

## Death Guns 761

### 761 Chapter 761

Lucius tried to calm his anger as he accepted the incoming video call.

Immediately right after he accepted the video call, the face of a furious Julius appeared.

"Lucius, do you take my empire's subjects as your guinea pig?" Julius asked, and his voice was not friendly; he skipped every formality and directly asked. The Pope, who was about to play the fool, stopped immediately when he saw the memory stone in Julius's hand, the latter played it, and the entire video was playing. To make matters worse, there was one of their believers, a young child around twelve; he had a pale face and above his head was a sinister floating black seed.

"What do you have to say, Lucius?" Julius asked slowly, as if he didn't want the Pope to miss out on any word.

The Pope closed his eyes, and his eyes turned frosty.

"I don't know what you're talking about. What kind of proof do you have?"

Shameless, the Pope was even more shameless than Alex; even though the proof had been presented, he refused to acknowledge his empire's involvement. He would rather die than acknowledge it. Alex thought he was smart, but by killing the church's members was a mistake; if they were still alive and were handed over to the emperor, things would have become messier; fortunately for him and unfortunately for Alex, he had been too impulsive.

Julius waved his hand, and the boy disappeared from the meeting room before the emperor burst into laughter.

"Hahaha! Lucius, do you take me for a fool?"

Boom!

A terrifying amount of lightning exploded from the emperor's body, turning the meeting room upside down, the sturdy pillars began to show signs of cracking, space was constantly twisting around Julius, even Lucius could feel Julius's threatening aura from the video call, he felt a little bit stuffy even when the man was a thousand kilometers from him.

'As expected of the strongest emperor.' Lucius sighed because of the difference between them but soon smiled internally; soon, he wouldn't have an equal; even Elseria wouldn't be his match after their goddess descended into this world. He just had to endure it a bit more until tomorrow, and everything would be worth it.

"If you have nothing else to say, I'll cut off the communication. I have something urgent to take care of." Lucius said, and he was prepared to cut off the communication; Julius looked at him strangely before concealing his strength; he was the one that cut off the communication first, but before doing that, he left some words behind.

"It's good to pretend, but we will see how long you will pretend. You got it all wrong and soon you'll understand."

The Pope felt a chill run down his back. He didn't know exactly why either, but his fine hairs were standing on end. He immediately called out for someone.

"Gather every information you have on what happened in Avalon right away." The Pope ordered before calling for an immediate meeting.

The seven cardinals and several high priests reunited around the holy table.

"Have you heard what happened in the Drexia empire? Two of our churches were destroyed, our church's members slaughtered." The Pope said right after taking a seat.

"We heard what happened. Holy Father, what should we do? We must not sit idly and do nothing. What would the world think if we let this blasphemy unpunished?" One of the cardinals said, cardinal Pierrot, a muscular man with a mustache.

The other cardinals nodded, the Pope nodded, and right as he was about to continue, he stopped as his communication stone started ringing again. However, because he was in the middle of a meeting, he decided not to receive the call; the other party saw his refusal and sent a vocal message directly into his head through the communication stone.

Lucius's face darkened upon listening to the message, the content of the message was not much, but it came from the emperor of the Lionheart Empire; as the leader of the union of the Beastmen, he asked for an explanation about some discovery, a clown appeared in their empires and revealed a terrible secret. It was exactly like what happened in the Drexia empire.

"Holy father, what is the problem?" Cardinal Pierrot asked after he saw the Pope frowning and his face darkened.

"We are being attacked from all sides." The Pope responded.

"What?" Everyone present was shocked. They knew what the Pope's words meant; it means that this clown whatever was attacking the other empires as well and also revealing their secret.

And when those present came face to face with the reality, their faces darkened; how audacious one had to be to do all of this? It was at this moment they understood that Alex was a madman. It was impossible for him alone to do all of this, but he must have relied on his men and friends; he must have dragged the emperors to his side.

Just imagining how he did all of this while not being present made the cardinals afraid, and they said in unison.

"This young man must be killed at all cost."

The Pope was well aware of the urgency of killing Alex; the young man was too dangerous; just for the sake of one woman, he did all of this?

This type of person was too dangerous to be kept alive, not only because of his terrifying potential but because of his scary connections; the current Alex was like a chess player moving chess pieces as he pleased just to kill one chess piece.

"Send Lazarus to the Far East Empire to eliminate the boy. I bet he would be trying to sneak away now that a big commotion has started. It must have been what he was waiting for." The Pope ordered while ignoring the numerous messages he had received for a while; even the Far East Empire emperor also contacted him.

'He has to die.' More than ever, they must eliminate the man.

Lazarus was their strongest templar knight; the templar knights were special military forces of the Holy Crux empire, only used for their crusade, they were not many, but they were strong. Lazarus was the strongest of all, gifted in the assassination.

One of the cardinals left after receiving the Pope's order, in charge of the military department.

762 Chapter 762

After one of the cardinals left, the meeting continued; they mainly discussed countermeasures against the crisis they were currently facing.

Suddenly someone came running inside the meeting room; it was the man in charge of the empire's intelligence network.

A frail-looking middle-aged man with the appearance of a scholar,

"Holy father, the situation isn't looking good."

"Speak!" The Pope ordered with a frown.

The middle-aged man with the scholar look gulped before taking out a stack of paper and began reading it.

"Not only did we lose two important buildings and our members, but we also lost the donation collected-"

The man had not finished reading the pieces of information collected before the Pope stood up; his face had lost all colors; if previously the damages suffered could have been minimized, losing their donations was a huge matter, but it was not the only thing that made the Pope's face lose color, it was because he thought of a dreadful possibility, what he would do if he were in the other's shoes; finally he understood the last words uttered by Julius.

"Immediately contact every church across the world and order them to hide the donation, not tell them to head back with the donations. Hurry up." Lucius shouted as if he had gone mad.

The cardinals hurriedly took out various communication stones to contact the churches worldwide to warn them, but it was already too late; a desperate cry was heard coming from the other side. Clowns appeared everywhere, destroying the churches and stealing their donations.

Lucius stood there like his soul had left his body; he understood that he had lost big this time; everything was because of one man, one youth. He dealt him such a severe blow he would never forget as long he lives. Lucius didn't blame the emperors and the others for using this opportunity to earn some money; after all, if he were in their shoes, he would have done the same thing; everything was because of that young man.

