

## Death Magic 101

### Chapter 101: Fight

“Coming out first, the man, the myth, the legend, the son of the famed warrior from overseas; Goliath.” The intercoms announced, all cheered. Goliath was popular amongst the people as a foreigner who fought across the seas. Some say he hails from a land named Vinland, others say it’s but a myth. However, the father was truly someone powerful. The warrior blood did run in his vein. The boy, one who was only in his twenty’s practically beat everyone in his trial. There were a few misfortune souls who succumbed after their injuries grew worst.

“Alright, this is your time to shine, go out there and give them hell,” Josiah stood next to her. Before her, a blinding light shone at the end, a tunnel to the outside. The loud applause was but a fleeting whisper inside. “Will do, master,” her hands gripped a sword, a great one at that. “be sure to not overextend yourself, this is only an exhibition match. I don’t want you to get hurt but don’t lose either; all rely on this fight. Exhibition or not, a loss here would prove to be rather inconvenient. “I got it, no need to worry,” her other arm slowly moved, the injuries from the last battle still weighed on her. Josiah wasn’t made aware of this.

“Second,” she quickly glanced and walked out, “-though young and feeble looking, make it up for the ice-princess, Eira Haggard.” The crowd went wild, she walked nonchalantly, it looked as if nothing bothered her. The stare she cast onto the crowd was one of a girl who had lost everything. The eyes felt emotionless but held a glimpse of sadness. She carried a great sword, it got dragged from the entrance to the middle. They both stood, she wore nothing but her uniform. Goliath, on the other hand, wore a blue helmet, a brownish chest plate with no leg piece. Only the upper half of his body was armored. “Pleasure to meet you,” though his face was hidden behind metal, he spoke. “Pleasure is all mine,” she replied. The conversation ended, he wielded what seemed to be a war-hammer.

“Time has come for the battle to start,” the speakers reverberated across, everyone’s high spirit was felt through their passion and tone. ‘Let’s see how much you’ve progressed,’ from leaning further back into the chair, he changed the posture and got into one that was more serious and focused. “Both opponents, are you ready?” it asked rhetorically, “-fight,” a bell rang.

\*Clang,\* the first strike made all silent, Eira blocked the massive war-hammer with ease. The sound echoed, her face held nothing but the will to fight, Goliath was taken by surprise. This had been the first time since someone was able to stay face to face with said strike. Beneath that helmet, he smirked – the battle had only begun and his blood pumped. Using the heavyweight of the hammer, Eira pushed and jumped away into a more neutral stance. “Let’s do this,” the boy screamed and held up his hammer. Without notice, he charged headfirst, strike after strike, he relentlessly attacked. Left, right, she dodged, her face remained as cool as stagnant water. \*Shadow Element, Shadow-step,\* the weight behind each of his strike momentarily grew weak. At the precise time he attacked, she vanished and swung horizontally. Her blade slashed through that piece of armor as if it were butter. Blood gushed out but the man remained focused on her.

That injury would normally make any opponent scared and hesitant. The risk of dying was a threat all feared. Not him, after getting cut, he rushed her down and continued to attack. The strike became harder than before, “Grrrr,” using all the power he had, Goliath swung horizontally, she dodged.

However, he didn't stop the strike, rather, he added more force into the weapon and did a three-sixty. The movement felt peculiar and before Eira could react the hammer slammed against her right arm. The impact was so hard it sent her flying across the whole stadium. \*Bam,\* the barrier stopped, her sword fell in the middle. \*Cough,\* both her arms were injured.

Overlooking the battle, Staxius's eyes changed from focused to angry. The aura around him grew darker and denser, "dude, are you ok?" a blonde headed boy bearing the same uniform Eira wore, shook him. "Don't worry about him, look in front, the princess has finally met her match," a red-haired girl spoke. "You're right," he changed his attention. Staxius sighed, the blonde boy had unwillingly defused a bomb. Seeing Eira like that, the saddened gaze made him want to intervene. However, "what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger," \*Ding,\* the bell rang, she wasn't in any condition to fight. Exhibition match or not, people didn't want to have another death by the hands of that foreigner.

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The gates opened, medics rushed to help Eira, she fainted. The people left the battle arena one by one. Goliath, though the winner felt a little strange. He didn't drop the weapon, the stance he used was one of a man ready to fight. Slowly, he stared as everyone made their way to Eira. "Come on Goliath," an announcer came to commend him on his win. "Congratula-" \*Boup.\*

Screams overwhelmed the people who conversed. All were in the process of leaving, those screamed caught the attention of many. "W-what?" a massive splatter of blood laid to rest on the barrier. "SOMEBODY HELP US," inside the arena, Goliath swung his weapon mercilessly and attacked all who came close. One by one, people who rushed in to help were slaughtered. "What's happening?" Josiah tried to help, "leave it to me," a shadow leaped over the gates. "Berserker," he whispered. \*Death element; Unleash Aura x3\* Staxius sensed the problem long before Goliath took the first strike. The aura he pressured Goliath with slammed the latter's face onto the ground. It was as heavy as lifting five cars. "Avon, can you please just knock that guy out," he asked monotonously, it was tiring to see someone who defeated his daughter in such a situation. "As you wish," the boy dropped. Avon returned, none realized what happened. It all took place so fast that the girls who screamed were still at it. "Huh?" she stopped, "why are we screaming again?" the high-pitched torture stopped. "F-father?" she caught a glimpse, he waved. "Director Josiah," Staxius spoke, "Yes?" he had stepped into the arena. "-you should really consider adding some security or at least check on who is fighting. That boy was possessed, the blood lust that runs in his vein can become both an asset and complete devastation if left unchecked," he turned around, "-all and all, Eira fought well." He smiled. "Don't patronize me, Staxius," he fired back, the eyes looked disappointed. "-I was counting on this fight to have an opportunity to recruit someone in the audience to fight beside her in the next stage of the tournament." The aura changed from disappointed to lonesome and sad. "Can't do anything now, can we?"

"Don't give up just yet, director," Staxius patted his back. Behind, additional medics rushed in to help whoever was hurt. The announcer who got flung into the barrier was taken to the hospital immediately. "Nothing is lost just yet," he smiled. "You're right," they both walked beside Eira who rested on a stretcher.

The scenery changed, from an enclosed arena to the outside, the air felt refreshing. Eira was taken to the hospital; her injuries were more than they bargained for. Staxius conversed with Josiah, the few

people who witnessed what took place were still in shock. Sat inside the director's office, their conversation reached its end.

"I see that she has made some improvements," Staxius spoke. "Yes, her theoretical knowledge of magic is truly mesmerizing. However, I fear that she's holding back something. I know not what it is, but that fear she has is affecting her. Not consciously but subconsciously. Do you know what I'm speaking about?" he looked at Staxius with piercing eyes. "I'm afraid not," he fired back, the tone honest and without lies. "I see, well that's something we have to train to get rid of." He stopped and stared. "Director," the atmosphere changed from tense to casual, "I was wondering about the thing with the two versus two, what's the point?"

"There's nothing much to it," he answered, "the order asked us to put in a team battle. Almost like a small tournament within another tournament. However, the team must be a fighter who's already qualified for the inter-magical. Their partner can be anyone as long as they're under the age of twenty-five." He smiled, "-it's dumb but at the same time smart. Having that small tournament is like a pre-warmup for the big stage. Not to mention that whoever wins the two verses two is sent to the quarterfinals immediately." Josiah stopped, Staxius wanted to say something.

"What about Eira, is she ready to fight on the stage?" he asked, the tone filled with doubt. "Not really, no." the answer was firm and direct, "Eira, though she's powerful individually isn't nearly ready. You've seen the facts earlier, she got defeated in one swing," the arms rested on the table, Josiah looked out of ideas. "How long will said two versus two last?" Staxius asked once more. "Probably two to three days," he sighed, "but it's pointless to worry about that. Eira is badly hurt and we still haven't decided on a partner." Staxius stood, Josiah watched intriguingly. "alright, I've made my decision." The tone felt serious, "sign me up as her partner, I shall show my daughter how a fight is meant to be fought," he smiled. "the tournament is not till three days from now?" Josiah nodded affirming his question. "-well then, better get ready. I'll take over for the next few days; I've got some business I need to finish up before assigning my focus onto Eira."

He walked to the door, "aren't you too old?" Josiah asked. "Not really, I may have been here for thirty years but I'm still in my early twenties." He winked; the decision was made. Josiah did naught but smile, "take as much time as you want, but make me one promise." He spoke, Staxius held the door handle, "what is it?" he asked. "Promise me that you will return Eira back to me and not disappear as you did." \*Click,\* it opened, "worry not, uncle. Eira is your apprentice and it's you're right to teach her, not me. I'm just going to show her what mindset and the pleasures of fighting using all your strength." He left, 'who am I kidding? The pleasure of fighting using all your strength. It may be fun, but the moment you lose, it's over.' He sighed and headed for the hospital.

"Hey, aren't you that boy from earlier?" a voice called for him. "Do you know that creep?" the red-headed girl asked. "Not really, I just felt something off about him," he replied. "Huon, let's go, that gloomy expression on his face is making my stomach turn upside down," the girl tucked on his shirt. \*Dark Arts, Sense personality,\* "Isott Rosalinda, I cautiously advise you to choose your words before speaking to somebody. It's shameful a noble name like the Rosalinda has to have such an arrogant heir to their family." Staxius spoke, the words he chose were perfect. It got under her skin, "excuse you?" she rushed towards him and tried to grab his collar, "don't you lay your filthy hands on my master," Avon materialized and caught her hand. "W-what is this?" she tried fighting back, "I care not if you're noble by birth. If you don't respect the people around you then you have no right to expect respect from

others," Avon tightened his grip. Staxius walk with disgust in his eyes, "let's go Avon, don't bother dirtying your hand with filth," the spirit vanished. "You little piece of," She tried to strike from behind but was stopped by Huon, "don't" he whispered. A loud thunderous noise caught their attention, "let's head to the hospital," Void drove off, the car looked sublime. "Don't tell me..." they were lost for words, "is that another Xerxes series car?" Rosalinda asked. "I'm afraid so, that one is the black version nicknamed Void. None know the price but it's the most secretive and the lack of information makes it highly sought after." He paused and stared at the girl, "you might have picked a fight with someone who may be more powerful than your family."

### Chapter 103: The Central Guild

Night passed quickly, amidst the cold, loud chatter, frequent gun-shots, the sun emerged. It's orangish vigor slowly spread throughout the town, it looked as if a drop of water spreading across a tiled floor. Though it looked uneven at times and regular at other, the light slowly entered through every crevasse: hole, windows, doors and more. It marked the beginning of a new day; the royal family had remained quiet for the past months. The incident with his majesty really took a toll but none knew to what extent. Kreston, despite they leaving in a fit of rage that particular night, all remained weirdly tranquil. The attacks on Dorchester stopped – with the help of some allies, Adelana kept sure to watch Rotten Thicket. Up to now, nothing seemed out of the ordinary and it would stay that way for the many months to come.

