullius' mouth, much to Stylla's surprise.

The Hybrid Luman gazed at her with his white eyes.

"If some of us could give up just because we made mistakes or were weak or angry, life would be a breeze, wouldn't it?" he said with a ridiculing tone that Stylla didn't miss.

A flash of tamed fury ran through her eyes.

"Right. Maybe that's why you should stand in for me. You're brave, bold and strong. You never doubt yourself. That is someone the Family needs right now," Stylla said, subduing her emotions.

"So I should do all the work while you hide away in your own petty fears feeling sorry for yourself? Give me a break. You think by doing this you're proving that you know yourself and your limits but it's all just an excuse to give up," Skullius said with a sharp tone.

Stylla's body trembled and she balled her hands into fists while rising from her seat.

"My fears are petty? Oh, sure. You'd know everything about that, right? Since you've been to the Under and back and have been through the worst the world has to offer," she hissed weakly.

"Maybe I have. In fact, I actually HAVE been to the worst of places and back. And you know what I can tell even without seeing with my eyes? A coward."

Stylla opened her mouth to release a hot breath that carried a chunk of her frustrations. Her face turned red and she pointed at Skullius only to lower her hand and take another puff of the cool air to calm down.

"Good then. I'm a coward who doesn't know who she is and what the fuck she is supposed to be. But don't you speak to me as if you weren't an aimless, paranoid, dense little Mage when we first met. If it wasn't for Silrat, for Uncle Jac and me where the fuck would you be now? Stop acting tough... like...

like you know who you are and where you're going with so much clarity that everyone else turns into an idiot before your oh so mighty view, Festos!"

...

This time.

It was Skullius' turn to twitch in a bit of rage.

There was truth in what Stylla said and it stung quite a bit, forcing Skullius into thoughts he usually tried to avoid.

Who was he...

Where was he going...

Chapter 636: The Conflict In Identities

The question of who and where.

Stylla's words brought to light some of Skullius' concerns. Perhaps because everything in his life happened so fast, he had failed to fully digest it all or find time to properly find the answers to these questions.

But in the end, Skullius' mind had found itself... doubting.

After all was said and done, the person who truly understood how much he had changed was Skullius himself.

He was no longer the little fragile skeleton that landed within the Tremur, got beaten, forced to scurry away and scrounge for power in some and unfortunate conflicts. His mind, body and soul from back then were vastly different from what they were now.

Fragments of him had started getting chipped away before he knew it.

Wait.

Where they even fragments of him or something else entirely?

This went back to the fact that Skullius didn't know which he was. Which he truly was – a human who lived a currently unclear life on a distant, dying world as Somanda said, a moronic, braindead and full of shit little skeleton that spent the better part of a 1000 years mining mana gems for an Arch-Lich, or a fearless, powerful inheritor of two devastating powers who was going to change the world.

Hmph.

If the same Skullius who once bragged to his fellow skeletons about Somanda caressing his skull were to hear that he would become such a force to reckon with, he would call Bonet over and have a hard laugh at the joke. The same was probably true for the currently vague version of himself from when he was still alive.

Skullius released a rough breath under Stylla's accusing eyes.

She was right.

The Hybrid Luman had changed.

Back then, while living under the doomed AND cursed status effects, his life was mostly strife with little benefit. He feared death but pushed through with everything he had to get what he desired.

Him leaving the dread he had of death when fighting Bassbion was the first time Skullius broke through an abstract fear all on his own but...

'Maybe I really...' he thought.

Maybe he really was losing himself as he begun to fear.

The very same day he felt like he overcame a huge obstacle, was the same day murky traits that weren't his invaded his being, anchoring themselves through the legacy he had gotten.

The <WILL OF UNDERSTANDING>.

The <WILL OF BRUTALITY>.

The <WILL OF CUNNING>.

The <WILL OF BLOODLUST>.

These were fragments of thought and existence that sank and dissolved into Skullius, forcing him to change.

He was never really smart. Maybe he was in his past life but not when he was a skeleton.

He was never a brutal existence. He was just a psychopath who didn't have notions of human norms.

And with these changes...

"You know what, Stylla?" Skullius said while dimming the fury that had been building up within him. He then laughed at himself while clenching his face which brought hints of anxiety over Stylla's visage.

"I've changed. I received help and I grew. And lately, I have been getting a big head because of everything I've been earning. I'm rich, I'm strong and I'm special. Even if I don't fully know who I am or where I'm going, I'm still making my way forward. You don't need a fleshing journey of self discovery that lasts for weeks or months to move on.

I should know."

Stylla flinched.

"And are you getting the answers you want while blinding doing whatever you think is the right choice?" she asked with a stern expression.

Answers?

That's right.

Camilla, his adopted sister, the girl he frequently saw...

His unusual ability that staved away the atrocious luck he was supposed to have from time to time...

His incomplete soul didn't give him the answers through normal recollection.

Even Serenity refused to shed some light.

"They will. If I get all the power I can ever find, memories, self realisation and fulfilment will follow. Isn't that what all creatures want at the end of the day?" Skullius said with an immovable conviction.

Stylla stared deep into his eyes for several moments before she dropped to her seat and sighed.