At this moment, Lucius regretted deeply, not because they had kidnapped Luna, but he regretted having underestimated the boy known as Alexander Kael Touch; he must have eliminated him a long time ago; if he had done that, maybe today's problem would be avoided.

However, it was too late to regret; what needed to be done was to at least cut some loose; Alex had to die, only his death would appease his anger.

Lucius had never been so angry in his life. As proof of the anger that he was feeling at the moment, his lips curved upward slightly, and a slight smile escaped from his mouth.... Just like what happened to many people when their anger reached a certain level, the Pope began to laugh softly as he took a step forward.

"I want him dead by tomorrow night. Send Lazarus with two others templars; I don't mind if you kill one of his women in the process. Also, immediately contact the churches that have not been assaulted yet and order for a temporary retreat. We must not lose any more money." Lucius instructed before disappearing; he went to see how the preparations were going on.

After the Pope left, the cardinals and high priests discussed of countermeasures and succeeded in alerting some of their churches that had not been attacked yet. They were not happy even after preventing more losses because the number of donations they lost was too huge; it surpassed half a million gold coins, an astronomical amount of money.

Just before night arrived, Lazarus and three templars left for the Far East Empire; their goal was to kill Alex. The cardinals went to their respective mansions.

Night finally arrived.

Darkness had descended upon the city . The sun had long hidden itself away beneath the horizon. Tonight it was moonless; the world was dark as if a terrible beast wished to devour the earth.

Above the cloud of the Holy capital were a man and woman. The man was handsome, with black hair and heterochromia eyes. The woman was simply breathtaking; her beauty was out of this world, long silver hair accompanied by beautiful silver eyes.

"And now?" The woman with silver hair asked the young man; he chuckled and said.

"Nothing, we just have to wait. Zero and Alpha must be about to make a move now."

Naturally, the young man was none other than Alex, who had just arrived, and the silver-haired beauty was Silveria. The reason they didn't infiltrate the capital right away was that the empire was on alert and also because Alex wanted to leave the two women, Alpha and Zero complete their mission before infiltrating the capital. He was not in a hurry to rescue his woman as now that he was above the capital, a few miles away from the tower of babel, Alex could feel Luna's presence; she was being held hostage on the highest floor; it would not be easy to get there, but he had the perfect trigger for this, the death of a cardinal would shake the capital, sending it into a frenzy which would be a perfect opportunity for infiltration.

"Huh?" Silveria frowned as her eyes turned northwest, in the direction of the sea. This sea route was used to reach the Far East Empire.

"What is the problem?" Alex asked; unlike Silveria, even after becoming a demigod, his senses didn't become exceptional as Silveria's senses, especially his Divine Sense.

"I felt four strong presences surrounded by a heavy death aura in that direction. If I guess correctly, they must be heading toward the Far East Empire." Silveria explained, the four presences she felt were naturally Lazarus and the three templars sent to assassinate the fake Alex.

Alex chuckled and immediately understood what was going on.

"Those four must have been sent to assassinate me before I reach the Far East Empire. I guess the Pope must have been furious to have decided to do this."

Silveria rolled her eyes at her master; the Pope was right; nobody would have stayed silent after suffering so many attacks. She shook her head and thought that the past few days had been more enjoyable than the time they spent together because Alex showed how smart and vicious he could be once his reverse scale was touched.

Suddenly, Silveria's eyes narrowed, and she smiled.

'It's time. It's about to get interesting. I wonder how he would react after this.' She mumbled while her eyes followed two shadows moving in the darkness.

### 763 Chapter 763

The eastern part of the holy capital was reserved for the cardinals to build their houses; each house was separated by a long distance, sometimes reaching five kilometers.

Seven grand mansions filled the eastern part of the holy capital, forming a beautiful picture.

People knew this part of the capital was forbidden if you were not members of the tower of babel. Since the creation of the empire, nothing happened; nobody dared to attempt an assassination on the capital, firstly because it would be like courting your death and secondly because all the seven Cardinals were strong, all Saint Realm experts, Saints are below Demigod, so nobody would want to mess with such expert.

However, tonight it was about to change; Zero arrived before cardinal Jean's mansion, the second strongest cardinal; it was beautifully built with a touch of nature.

The mansion stood there as if the surrounding nature had embraced it, that the flora flowed within it as much as around it. The architect had loved the trees so much that there was a mighty oak in the center, centuries-old, and a great house had been built around it.

"What a waste for such pig to own it," Sera commented as she infiltrated the mansion, maybe because they were confident that nobody would ever try to assassinate them, or it was because of blind confidence; the security around the mansion was too lass. There was no formation in the walls or near the wall.

Sera easily infiltrated the mansion; the guards were even playing cards obvious to her presence. The mansion was really big; if not for their intelligence network, it would have been hard to locate cardinal Jean's room easily. His room was located deep underground near how hidden chamber where he used to perform his wicked hobby.

Currently, cardinal Jean was enjoying himself; he tied a young lady around fourteen against a cross and was raping her.

"Ahhh! Please stop, ahhhhhhh, stop it, it hurts, please...." the young lady whose skin was filled with injuries kept crying, begging for help, but the cardinal never stopped swinging his plump waist as he slammed into her, pinching her undeveloped chest. Earrings were piercing through her pink and swollen nipples; at the end of these earrings was a chain.

"Uhihihi! Keep crying, keep shouting, it excited me, your lowly sow be grateful that I'm willing to purify your dirty body with my pure body." Cardinal Jean murmured like a degenerate as he rammed into the young lady's sacred land.

Slowly the young lady did not emit any sound; life slowly left her body as she had given up; she would rather die than suffer like this. For the outside, the cardinals and members of the Holy church were noble existences, she thought like that one time, but the reality had shocked her; they are the lowest scums existing. For example, this man above her, adored by many, was just a sick pervert whose hobby was raping young girls barely fifteen.

'Oh! What have I done to deserve this? If there is a goddess, please save me.' the young lady made one last desperate plea to life.

Meanwhile, cardinal Jean frowned as the girl beneath him was showing less and less reaction; it would be boring this way. Cardinal Jean grinned evilly and was about to completely heal the young girl, even her hymen, before raping her again when out of the blue, he felt something penetrating his body.

The cardinal's body shook violently for a moment, and he vomited blood; he immediately jumped off the young girl, putting some distance between them.

He saw a girl dressed in black standing there; her beautiful lips were visible.

'Assassin!' Cardinal Jean thought and felt chill, but still calmed down.