As strong and powerful as Kreston might have seemed, the apparition of monsters affected them equally. Their forces were divided across all corners of the province. From the sea to the slightly mountainous regions, they spared no man. They oversaw all, from peasants to nobles, their eyes remained ever watching. Adventures willing to cross their border had to pay a toll and go through rigorous security checks. Around that time, strange rumors about them being somewhat directly involved discouraged many – some thought they had opened the portal. The portal for monsters to enter; others thought that Kreston had bought Totrya and affiliated themselves with the dark cults who were in no way as strong as the God-slayer.

Information about the subject was scarce. All the general populous knew of was that the monster became a new way for a stable income. Adventures and quests presented themselves for the ones who deemed it necessary. The thrill of fight rekindled old mercenaries. So close yet so far, the days of slaying humans for the purpose of resolving a conflict turned to become barbaric. Despite this, people still used duels to settle down conflicts. Bloodshed never really stopped, no laws nor overseer had an interest in grasping the warriors with a firm grip. Many wish it to be like the main continent, said place had firm rules and regulations. A strong unit to enforce and protect, they were civilized. Visiting nobles found the way of life here putrid and filthy.

Monsters being present caused no harm, at first panic ran rampant. Now, it was but a question of waiting till an adventurer would swoop in and take its head and coins. In a way, life became easier for villagers. Long were the days where they had to grovel before the rulers to have food and shelter. Long were the days where sisters and daughters would be taken as playthings. Long were the days where brothers and sons would be forced into joining armies or plain slavery. The rise of potential adventurers being born on a daily basis had put a stop to all those inhuman practices. Given they weren't that frequent, one of those gifted warriors could easily slaughter many.

The silent atmosphere changed into chaos, the cacophony of people rushing to work awoke Staxius. He sat and all he saw was hordes of people rushing into buildings and shops. Given the garden was closer to the commercial district as opposed to the business, people still flocked to work. Some yelled annoyingly, some complained, and some lashed out before their day had begun. 'Good to see that people are still thriving to make their lives better,' he stood, dust and dirt stuck onto his shirt to which he calmly patted. "Hey you, get off the lawn – this isn't a place for anyone to sleep," an old man yelled. He wore a straw hat, big bushy mustache and wore out clothes. "I'm sorry," he casually smiled, the tone he used was one of an innocent child. "Hey, it's no worries," the old man approached him. "You best not sleep here again, I'm not saying this out of spite, but people are often killed around this part of town; better be careful," he smiled revealing the teeth he still had and the ones he didn't. "Thanks for the advice," they shook hands.

'What a joyful old man.' He headed into the business district. The scenery changed severely, from stone buildings to ones of concrete with unorthodox designs. The heights of certain were just a statement. The higher, the more powerful. As he walked along the well-maintained pavement, the sight of cars and vehicles grew more popular. At times, before a huge office, a man wearing a black suit, a golden watch and a cigar in his mouth walked inside. The cars all used were particularly expensive and elegant.

'I'm assuming they are the leaders of said corporation or whatever the business is.' He watched in awe, '-I wonder if Julius dressed and acted the same way.' He took a pause and thought about the friend he unwillingly dropped all his problems onto. Little did Staxius know that thinking about Julius would make him simultaneously choke on his toothbrush, those two were weirdly connected.

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Minutes turned into hours, Staxius watched and studied. He memorized peculiar mannerism, often he snuck into buildings to check how the leaders acted. 'What's a king without cash,' he chuckled. It became obvious that people here didn't care about what one was as a person. Clothes maketh the man, was the aura in this place. And so, he continued to observe, like an artist admiring a picturesque scene. The weird interaction the day prior with a certain arrogant lady had piqued his interest. While using dark arts, it somehow felt that she had a reason to back-up all her talk. A powerful family, or maybe the bride to someone rich, who knew; at this point, it was as if shooting in the dark. Assumptions weren't going to suddenly turn into the truth. The only way to get useful information was to contact Rose – something he knew not how to do nor accomplish.

The sight of people acting and living in a different way made him envious. This had been a world totally alien to him. Staxius wasn't a man born in this Era, he had been imprisoned and transported into the future. For him, resolving in a diplomatic way proved to be a hassle. Often, he'd rather intimidate and get what he wanted. Though Arda and their teachings from both the nobles and scholars soon changed that. He had become a man with talents none knew: the power of words, the power of manipulation, the power to make someone yours before unsheathing a sword. He did all those before but subconsciously, now it was a new game, a new battlefield.

Like any good strategist, he took the time to research the land and look for obvious things that could turn into his advantage. For one, he was the owner of a car people would slaughter to obtain. The title as king was another trump card he could use. Financial prowess was also something he had but lost a few hours ago and not to forget, Dark-arts. Armed and ready, Staxius headed for the central adventuring

guild – the one who ruled all. The overlord of all guilds; their headquarters was square in the middle of the district. Beside it, the bank as well as mages and fighter’s guild. Then came other construction for companies and such. At this moment in time, they were inconsequential for the current objective. As opposed to driving in with Void, he walked and remained inconspicuous. A feat easily attainable, people walked by as if he were invisible.

A flight of stairs took him inside, ‘this is the central guild,’ a revolving door stood before him and the inside. Mild chatter grew into a full-on verbal war, he walked in at the worst possible time. Tis was usual, he gently stood near a group of individuals who remained calm. The layout of the guild wasn’t that complex. Instead of having the receptionist in the middle, the desk was but at the edge of the hall to the right side. On the left, you had a small café, people sat and drank – though nothing alcoholic were served. Also, looking up, a small balcony on which people wearing heavy armor rested their arms onto the balustrade. Directly underneath was where the commotion happened.

“It’s always the same,” Staxius overheard a conversation, “they always cause such a ruckus. All those fiends brag about is fame and glory. Apart from boasting, none cares about anything. Though I guess it’s fine, sometimes it gets obnoxious for old ladies like us trying to put in a request for help.” She stopped and took her time to breathe. “I agree with you, sister. They have muscles for brains, I swear, their parents should have taught them some manners.” The other added, the frustration clearly showed in their tone.

It came as a shock to him, none seemed to pay attention. They did complain but all chose to not intervene. The air felt calm despite some of the adventurers had gotten into a fight. Up above, the people who stood cheered and provoked them to fight. It was obvious sarcasm, the receptionist continued with her job. The people besides who Staxius stood walked to her. Though her name title wasn’t receptionist, underneath the counter, engraved on a piece of brass; Guild assistant.

The chaos didn’t stop for another few minutes till the room went quiet. The elevator who had been on the higher floors came down; tension filled the room. \*Ding,\* heavy footsteps resounded, the fight stopped. The two opponents seemed as if they were childhood friends. People walked out of the lift, the two who walked in front weren’t impressive in size, their armor was peculiar too. A warrior forsaking his weapon, behind them, many more walked out, their presence was on a whole other scale. These guys meant business, “thanks for your work,” the guild assistant spoke, they nodded and left. ‘Who are those guys?’ Staxius wondered.

“Alright everyone,” the same lady yelled, another one came rushing down from the door behind. “Time to work,” the sound of armor hitting one another felt as if an army marched. “Daily quest’s have been put on the notice board; please if you are to take any quest. Run it by us first, taking quest three tiers above your current tier will result in immediate denial. Parties who are to take group quest please come to counter number two – solo quests are at number one.”

She clapped twice; a massive board appeared underneath the balcony. It was filled with requests from nobles to villagers. The reward and difficulty both written in bold. People argued about which quest to take; often two people would choose one quest. It wasn’t prohibited but the one to complete the requirements and necessities specified first would be the one who is recompensated. The sight of teenagers who were barely old enough to hold a long sword wasn’t that uncommon. It did come as a shock for Staxius, anyone could register if they were above the age of fifteen. Despite their size, they

were ruthless when it came to picking a job, some spoke so savagely they were knocked out by others. As usual, the guild assistant remained as blasé as she could. Curious, Staxius peeked from afar.

[Protection from the Dark Guild – Tier 7]

[Emissary from God – Tier 9]

[Goblin infestation – Tier 10]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Slavery & Torture – Tier 7]

The tier-X made Staxius suspicious, the guild assistant caught his eyes. She stared at him with such intent it nearly made him want to break her neck. Her gaze felt cold and piercing, she knew he wasn't part of the adventurers. It wasn't unheard of for non-adventurers to sneak peek at quests and steal said rewards before anyone could officially begin their expedition. Instead of backing down, he stared back and smiled confidently. She rolled her eyes and went back to her normal posture seeing as people had chosen their job for today.

'This is very interesting, the quests don't have much detail except for the names and tier. I guess it's pretty normal, if you want more information, contact the guild assistant.' He stood and watched – this was a whole new experience. Secretly, he loved every possible moment.

#### Chapter 104: Magical Scrolls

A few minutes into the quests being displayed, the crowd changed from violent to somewhat calm. The kid who got knocked out was helped by the partner of the one who threw the punch. Healing spell was used directly, they used mana but didn't channel it. It wasn't normal magic, it felt more like a scroll. Those pieces of paper didn't have the power to individually cast their spell. The caster or the one who was to write said scroll had to physically imbue it with their own mana. Thus, the reason for rarity and quality, more powerful mana is equal to better quality. This, in turn, explained why common scrolls changed to Rare when Staxius wrote them. Obviously, he knew why but acted clueless as to not raise suspicion.

As per usual, two lines formed; one for party quests and one for solo quests. Barely a few were standing in the latter for it was more dangerous to go out into the wild alone, and with broken gear at best. Their body may have been strong and their fighting prowess may have been on par with monsters, the fact remained that bad equipment served to only hold them back. A few glances here and there, the average party counted four to five members. Individually, none looked any special but each had their specific set of skills. All this was but a mystery to him, thus he stayed and watched for a few more hours.

One by one, the adventurers left. Staxius sat and had coffee though he didn't have any money. A piece of silver hid inside the pocket watch. 'Time to see what is required to start a party,' he stood. An invisible wave of tension hit both guild assistants. Their eyes locked onto Staxius instantly, he used a bit of unleash aura. His footsteps felt louder and denser than the people who were here before.

"Morning sir, how may I be of service?" her hands out of view, the lady spoke courteously. "Morning," he returned the greetings. "...". She examined his face and body from top to bottom. The man who stood before her wasn't anything out of the ordinary but she felt something else inside him. "Excuse me," he spoke, she subtly started to daydream. "I-I apologize," her face remained blasé, it looked unbothered though she had just fallen asleep. "Could you kindly explain how one is supposed to begin adventuring and also how is one supposed to start a party and guild?" the tone felt gentle and innocent; her guard lowered. "Of course," she clapped, "Melisa, please take this gentleman here upstairs," the order felt vague but the assistant understood what she meant. 'A little suspicious but I'll bite,' he eyed both down.