"Like I said. You never doubt yourself. Someone like you should be heading the Family for now. Maybe I'm just too... normal," Stylla said, shifting her position to once again stare into the light guarding her father.

"I'm sorry about what I said. I'm pretty keen on defending myself. But I'm still not going to meet them. You and Silrat will do it."

Skullius sighed exasperatedly and exited the room.

What a handful.

Maybe Stylla really wasn't built for this after all.

'Tsk.'

The people that he and Stylla were talking about were representatives from Families on the same level or a bit higher than the Bryne Family. Using her connections as well as her father's, Stylla had called for a meeting so that she, Skullius and Silrat could pitch their attractive resources available for sale.

This was all in order to form alliances.

Perhaps loyalty had died when Stylla's father was cursed but the bond built from mutual benefit could stand the test of multiple lifetimes even if the original individuals to forge an alliance had long passed.

The trio had several resources to pitch already but now, with Skullius' new [Advanced Potion Making], there were more options on the table that he wanted to add, provided that he tested the limits of his abilities first, that was.

This was a lesser concern however.

This exchange with Stylla was really going to mess with the Hybrid Luman for a long time.

The more he pushed on, the more he found that his identities grew and all of them wanted to claim his soul.

He was the Luminant, with a supposed true self that he could awaken through [Son of Luserus].

He was the undead. Well, he was. Not anymore.

He was the Eternal Storm Veil Penetrator, connected to the mysterious otherworldly being known as Serenity.

He was the Insurgent Magnus, the legacy of the most vile human to walk on Aigas.

And soon, a more terrifying identity would grace Skullius in the future. One that was recognised everywhere.

'What's even more scary is what Sause said about that power...' Skullius thought as he looked at himself.

Seramoro, Oblivion's Edge.

On the same day that he inherited the WILLS, one of the Nine Seeds of the Fruit of World Myths had almost taken him over.

It was a power that Sause warned against because it was a form with heavy ties to Fulgardt. It had changed his appearance when he used it – making Skullius' hair long and dark, giving him a second face and gifting him power that had rocked even Fuwin's Majestic Territory!

But it left no room for Skullius' consciousness.

The Hybrid Luman was wary of this.

"When I get stronger again, I might lose myself to the more WILLS that will awaken in my body. The stronger I get, the more I'm likely to... No. I won't allow it. If Fulgardt is devouring me... I'll have to devour him too.

I've already created something similar with the last resort card I've placed on Sila. If push comes to shove...' Skullius thought while hardening his face.

The future looked both bleak and bright at the same time but moreso bleak if he didn't play his cards right.

Come to think of it...

Skullius summoned Demion's Dance.

The tale of Demion, Escus and Irisa.

Frock had hinted at this before but it was only a few weeks ago when Skullius got to truly understand the story behind his green blade.

A tale that seemed to foreshadow what might happen to him, surprisingly.

Chapter 637: The Tale of Demion, Escus and Irisa (1)

Seven millennia ago, in the far East within Pelian, there existed a Family once, one that reined over expansive, rich lands. The lands were so rich that from their soils, the finest crops and fruits grew, the rarest breeds of quality livestock could be reared in the climate and from the overall uniqueness of the domain, the most powerful and beautiful of man in Pelian were born.

Legends passed by man said that a blessing ran through the waters of the four rivers that bled into these lands from the sea, a blessing from Listafelle that gave the normal soils high fertility and the living things that drank from them heightened qualities. They claimed that the waters drew impurities in the air and cleansed them, alternating the climate as well, shockingly.

Later, doubt suffocated this legend as bold wanderers tried and test the waters, literally, but nothing changed even after constant consumption, leading many to believe that it wasn't the waters that were special, but the act of dwelling in these expansive lands for extended periods of time.

It was the land that protected its people, they surmised, after all, hadn't the giants preached that Quintess' body became all the lands in Aigas? Some of these lands were bound to naturally have abnormal qualities like this!

Yes, that made sense!

These rumours spread like wildfire and soon enough, many more were recruited into this belief.

Before long, these expansive lands were given the name 'Quintess' Paradise' and all man coveted them and the beautiful people that resided within them.

The Family that ruled over these lands was called the Bewatered Family and had a mighty force of 7,000 men that were rumoured to be as strong as three others at the same level of power!

Also, since the lands were so rich, the ores and minerals found within them produced fine weaponry and armour that gave the army a defining edge against other clustered combatants.

When the expected formal declarations of war were waged against the Bewatered Family for their lands, they came out the victors each time, which fuelled the burning desire from their enemies, the intense motivation that spawned from it edging over the bounds of what was legal and allowed.

Fortunately, the men defending the lands of the Bewatered Family were also sufficiently motivated. One could only hope to think why.

Not only was the lord of the lands a kind and honourable man, he also rewarded each effort given for the good of the lands adequately, garnering the unyielding loyalty from his men.

But that wasn't all. Actually, it wasn't the thickest of it.

The Head of the Bewatered Family had a beautiful daughter.

Irisa was her name.

Her beauty was said to be so surreal that reflective surfaces – water, glass, glossy steel – couldn't depict her face. Whenever she stood before them, she appeared faceless, the details of her visage so mesmerising that she usually had to wear a veil, otherwise whenever she passed, time would stop moving, as did all productivity.