"How do you enter here?" he asked, but Sera ignored him and scanned the young girl; she would not die. She heaved a sigh of relief, and her eyes turned frighteningly calm.

Cardinal Jean jumped in fright as he saw this; he hurriedly asked.

"W-what do you want?"

While asking this question, he secretly fished out a small scroll from the spacial ring around his finger; it was an instant teleportation scroll. The teleportation range was not too wide, but in his current situation, it would greatly help him. If he were to go back into the hall, this assassin would be dead meat. The reason why the cardinal didn't want to fight here was that he didn't wish to destroy his sacred place where he would come to enjoy his hobby and also because he didn't wish for too many people to let about this place.

While clutching the small scroll and secretly sending mana into it, ready to activate it at any moment, the cardinal waited for the assassin to answer his question; it was a pity; if she had been younger by a few years, it would have been perfect, after capturing her he would thoroughly discipline her into an obedient bitch.

In the darkness, Sera laughed as if she was baring her fangs and brandishing her claws. She looked at cardinal Jean and calmly made her request,

"Hand over your life."

Bold, too bold, the young lady lying on the ground was shocked by Sera's demand. Normally, an assassin would strike its target, not speak as Sera did; she wondered how the cardinal would react.

Cardinal Jean laughed as if he had heard the funniest joke before stopping abruptly.

"You want my life? Come take my life, you fool."

After saying those words, he crushed the instant teleportation scroll, and golden light enveloped his body, and he got teleported away.

"Nooooo!"

The young lady lying on the cross shouted in despair, the assassin had missed her chance, but upon hearing the following words uttered by the assassin, she was shocked.

"Fool!" Sera said after the cardinal ran away. It was precisely what she was aiming for; there was no doubt she would have killed him if she wanted, just that it would not be easy, but her goal was not only to kill the cardinal, it was to completely crush the cardinal, meaning killing him alongside his subordinates, only this way she would feel like she completed Alex's mission.

"Take this!" Sera fed the young girl a healing potion after removing her from the cross and covering her body.

Just as she was about to leave, the young lady held her hand and said.

"Be careful."

Sera nodded, "I will be back."

Then she vanished.

764 Chapter 764

Cardinal Jean appeared in the middle of a big hall after crushing the teleportation scroll. Someone stepped forward and put a cloth on him.

"Good, quickly calls all the guards here." the cardinal ordered without looking back.

"We are all already present." The head guards replied, and the cardinal frowned.

"Huh?!"

Finally, the cardinal scanned the hall, and when his eyes landed on the corpse with a missing head, he immediately understood why the hall was filled with guards; instantly, his face darkened, and he shouted.

"Shit! Her goal is to lure us all here."

After he said those words, the luminaes lighting the room exploded, and the hall plunged into darkness.

Everyone present became tense as they gripped their weapons, ready to defend at any moment.

Suddenly, the hall got lighted again, but this time by the cardinal; he used his light element, activating his light domain.

The guards felt like they were bathing in holy light; it was a nice sensation; they wished to let go and never wake up, but they knew now wasn't the time to be selfish; they forced their eyes open, trying to search for the enemy, however, they were not able to quickly find her until the cardinal pointed above them, Sera was floating in the air.

The cardinal finally understood that this assassin was not weak; at least she was in the Saint realm; if this was true, then it was bad news for him. Cardinal Jean was panicking, not sure of his chance of survival; having indulged in lust every day for the past seven days, his strength was not what it used to be; at the moment, he was slightly stronger than a Grandmaster, facing a Saint realm assassin at his current level would be tantamount to suicide. How said that having sex every day was good for the health? It is only when you don't abuse it; at the moment, he regretted he must have restrained himself a little bit.

Cardinal Jean quickly shook his head; there was no need to cry over spilled milk; what needed to be done now was to survive.

He tried his best to calm down his fear but failed; his voice was hurried and hoarse as he said.

"Purify, purify this heretic!"

He threw a spear made of light at Sera, who dodged. Immediately on the ground, the guards unsheathed their weapons.

Finally, Sera made a move. Her straight figure moved forward in the air.

"Shadow of Death!"

Shadow began to gather around her and form a perfect copy of her.

She was walking, and so was her shadow.

The extremely cold and cruel killing intent surged like a raging tide.

Countless people among the guards flew in the air.

Sera was moving.

The shadow was also moving.

The shadow, with the perfect copy of Sera's actions, was a machine specially designed for killing.

The big hall turned silent, and darkness enveloped the hall again, trying to devour the only source of light inside the hall.

Then she disappeared; her shadow also mimicked her action and vanished.

Fresh blood flowed down.

The torn corpses and pieces of flesh kept falling everywhere.

Tribulation's face was expressionless as if she had never been as serious as she was then in her entire life. She sternly moved forward, slaughtering, looking deeply focused.

Everyone was like an ant in front of her. It didn't matter.

Level 50, level 70, level 80, Level 90! Level 100!

Zero (Sera) always went all out for each of her opponents.

One strike.

With only one strike, no matter who stood in front of her, the person would be turned into a splatter of flesh and blood.

She was calm and quiet, but she marched forward with an indomitable will! The will to kill. She was so accurate, so deadly that each blood splatter was a beautiful piece of art. She was like the pinnacle of what an assassin should be. Fast, accurate, and deadly.

It was a beautiful bloody party animated by one woman, the one known as Zero, the strongest assassin Elseria ever created.

"Zero!!!" Cardinal Jean mumbled as he fell on his butt, he was sacred beyond. The Pope had said one time.

"I don't fear assassins, but there are two assassins I feared most: Zero and Alpha. The first is dangerous; I hope she never comes for your life; if she comes, then I can only wish good luck."

The cardinals and high priests laughed at that time because they knew those two would never dare to accept a mission to assassinate them as it would be declaring war on the Holy Crux empire, something Elseria hailed as the strongest wouldn't want.

And yet this nightmare was currently in front of him, slaughtering the men he painstakingly nurtured like they were cattle. They have miscalculated; the young man known as Alexander was dangerous beyond their wildest dreams. He succeeded in hiring Zero; his connection with Elseria must have made things easier, but it was his wish to hire her, and Elseria complied.

'Does this means if he wished for the strongest adventurers, the Sain rank one, to join him, Elseria would accept?'