'This way, sir,' she climbed, Staxius followed. They walked across the balcony that stood above the noticeboard and arrived at a black door. \*Click,\* the door opened, she stood outside but pointed inside. He nodded and took a seat. The room felt dark and vacant, it was lonesome and quiet. \*Adventuring 101,\* it read, a short film began to play. He watched intently and waited for the bit that concerned him personally. "Now we come to our final chapter, Guild formations," he sat into a more serious and focused posture.

"Guilds can both be independent or allied with the main guild. Independent guilds are the groups that are formed by individuals who choose to step away from the restriction that the central guilds have in terms of ethics. Though becoming a partner of the main guild can be tiresome, people opt for starting their own. The process is rather simple, though the prerequisites are hard to acquire." The video continued, it felt somewhat homemade, the voice narrating was the same as the lady at the desk.

"Firstly; the founder must be of a rank higher than Tier-four, Bronze. We know that acquiring that rank isn't simple nor is it easy; however, these are in place to provide a safe working space for anyone and everyone." She took a pause and did so with each requirement.

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"Second; the guild in question must have three members excluding the leader."

"Third; the leader or party must have done something that is recognized by the central guild; the slaughter of a beast or saving of a village. Anything deemed worthy will be accepted. "

"Fourth; any endorsement though not required by other guilds will greatly boost your chance of being accepted."

"Fifth; the party in question must have at least fifty thousand gold pieces."

"Sixth; the guild must have a building to be used as their headquarters."

"Seventh; for people starting guilds in other kingdoms, after all those requirements have been made. The newly formed guild will have to accomplish quests and be deemed worthy to expand into another territory. Permission from the ruler of said state is a must." The video ended, Staxius held a smile on his face. The quality of how they shot and filmed was worthy of an award for it had made him laugh with their inaptitude to keep a straight face or straight shot.

'Interesting, very interesting,' he stood and began thinking. The door opened, the lady outside waited for him to leave. 'Most of the requirements seem hard but actually are not, I'm sure I can find a way

around most. Gold, location, permission from the queen of Arda, those I can cross off without any problem.’ He stepped out.

“If you have any questions, please ask them right away.” Her stance felt rigid, Staxius’s presence was menacing. “Matter of fact, I do,” he turned and stared the girl, her eyes wandered off everywhere except him. “-will becoming an adventurer cost money?” he asked. “Yes, the cost of being tested for compatibility is ten gold pieces.’ She replied with shyness still plaguing her tone. “Very well, thank you,” he left. “Thanks for your visit,” the other guild assistant spoke as he walked out.

‘Avon,’ Void’s thunderous roar echoed throughout the street when he arrived. The door opened and they both left. “Morning master,” he spoke, “morning to you as well,” Staxius drove. “May I ask were we are headed?” instead of hiding within the car, Avon materialized and sat beside him. “Can you contact Arda?” the car came to a slow halt behind the giant buildings. “Yes, but for what reason?” Without replying, Staxius took a pencil and wrote down all the prerequisites for starting a guild, “send that by whatever means you want to Arda; I wish I had teleportation for myself.” As ordered, the message got delivered to queen Shanna.

“Your majesty, why do you look woeful,” the sage asked, she had spoken with many inhabitants for they wanted a private audience, monsters still ran rampant. Her gloomy stare changed into one of a woman reborn, “what’s the matter now?” the sage stood baffled with how regularly her expression changed. “We’ve got the necessary information about starting an adventuring guild. Staxius has just sent a report through Avon.” She told the old sage for he was a counseling member as well. “-it also included, I wish I had teleportation for myself,” she finished and chuckled.

“What are we to do now?” he asked, “well Staxius told us what the prerequisites are. He didn’t ask for any favor nor supplies; let’s leave it into his hands. Monsters are growing more common but we can manage for two years if need be.” Her tone was serious but reassured.

Back in Rosespire, still sat inside Void; Staxius wrote. He made a lot of magical scrolls. From uncommon to rare, he wrote till Avon was out of blank scrolls. “This should suffice, I’ve got a gut feeling that magical scrolls aren’t that common here. If we start selling them at a cheaper price than what medical or magic shops do; I’m pretty sure it’s easy money.” Staxius said with a smile on his face. “Are you sure it’s that easy? I mean trading and such.” Avon asked. “Yeah, don’t worry about it. We’ll scout out shops and ask for how much and what type of scroll they sell. My guess that an uncommon scroll can go for two gold pieces give or take one. It all depends on how much they obtained it.

“There’s only one thing to do now,” for two hours, Staxius and Avon drove around the entire capital. Mainly commercial, they checked each shop personally. The prices were written down on a piece of paper, they even went as far as asking the magical guild whose prices were above average. With that, they managed to get all the information needed.

[Common: One gold piece]

[Uncommon: Ten gold pieces]

[Rare: Fifty gold pieces]

[Epic: Five hundred gold pieces]

[Legendary: Last reported sale two-hundred thousand gold pieces]

[Relic: Unknown]

“No wonder the fuss about using rare scrolls on mild injuries.” He laughed; Avon continued to watch over the data. “Master, the prices of the scroll are expensive, but they also differ. From what I see, there are different scrolls and the different types and different spells. We have healing spells which are the price above, but common attack spells go for more, and not to mention the Relic; that can be a whole fortune.” He stated what Staxius didn’t say. “Well spotted, they are indeed more costly. However, the time it takes to craft an attack spell is very long. I can write healing spells quickly for I had to back when Arda needed the help. I felt Clarity, and that skill is embedded in my soul. I’m confident in writing healing scrolls; but not attack and other types. I’ll have to research the magical circuitry first, but they are hard to come by. For now, let’s settle on what we have.” The trunk was filled, it held two bags. One for uncommon and one for rare; they were ready to start.

“Before we go looking for people to buy, let’s visit the magical guild, I’ll take a few scrolls with me.” The car turned and headed towards said guild. Staxius changed his mannerism, he looked more serious and credible. The car he drove made people envious. The thunderous roar of the engine always made an impression when he needed it most. He walked inside, the guild assistants were already scared about him. The way he stepped out, the aura behind him, the visual intimidation of such a powerful car.

“Greetings my Lord,” they automatically assumed he was a noble. “Greetings,” he returned the greetings with a cold tone. “How may I be of service?” the assistant asked, his tone felt feeble compared to Staxius’s. “I’d like you to check on these scrolls,” he placed the rare scroll then the uncommon ones. “w-with pleasure,” the assistant quickly took said items into the master wizard’s study. “If you would, please follow me this way,” while the scrolls were sent for examination; one of the other assistants took Staxius into a flashy meeting room. It was situated on the upper floors.

“Impossible,” the wizard’s quill fell, the assistant knew not what happened “T-this scroll... i-it’s a work of a-art,” his tired old eyes rejuvenated. Do you know how much value this item is worth? It’s extremely rare and not to mention very sought after by scholars, warriors, and collectors alike. I thought scrolls were so rare that only a few existed. I know of only two I’ve come across in my many years of researching magic. Despite being in my fifties, my legs are shaking as if I was a kid again. I need not look inside for I have a natural talent, [Skill: Appraisal]”

Appraisal; a skill that can be taught easily but hard to master. Normally, anyone from adventurers to normal folks could learn it. Most traders, craftsmen, and artists possessed it internally, the skill to judge an item accurately. However, said skill can be very useful when trading. If a master gave an item a good appraisal using the current ranking system – the word from the master will be enough for it to be authenticated. If need be, a certificate could be given in extreme situations. The wizard who sat in the study that day was someone renowned in the field of magical research. A twist of fate or a blessing from lady luck, none knew.

“Take me to the one who brought this,” he stood and demanded, the eyes lit. ‘Here they come,’ Staxius felt the presence, the footsteps were one of people running.

\*Bam,\* the door flung open, “sorry to barge in.” Staxius let out a small smirk; the first step towards making the guild a reality had been made. ‘Time to step into this battlefield called business and trading.’

## Chapter 105: Potential

"Excuse my rudeness," the room white and grey in color with lovely wood furniture screamed. An old man accompanied by the guild assistant had just rushed inside. The sound it made perturbed the peaceful and quiet room; Staxius felt at ease till that incident happened. Time was nearly noon, outside; most were taking lunch breaks. The lucky one that is, apart from that nothing else major happened.

The wizard breathed heavily, he could not say another word. "No need for an apology," Staxius stood and helped the man get comfortable on a cream-colored sofa. "Would you mind bringing this gentleman a glass of water?" the guild assistant nodded and dashed to carry out Staxius's request. "Take your time and breathe," he tried to calm the old wizard. After a few deep breaths, he gained back the ability to speak. "I-I a-apologize," he tried but Staxius rested his hand onto his shoulder. It signaled the man to not bother speaking at this instant. He nodded and waited for the guild assistant.

A few minutes went by, the man's breath returned to normal. As if by fate, the assistant came in at the same exact moment. He took a few sips, Staxius stood with his arm crossed. The aura he gave out was of a powerful yet compassionate man. "First impressions are the last impressions," it's within that timespan that the mind processes and acknowledges someone by their traits. Depending on how one appeared; some might find a gentle person aggressive if he acted irrationally. So many misconceptions about appearance have put innocents to the sword. A guy with an evil stare though he might have been someone good would have made anyone suspicious. Staxius knew that from the start; so today he decided to appear as someone to be strict and scary. Subtle intimidation so that any advantage the other party had was neutralized.

"Glad to see you are doing far better," Staxius spoke with arms still crossed. "Thank you for taking care of an old man like me," he stared up, Staxius's face felt neutral. The wizard could read nothing of him. "Well then," Staxius walked slowly, "-why were you in such a hurry earlier?" he headed for the chair. "I-I w-was b-baffled by how masterful this scroll was," the wizard got up and sat opposite Staxius. The scrolls laid on the table, the assistant remained in the corner and waited patiently. "May I enquire to where you appropriated yourself with such valuable items?" he held a small smirk, the eyes looked shady, Staxius observed carefully. "With all due respect, you may not." From a relaxed position, he leaned and rested both elbows on the table. "I can assure you the items aren't from anything shady. That is all I can divulge at this instant," the tone felt sinister and dark. "Very well, as long as you say they're not stolen property, we haven't an issue." The old man stared Staxius as well, they both watched one another. "What brings someone like you to our humble guild?" the wizard asked. "I came in hopes of having a few items appraised and authenticated by someone credible." Two uncommon scrolls and one rare rested in the middle of the table. "I see, you wish to get the item appraised." He took a quick pause and resumed, "I can personally help in the endeavor however the authentication will require some effort," the tone was filled with greed. Staxius knew what he wanted; coins.

Slowly, Staxius brought the scrolls closer. "I see, but isn't getting something appraised free of charge?" he softly rolled one of the uncommon scrolls with his middle finger vertically. "It is free of charge, but the authentication is something not many have access to." The tone remained the same. "Is that so, how's this authentication so precious?" Staxius now rolled two uncommon scrolls. "Well you see, I shall personally vouch for said items. It puts both my name and the name of the magical guild on the line. If someday these items are revealed to be stolen property, our credibility would be nullified." The eyes looked as if the wizard plotted something. "In that case," Staxius stopped rolling the uncommon scrolls

and used the rare one instead, “-that’s a quandary, though if the items are revealed to be authentic and worthy. And if by any chance you are to reject my request; the one to who I will turn to next might stand to gain more than recognition.” He smirked, “you seem a man of his word. I shall vouch for you and your items.” The wizard glanced at the assistant, “prepare the study and notify the guild. I’m to give this man a certification of authenticity, the scrolls he has are valuable.”