And if the enemies of these lands were ever to know that she existed... the lord of these lands always shuddered at that thought.

Irisa was also kind like her father. Still, she went out of her way to interact with everyone, including the men that fought for their land.

She had been taught so.

She had been educated since she was young as to why it was important to give these men respect.

To bow in their presence and motivate them sufficiently.

They were ones responsible for their peace.

They were the reason why she could live without worry.

And thus her late mother who rivalled her in beauty had told her to use her otherworldly prettiness to garner the simple praise from men, just as she did.

Therefore, her fair gaze from beyond a silver veil, her fair hand outstretched for a loyal kiss and her sweet voice that encouraged the might of the seven thousand men was their motivation.

Nomatter what, Irisa would never lose her home if she had the means to stop it.

The victories her Family procured kept piling on until the treachery of greed overcame the meaning of the law.

Six Families banded together and assailed the lands one night, killing all who stood in their way to reach the Bewatered Family Estate. The rich lands – Quintess' Paradise – were soaked in blood that night. That of the common folk, that of the seven thousand strong and that of the lord of the land.

Several were spared as ornaments and objects of entertainment. Human trophies with excessive beauty so fine it had to be preserved and enjoyed on selected nights.

Hmmm. The satisfaction wrought was sublime.

The blood these six Families failed to spill however, was that of Irisa and two guards that her father had assigned to protect her without her knowledge. Only when the lands were burning with fire and hatred, the legacy of the Bewatered Family falling, did these two men rise to save Irisa and flee with her elsewhere.

These two men were Demion and Escus.

Irisa mourned bitterly for 65 days in their care following the fall of her Family until the need to move on held.

She and her two guards went to another land far to the West, escaping the loathsome terror of the six Families that plundered the land.

During this journey, she grew to know the two men who protected her wholly.

Demion was an upright man, loyal to a fault and strict on duty. His strength was bottomless determination that allowed him to persevere despite not being gifted with extraordinary powers.

Escus on the other hand, was a loyal guard but he did not believe in honour at the expense of living as he wished. The prospect of his power was his defining trait. He was very powerful and had been one of the strongest among the seven thousand strong, only stripped of rank because of his immovable mind-set and beliefs.

Irisa appreciated both their qualities as both were willing to give up their lives for her. She was lucky she didn't have to share a fate worse than death if ever found with them by her side.

Thus in their travel, the three had to wear veils around their faces as outside their lands, their beauty would attract too much attention, moreso for Irisa.

For a good seven months, the three found a good place to live and integrated themselves shakily among the natives without staying for too long in one place. After all, sporadic interactions demanded that they get comfortable enough to remove their veils and show their faces.

If they did so, that would be the beginning of all the tragedy, something neither of them wanted.

However, this so called tragedy was inevitable, because sooner or later the three would grow comfortable with their escape from the chaos and this comfort would allow for the boiling human emotions and needs that had been repressed from the tension to finally take hold.

Naturally, this started with Irisa, who admired Demion's stature. His aloofness and the bright fire of firmness that was aglow in his steady gaze melted her heart.

What's more, when she casually seduced Demion, he refused to be taken by the temptation, warding away her advances with a solid face that did not betray the ferocious demons underneath, egging him to give in.

Be it turning his head to 'accidentally' glimpse at the full view of a pair of fine, fairly large breasts with snowy skin bundling them into delectable shape, entering his room to find a naked woman sprawled under his sheets or having a strangely experienced, soft hand caress his masculine sensitivities from the blue...

Demion had persisted.

He had persisted until the wall he built was finally scaled and torn down violently by the mad beasts that had been pooling on the other side.

He gave in, and when he did, he did not hold back.

He didn't care anymore.

If Irisa desired him, he would take her.

After all, he would still fulfill his duty afterwards, perhaps with even more vigour.

On the night that he satisfied his lusts fully, feeling the last shards of guilt and doubt fade away with every thrust he gave the warm, soft and ravenous body under him, the sparks of jealousy grew in Escus who was there to hear the moans of desperate pleasure.

Peace decisively took a hike.

Chapter 638: The Tale of Demion, Escus and Irisa (2)

Irisa and Demion openly showed off their intimacy since that day. There was no point in hiding it. Demion felt like keeping it a secret from Escus would only serve to make him feel like a fool, especially if he should find out about it in other ways.

Naturally, he didn't know that his fellow guard already knew and was boiling with rage. Rage from jealousy and from something else he knew.

Escus might not have been the most honourable man in the world but while in the company of someone he viewed as incredibly noble like Demion, he had been forced to conform to a more civil persona. In a way, he respected Demion and saw him as something of a moral compass.

That was why it was such a heavy blow when he found out that this man he thought was better than him and strived to emulate, was fucking the person they were supposed to protect. For him especially, like any man who had seen Irisa, burning feelings squirmed within for her. Maybe not love but the searing passion to bed her as well, even with what he knew.

Escus was also a little angry for Demion because he didn't know...

How cruel.

He was the one being considerate here.

Yes. That had to be truth. Or an excuse.

In light of this development, Escus sought to change the status quo. That was why he made a proposition to Demion.