Cardinal Jean thought of a certain possibility. He felt goosebumps rising all over his body. He almost choked on his breath. He'd sensed a sudden spike of alarm because of this thought. He must not die here; he must go back to convey this thought; he would tell the pope that they had wholly underestimated Alex; he was far more dangerous than they would imagine.

"Bellad, come out!" Cardinal Jean shouted and decided to use his trump card. Every cardinal had one; it was why they were not afraid of assassination; the death knight was there.

Sera did not pursue the guards that retreated, afraid of her. She was perfectly calm as her brown eyes zeroed on a particular spot; she had been waiting for this moment. The first plan was to lure everyone

here as she had already sealed the mansion; nobody could go out or communicate with the outside world; the second step was to slaughter many, scaring the cardinal to use his final trump card, the death knight.

"Finally, you are out," Sera mumbled as the corners of her lips couldn't help but tilt upward.

765 Chapter 765

Somewhere on the continent, at the headquarter of the Chaos organization, in a dark palace hall, the lord of the chaos organization sat on his throne, his chin resting on his hand.

Suddenly, someone entered and kneeled before the man.

"Greetings! Lord Thanos, I have come to make a report." The man that arrived declared with his head lowered.

Lord Thanos, whose face could not be seen, nodded as if to say go ahead.

The man immediately began to tell Lord Thanos the latest news.

"I see, how interesting. We know how outstanding he was but think he was this smart? No wonder Lord dragon was so interested in him. Don't do anything. Making the Holy Crux empire suffer is advantageous to us." Lord Thanos declared after hearing about Alex's exploits.

"Where are Incursio and Leonardo?" Lord Thanos asked.

"We don't know their exact location." The messenger replied, and Lord Thanos felt compelled to massage his forehead.

"That girl is a real troublemaker. Send someone to ask her to come back together with Leonardo. It's time to use them as carriers. The Lord is getting impatient." Lord Thanos ordered, and the messenger nodded and immediately disappeared to carry out his orders.

Once alone, Lord Thanos sighed and left his throne; strangely, his face didn't look old; it was extremely young, and he was slightly older than Alex's group. After putting on a mask, he disappeared; he was heading toward their Lord. Despite knowing that their Lord knew almost everything happening on the continent, he must still go there to inform him of the recent news.

En route, Lord Thanos looked in a certain direction; in that direction was the dungeon where Elseria, Freya, and Armstrong were trapping Zero, Incursio's big brother.

For an instant, Lord Thanos wanted to go there but knew he would be falling into the enemy's trap if he were to go there. With Elseria's strength, no, Typhania's strength, it would be easy to kill Zero no matter how great the latter was. Still, she chose not to do so simply because she wanted to use this opportunity to lure another big shot and kill this big shot together with Zero.

Unfortunately, Lord Thanos had seen through her plan as she had seen through his but didn't have the choice but take a gamble. Elseria knew she was being lured away but still chose to go there; this could only mean one thing, she was confident enough to stop them, but Lord Thanos thought that this thinking was naive; as a former survivor of that war or not, she had underestimated them, and for this mistake, she would pay a greater price. Well, she was already paying for this mistake.

They had recovered four keys; the fifth key would be acquired soon. This key was located deep in a dungeon on the Elven continent. It was a high elf, a former member of the elder's council, who was sent to recover the key. Elseria (Typhania) knew this person well; unfortunately, she was trapped in a dungeon, unable to leave; except for her, nobody could stop the man they sent after strengthening him.

"Hehehehe! In this round, you have already lost Typhania." Lord Thanos mumbled with a smile, but suddenly his expression changed. He felt a presence that seemed awfully similar to Incursio and Zero. Just as he was about to make a move and locate this presence, the latter vanished like he was an illusion, shocking Lord Thanos.

One had to know that he was extremely strong, one of the strongest existences right now, but he could not locate someone.

Naturally, that presence Lord Thanos was trying to locate was none other than Alice. She noticed Lord Thanos's gaze and immediately acted, activating one of her trump cards, void teleportation. Not many could walk into the void, which was a higher level of space element; the void could be said to be the true essence of the universe. Not many could access it; Alex and Noire were among those who could access the void. Noire offered something to Katherine, a void teleportation scroll, and it was this thing that saved Alice; after crushing the scroll, she was immediately sent inside the void, thus successfully escaping the calamity known as Lord Thanos.

There was no doubt nothing good awaited her if she were ever to get caught; she would return to being a guinea pig, a fate she wouldn't want at any cost; it had been extremely hard to leave if not thanks to Alex, while she escaped from someone else control to end up under another person control, the difference between those two was fundamentally different as being under Alex's control was far more good than being under the Chaos organization control. There was no experiment; she lived as she pleased and even made a friend; she would never exchange this life for anything.

So Alice, immediately after entering the void, headed toward the demon's continent; from time to time, she would leave the void before re-entering it again. The purpose being her action was to draw Lord Thanos's attention, like that Lilith, who was still behind, would quickly pass.

Naturally, Lord Thanos noticed Alice reappearing and disappearing; he frowned; although he wanted to catch her, to dissect her to know how this unknown ability works, he knew this was not his priority; as for Alice's direction, he could speculate her goal. However, he didn't inform Lucifer; this would serve as a test and also as punishment; the boy was becoming greedy; lately, and this would serve as a good punishment to let him know his place.

"Don't disappoint me, girl; you and your accomplices must cause some damage to that ambitious boy." Lord Thanos mumbled before leaving. He was talking about Alice and her group; while he didn't notice Lilith's presence, he knew Alice was not alone. Whoever this group must be, at least they must make Lucifer suffer a small loss; if not, the next they met, he would kill them in the most painful way.

766 Chapter 766

Back in the holy capital, in cardinal Jean's mansion.

"Finally, you are out," Sera mumbled as the corner of her lips couldn't help but tilt upward. She had been waiting for this man to show up. She heard about them, the death knights, beings neither dead nor

alive; they are hovering between life and death. To create them, the Holy Crux empire used a forbidden technique that mixed black magic and holy magic (Dark and Light elements). For a church preaching holiness, it was quite ironic to use such a technique.

At the same time cardinal Jean shouted, Bellad's figure finally emerged from the darkness.

Before today, Bellad had never thought he would fear anyone. As an expert who was infinitely close to the middle of the Saint Realm, he was never afraid of any battles, under any circumstances. After all, even if he couldn't win, he could still leave the battlefield calmly. He had been created without the emotion known as fear.

But at this moment, he was facing Zero. He didn't want to admit it, but he had to admit his inner fear. An unknown emotion he had never felt.