Scared, the relatively young man ran to get the room prepared. “You’re a tougher nut to crack as opposed to your appearance,” Staxius spoke, it took the old man by surprise. “So are you,” he smiled, Staxius gave the rare scroll a final push. In that exchange, what seemed to have been a normal conversation about the legitimacy of his items. Staxius was cutting a deal, the wizard had hoped for coins in exchange for the certificate. However, the way Staxius interacted with him, it became obvious that he wanted to trade the scrolls he had for said item. The price changed from two uncommon to a rare in a matter of seconds. Though it cost a lot, the return would be better forward.

“Alrighty, let’s leave, Avon,” the car drove. “aren’t you missing a rare scroll?” Avon asked suspiciously. “Well I traded it for this,” a badge engraved and signed by one of the master scholars in the magical guilds. Someone respectable and with a lot of credibility behind his name which remained a mystery. “And will that badge help us in any way?” Avon didn’t bite just yet, “considering we are to sell scrolls to people who don’t even know our identity. We need to have something to show our legitimacy and this badge will do just that. We can now start selling those items to shops and traders for quick cash.”

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In that manner, Staxius walked into places of interest. He negotiated and mainly sold the items for gold coins. The empty wallet began to fill once more. The demand for his wares was a bit overwhelming. Though it had a price tag that would make anyone run; it surprised him when people happily accepted to pay his price. In most situations, he gave out the price and got what he wanted as opposed to bargaining. All and all, he sold fourteen uncommon and nine rare which brought the total to five hundred and ninety. The time now was around three, the sun’s blazing heat let up slightly.

“A very good day of work,” they sat under a tree. The place felt familiar for it was the same garden as before. “People do waste an awful lot on healing scrolls don’t they?” Avon added, his gaze turned to the people walking back and forth. “Scrolls are magical; they have the power to heal any illness. It doesn’t care what deadly disease you have, the strong mana from the spell is sufficient to cure it. Given that healing magic alone can’t hope to save anyone, not one who is mortally injured. The immense quantity of mana in those items can just about cure anything. Sadly, it can’t bring back the dead, or can it? I know not, maybe a Relic classed scroll can be a resurrection spell instead. The possibilities when dealing with magic is endless.” A smile shone on his face, he truly was passionate about the subject.

“father, Father, FATHER,” The voice echoed, Eira awoke suddenly. “What is it?” The nurse beside her woke as well, they were both as equally shocked. “Eira Haggard, you’ve finally regained consciousness, let me call the doctor,” she left. ‘Where am I, my head feels heavy...’ flash images of her father helping in calming Goliath got her to wake. ‘Father is here, my memory never lies.’ The door opened, “good afternoon, Eira,” she recognized the loud voice, “greetings master,” she mumbled. “No need to feel ashamed about the last battle, it happens. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger,” he cared not about results but her health as well.

Despite this, Eira tried her hardest to move and leave her bed. "What are you doing?" Josiah rushed to her side for she nearly fell. "We need to go train, master," she regretted not having enough strength to win that supposedly easy match up. "I respect the will to grow strong, but there's a fine line between insanity and genius. You're about to fall into the former. Given that genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration, it doesn't mean that overworking to the point of death is going to do any good. From today forth, I shan't be your master." He replied with regret in his voice. "What do you mean master? Did I do something wrong," her face changed to scared. "No need to worry about that," he sensed what she thought about. "-I'm not leaving you just yet. You are still my apprentice, however, from today forth, I've called in someone else to help train you for the next two versus two." The face regained its composure, "have you found me a partner?" she asked but his reply was, "you'll find out soon enough," her body felt sore all over to which it put her right asleep.

'These people never remain quiet,' Staxius walked into the central guild. He spotted a few familiar faces from earlier. They were back from their quests; the notification table had changed.

[Protection from the Dark Guild – Tier 7(Completed)]

[Emissary from God – Tier 9(Completed)]

[Goblin infestation – Tier 10(Completed)]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Slavery & Torture – Tier 7(Completed)]

People worked fast, only two remained. They cheered and smiled and as usual, the one who completed the hardest quest had rights to brag. A few minutes later, all grew less chaotic, adventurers came frequently but fewer in numbers. They came to exchange Qaisar and report on the previous quest they might have taken. The guild assistant caught a glimpse of Staxius and rolled her eyes once more. He seemed unaffected but wanted to rip her neck. "Good afternoon Melisa," he chose to approach the other assistant instead. "Good a-afternoon," she bowed. "I'm here to register as an adventurer," the other girl chuckled. "Diane, don't be rude," Melisa quietly mumbled. "I'm sorry, but someone like you registering as an adventurer is a joke. Have you seen how frail you look? Not to mention it costs ten gold pieces." \*Clang,\* he dropped a bag of gold on the desk, "I'd like to politely say that you should not judge a book by its cover." The aura around him turned violent for an instant, "WATCH OUT," the whole guild got out their weapons subconsciously. "What happened, I thought I sensed a demon," some covered behind their companions. "Probably something to not worry about," they returned to their usual chatter. "Did you just...?" she tried to ask but her feet shook. Staxius winked, "this way please," Melisa spoke, she wasn't affected. 'Who is that man, I thought I felt something so ominous I saw my life flash before my eyes.' The air remained confusing.

"Did you sense that?" a deep voice spoke, "yes I did, it was that man who just headed inside with Melisa." A feminine voice replied. Their necklace shone with a silvery color. "Do you think it's an illusion?" the deep voice asked once more, "probably not, however it reminded me the aura of a demon, forget that, stronger than a demon." They rested their hands on the balustrade and forgot whatever happened.

“All you need to do is place your hands onto the globe there,” he walked to where the object was. “Ready,” he spoke, “alrighty, so am I” she replied. The machine turned on, his hand placed onto the globe. It oddly reminded him of the time he tried out for Claireville academy.

#### Chapter 106: Registration

‘Ten gold pieces to have my name and rank checked by a machine. Being an adventurer might not be that bad. I need this thing to hurry up, I’ve been standing here for ages now.’ He waited patiently in a rather small room. A massive apparatus stood behind him, it glowed, flickered, and made a weird rumbling sound. For the most part, he looked oblivious, the thing behind could not be further examined. From what he sensed the moment the hands touched the globe, part of himself got sucked in. ‘Did it take in a bit of my mana?’ he wondered; Melisa stood in awe. Staxius didn’t pay heed to her facial expression but she was shocked.

She walked closer for it didn’t work as it normally did. A test to gauge one’s strength and eligibility to become an adventurer was done in minutes, if not seconds. However, this had gone on for too long. Staxius waited, she waited, the machine worked tirelessly. The gauges began to move uncontrollably and shook violently. “Is this thing remotely safe?” Staxius asked with a hint of sarcasm. “I think so, well for the most part yes,” she shouted over the noise it made. “WHAT DO YOU MEAN FOR THE MOST PART?” He yelled back, steam blew overhead. ‘Is this thing going to explode on me,’ Staxius thought, ‘is that thing going to explode on us?’ Melisa thought the same.

The strange rumbling grew more apparent, the smoke seeped into the hallway then proceeded to invade everywhere. “WHAT IS HAPPENING?” Diane rushed inside, the few people sitting quest hall grew cautious. Some left out of fear, some tried to enter but it was prohibited for anyone without permission. “This is boring, let’s head out and do the Escort quest.” A deep voice spoke, “lead the way,” a feminine voice agreed.

“Diane, Diane,” Melisa called out from the smoke infested room. “What is it?” she walked slowly and coughed, the smoke was dense and thick. It made seeing more than an inch in front impossible. “Could you guys please calm down?” Staxius shouted, “this is your fault, I’m sure of it,” Diane yelled across. “Please don’t start arguing now,” Melisa spoke in turn. “How can we shut this thing off?” he asked once more, “no clue, the machine is autonomous – it will when it needs too,” Diane added. “At this rate, we’ll all die by suffocation.” He voiced a very important point, “we can’t just have you take off your hand from the device. It took ten of your gold pieces to go through this test, we ain’t leaving till you have your rank and stats.” Diane added, she was adamant. “Can I at least remove one hand then?” He asked for the smoke had made him annoyed. “Yes, as long as a piece of your body is touching the device, you should be fine,” Melisa replied.

‘The smoke is thick, think of something. You’re a mage, you should be able to use magic,’ Staxius thought long and hard. The elements he had were rather limited, the focus on augmentation magic had made him neglect on learning spells and elemental magic. “Avon, can you do something about this?” he mumbled, “sure can,” the spirit replied.

A faint breeze manifested, the doors opened. “What is going on?” both assistants were at a loss for words, \*Clap,\* a loud noise made all silent. The smoke felt alive, slowly it headed out into the hallway. Everything grew clearer by the second, “who is responsible for this?” Melisa asked and the culprit

showed himself. "There you go, master," before they stood Avon and Staxius, the latter patted the former's head. Without any notice, Avon vanished into thin air, "... Melisa's face looked blank. "Who the hell are you?" Diane's mind was overwhelmed. The device steadied its rampage.

"What a great piece of equipment," he glanced and stared at Diane intently. "Not our fault," she left with her cheeks flushed from embarrassment, it was the first time he broke through her cavalier behavior. "Thanks for waiting," her mind got back to normal, the globe Staxius held broke. It took him by surprise, the blue hue from said globe scattered around the room. They levitated, sparkled, and sent jolts of electricity to one another. It was as if they communicated with each one. \*Whoosh,\* all the floating shards of glass shot back onto the pedestal. Each collided with one another at such speed that the shard shattered at the moment of impact. This process continued until a rectangular shape presented itself. "Your guild card will be ready shortly," Melisa approached and watched the process finished. "This is the bit I adore, just seeing all those broken pieces come together as one. It gives me a feeling that even the fiercest enemies can unite to fight a common foe," she mumbled thinking Staxius would not hear any of that. "That's a beautiful thing to say," he smiled, "- I agree with you, one day the animosity between people will die out when all our survival is questioned," the rectangle began to glow, letters were engraved.

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"I do apologize, I ramble on about that sort of thing unconsciously," she hid her embarrassment. The card began to shine brightly it dazzled the room. It looked like a sun being born, "it's so bright, I've never seen anything like this." Her eyes closed, Staxius turned away. A few seconds later, the light grew dimmer, "... her whole body stopped moving. The card was of a silvery color; "What happened?" Staxius asked, her only response was... nothing.