Over the past few months that they had been travelling to settle West, the trio had made a habit of gathering information on the current state of where they settled temporarily in order to ensure that it was safe. They did so through various means; eavesdropping, paying information merchants among other methods.

Not all the information they acquired was helpful as it could be rumours about foreign affairs, lazily put together town gossip, or... stories about an ancient underground city that held a legacy.

Demion, Escus and Irisa had heard quite a lot about this rumour during their travels, but at the time, only Escus paid it much mind.

After all, it had something to do with attaining more strength.

Escus' proposition went like this:

"We were charged with keeping Irisa safe but are we such cowards that we can't even think of seeking revenge against those bastards who robbed us of our home?"

Demion was surprised by these words. Not only did they sound blind but also... empty.

"To what end? If we two go back there as we are or even with hired mercenaries, we stand no chance against the force that assaulted us that night. And if we die..." Demion said while glancing at Irisa who hadn't been invited to their discussion. "...we would have failed at our one assigned mission."

Escus scoffed.

"What if you had the hidden power from a legendary powerhouse? Would you join me then?" Escus asked.

The noble of the two was startled and when Escus elaborated on what he meant, Demion grew suspicious.

Weren't these merely rumours they had heard of on the way? Why would they risk their lives for something that was uncertain?

Escus appealed to Demion for five days.

With each setting sun, he gathered information on the rumoured whereabouts of this place and why no one had claimed this legacy yet.

The location was fairly hard to find but Escus eventually located it and discovered that there was a very peculiar restriction on entrants who desired to enter this underground city.

Whenever someone attempted to reach the entrance to this place, an engraving would etch itself on the hard ground, declaring the stipulations for those deemed legible for entry.

'Only one who is pure of heart, whose hands has not yet claimed 100 lives can enter.'

This was the restriction.

Sadly, this weeded out a lot of people. The common folk couldn't enter because they feared they lacked the strength to endure what was inside. Strong warriors couldn't enter because more often than not, they had slain more than a 100 people.

The news of this requirement created a rumour that made many reluctant to even try to find this legacy, thus making its existence as most likely a lie prominent.

Escus pulled on Demion to this information and had him confirm it himself.

Then, he urged him to enter this lost underground city since between the two of them, Demion had less blood on his hands as he had never been in the local army back home.

After the conflict of thought for days, Demion felt that perhaps it was worth a try. After all, there were some who returned alive and well from this underground city and he was quite stronger than some of them. Irisa did not like the idea and even contended against it, but Demion stressed that Escus was right.

If they could acquire this legacy, avenging their people would likely not be impossible anymore and as a man who kept to the idea uprightness and justice, he couldn't pass up this chance.

Thus, against Irisa's wishes, Demion became one of the many challengers to enter the mysterious space underground, the Ruined Starlight City of the Nameless Conqueror.

On the same day Demion went on his excursion, Escus made his move.

Avenge their people?

Pfft!

That had been an idea he made up to appeal to Demion whom he knew simply couldn't resist to act upon it.

His heart was pure but Escus' wasn't.

He was different from Demion who hadn't been part of the army when he was chosen by the lord of the land to keep Irisa safe. He had been one of the Commanders years before and stripped of his rank because of his personality.

Thus, his honour was non-existent and he knew things Demion didn't.

He took Irisa on a short trip to a major city where wealthy and powerful figures usually congregated for important and casual fellowships because of the luxurious amenities within the settlement. While in this city, Escus said something brought Irisa chills, something she had been sure both Escus and Demion did not know since her father kept a tight lid on it.

"I know the 'duty' you and your mother upheld. As beauties that transcend anything, even within our the lands, as special as you are, you bedded the mightiest soldiers under your father to keep them... 'motivated', didn't you? Your mother and now you," he whispered to her ear with a sharp voice.

"Your father was always so weak. He failed to keep the army that was so loyal to his father before him under control. When he failed to garner respect on his own, he made you and your mother whores to the army, right? I wonder, does your body really possess the natural property to revitalise and edify any man's strength a dozen fold in a single night? I only heard passing rumours.

Did you enjoy doing it? Are you planning on using dear ol' Demion? Do you even love him or are you just craving your old life?"

As he said this, Escus removed Irida's veil in the middle of a populated street road and the world around her seemed to stop as her full face was revealed.

Everyone's eyes were attracted to this woman who seemed out of place. Men, women and children alike fell under the spell of Irida's divine beauty.

First there was awe, then admiration and then spawned greed.

Irida was terrified.

There was no way she could escape being snatched by any one of the powerful men whose eyes were already fantasising about having her as a prize.

In this desperation, Irida turned to Escus who grinned at her sullen, horrified face.

"Beg me to save you," he said. "Beg and plead me to take you far from here, away from the foreign greed."

Irida could not believe her ears.

To beg Escus?

That's right. He was a powerful man, the heights of his strength having been publicly recognised as among the most powerful back home. He could protect her.

Demion was not here to save her.

If she refused, she would have to entertain one of the tens of devil's drooling at her in this moment and thus, she could only oblige.

The devil she knew was better than the devil she did not know.

And this devil she knew was elated.

Escus wrestled everyone who so much as glanced at Irisa with longing, slaughtering them all brutally without sustaining any wounds or being tagged even once. He laid waste to the entire city thereafter and did as he said – taking Irisa for himself far away.