This fear was so strong that it was extremely difficult for him to take a single step.

This was the opponent Bellad didn't want to meet the most.

Zero, like this...

When someone fought her, it wasn't a battle at all.

Instead, it was a life-and-death gamble. You either kill her or die.

He had faced many assassins, all of them died under his hand, but the woman before him was different from anything he had ever faced; compared to Zero, those assassins he killed were like trash.

"Sigh!" Bellad sighed before attacking. He reached out his hand, and dark mist exploded from his hand and immediately covered those guards behind him.

"Ahhhh!"

"Why? Ahhhh!"

Endless cries soon followed when those guards got covered by dark mist, they aged at a visible rate like something was sucking away their vitality, and soon they were turned into mummies, dying with unwillingness.

Cardinal Jean had retreated to somewhere safe and tried to contact the Holy church to ask for assistance but failed several times; he could only give up. He decided to wait for Bellad to kill or weaken Zero (Sera); he would use this opportunity to recuperate; summoning a death knight to fight was not without a cost. He had to pay up with his vitality. Currently, the cardinal Jean's plump body had thinned down considerably to almost a skinny level; he had fallen from two levels, but he didn't regret it as level could be recovered like his vitality by giving up a part of his vitality and strength, Bellad, the death knight had gotten stronger, his current strength should surpass middle Saint Realm, getting closer to the late Saint Realm.

"Kill her." The cardinal shouted in a hoarse voice.

Bellad nodded before launching an attack on Sera with his bastard sword.

A black mass was shot at Sera. It was like a sword strike with a sharpness that was powerful enough to tear space apart.

In front of this powerful attack coming from a powerful Saint Realm expert, Sera was completely calm. Usually, assassins avoid head-on clash but seeing Sera's calm face, Bellad knew she was going for a frontal clash.

Suddenly, Sera reached out with one hand. The shadow next to her attacked at the same time.

The two attacked with their sword. A powerful wind storm was created with their combined might.

Then the wind storm floated in front of Sera before it was condensed into one place.

**BOOM!**

The whole hall shook; the cardinal was sent flying while Bellad was pushed a couple of steps back.

The next second, blood flowed out from his mouth; he had been in that exchange.

Bellad suddenly gritted his teeth. His body was shot into the air, leaving countless afterimages behind him. Like a bolt of lightning, he charged towards Zero.

In the moment when he seemed to become extremely fast as well as slow, black mist gathered around him to form armor.

Sera glanced at him.

Her eyes were extremely calm, devoid of emotion, life, and death.

Then she raised her palms.

The black shadow around her dissipated, seemingly to have merged with her sword.

Suddenly, a sharp sword sound filled with a killing intent was heard within the hall; the already dark hall turned darker.

Then Sera's sword gave out a bright light in an instant. The sword light flew out from her hand like a shooting star.

Silently, all the space in front of Sera was completely twisted, and then torn apart by this sword. The silent void was directly spread forward along with the sword light.

It was truly beautiful; even the cardinal couldn't help but focus on this sword.

Meanwhile, countless afterimages merged with Bellad's true body.

The darkness swallowed everything, and the sword light appeared behind him.

Space swallowed up his figure. Roaring, he threw his bastard sword at Sera, who easily dodged it.

Bellad then threw a punch forward, but it was thrown into space.

The silent punch suddenly roared in the silent space twisting around them.

Bellad's eyes were focused and serious. His body was constantly vibrating in the air. The shadow of his fist, which carried endless power, was instantly filled with every piece of darkness.

The silent and dark space was lit up.

A piece of hazy and cold light was being spread with his constant punches, just like stars in the sky.

Starlight appeared in the silent space.

The starlight flickered, mysterious and boundless.

Charge!

Without any hesitation, Bellad immediately began to charge forward at full speed.

It was as if the endless starlight suddenly lighted up the whole hall.

The dark space was torn into pieces.

The two of them were getting closer to each other.

Then abruptly, Sera's sword transformed into a shadow that attacked him with a dagger. It was too sudden, but Bellad was able to react instantly. He threw a punch toward his back, hoping to make the shadow give up, but unfortunately, she didn't give up.

Bellad's pupils dilated because Sera had disappeared, and the next word he heard made his world stop moving.

Like a ghost, Sera appeared behind the cardinal.

"Death's hand!"

"When-" Cardinal Jean could not finish his words before his eyes lost their luster; an invisible hand crushed his heart. It was instant death.

At the same time, Bellad was like a broken kite falling from the air; his head was smashed against the stone floor. Because his master died, he also died following him. The two had forgotten about an essential fact; at the end of the day, Sera was still an assassin. Everything she did in battle had one end goal to kill her enemy using the assassin way. They thought she would try to kill them in a frontal clash, but they were wrong.

Just like that, a cardinal died.

"Mission completed!"

Sera had almost run out of mana, every action she performed since the beginning, since the moment she infiltrated the mansion, was this moment. She knew what would happen once a death knight was called out; using her frontal clash as a decoy, she sneaked behind the weakened cardinal and killed him—a perfect assassination.

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Above the holy capital, Alex and Silveria were floating, watching the scenery below them.

Because he couldn't see what was happening inside cardinal Jean's mansion, only Silveria could, Alex asked.

"Are they done yet?"

He was asking about Sera, and Alpha sent to assassinate two cardinals.

Silveria did not immediately answer. She seemed to be thinking about something; she appeared as though to be in a trance.

"Silveria?" Alex called out but still no reaction. He could only touch her to bring her back to reality.

"I'm sorry, I was thinking about something fun. Mission completed."

Alex was delighted, but Silveria's following words made him frown.

"We expected the formation under the seven mansions to be broken once two cardinals died, but from what I can see, it didn't seem it will work like that."

Alex sighed; the reason he targeted the cardinals was not only because he wanted to make the Holy Crux empire suffer a severe loss but because the seven mansions formed a grand formation protecting the tower of babel in the distance also, there was a secret passageway under the sewer. To use this passageway to sneak into the tower, they had to deactivate the formation protecting the tower. This formation was a copy of Avalon's shield formation.

Just as Alex was thinking about a solution, Silveria unexpectedly offered him a solution.

"Those two can't kill another cardinal. Killing those two cardinals wasn't easy. Besides, one of the cardinals is growing suspicious; he is the strongest of them. He will activate the formation to trap whoever has infiltrated it inside. I will act; time for some fun."