"There's nothing on the card, nothing." She faced Staxius, "nothing means I didn't pass?" he asked. "No nothing means unknown, unmeasured, and uncalculated. This means that your potential as an individual is limitless. Are you some kind of superhuman? Never have I seen a guild card like this. It's of a platinum color..." her eyes wide open, "...impossible, you can't be platinum ranked." She nearly fainted. "You're probably mistaken," he caught her body. "Don't worry, I'm not that powerful – however, what rank did the machine assign me?" he asked in a childish tone. "The rank assign to you is over there in the basket, a necklace of some kind of material has been dropped." She stumbled her way to the device. "The necklace wasn't anything she had ever seen. The rectangle had three different materials: silver, gold, and platinum. "What's the meaning of this?" her frustration grew, it was from tier one through three. "I give up," she sighed, "the rank assign to you is tier three, I'm not risking giving you any higher. It may be gold and platinum, but I have no way to correctly say what rank you truly are. Thus, Staxius Haggard, you are to be known as a rank three adventurer." She smiled, "the machine never lies. You are to become someone powerful one day," her tone still remained confused.

"Thank you," he put on the ornament that portrayed his rank and stepped out. On the guild card;

[Staxius Haggard: Silver]

[Potential: Platinum+]

Those were the only piece of information available. Gauging the potential of a would-be-god was a bit unrealistic. "Let me guess, you didn't qualify to become an adventurer?" Diane spoke as soon as he

walked out. A crowd had formed before the door, the smoke brought in more attention than desired. She spoke what she saw, his face was indeed gloomy, but it was for a whole other reason. "Not really," he placed the card on her desk, people were curious to what sort of rank he was assigned. "...how is this even possible?" she asked, her tone sharp and surprised. This brought in more people, seeing the blasé Diane act out of character was unheard of. "Staxius Haggard, silver ranked and potential to become platinum plus? What does that plus even mean, I've never seen anything like that before." She spoke loudly, the shock made her forget that people were around her. "Show me the necklace," she ordered, Staxius placed it next to the card. "Silver, gold and platinum," her eyes turned blank. "you're not human, are you?" people caught a glimpse of what he laid on the table.

"Maybe yes and maybe not," he replied mysteriously. "Whatever," her face remained in shock but she proceeded to register him in the main database. [Staxius Haggard: Silver] the keys tapped, and the process was finished. Murmurs crashed behind Staxius, it came like waves, at times it was soft and at times loud. She took a deep breath, "before I formally register you with the central guild, I'd like you to answer some of my questions; please be honest – if you lie it will make the whole process harder than its worth." Her tone returned to normal, silver rank was the rarest of the rare but she kept her calm.

"Do you hold a noble title?" she asked, "yes, the title of king." He replied nonchalantly. "you must be joking?" her eyes turned sour, "-I said no more lies," she sighed heavily. "How dare you assume that I would lie to someone like you?" he took out his crest, "I'm Staxius Haggard, King of Arda," her eyes became mesmerized by the ornament.

\*Death Element: Shadow-Step,\* the sword moved faster than lightning, Staxius stood behind a figure and had his sword right near its neck. "No need to be threatened, my friend," the atmosphere around the room changed. Time felt like it stopped. "state your name and business," Staxius asked in a menacing voice. "We're but friends and allies," he walked through the sword, "we're but illusions," the figure knelt and two more appeared on both sides. "-King Staxius of Arda, we apologize for being so straight forward. We are Whisper, a branch from the Order of which no one has ever met nor heard of. We are here to relay this message to you," they stopped.

\*Greetings King Staxius, we're from the Order. The machine you were to use earlier has transmitted all the information deemed necessary. We apologize for the confusion, your adventuring rank is to be Platinum – however, we must put your majesty down to Silver rank. This is all to avoid any further problems down the line. For you see, we know that Arda has plans to open an adventuring guild of their own; away from the main kingdom. Thus, we want you to experience and learn how a guild is meant to be run first. We are allies with you, for we know that Tempest Haggard is your father. Staxius Haggard, the Order has always been watching over you; not as an enemy but as the one who is to help you when things grow out of hand.\*

Time took back its course, "I apologize for being rude towards you, your majesty," Diane's tone changed. She got a message from the Order that confirmed Staxius's noble rank as king. "No need to be formal," he spoke, "-have you asked all your questions?" he inquired with a monotonous tone. "Yes, all your details have been filled out by someone who seems to know you personally." She replied.

'That aura, I've felt it somewhere. It feels like it's someone who has known me since I was born. There's also another aura about a girl, slightly younger than me, I get the same feeling from both.' When time

stopped, Staxius used all he had to sense and trace back the mana of the individual responsible for it. 'It feels like father's but not really, it's more feminine.'

"Awesome, I'll come back in three days or so," Staxius took all the items and left. He was registered as a silver-ranked adventurer. Before he left for Claireville academy, Staxius walked inside the bank. There, he managed to link the old guild card; the one where all his money was previously stored to the new one. The balance showed;

[Gold: 1580]

[Silver: 98]

[Copper: 99]

Silver and copper didn't go over the one hundred mark. The reason for that was that it automatically changed into one piece of gold or one piece of silver. This was to avoid people having to carry more change than needed. Coins were heavy, thus why it converted automatically. 'Must have had one thousand gold saved up from somewhere,' the car drove.

#### Chapter 107: A wager

The scorching heat calmed for evening came. The wind pleasantly danced with the orangish sun, it set. The sky seemed gentle and calm, the clouds all changed from white to reddish-orange. It looked like a work of art, the clouds; not bundled up but separated, like snowflakes when it first snowed. The spread felt uneven but mesmerizing; as Staxius's car approached Claireville academy's noble district, the wind sang and hummed. If heaven could be placed into a moment in time, it would have been then and there. Everything harmoniously worked with one another, none had the advantage over the other. Perfectly balanced like a scale, he walked and knocked. The mansion, one he stayed in long ago had a new shine to it.

"Excuse me but who are you?" the door opened, one of the maids asked, her eyes went from top to bottom. "Is Ayleth or Alyson present?" he asked with a gentle tone, the setting sun sprinkled its rays onto his face. "May I inquire to who is asking?" she didn't let up, her suspicion about him being a shady individual was baseless, – it was but a gut feeling. "Do tell them that Staxius Haggard has come to visit," he smiled, the door closed. A few minutes later, what seemed to be an argument, one-sided at that, seeped through the door. Staxius waited casually, the nature of the fight did intrigue but he chose to ignore.

"I a-apologize for the wait," the same maid breathed heavily. The door opened at last and he stepped in. Avon followed close behind, Alyson greeted both with open arms. They were welcomed to stay for it was closer and more practical. Reason being that the destination for the next day was the academy. "Congratulation on your new rank, master," Ayleth softly spoke, her shyness had outgrown her over the years and so did Alyson. When Staxius first met the Silver guardians, Ayleth and Alyson weren't the talkative types. However, sat at the dinner table, it showed how much people changed. For Staxius, one who was very out of touch with the companions he made years ago; it was nice for him to catch up.

With a lovely glass of wine paired with a succulent dinner, the trio reminisced. Staxius was very fond of hearing what they had to say. The way Alyson spoke felt monotonous but it had its charm. Contrary to her, Ayleth's voice felt very soft and timid, but her smile compensated for her lack of self-confidence.

Lack of confidence when it came to interacting with others, her strength as a fighter was a different kettle of fish. Amidst the tales they recounted, one stuck in particular. It was when Eira first discovered how to fight.

As Alyson put it, from early on, since Eira was left alone by a certain someone. She grew up in a war-torn country, the battle between Dorchester and Kreston raged on. The companions Staxius left behind had to fend for themselves. Abandoning an angel-like Eira was out of the picture. Adelana and Viola took the reigns and guided everyone to a stable source of income. They became mercenaries, sadly, Eira had to grow up watching people fight and die. The sight of blood felt natural, she laughed rather than getting scared. At the age of six, her little hands first touched the sword. We had to teach her ways to defend herself. Quickly, she memorized techniques, postures, and stances perfectly. Her body though frail was trained harshly. This happened because of a tantrum she threw over not being strong enough to fight. Her eyes lit, each time she held that weapon, it felt as if she was free. Her hands and arms moved gracefully; it was like an angel fluttering her wings. Along with that, Viola taught her magic, thus she began her journey in swordsmanship.

It wasn't until she reached ten that she killed. For four years everyone did what they could to have her avoid taking a pointless life. However, Kreston demanded someone to infiltrate Dorchester and assassinate one of the nobles. The silver guardians were out of the picture and so were the rest of the party. The only option came to Eira – then she left, Fenrir accompanied her.

A few weeks later they returned, Eira completed her assignment but the look in her eyes changed. She came across the then imprisoned statue of her father. Fenrir had taken her to visit and pay homage. Her eyes burnt with passion, "I want to become as strong as my father," those were the words she uttered. Something happened when her tiny hands touched the stone; she said that she caught a glimpse of Staxius's past. None knew what she really meant, but the way her eyes sparkled, it was for the best. She had the passion and talent to become as strong as her old man.

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The story ended, all that might not have seemed important. However, for Staxius, knowing that Eira had the drive to become strong was more than enough. The fight he witnessed the day before told more than it let onto. She was being held back, held back by something, her wings were constrained. No longer did they flutter, instead, they shook and remained still. They were bound by chains of unknown nature. Thus, dinner ended and they all slept. 'Wings,' Staxius muttered, '-constrained,' he added again. 'The freedom to fight and fly,' after a few hours of thinking – sleep caught up.

"Rise and shine," a gentle voice spoke, "Ysmay, please give me five more minutes," Eira refused to wake. The night before, Josiah got Eira permission to leave the hospice and to return to the dormitory. "No time for five more minutes, it's already eight, have you forgotten that we have combat classes today?" her eyes wide opened, "I totally forgot," quickly she got ready and headed for school.

"Director, are you sure it's fine for me to barge into the student's training?" They walked, Staxius arrived a few minutes ago; his day began with cold-water being dropped on his face; courtesy of the ever-playful Avon. "It's fine, we're in the middle of the inter-magical tournament. Students who are to fight have been exempted from normal classes. This goes for every class and every year." They headed towards the back of the campus. "-Today is special, the two verses two partners are to be revealed."

They entered the stadium, “from our school; we have about five teams including yours. They are all training individually at their own discretion.” The arena came into view, “but you’re not alone.” Josiah stopped, swords and weapons being used echoed all around. “You are to train alongside the third-year team or not, that is up to you.” A barrier was erected and it blocked out the view from inside to the outside. It was to make the atmosphere tenser and make the students more alert.

They climbed down the stairs, Staxius spotted some familiar faces. About five individuals were on the field fighting training dummies and such. On the right side, you had the third-year students and their instructor. On the left side, Eira and her friend trained alone. They were given orders to do conditioning. The gates squeaked; it caught their attention. “I apologize for bothering your training,” Josiah spoke, the third-years sighed. “Greetings director,” the red-haired instructor spoke loudly. “Good morning Sophie,” he fired back and returned to Eira and Ysmay. “Must be nice to be the director’s apprentice,” a familiar voice growled. The duo was Huon and Rosalinda to which Sophie reprimanded them.