What he knew of Irisa did not deter his want of her as any man would and with this, he had won her while Demion had gone off to find something that he probably wouldn't succeed at finding.

His chapter began.

Three months later, Demion emerged from within the Ruined Starlight City, changed and strong.

He had succeeded in claiming the legacy of the Nameless Conqueror, much to the locals' disbelief as many a century had passed without anyone being able to claim the powers of this mysterious historic figure.

The people sang his praises and some gave him gifts, asking him to overthrow the Families that loaded over their lands and take power instead but Demion focused on one thing first.

Irisa and Escus were gone.

At first he thought a threat had driven them away or harmed them but from what he heard, the two had simply up and left.

If Demion were his old self, it would have taken him some time to figure out what had happened but now, or rather doubt it hard before believing it, but with the mysterious change that sat over him, his paranoid and broader view, his wrath instantly rose.

Had Irisa and Escus left him just like that?

Did Irisa betray him for Escus?

Had it been their plan to send him away so that they could escape with each other to another land?

But wait.

Escus was stronger than him before, he could have just... No. Did he do it this way out of pity?

Demion's fury burned like a wild fire.

Instead of searching for these two frantically though, he took up the offer of the people who admired how he had done what others had failed at.

He began to conquer, as his newly acquired Hidden Class, the Appetent Guzzler, desired.

From the West to the East he invaded and claimed, making his search whenever he settled to bring lands under his rule, something his old, noble self would have never done. The needless shedding of blood, the excessive killing even to those who were blameless... this was not Demion, but the Appetent Guzzler, the Nameless Conqueror's will.

A mere eight months after Demion began his journey, he reclaimed his home land, killing and burning every single inhabitant to 'cleanse' the rich lands that weren't his enemies' to take. None of the six Families that had conspired to claim the Bewatered Family lands were spared and truly, it would have been a sweet revenge, if he didn't have to enjoy it alone.

The fact that Irisa and Escus were not here to celebrate with him burned his soul and he found himself searching once again, using his connections to look everywhere.

On one fateful day, Demion's men finally found Irisa and Escus.

No. Rather, Escus seemed to want to be found, finally. Their meeting was inevitable at this point. The whole nation knew of this risen conqueror and Escus had heard of him too, knowing full well who he was.

When they met, Demion was torn to find that Escus and Irisa had had a child and the beauty of the Bewatered Family was pregnant with another!

The flames of boiling emotion couldn't be contained within his body.

So he had been right. He had been betrayed after all. The small hope he had that there was something else that caused his lover and his friend to flee died with the sight he saw and he drew his blade to kill Escus with a bold sword technique that the Nameless Conqueror before him had forged for himself.

The Swindling Death's Dance.

Chapter 639: The Tale of Demion, Escus and Irisa (3)

Escus did not show signs of fear.

Admittedly, his greed had dulled his judgement on that day a year and a half ago when he saw Demion enter the Ruined Starlight City. He had not thought his friend's determination alone would allow him to claim a legacy that many had failed at winning for themselves but here they were.

He had been wrong.

It seemed that determination and a righteous heart was what won in the end.

Escus' lust for Irisa had also brought him here, where the world would either devour his or Demion's blood and will.

But regardless of how much the odds were stacked against him, Escus would not allow himself to fall. In preparation for Demion's wrath that would definitely find him someday with or without the legacy, he had scoured and found a weapon to defend himself just in case.

A Mythical grade Spear with the name Letting Dawn Space.

While wielding this weapon in preparation for battle, Escus had turned to Irisa who was watching the unfolding events from a distance with tears running down her eyes and spoken his last words to her.

"I should have known. When even worldly objects refused to see your face, I should have gouged out my eyes back then."

Amidst Irisa's mourns, the battle between the two men had ensued. It was a catastrophic battle that lasted a little more than day as even with Demion's new might, Escus had contended brilliantly with his Mythical spear.

Sadly, the uncomforming former Commander was killed in the end, falling under the Appetent Guzzler's full might and the treacherous motions of his sword technique that were quite literally, a mesmerising dance.

The result of the battle was another meaningless death.

Demion had looked to Irisa with his spear deep in Escus' chest wanting to kill her too, but he stopped himself. His true will held down the urge for senseless murder.

He took the woman as well as her child in, going on to settle with her back in her birth lands where he ruled with a growing empire.

Demion no longer felt any affection towards her, but she still did. Burning embers of what Escus had thought was a mere craving for her past life of pleasing men were actually true love born within Irisa from finally meeting a man who resisted her outer beauty.

Demion didn't know it, but there had never been a spark of attraction between Escus and Irisa at all. She had merely lived with the man, serving his lusts day by day, which she saw him grow old with rather quickly, soon turning to demanding that she bear his children.

Truly, lust was finite.

To try and win Demion back, Irisa gifted the Appetent Guzzler a weapon of unknown origins.

Perhaps it was a trinket she had found in passing on their journey.

Perhaps she had found it in the months she and Escus spent trying to find peaceful solitude?
Perhaps he had given it to her for self defence.