"Okay, please help."

"I will," Silveria responded before vanishing. Alex could only wait.

Meanwhile, inside the biggest mansion out of the seven was Cardinal Pendragon, the strongest of the seven. He was a man of few words; tonight was not different than usual, but he felt like something was not right, his instinct told him so, and he was a man that always believed in his instinct. If his instinct told him that something was not right, then it was true.

Cardinal Pendragon was about to activate the formation when suddenly his body jolted. He felt goosebumps rising all over his body as alarm bells rang in his heart.

"Who are you? Come out?" Cardinal Pendragon roared; he was not calm as he was a few seconds ago. He couldn't be blamed; the being that managed to sneak into his chamber must not be anything ordinary.

"Oh! Not bad. I left a clue, and you were able to notice it quickly. Your instinct is not to be underestimated." A beautiful voice rang out not too far from him, and when he laid his eyes on the owner of this voice, his body shuddered; he had never seen a woman so beautiful; he momentarily forgot to breathe; this would have continued if not because Silveria's eyes were locked onto him.

Unprecedented feelings of fear arose, and Cardinal Pendragon felt his scalp blistering. He had goosebumps all over his body. This was the second time in two minutes.

Without hesitation, he summoned his gift, a golden spear. He thrust his spear forward with all his might; a light ray was shot out from the spear tip like a laser beam, going straight to Silveria.

"Nice reaction, but unfortunately, you met me," Silveria said with a sigh, almost as if she were pitying Pendragon.

The cardinal understood that something was wrong; just as the beam arrived five meters from Silveria, it simply vanished.

"Huh?" Cardinal Pendragon was shocked, but he was not going to let this affect him; he knew instantly the moment he saw this woman whose beauty was out of this world that he was not her match; he must take the initiative to distract her until he succeeded in activating the formation. Once he succeeded, no matter how strong she might be, she would die once trapped as every cardinal, and high priest would swarm over and strike her. Even without the Pope coming, they could kill this mysterious woman who should be the origin of the uneasiness he had been feeling.

"Heretic!" Shouted the cardinal to destabilize his enemy while at the same time unleashing his mighty domain. The room turned white before turning into a white flame; this white flame looked holy.

Suddenly, cardinal Pendragon raised his hand.

A thick palm symbolizing absolute power was raised with his gesture.

"Go to hell."

With a loud voice, Pendragon's palm started to fall.

The distance between them could be traversed in an almost straight line.

In an instant, the domain around Pendragon began to break, to his dismay. It was at that moment that he saw the smirk on Silveria's face.

"I know what you are trying to do." Silveria's voice appeared behind Pendragon; then he heard a sound.

"Buzz!"

An extremely harsh sound suddenly passed through the void. This sharp sound was only a fleeting and soft sound for ordinary people. But in the ears of an expert, whose willpower was absolutely focused in the combat state, it was like a steel needle directly piercing the ears.

Silveria completely shattered the domain around Pendragon, suddenly appearing behind him. But before he could change do anything, one of his arms holding the formation eye was sliced off and torn into pieces.

Bang!

Pendragon, who had not completely recovered from the last attack, got slapped onto the ground; he couldn't muster any strength; the surrounding mana and his own mana seemed to have vanished.

"W-who... are you?" With great difficulty, cardinal Pendragon managed to squeeze out those words. Currently, he didn't look like the strongest cardinal, the second strongest of the empire, at all. He looked like a child getting bullied by an adult. He fully understood that he was not this woman's match; she was a monster beyond his understanding, capable of canceling his domain and magic.

'Wait a minute, don't tell me?'

Suddenly, cardinal Pendragon remembered something, and his eyes widened in horror; he understood.

"He is here!" He murmured with a pale face.

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"He is here!" He murmured with a pale face.

Silveria smiled as if to acknowledge cardinal Pendragon's words.

"Hahaha! We got it all wrong." Cardinal Pendragon said with a self-deprecating smile. It was ironic that they thought they had the initiative all along, but it never occurred to them that the boy known as Alexander Kael Touch was more than the eyes could meet. He was more intelligent than them; once he used his brain, he was more dangerous than his talent as a ranker. They thought he was going to the Far East Empire, but in truth, it was a lie; he misled them into thinking that he was heading to the Far East Empire; how did he do that? Did he think of all these plans himself?

He had to know. He knew his fate was sealed, he would die here, but even he had to know, it would be like granting him his last wish before his death.

"Did he create these plans on his own?" Finally unable to endure the burning curiosity, Pendragon asked; he expected Silveria not to satisfy his demand, but unexpectedly she responded.

"Yes, nobody gave him those ideas. I was quite shocked when he came up with so many ideas. To tell you the truth, I was excited. My master is smart, he could do a lot of things if he put his mind to it, but for some unknown reason, he seemed to be hesitating, almost as if he was restraining himself, as if he was afraid of something. I don't know what he is afraid of, but I found it wasteful not to use such a brilliant mind. When I thought the situation would never change, you guys unexpectedly provoked the beast, and he got awakened. I'm grateful to you guys, after this, he would be the same anymore. It is exactly what we needed; a soft-hearted master would die while a calculative one capable of alternating between gentleness and cruelty is welcomed."

Cardinal Pendragon widened his eyes; from Silveria's casual speech, he learned a lot of things; for example, this mysterious woman, this mighty woman, was under that boy. He also learned that they are the ones that awaken Alex to be what he has become right now. It was somewhat ironic when he thought about it, but he would not accept everything without fighting back; while he could not fight using his body, he could use his mouth. Words can hurt as much as fists and weapons hurt.

"Do you think you have won? We sent our strongest assassin to kill the imposter going to the Far East Empire with Alex's women, and while we might have miscalculated you appearing here, there is nothing you can do even with your strength. The goddess will descend you have already lost. Hahahaha! I'll wait for you in hell, hahaha."

Pendragon was trying to appear strong; unfortunately, this was nothing but the last attempt coming from a loser refusing to admit that he ultimately lost.

Looking at the man wriggling below her feet, Silveria let out a sad sigh.

"You know I understand your feeling, and I know what you are trying to do, but unfortunately, you have miscalculated. Indeed, it's not my master over there; it's another person impersonating him, but to think you could kill her is the funniest joke I have ever heard. If not restrained by her master's strength, none of you in this world would be her match, now that her master is a Demi-God, a part of her strength would come back, and with that, you assassin stand no chance; it would be a massacre. There is no doubt this time you will suffer severe damage like never before. Losing two cardinals, no, with you, it would be three. What a terrible thing."