“Morning master,” Eira stopped and bowed, Ysmay followed suit. “Are you here to continue our training?” she asked, Josiah held a weird grin. “About your partner for the two versus two,” he paused. Sophie and her students overheard what he said and came closer. “Have you found a good partner for Eira?” Ysmay asked shyly. “Correct,” he replied and kept the smile. “Who in the right mind would pair up with that icy demon.” Rosalinda whispered, “-I don’t know, probably someone the director hired,” Huon replied.

“Stop keeping us in suspense,” Eira grew tired, she wanted to know her partner. “Sorry, I do like to keep things interesting, but you see; finding a partner for you wasn’t that simple. Your fighting style and use of magic are unorthodox, finding someone who can understand and match that is hard.” He turned around. “therefore, someone who knows you very well has requested for this – reveal yourself,” he winked. The first step he took, the air around the stadium changed, “way to make this difficult,” Staxius walked, his head held high, a smile and the usual monotonous tone. “...” Ysmay froze, she recognized who he was, “you d-didn’t...” the sword Eira held, dropped.

“Who is that man, why are they acting as if he’s some kind of big deal?” Rosalinda asked. Sophie’s face froze as well, “t-that man m-means bad-luck.” She mumbled; her student’s face changed for the worse. Never had they seen the crimson-princess look worried.

“Good to see you, Eira,” he smiled. She didn’t care, everything about ethics and manners went out the window; the sight of Staxius made her heart beat with excitement. Without wasting time, she rushed into his arms, he held her up high. They looked like an old man holding a baby. “FATHER,” she yelled, “WHAT?” Rosalina nearly choked, “that boy is her father?” they laughed. “I’ve missed you,” she embraced him tightly. “Alright you two, this isn’t the time.” Josiah coughed, “-Eira, you are to partner with Staxius Haggard. The rule says anyone below twenty-five can fight, and you know full well that Staxius is about twenty. Therefore, I have no qualms about this set-up. “Who knew that I’ll ever fight alongside father,” she spoke. “Yeah, who knew,” he added softly. “Alright, starting today and till the tournament ends, Staxius is to be your instructor.” The director left, the training ground felt dense. “Okay, I have to see what you can and cannot do.” He patted her head and walked toward the opposing team. “Greetings instructor Sophie,” he spoke, the aura behind him was menacing. As a statement, he used the left hand to pull down the white glove on his right hand. That motion made him look more imposing than before.

"Greetings Staxius," she replied. "-how may I help you?" she continued. "I'd like our students to have a small match." He suggested casually, "you can't be serious?" Rosalinda tried to protest, "don't speak in-between when two adults are speaking to one another. Especially when we didn't ask for your opinion," he fired back with a cold-stare. "HOW DARE YOU DISRESPECT ROSALINDA," Huon tried to jump in, \*Death Element: Unleash Aura.\* For a second he released part of the pent-up stress. They dropped instantly, it felt nauseating, trying to stand became close to impossible. "Your parents should have really taught you manners," he added insult to injury, Sophie stood by and watched. "I'm sorry but this isn't a way to formally request a fight," she had a good point. "Of course, I apologize," he nodded, "-would you rather us fight?" he asked, Staxius was itching for a match. "a battle between instructors doesn't seem that polite, don't you think?" Sophie spoke casually.

To that, he chuckled, "politeness in this situation is a bit far-fetched. I can feel your animosity reaching from deep within. Not to mention your students, those brats who dared protest when I, a friend, came to ask for a small mock battle." He paused and stared at Sophie directly, "isn't the prospect of a mock battle fancy you the least? You're a teacher, seeing your students, the ones you've nurtured perform in a simulated environment, wouldn't that make the least bit sense?" her sole reply was looking away defiantly, "if I remember correctly, Claireville academy has a rule. Something forgotten over the age, but ever-present," he took out the glove, "this is a mage's school after all," he threw it at Sophie, "mages don't normally resolve conflicts by words, am I, not right. Crimson princess, once SSS-ranked," he smirked.

"You're correct," she picked up the glove, "let's make a bet, the one who wins has the right to ask anything from the other. That can be for you to resign as Eira's partner or me being dismissed as a teacher." She smiled; her confidence overflowed. "Very well, I agree to those terms. Let's have a good battle," his eyes turn to the students still on the ground. "Watch me crumble that fake bubble you call confidence; I'll show you what true strength means." Staxius crouched. Sophie didn't hear what he said. "Go ahead and try," Rosalinda stared back, she was ready to fight.

#### Chapter 108: The Immortal

"Father," Eira rushed to his side, Ysmay followed close behind. "What's the matter?" He turned and faced her, the eyes looked emotionless. That sight sent shivers down her spine, something bad brewed beneath; she felt it. A fire burnt, not yellow and warm, but black and cold. "What is it?" he asked with a hint of coyness. "A-are you s-sure it's wise to just walk and straight-up challenge an instructor like that?" her eyes were filled with doubt and amazement. Ysmay stood, her thoughts and speech remained as still as she did. "It's fine, don't worry about it." He pattered her head and walked towards the center.

There, Sophie waited patiently. Her eyes didn't leave Staxius for once, her right hand gripped a small sword while the other held a gun; a small black and golden colored pistol. "You and I may be mages, but that doesn't limit our arsenal to be only magic and spells," she justified herself even though he didn't care. "Gun, sword, anything to that matter, a battle is a battle, winning is all that matters. That's the simple and sad truth, lose and you die, one must always think about winning and surviving. This world may have changed but the universal law of survival still holds true." He fired back, a dark mist began to emanate from his feet. Out of fear, all the students left and ran for the safety of the spectator booth. Luckily, the escape was made easy for an exit was located right behind them. Huon managed to help the stumbling Rosalinda outside, Ysmay still didn't utter a word.

Unknowingly, the four of them sat a few meters apart. "Sophie is going to win this battle," Huon spoke, "-I care not if she has to kill that man. Disrespecting Rosalinda is something no one has ever dared doing." He burnt with anger and hate. "Calm down," Rosalinda spoke, her body fatigued and mind spinning. "Honestly, I just wish father kept his calm in situations like these. He always tried to start a fight wherever he goes. Sadly, that's the thing I admire most; the confidence to take on anyone, anywhere."

"Good," Staxius broke the pin-drop silence, "-our students caught the hint and left." He looked around but the view was blocked by the one-way barrier. Good indeed," her eyes and body changed, they looked intimidating. Her whole stance looked much more relaxed, her feet seemed to levitate, wind magic was in use. Channeled through the sword, lightning magic. The air around her boiled, she used fire magic to cast a shield, none could reach her without getting burnt, and not mildly. She wasn't playing, if any body-part came into contact, it would instantly melt.

Meanwhile, Staxius just watched. He didn't use any particular stance. The simple steel sword rested on his belt. None knew he had that weapon but a light tap dispelled the illusion spell. The arena grew colder, "did you feel that?" Ysmay muttered. "Feel what?" Eira asked to which Ysmay replied with, "the sudden drop in pressure; the drop in temperature and the screams of many ruthless souls. I can see them, they are enraged but tamed, the bloodlust is..." she could not finish, as she began to cough. "Don't overexert yourself," Eira patted her back, "-being a psychic must be hard," it all faded into the background.

\*Clang,\* it resounded, the first clash of swords made waves. The battle began, Sophie didn't rely on her weapons. Within the first seconds, she used a multitude of spells, ranging from lightning to wind. They were all high-tier magic, she went all out. Staxius tried his best to dodge and perry the spells. Most of the fireball spells were sliced and dispelled. He channeled mana cancellation into the sword, thus they fought. From the first instant, Sophie held the advantage. Staxius only but dodged and run; "Coward," Huon yelled. This didn't do anything, both opponents were focused and without any notice, Sophie cast something incredible.

\*Lightning and Fire element: Infernal Thunder,\* in a quick motion, she threw both her weapons above; they levitated and summoned forth a spell. Said spell was so powerful, the Order deemed it illegal to use. She didn't care, the spell was properly summoned. 'Trouble,' it looked as if two gigantic hands; one of lightning and one of fire trying to grasp Staxius. They came together like a clap and \*BAM,\* it rattled the whole building. It raged on, the spell didn't end, it was a continuous stream of lightning and fire. They did, in fact, made contact with her foe, 'sorry, but I care not if you live or die. This is revenge for the last time we met,' her eyes turned red.

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Panting, she used most of her mana in that attack. Fast and quick, she could not afford to draw out the battle. That was playing right into Staxius's hand. The emphasis on a defensive style to tire out the opponent. It saved both his stamina and mana while the other went full-force. "Eira Haggard, I apologize," Sophie yelled but coughed blood. Eira knew what she meant, Staxius's presence vanished. No longer could they feel him nor his aura, that spell must have vaporized the poor boy. "Pathetic, no one has ever lived to see another day when the crimson princess used her signature spell." Huon and

Rosalinda celebrated their win. \*Chuckle,\* Eira laughed, “father isn’t that weak,” it caught their ear, a small feeling of dread loomed.

“Going full out before I can tire you out,” a soft voice spoke, the spell raged. “-I admit, that’s something very smart.” A figure walked nonchalantly, “-but, you must have known that magic and spell don’t work on me,” the face burnt, arms and legs melting, Staxius walked. He didn’t dodge nor use anything else to counteract her full power. One of his eyes was burnt out of recognition; the cheeks had holes that revealed his teeth. The clothes were gone, burnt to ashes. Skin fell, muscles exposed, the right tibia didn’t have anything apart from bones. Without muscles, the bones would have crumbled away, but something held his skeleton in place. “W-WHAT ARE YOU?” he emerged, Ysmay puked blood, Huon’s mind went numb, Rosalinda’s gaze could not lift off that man. Eira watched, her father was a broken mess.

“H-how can y-you walk, b-by all means you should be dead,” Sophie muttered, her voice faltered. \*Fire element: Fire-ball. Wind element: Slashing Gale.\* her assault didn’t end, she continued to throw all her projectile spell. Staxius walked, the fireball blew part of his hands off. The wind spell pierced and sliced his chest. A massive hole was made, the heart was gone. He fell onto his knees. “Y-you’re d-dead now a-aren’t you?” she smiled; her face was one of a murderer gone psychotic.

The realization finally hit, Staxius did die. Eira’s face changed, everyone’ turned gloomy. Without saying a word, she unknowingly cast shadow-step and rushed onto the battlefield, “FATHER,” she screamed while approaching what remained of him. “Avon, take care of her,” before she could touch his shoulder; just a few millimeters away – a figure shot out of Staxius. It stopped and carried her to the exit, she flew for a solid five-seconds, the door shut before her. \*BANG, BANG,\* “LET ME IN,” She screamed, tears flowed.