Whatever it was, on a very special day, Irisa gave this sword to Demion, hoping to show that she was grateful for being delivered from Escus. That their battle and its result had freed her.

This weapon was a Mythical grade level object with a green curved blade and golden hilt.

The eyes of the Appetent Guzzler had shone with wonder when he saw the sword and upon wielding it, traits that Demion felt attached to became imprinted on its blade with the power of 'truth.'

The grim battle with a friend, the betrayal from a lover and his new might.

Demion never forgave Irisa and they grew apart as the days went by, with the Appetent Guzzler wanting to conquer more while Irisa focused on becoming a mother.

Then, as if the world had finally decided to enact punishment against Demion, a man from one of the Six Houses of Pelian acted against this conquer, finally.

A man by the name Uriyal Shannazah.

In a single day, in a single hour, he ended the legacy of the Nameless Conqueror and brought down his growing empire in the still recovering and still maturing nation of Pelian.

As if direction chortled with ridicule at their lives, Demion's body was sealed back in the Ruined Starlight City, the entrance to this mysterious place destroyed by House Shannazah.

Irisa and her children were taken by some unnamed invaders after the fall of Demion's tyranny and their fates were anything but pleasant to their last days.

...

When Skullius thought about this story, he couldn't help but grimace at its tragic ending. If he ended up sharing the same fate as Demion – being sealed back where the last holder of his power perished – that would be tragic.

He imagined that the Nameless Conqueror was also defeated by some horrifically powerful expert who showed up out of nowhere to put him down, which was strangely poetic.

Ambitions trampled in their rise twice.

Skullius wasn't that ambitious or evil, though, he did wonder how exactly Fulgardt had died. That part of history wasn't recited very well. All he knew was that Fulgardt attained Divinity through some emotional trigger and became so vile that he was called the Immoral. He crossed worlds to abduct powerful beings and commit atrocities that most weren't even aware of and after that...

what exactly happened?

Damn it!

Would Skullius' end if he was consumed by Fulgardt's powers be good or bad?

Who knew?

As he gazed at the green blade, Demion's Dance, Skullius found himself wondering again.

He got that this sword used to be more powerful than just a measly Unique grade item in the past, but its properties now were so weak that he wasn't sure if there was something that still remained of its former glory, trying to push it back to its height?

Was it still special?

'We'll find out someday,' Skullius thought.

He entered his room and held the Elimparidis Stone Staff to transport himself into Fortune. Once there Skullius took deep breaths and looked around, appreciating how far he had come. There were

a few additions to the overall world, especially where the stout mountain had been. Skullius had replaced the massive hole there with something else.

But that was not important right now.

Skullius flashed his way into the thick forest where he felt most uncomfortable.

He sat on one of the branches to a large tree while overlooking the canopies of the surrounding shorter vegetation.

Perfect.

"Now let's see what all these skills can do," Skullius said as he immediately chose to begin with [Lesser Gravel Rune Mastery].

Because he had the memories from Hobbu Gogo, he didn't have to start from scratch to learn how these runes worked. In fact, if not for the fact that the full capability of the runes was nerfed in his hands because he didn't have the relevant class, Skullius would have been able to use all the Rune networks the old goblin could!

'It's weird that these Gravel Runes are constructed from an appreciation of nature. Well, the land in particular hence the name. If I was a complete beginner, I'd only be able to manifest the runes on the natural ground. Hmph. I can't imagine only being able to use these runes to filter running water or something,' Skullius thought with a scowl.

That would have been depressing.

The full capabilities of the Gravel Runes included reinforcement, empowerment, enabling, protection, sealing, temporary storage and conjuring.

Skullius was only limited to reinforcement, sealing, temporary storage and protection right now. Maybe it would change later but for now, this was all he got.

The Hybrid Luman infused mana into his finger and traced the shapes of seven runes in the air. As he drew, the runes, bright and pristine as they were hung in the air steadily, their brightness egging on Skullius to use them.

Skullius smirked and extend his hand into the space where he had drawn these runes.

Surprisingly, his arm sank in, as if swallowed by a watery, conforming surface of blank space where the runes were drawn on!

Space rippled as Skullius' hand moved around within the unseen fold of the newly created temporary storage. It looked as if his arm had been severed from the elbow if one looked from a side view.

"Nice," Skullius said.

This was the Temporary Storage function of the runes.

The space afforded wasn't too big and Skullius couldn't store things forever in there – there was a time limit of 40 days till his stored items were spat out – but there were benefits to it.

There was no need for an item, a conduit, to use for the act of storing, meaning that Skullius didn't have to worry about losing all his stuff when the medium for storage was harmed. Also, Skullius could access this storage from anywhere. It wasn't like setting up the runes here firmly placed the storage in Fortune. It was anywhere he wanted it to be as long as he assembled the runes correctly!

This was convenient!

Though Skullius already knew, he grew excited to check out what the other runes looked like when he was using them!

Chapter 640: Exploring Convenient Spoils!

Skullius had a lot of fun playing with the Gravel Runes. For the sake of research, as well as amusement, he stored and released objects from the temporary storage to extract more information about the other limits and potential upsides of using this form of spatial containment.

The additional findings were exciting.