Silveria's words were like knives repeatedly piercing his heart. The impostor was stronger than them, which means the assassination mission failed; another shocking piece of news was Alex reaching the Demi-God realm; not many could reach this realm their entire life, even he was not sure how long it would take him to reach that realm but unexpectedly a young man barely twenty became a Demi-God. It was unheard of; not even the past otherworlders were this fast; this young man was a real monster. He was the definition of what a true monster should be.

When Pendragon was overwhelmed by these two pieces of news, the third piece of news was more shocking than the previous two. Among the seven Cardinals, three (he was included) died. The cardinal fell into despair; just as he thought he had hit bottom, Silveria's following words plunged him into the abyss of no return.

"Oh! My bad, it's now four cardinals out of seven as my Big sister acted. You guys are quite unfortunate, you know?" Silveria said as she noticed Nyx's presence not too far away. She must have gone out to kill another cardinal after seeing her doing it.

"Hahahaha! Kill me. Even if we lose four cardinals, everything will be ok as long our goddess descended into this world. She will be the strongest, and we will rise from ashes like a phoenix to dominate the world and soon the rest of the universe." Maybe he finally understood that his time had arrived; cardinal Pendragon had become talkative.

"Another one with a delusion of grandeur. Too bad the universe is against you. You are only his stepping stone, nothing more, nothing less." Silveria declared.

"What do you mean?" Pendragon asked, fearful of the answer he would receive; for some unknown reason, his heart began to beat too fast like a drum.

"I don't mean anything just your so-called goddess would not make, the real gods above have decreed so, and because my master wanted her dead, nothing could save her. Since the beginning, you guys are mistaken about something; you are not the chess player but the chess pieces instead. Goodbye."

After saying those words, Silveria canceled her ability, and Pendragon's body became overflowed with mana.

Boom!

His body exploded except for his head. At the same time, inside the tower, the Pope faltered; he heard the sound of four souls' crystals breaking simultaneously, his face turned pale, and before he could say a word, the goddess trying to possess Luna spoke first.

"He is here."

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The Pope sensed when four cardinals died as their soul's crystals were broken simultaneously; his face turned pale instantly as he understood what this meant.

And before he could open his mouth, the fake goddess said anxiously.

"He is here. We must hurry up and complete the ceremony before he tries anything else."

The goddess had never been so anxious as she was now. Like the others, she had utterly underestimated Alex, thinking before he could do anything, they would have long since completed the ceremony.

Truth be told, she never took Alex seriously, never took him as a threat. Although where she comes from, his talent could be said to be rare, it was nothing; she had seen many things so naturally to her, Alex's plans wouldn't be worth worrying over.

She understood that she was completely wrong, and she also sensed their desire to get rid of her. The fake goddess was talking about the real gods and goddesses watching over the worlds; the reason why she had not acted all these years wasn't only because of the lack of suitable vessel to possess but also because she couldn't recklessly act for fear of bringing down their wrath upon her, as far she knew she was not their match, none of the powerhouses in her hometown could do anything against them maybe only true powerhouses in the higher worlds could do anything against them.

So she had been cautiously acting since she didn't wish to be killed, and finally, after a long time of waiting, she found the perfect vessel, and she knew she was an otherworlder like Alex and the rest; she didn't immediately act probing here and there just to see would the Gods would react, surprisingly they didn't react, and she took this as signal and acted but who would have thought that the situation would turn out like this? At least she hadn't; it was why she became anxious.

"Don't worry, we will begin immediately. I have already activated the hidden mechanism inside the tower; I understand what he was trying to do and how he succeeded in killing four of my men. Those two must have helped him."

After the initial panic, he was now calm; the only emotion remaining on his face was his determination to carry out his mission at all costs. He quickly analyzed the situation and concluded that Alex must have received their help.

"You are talking about Zero and Alpha, right?" The fake goddess asked.

Unexpectedly, she was even aware of their existence.

"Yes! I'll make them pay. How dare Elseria do this to me? Unforgivable, but that's not the point; let's finish the ceremony for your descent, oh! My goddess."

"Good, do not disappoint; my soul is getting ready for the transfer. Go check the last preparations." The fake goddess ordered, and the Pope nodded before disappearing.

All the remaining cardinals, the high priests, and the death knights were summoned to the tower. Their mission was to stop anyone from going past the fourth floor.

At the same time, under the tower, inside the sewers, the figure of Alex and two beautiful women could be seen. Those two were Sera and Althea, codename Zero, and Alpha. They are the strongest assassins currently in the world.

"You two should go back, but if you truly want to help me, I can't say no," Alex said with a fake smile.

Both girls rolled their eyes at him, Sera said.

"Do you see? Didn't I tell you he is no good? You better not work for him." Sera said, trying to sound persuasive but failed.

"What Althea wished to work for me? I'm honored. Feel free to apply; you won't be disappointed, and you will see your sister often. Isn't it a good deal?" Alex said; the moment he saw her, that feeling he had when they first met came back; her purple eyes were exactly like Lilith's eyes; Silveria had confirmed she was Lilith's big sister.

"How do you know?" Althea stopped, smiled, and asked. Sera was also curious as she didn't think she had left any clue that could indicate Althea was Lilith's big sister.

"Intuition, you could say so. The first time I saw you, I thought you two looked alike, but I couldn't confirm my guess because you only appeared and left right after taking Sera with you. Today I saw you and looked closely at you. I concluded you two are sisters. Still, I was not completely sure of my guess, but just now, your reaction confirmed my guess. You are really Lilith's sister." Alex said with a teasing smile, it was a trap, and she fell for it.

"Damn it, you are quite something. No wonder our proud little princess over here falls for you." Althea wanted to tease Sera, but the latter face darkened, and she glared at Althea. She felt goosebumps rising all over her body, and she hurriedly said.

"Ok, ok, I admit defeat stop looking at me with those scary eyes; they might give me a heart attack."

"Humph!" Sera harrumphed and continued walking; they had left the sewers and arrived in a small room with a simple-looking black door.

"We are here," Sera called out to them. Althea, who was about to say something stopped; she would continue after they entered the tower.

However, Sera's following words made them frown.