“You people always make such a fuss about the death of a loved one.” His head moved and faced Eira, “-this is your first lesson. One must never cry over someone dear’s death. Especially during a battle; it leaves you vulnerable. Seeing me die made you want to come and rescue, but if this was a war, you’d have gotten killed instead. War doesn’t care about humanity and compassion; you fight for yourself and your team – not to fulfill some noble goal.” The tone felt monotonous and deep, “-you should keep those emotions in check while on the battlefield. But don’t turn emotionless, for it’s the very thing that can give you the last push when the table turns against you.” His body began to regenerate, the muscles and skin reformed. The aura around him grew even darker, it felt like the death reaper loomed over his head. “Remember the smiles, remember the love, remember what you want to protect, the people you care about, the things you love. Remember their affection, it will help make you into a stronger person; this is something I’ve learned from experience. I have a lot of things I want to protect; this is why I had to put on that show.” He stood; the body fully healed. He stood, naked to his core, on his back, a giant scythe with a skull engraved. On his chest, the ancient markings that once disappeared engraved themselves yet again. From his arms to his legs, scars in the shape of dragons and other symbols made their presence known.

“W-what are you?” Sophie gave up, she knew not what happened. A man who died before her eyes was revived into someone even stronger. The students were too dumbfounded to mutter anything, their mind constantly replayed the scene where the body healed itself. Around his neck, his crest, the adventuring necklace hung. All the stuff he used to carry around was back in Void. Avon made sure to take everything away.

“What am I?” his body turned from staring Eira to Sophie. “-that’s a very wise question. A question to which I don’t hold the answer,” the tone remained monotonous yet it had a hint of friendliness within. His naked body was like a work of art, a canvas for all the symbols and curses he had. Everything engraved, it grew over time. No one knew for he never showed his body. Always wearing the suit that left only his face out to the public. Sadly now, it all was laid bare for them to see. Every time he died; one mark burnt itself onto him. It began from the chest, but as the time progressed, the chest filled out and moved to the other parts except for his back. Both legs were filled, it had reached the arms. That death meant a new part was to be engraved, the symbol lit on his right arm. “On said topic,” he stared Sophie who was scared beyond words. “The battle is yet to be over,” the eyes closed and he vanished. “I win,” a sharp metallic object poked her back, “I yield,” she gave and fell. Everything that transpired before them was too unreal to be true.

“Master, it’s not wise to walk around with your sword unsheathed.” Avon materialized, he winked and joked. “-here,” all he managed to acquire was a pair of boxers, white ones at that. “Thank you,” he patted Avon and walked out. “I shall tell you what I require tomorrow,” the gates opened, he quickly glanced to check on Sophie. ‘Yea, definitely going to take some time to realize what happened.’ He wondered.

“OUCH,” Eira yelled, Staxius gave her a hard forehead flick. “Sorry, but you were out of it.” He added joyfully. “Father,” she tapped his back, her tone formal and serious. “Are you immortal?” she asked, she wanted an answer. Unlike the others, seeing Staxius come back from the dead didn’t phase her nor did his naked body. “The honest answer is yes, I’m immortal – but most don’t believe what I say.” His tone matched hers. “I’m your daughter, it’s my job to believe in the weird tales you have to recount.” It came from the heart, she didn’t have a very good childhood. “I’m sorry,” he turned and knelt, “it may sound cheesy, but I’m Staxius Haggard, heir to the god of death.” The tone serious, he stood and walked. “Go back and get ready, I am to train you later in the day. Finding some proper attire is a must.” He waved and left, the signature wave – the one he hadn’t done in ages. A quick flick of the wrist over his right shoulder while pointing out only the index and middle finger. Thus ends the wager, a fight with Sophie that was indirectly the first lesson for Eira.

#### Chapter 109: Comfort

Time went on, Staxius made it out of the stadium without anyone catching the sight of his body. Eira was left shocked and so were her comrades. Sophie remained in the middle without a clue of what to do. Her breathing was erratic, given her mana was nearly depleted; that sort of breathing wasn’t normal, peculiar was best fit to describe it. The third-year sat with nothing more than regret. Rosalinda’s senses came to the norm, she realized that she had unwillingly stepped into dangerous territory. She acted in a very condescending and disrespectful manner towards that demon. Huon’s eyes were but an empty shell; Staxius truly displayed what true strength meant.

“Ysmay,” Eira managed to snap her friend out of her dream. She had lost herself in the dense, powerful screams and pain of the souls the sword unleashed. Nothing hurt more than the screeching screams of an unrested spirit. Ysmay was special in her own way, her boon from birth was spirit sight. Her eyes and senses were very sensitive – thus her shy demeanor. A hypersensitive mind meant always being alert. Every little thing scared her, but she had learned how to differentiate between evil and good. What she saw on that day wasn’t either – it transcended the rather limiting concept of conduct. Good or evil, it

didn't matter, she witnessed what most would have killed to see. True clarity and true wisdom about the nature of life after death.

"Master," the sun shone mildly; people got ready for work. Time was around ten – though late in some people's eyes; the place wasn't that crowded. "Yes?" Staxius asked. The car drove to the academy's town. "Are you sure it was wise to reveal that you were immortal. I mean, wasn't it supposed to be a secret? Sorry for assuming things, but don't you always make it a point to hide your true strength?" Avon, being Staxius's personal aide, defender, spy, and other things he could have wanted; became familiar with how the master thought. "It's not a matter of hiding my strength, I just like to have my cards hidden from play. I find dealing with situations, people, a fight or anything in that matter rather tedious. I have to both think and outthink the other – it's a guessing game. I may be smart, but I'm no mind reader. Sure, I can sense a person's private information; emotions and manipulate them – sadly, I can't always read what they think at that particular moment in time. Thus, the reason I like to always have various opportunities to get out if ever things go out of hand. A back-up is better than not, I'd rather be prepared than getting ambushed." The car pulled next to a tailoring shop, "enough talk, I need new clothes. I'm going to miss wearing that grey suit, but tis not a quandary. I'll just have the tailor make one back in Arda."

The brown door with a small window onto which, "Clareville's tailor," was inscribed, opened. 'Very imaginative,' he thought sarcastically, a small bell rung in a jingle fashion. "Good morning, how may I be of servi...oh my god." The lady who ran the store quickly turned away. "I apologize for my exposed self, but could you please help with garments." He asked in a childish tone, it made her think less about him being someone undesirable. "I apologize as well," she faced around and smiled, it held the comfort of a mother's compassion. "Thanks for understanding," Staxius smiled and tilted his head as if he were a playful kid. "Come this way," she led him to a small stool. "Sit right there, I'll get you an outfit." She seemed blissful, occasionally while walking, she subtly added a little hop. Staxius watched as she went from right to left picking and matching shirt and pants. The lady hummed as if putting a child to sleep – the feeling of this shop was what he imagined being raised with a caring mother would have been like.

"There," she handed him many outfits, in the end, he settled for the simplest looking one. A long-sleeved buttoned-up white shirt with checkered tight pants. The latter was of a greyish color while the top was white. "I had a feeling you'd have picked the simpler looking ones," she spoke softly as she did some work over the counter. "How so," he checked if the clothes looked proper in the mirror, "you have the feel of someone who has to deal a lot on a daily basis." They held a normal conversation while being ways apart. The shop wasn't that big thus their soften tone. "- you may be wondering how I know these things." She stopped and stared, "the manner in which you speak and act. They're peculiar – your shoulders seem tense yet you push to give out a smile. The way you always have a friendly and welcoming tone; it's admirable. I like that attitude, the blasé way to live and not care about the things bothering you. If I had been your mother, I'd be very proud." She continued to speak till Staxius came to the counter.

"I'm sure I'd have been blessed to have someone like you to be my mother." He said honestly, the hatred for the lady who abandoned them long ago hadn't left his mind a single bit. "I appreciate the sentiment but you should not look down upon your mother; I'm sure she's a good lady." Staxius shrug at that comment, "if you say so," the price indicated twenty silvers for the pants and ten silvers for the shirt. "Here," he handed her a gold coin, "-this is a pleasant surprise, but I'm afraid I don't have spare

change.” She tried pushing away his hand but Staxius insisted. “No, it’s the correct price.” He placed the coin on her right palm, “-this is just a token of my appreciation. You made me feel at ease, you can’t understand how much that means for someone like me.” She unwillingly accepted. \*Click,\* the door opened, “excuse me,” she called for him to stop. “Yes?” he asked courteously, “-I care not if you’re being generous. It made me feel nice when you said you appreciated my compassion. If I remind you so much about mother’s, why not come by later in the evening. I’ll treat you to a homecooked meal as a token of my thanks.” Her tone was overwhelmingly pure and caring, before such a great lady – who in their right minds would have refused. “I’ll be here faster than you know it,” he winked and left, Staxius’s mannerism genuinely changed to one of a boy who loved his mother.

“Master,” Avon waved, Staxius quickly got in the car and headed for the academy. “You seem pretty joyful,” the spirit wanted to know more, “-that lady in that shop was surprisingly very nice. I felt like I was back in the epoch where my family wasn’t a complete mess. But don’t worry about such things – we’ve got training to do. The car came to a full stop in front of a noisy establishment. It was break-time, the chattering raged on like heavy rainfall. A few students caught a glimpse of the black car, the reaction had become obvious and predictable. Rather than focusing on them, he walked to the office.

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There he met with Josiah and gave a brief summary of what happened. Josiah told him that the three students who witnessed him in action were left sick. Each one rested in the medical bay; they were affected mentally. Staxius only replied with, “that’s the price of watching a being who is cursed.” Josiah didn’t give any reaction; it remained neutral. Staxius was free to do as he pleased for he was the partner of a student in the academy for the two versus two. That basically gave him privilege as a temporary student as well as an instructor. “I must say that your choice of garments is a bit refreshing. Never have I seen you without a suit or something formal.” The remark changed to Staxius’s attire; his body shone through. The muscles filled the clothes nicely, though the latter looked cheap – his body and overall aura made it look as if it were something crafted by a master tailor.

“Before you leave, may I enquire to where you bought said attire?” Josiah asked, “I got it at the Claireville Academy’s tailor shop.” He left without saying a word, ‘what tailor shop?’ the director wondered. Seeing the academy was free for him to do as he pleased; Staxius walked and took a trip down memory lane. Time might have been short spent here, but the journey to where he stands now began on said ground. Students were intrigued by the new boy; mainly the boys. They were impressed by how well-maintained the figure was.

It didn’t catch many people’s attention, but the crest and guild rank hung around his neck. Most’s attention was on the dragon; a few spotted the silver plate but didn’t know what it meant. In said manner, Staxius walked and searched. He wanted to know what Eira did during her break. From the stadium to the training grounds, he checked to no avail. Her dormitory was out of the question for it was not permitted to go back when the bell rang. In the last attempt, he walked inside and headed for the cafeteria.

Long white hair, red eyes, a stance befitting a princess. She sat, alone, in the middle and had her food. Ysmay would have usually accompanied her but today was absent. The tables around her were filled completely, some students stood but none dared approach her. She had an invisible barrier raised; it

was subconscious; people didn't want to disturb her. A single glance from her made people both scared and ashamed. To that scene, Staxius chuckled and ordered some food.