Just like spatial storage tools of various kinds, the temporary storage rune network allowed him to store non-living objects and could preserve perishables or items prone to degradation through the

passage of time. Taking advantage of this feature, he tried to store more complex things just to analyse the extent to which he could exploit this new addition to his utilitarian arsenal.

To his surprise, fire, pressurised air, mana, water vapour, among other like-mannered matter could be contained uniquely within this space mainly because Skullius could manually control the shape and size of it – though the aforementioned limit still stood.

Essentially, the storage was conforming, something basic storage rings couldn't do!

In more ways than he had imagined, this was far better than his conventional means of storage, more than he had initially thought at least.

Additionally...

"Can I also...?" Skullius said as he drew the same rune network for temporary storage in the air thrice.

As he imagined, his arm sank into the first established storage. It was the same size as before. He retrieved his hand and extended it into the other network of runes above it and... it also dove in!

This worked a third time with the other rune network as well!

"Hahaha. I'm only 20 times behind that old hag but this is cool too," Skullius chuckled.

Surprisingly, he could summon a limit of three temporary storage spaces, all of them the same size as the first – the size of a small house.

What made this an even more appealing discovery was that these storages, after a close inspection, were linked to Skullius in a more intimate fashion than the storage objects, though the process of access could be said to be a bit more time-consuming since the runes needed to be created every time the user wanted to reach into the storage space.

For lesser efficient users, this could be a detriment.

Luckily, through Hobbu Gogo's memories, Skullius new a way around this drawback, even though he wasn't too slow when summoning the runes.

Removing the attire protecting his torso to reveal toned muscles sculpted under his blameless skin, Skullius, with his finger, began carving the rune network over his abdomen with mana, burning his skin in the process. After the runes were fully drawn above his belly button with a crispy, slightly bloody look to them, Skullius wore a sheepish smile.

"I'll have to make sure that I don't erase this whenever I use [Saint Lumis' Benign Arc]," he said to himself.

Carving the rune network on a surface near a mana source was a great way to shorten the time for activation. In this case, the runes were near Skullius' mana core and the groves he had made over his skin acted as a mechanism to have the mana traced into the form of the rune network quickly.

It wasn't the best solution but it was something. With enough self awareness, it would be nigh instantaneous.

Skullius then drew two more networks on his abdomen and nodded in satisfaction.

"Now, instead of storing excess mana around my core, I can store some more in the temporary storage."

After analysing the temporary storage, Skullius checked the other functions of the Lesser Gravel Runes. Protection was pretty straight forward. Once more, Skullius found the network to have a stacking limit of only three times.

Once the networks for protection – Skullius knew four types – were erected around him, the Hybrid Luman found that the strongest could defend against a total of 10 hits with more or less the same amount of power behind his previous full 30,000 ton raw physical attack.

This wasn't pretty bad in Skullius' opinion, though this version guaranteed no protection against non-physical attacks. The two other types he knew could resist obscure mental attacks and lower forms of debuffs while the last worked best against elements. Sadly, the other high level rune networks were pretty much untouchable with his current Mastery level which would rise in due time for sure.

The reinforcement runes he was currently able to use buffed mana, strength and endurance by an exact factor of 2.5 times and likewise could also be stacked only three times.

At this point, Skullius felt like Ferex who relied on a similar system to strengthen his physical attributes.

Funny.

After inspecting the runes, Skullius drew the Bashful Abomination.

"Ah, dear Master! Are you ready to imprint your own affix?!" the sword shouted enthusiastically.

"Not yet. You're pretty desperate for that, aren't you?"

"Desperate is a strong word, dear Master. I prefer a classier way of depicting my emotions. Like begging or grovelling. That sounds about right. Hmph. I may be made of steel but I'm sensitive," the sword said with a subdued voice leaking bits of bashfulness.

"...Right. Anyway I just wanted to test something out. I get the uses of the [Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art] and [Unmatched Sword Sense] but I want to see what I can do with [Swordmaster's Quiescence]," Skullius said as he removed the cloth around the zhanmadao, revealing its deadly silver chipped blade that was longer than he was tall.

For some reason, Hobbu Bobbu's memories were a bit fuzzy on the use of this skill. Was there some big secret that even [Immoral Authority] couldn't glean?

"Oh! Oh! Do it! Do it!" the Bashful Abomination cried excitedly, urging Skullius despite not knowing what he was talking about.

Skullius laughed and shook his head while feeling a pair of imaginary eyes trying to burn through his skull from Demion's Dance at his waist.

This wasn't the time indulge the jealous sword.

With a drawn out breath, Skullius activated [Swordmaster's Quiescence] and...

His body relaxed.

The state he entered was unnatural, foreign even.

Skullius couldn't see without [Graceless Hunter] but in this moment, he experienced a sensation through his four sensory abilities that gave the illusion that he was not standing on the ground but was floating way up in an unfamiliar, rippling space but without the usual burden of complex thought, worry, anxiety, fear or even heavy judgement.

He felt his figure streak up through a massive, thick yet soft blanket while he held the Bashful Abomination, the relaxation he felt utterly dominating his mind.

Skullius couldn't put together his own thoughts but shockingly, several bundles of ideas and images were fed into his mind.

Before he knew it, mystical sentences started to flow out of his mouth involuntarily.