"Wait for a while; it seems that the Pope acted faster than we thought. He activated the secret mechanism. I-"

"And?" Althea asked. She was started to get frustrated; although no sewer's water had touched her, she wished to quickly go into the tower to take a nice and clean bath before the killing party. If the Pope knew this, he would have puked blood because of anger.

"Can you let me finish first?" Sera asked, annoyed.

"Sorry, please do continue." Althea apologized.

Alex watched everything from the side without saying a word; it was more wiser this way.

"I will crack the mechanism in a few minutes; just wait over there; you can talk with Alex if you are bored," Sera explained before turning to face the door, and she started to crack the mechanism.

"Alright, I'll talk with Alex."

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Alright, I'll talk with Alex in the meantime." Althea said before approaching Alex.

"You are pretty awesome, you know that?" She said while offering Alex orange juice.

"Sorry, it's the only drink I have."

"No, it's not bad. I like orange juice. Thank you." Alex took the orange juice and drank it before answering her previous question.

"Well, I'm not that awesome; I'm doing this for the sake of my woman. Nobody messes up with my family. I might be harmless most of the time, but it doesn't mean I don't bite; I make anyone suffer hell if they touch my family; it is my reverse scale."

When Alex was saying those words, his voice was so chilling that Althea's body trembled, and she thought it was a good thing I'm not his enemy.

"Is my sister included in your family?" She couldn't help but ask this question, and Alex's response was immediate.

"Of course, she is always part of my family." He added nothing more; however, it was all Althea needed to feel relieved. At least her sister had someone strong to count on; she was glad.

"Do you want to work for me," Alex asked, bringing the subject back to what they were talking about before they arrived here.

Althea nodded with a troubled expression.

"I wish, but it will not be easy. My-"

"Don't worry about your master. I'll talk to her." Alex cut her off and tried to persuade her, but she was still hesitating.

"It's because she didn't know how to inform her sister, how to approach her." Sera's voice reached his ears. She informed him of the reason why Althea was hesitating.

"I see." Alex immediately understood what he must do, but before he could speak, Althea made a weird request.

"Can I see your status?"

Alex was confused at first but soon nodded.

"Sure!" He said. If this could convince her to work for him, it would be a cheap price to pay.

[Alexander (Alex) Kael Touch]

Class: Magic Gunslinger

Age: 19

Male

Race: High Human/Asura

Rank 15

Level 144 [Demi-God]

Experience Value (XP): 300000/ 5000300

MP: 12000/12000

Magic: Time/????

ATK: 3220

DEF: 3020

AGI: 2820 (+200)

INT: 2920

LUK: 2030

BP: 40

SP: 20

Gift: Death Guns/Eternal Chain

Skills: [Item box Level 4] [Swift Fingers Max] [Divine Sense Level 5] [Throwing knife Level 5] [Dark Vision Level 2] [Dual Wielding Level 2] [Accel Level 5] [Knife Art Level 4] [Link Level 5] [Gun Art Level Level 10] [High Regeneration Level 9] [Mana Synchronisation Level 10 Max] [Crimson's Bullet] [Shadow Shift Level 5] [Blade Dance Level 4] [Aurora Bullet Level 1] [Drifter Level 3] [Meteor Bullet Level 5] [Steel body Level 3] [Mana Convergence Level 1] [???

Special Abilities: [Language Comprehension][Danger Sense] [Overdrive] [Death's Eye] [Envisage] [Erase] [Magic Bullet] [Snatch] [Hellsing!!!] (New) [Xerox] [Death Bullet (???)] [Tempus Infinitum] (Time abilities) [Eye of Truth Level 5] [Asura Form] [Mana's Body] [Void Steps] [Asura's Might] [Devour] [Silver Eyes!] (New) [Temp]

Titles: [Otherworlder] [The one whose fingers are faster than Flash] [The Reborn] [Shadow Nemesis] [The Destroyer] [Death Master] [The Irregular] [Child of Mana] [Slayer] [World Wolf owner]

His XP increased because Silveria and Nyx killed two cardinals which counted as him killing them. If others were to see how fast he progressed after becoming a demigod, they would puke blood in anger, crying unfairness. A bit more, and he would level again; it was indeed unfair.

"Wow! You are truly strong. If I were to fight, I don't think I'd last long, but I still want to fight you. If you win the fight in less than a thirty, I'll work for you for free." Althea made this proposition, she was well aware of how strong Alex was, but she didn't believe he could win against her in less than 30 seconds.

Sera, who heard this proposition, could not help but smile, feeling pity for her friend. She had a brain, but currently, she was not using it; by making this proposition, she was pushing Alex to go all out. She thought as an assassin; she would have the opportunity to toy with her target even if she couldn't approach him. She just had to drag the fight until the thirty seconds passed.

Unfortunately, she had miscalculated.

"Sure, let's start this coin onto the ground," Alex said before tossing a coin into the air.

Clangs!

Just as the coin touched the ground, Alex's appeared behind Althea, a cold knife held against her pale white neck.

"You lost." Alex's calm voice reached her ears; it seemed like what he did was normal, but she was not in the state to focus on such detail.

Unprecedented feelings of fear arose, and Althea felt her scalp blistering. She had goosebumps all over her body.

"What the hell was this?" This question kept coming again and again. If someone else had told her what happened, she wouldn't believe it, but because she had experienced it herself, she knew it was real. She couldn't last a fucking second against a Demi-God; not all Demi-Gods are the same, but this still hurts her pride; she had thought after tonight's mission because she killed someone who used drugs to temporarily increase his strength infinitely closer to the Demi-God realm that she could last few seconds against real Demigod.

The answer she couldn't last a second. It was a hard blow, but it served as a warning for her not to become too arrogant as she seemed to be thinking that now she was capable of attempting an assassination on a Demi-God.

"Thank you, it's my loss. As promised, I'll work for you for free. You just need to take care of my master problem, and I'm all yours."

The atmosphere turned instantly cold when Althea misspoke that last word.

"Cough! Cough! Don't worry; I'll take care of that problem." Alex coughed, feeling secretly happy to be able to see Sera's jealous side.

"I have something for you. Take this." Alex gave Althea a map and said before she could say anything.

"Go there, your sister should be there at the moment. You can help her in her mission of taking back the throne. Don't worry, she is stronger like me and has many helpers. Sera will soon join you. Go, it's time

for a family reunion." Alex explained before pushing Althea out of the small room. The last thing he saw was Althea smiling with a face full of gratitude. Alex knew his plan worked; he had gained another strong subordinate.