Amidst the chatter, footsteps broke through. The sound of some rather expensive shoe hitting the tiled floor momentarily raised the curiosity of students who heard it. It still sounded cacophonous but those steps felt dignified. "Excuse me, but is that seat taken?" Staxius asked the footsteps were his. Eira looked, everyone stopped. Someone brave enough had the guts to ask her if he could sit beside her. "F-fa," she tried speaking but Staxius blinked and gave her a muted shush. She understood what he meant and nodded. The platter landed gently on the table, and he began eating as if nothing had happened. The tension grew, especially the boys, some were furious.

"Who the heck is he?" question riled out of control. "Someone is awfully popular," with each bite Staxius took, he glanced up and smirked – he teased her. Try as hard as she may, her serious and neutral face could not help but let a small grin. "You think so?" she began to speak. "Well yeah, just sense all the animosity, they want me dead," he took a sip out of the drink. "I feel it too, it's a shame that if it was to come down to a fight; the one walking out of here untouched would be none other than you," she took another bite. "You give your old man way too much credit," he added sarcastically. "Explain to me what part of you is old," she fired back, Staxius chuckled.

"Joking aside," her voice took a serious tone, "-why did you come to the capital, let alone the academy. I thought you were out doing god knows what," her tone held resentment; Staxius had the bad habit of leaving without saying anything. "It all came together by fate, I guess. It all worked out in the end, don't bother with the small stuff." He didn't answer her question, "if you want to be secretive that's fine." She ate her last bite, "-why is there a halo on the crest?" her eyes locked in. "About that, your old man might have gotten married," he took another bite, Eira choked, "YOU DID WHAT?"

## Chapter 110: Murder

Her voice echoed, the composure lost – eyes laid confused and baffled, Eira yelled. The news about the marriage came brusquely. He watched in awe as the flushed face quickly adjusted her body. The rather loud question had drawn them more attention than needed. "Someone's cut the rope on their own guillotine." Staxius casually took a sip, everyone around stared Eira. She could not do anything out of the ordinary, reason was that an angel was supposed to be perfect. She with the white hair and cold aura gave the impression of being said entity. However it might have looked, the way Eira changed her aura – it seemed as if it was normal for a girl to yell.

"You've definitely trained in the art of manipulation, haven't you?" he felt it, her subtle changes. "That is granted; my fath..." she quickly rephrased, "-or rather, the one I aspire to be is one of the best manipulators I know. Humans are but playthings for that man – no one is off-limits." She stood; her eyes filled with excitement. The way her eyes moved, it signaled Staxius to follow – both headed out. "May I ask where we are headed?" He walked beside her – they didn't look anything alike. "Just follow," she grabbed his sleeves and sped up her pace. The outside came quickly, mainly the fountain. They left through the main entrance – she had plans to take him to a remote place in the academy.

"Guild m-master..." back in the capital, a crowd had gathered before the central guild. All whispered to one another, a man laid with his stomach open. Blood gushed, none tried to help, the assistants all rushed out. "W-what happened?" Diane asked, her blasé tone changed for once, she recognized the

adventurer. The guild plate on his neck showed Steel. “T-the m-mask man, h-his t-the m-murderer. M-my party w-was wiped out in a single a-attack,” he tried speaking, the few adventurers inside followed. “Use any healing spell or scrolls, I care not – we have to save this man,” Diane didn’t care about him – he held precious information about the killer. A rumor went around that a masked man ran around town killing anyone he felt like. From what reports said, he wielded a strange slightly curved sword – people said it was made in the east; far, far away from Hidros. “d-don’t b-bother,” he coughed, “- Diane,” he grabbed her hands and tried to grip, she felt his life fleeting before her eyes. “-t-the murderers isn’t s-someone weak... g-gol...” the eyes shut, the hand lost grip, the man died.

All the whisper and chatter stopped, a heavy feeling loomed overhead. \*Click,\* the first thing Diana did was follow protocol. She removed the guild plate, guild card, and anything related to that. Second, the body was taken inside; his family got notified. It took some time but the quest board updated.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

Previously, said quest was ranked as tier seven. Thus, low-ranked worriers would often try and go finish said assignment. However, what returned was but dismembered body parts. “Are you sure it’s wise to leave that quest on there?” Melisa asked in a shy voice. “I’ve raised the difficulty; it all depends on them. That man needs to be stopped or killed; too many of our youngsters are getting massacred. As if fighting monsters wasn’t hard enough – now we have to deal with a psycho,” she sighed heavily. “Why don’t you try and reach that guy then, the one with silver rank?” Melisa asked and referred to Staxius. “Absolutely not, don’t you remember.” She took a pause and stared, Melisa’s clueless face told all that she needed to know. “-before he died, the last word was gold given he didn’t finish it, I heard it clearly. However, that man is a rank below platinum. We can’t underestimate the risk. Only accept if two Silver-ranks try to pick that quest. Do not let anyone else try – we’ve had enough bodies laying to rest.”

Time continued, the little incident became something of the past. People weren’t heartless, but the death of one adventurer didn’t bother many. That was the nature of said job, powerful or feeble, they didn’t care – if you’re weak, you died. It was a harsh world, many learned it the hard way but often too late; when their body laid on the ground with a horde of monsters mauling at them. Said was the thought, ‘adventuring isn’t easy, it was a mistake.’

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“Why did you take me so far off the campus?” the duo stood ways from the main gate. The place was hidden by trees and no one to interrupt. “I don’t want people to know what you have to say, I wanted to have their eyes off my back for once.” She gulped, “- about the marriage, what’s that all about?” her face slightly tilted – it was adorable. “About that,” he took a more serious stance, “I’m sorry about not telling you or everyone in Dorchester, but I’m in fact married. The situation demanded it and so did I,” he looked away.

“Who is it then, did you marry some noble’s daughter to improve your standing or what?” Eira’s deduction wasn’t far off, that was the type of thing he would do. “Not really,” he turned around and held a small grin. “Who is it then?” her tone filled with envy, the envy to know who her step-mother was. “Before I tell you who she is, let me formally introduce myself.” He cleared his throat and stood firm. “I’m Staxius Haggard, King of Arda,” he winked, “stop lying, who is it?” she didn’t bite, the wink was too obvious. “I’m not actually lying; I’m married to Shanna Islegust as well as first in line to the throne.”

No matter how he said it, no pride nor ego resounded within his voice. "... she stood by quietly for there was no reason to believe him. "Avon," Staxius mumbled, "greetings master," the spirit materialized, "thanks," Staxius smiled and he vanished. "There," he placed a ring made of gold and diamonds in her hands, "you can see the royal crest engraved in it as well as my name," he spoke the truth; it was one of the things that made him king.

"I-impossible," she fell onto her knees, "you can't be serious," her eyes glanced upwards. "You're a king and married to a queen," her teeth grit, "-did you manipulate that poor woman?" her eyes filled with rage. Prior, both Eira and Shanna met, Eira had grown fond and held her in high esteem. Before Eira could do anything, Staxius gave her a hard flick on the forehead. "Stop doing that," she pouted. "I did not manipulate her, she's the only person I can't read nor affect behavior-wise." He placed his hands onto her shoulder, "no need to worry. Your father didn't do anything shady to win her heart. I did it with grit and effort. Shanna Islegust is one of the people I cherish most, as well as you," he smiled reassuringly.

The news took time to settle in, but Eira soon believed it. The bell rang, Staxius asked special permission for her to be exempted from class. The training began, "I want you to remove the seal," he added suddenly. "What do you mean?" Eira asked – Staxius once told her about something he did years ago. His thought process was that maybe said seal was what made her try and hold back. Her eyes closed; the breathing grew deeper. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, do it," he demanded, a wooden sword rested in his hand. Her concentration heightened – \*Release\* a gust of sharp cold wind rushed out. Her hair levitated, a blueish flame burnt, the ground below froze. "I C-CAN'T C-CONTROL IT," her eyes wide open, she stared Staxius, the eyes changed from red to bright blue. "That's no problem." Yet again, no incantation, he cast shadow step paired with mana cancelation. Round after round, he dashed to and fro and subtly touched her body with the sword. She could not feel anything, the seal was a limiter. "Done," he stopped, her eyes turned back to normal, the freezing atmosphere subsided.

"Amazing," she stared at her hands, "I feel much stronger and in control." She quickly glanced to thank her father but he panted heavily. "Are you ok?" she rushed to his side. "-I'm fine, don't worry about it," he smiled and got back into a neutral stance. "Time for standard swordsmanship lesson. The training continued, what Staxius did was precisely use his mana cancelation and speed to fix her magical circuit. It's a feat and idea no one had ever thought of before. However, he did it all thanks to the new skill he acquired. The ability to see with the eyes closed; training it had its perks. As opposed to judging where the mana links were, he could now see them in action. The seal was put in place because her magical element grew exponentially powerful each year – the spell he cast when she was a child never stopped working. It trained her from within – she had no clue

The tournament was set for the day after tomorrow. They trained hard and loud; he didn't teach her anything related to magic. That was Josiah's job – trying to change how she used magic now would be detrimental and bring pain. He focused on training her mind and swordsmanship. It went on for ages and ages, till five o'clock. Eira was left drained, Staxius just stood, his breathing didn't change the least bit. "That's it for today, you better head out, Ysmay has come to fetch you," he helped her on her feet and left. On the way out, he waved at Ysmay who hid subconsciously. The images from before still remained fresh. "What are you doing out of your bed?" Eira asked, "I felt better so I came to check up on you," she replied and watched Eira stumbled out. "Let me help," they headed to the dormitory.

'That was some nice training,' without wasting any time, Staxius took a quick shower and left – he had an appointment. "Master," are you sure it's wise to just barge in and demand food?" Avon materialized midway through the journey. "Of course not," he pointed to the seat, "-I've gone ahead and bought some provisions. I'm not going empty-handed," he replied casually, the shop came into view.

The same jingle rang, Staxius walked in. The lady was busy helping customers; her hands were completely full. The shop was overwhelmed, so many people were present he could not believe it. From what he saw in the morning, it didn't look particularly special but now crawled with customers. Despite that, none ever purchased anything. They came to look at wares and leave. Rare did she get anyone to buy something – people thought her attitude wasn't that great. Being overly friendly pushed many away and not to forget she had the skill to tell what a person was like. Conscious or subconsciously, she tried to stare right through someone.

Staxius stood by and watched carefully, "good evening," he sensed something, killing intent. The moment he said good evening, it caught the people inside by surprise. This gave him the time he needed to close his eyes and feel everyone. The lady stood awfully close to someone with a dark flame burning. It was him – the one who let out said killing intent. To make matters worse, she had her back turned. "Di," he took out a knife and thrust forward into the lady's back. "Staxius what a pleasure to see you again," she replied, he stood before her, "good evening to you as well," he smiled reassuringly, the knife did, in fact, made contact, but not with the lady – Staxius was the one who got hit.

"Who are you?" no blood came out, a hand caught the weapon, Avon had his back. Without saying anything else, the man got punched and blacked-out instantly. 'Good job,' he whispered while speaking to the lady.