"The cold blade fashioned in steel, the searing orange piece yet to be carved clean and sharp by the judgement of blunt force..."

"The wind slain under the whispering sharp edge, the seamless trail where the blade descends..."

"The scream of doom on contact, the shivering slide and tight grip only won over by doubtless determination..."

As Skullius muttered, his body moved on its own and gripped the Bashful Abomination firmly in both hands within the strange space.

The Hybrid Luman held up the sword, his left hand leaving the hilt to slide up past the cross guard to affectionately caress the blunt side of the blade.

He intended to swing.

To swing hard.

To swing sharp.

But...

Skullius' <CURSED HEART> beat fast.

Then it beat faster.

When it began beating at its fastest rate, a sudden tremor rushed through his flesh and bone with a treacherous shuddering vibration that shattered the illusion around him!

"Huh?"

Skullius blinked.

The sensation he had been lost in just now vanished. He was holding the Bashful Abomination up but had suddenly stopped.

['Ghost Rending Divine Sword Art' has levelled up!]

['Unmatched Sword Sense' has levelled up!]

['Parting Wave' has levelled up!]

['Elite Sword Play' has levelled up!]

"What the hell...?!" Skullius exclaimed.

Every sword-related skill of his, except [Swindling Death's Dance, had levelled up... just by him using [Swordmaster's Quiescence] once?!

He didn't even use it for the full duration... seemingly.

Seriously, what the hell?!

"Dear Master, are you alright? I'm sorry. I had to pull you out from that trance before you sank in too deep," the Bashful Abomination said apologetically.

Skullius held the sword down, more than a little puzzled.

"Wait, you're the one who stopped the skill? Was that violent feeling at the end your doing?" he asked.

"...Y...yes but please don't be offended, dear master. It's just that... this is how I remember Hobbu Bobbu losing all interest in everything except swordsmanship. He kept drawing himself into this illusion until... until he was addicted to that feeling. I'm bound to you so I can tell what it's like.

I'm sorry I overstepped," the sword explained.

Skullius was silent for a while.

An illusion, huh? A trance.

That was a pretty effective one.

"Is using it once enough to make you... addicted?" Skullius asked the anxious sword.

"No but... with the way things were going, if you used me as you were about to, I feared you might destroy this home of yours with the way you were standing. You'd be fascinated by such power first then...get drunk with it."

"Destroy this... Oh, I see," Skullius said while scratching his head.

Destroying Fortune in a single swing of his sword? Was that what the sword was implying?

That sounded absurd but strangely, he believed it. While in that state... perhaps he could, especially with a Pseudo-Mythical grade sword.

After giving it a bit of thought, Skullius re-checked the description of [Swordmaster's Quiescence] which didn't quite expose what the skill did as well as the experience.

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[Swordmaster's Quiescence (Special) | Lv.31]

A sword master, after reaching a certain calibre can enter a state of flow, peace and immersion within their mastered craft. This state is only a once in a lifetime opportunity for most practitioners but for a true sword master, it is an ability used through simple choice.

Mana Requirements: 20,000 (I) Mana, 1500 (I) every minute.

Duration: 10 minutes

Cooldown: 20 hours

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This description didn't do justice at all to the skill but then again, Skullius had seen several skills he had which had this style of description – barely enlightening.

Was the guidance field unable to fully glean through the secrets of the skill or was it influenced to not give full details? Depending on how one looked at it, these were two different things.

Whichever it was didn't matter though, because this skill was actually incredible!

Skullius paced his attention back to his zhanmadao.

"You didn't overstep. I appreciate you stopping me. There are many things I don't know yet and this is definitely something I should remain wary of," he said, putting his sword at ease.

The Bashful Abomination was exceptionally exhilarated to hear this!

"I'm glad I can be of use, dear master," it said before directing a burst of condescension at Demion's Dance. "Let's see you do anything useful, fancy hilt!"

The green bladed sword hummed in rage.

Skullius chuckled.

Who knew it could be this lively without any humans around?

His mood had been soured a bit by how powerful and dangerous dangerous the abilities he acquired from Hobbu Bobbu could be, so the Hybrid Luman decided to put off testing out the remainder of the spoils from that Cluster – the cauldron, its herbs and Hobbu Gogo's other skills – to explore another new skill he had earned.

The mysterious [Celestial Hack].

Skullius sat down, feeling that this unevolving skill might have quite the kick upon activation and used it.

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[Celestial Hack | Lv. None]

With the Omniscient Thought Cracker as a prerequisite, send your awareness beyond the folds of worlds, of certain Rules and ethereal barriers to visit spaces within the SAME TIME junction, provided a sturdy image as a reference.

Mana Requirements: None.

Duration: 2 minutes

Cooldown: 10 days

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Just to test out what it was capable of, Skullius imagined something he thought to be simple and more vivid to him. The specific image he conjured would not only test the maximum extent of the ability but would be helpful in allowing him to check the status quo related to a particular group at the same time.... if [Celestial Hack] actually worked that was.

"Here goes," Skullius said, putting the image in his head, more specifically within the [Omniscient Thought Cracker] and calling on the might of [Celestial Hack].

In that instant and the several that followed, Skullius found himself stumped, emotional and lost for words with what he saw...