

Death Magic 1021

Chapter 1021: “betrayal is at the sentence of death,”

A great expulsion of mana caught the sense of Mana-sensible bystanders. Those unknown to the idea felt a strange thud; a feeling many threw on accounts of heavy drinking or lack of sleep. Ishta ran across the street, his breath puffed at the chilly atmosphere – a smoke beacon of essence cut over the alleys.

“Skarla,” he gasped, “-why, what?” the one in question had her expression thrust at the impasse. Four skid marks led to the unconscious Iyan and Syne. Their captive, Skarla, held their collar with a hint of anguish, “-Skarla,” voiced one more, her locked vision shattered, “-Ishta,” she blinked, “-you’re here?”

“What’s with that tone?” the runner’s pace eased for a calmer, breath-recovering walk. No sooner did he turn the corner to a blast of radiant energy. The pure beams of power sprinkle pebbles, the outfit lit mildly in tiny containments. “Lady Kul” he hurried to the lass, “-are you well?” she did not answer, keeping a low profile and head at the ground. Barrels horned downward, “-surrender or die,” screamed gunmen scattered across the rooftops.

“Ishta,” whispered Kul, “-won’t you leave with him?”

“What do you mean?” he paid no heed to the pointers, Skarla had her grip around RatX, ‘-Kul, stop slacking,’ she glared, a message that stuck to Kul’s pale expression.

“I mean,” she grabbed his arms and lifted a troubled gaze, “-Asmodeus left for the underworld, he left for the realm of demons; hell. Lilith has betrayed our master and has taken her place as Queen.”

“Impossible,” he slapped her arms and backed away, “-I won’t stand for blasphemy, my lord isn’t a pushover.”

.....

“Use your head,” she sniffled, “-don’t you see,” a snap shattered the mild illusion – a massacre stood under the leather shoes. Puddles of blood gathered, he gulped and scanned – *bang,* the fire shot thundered. Kul rose her index and twirled; cross-shaped circles opened before the many enemies. RatX fired and decimated flesh; Kul snapped and the circle fired darts of golden hue – some fell off the rooftops, others laid as nothing but an after image of Skarla’s weapon.

‘My friends,’ a troubled Ishta lost his strength and toppled against a garbage bin, “-WHAT HAPPENED?”

“Asmodeus,” she returned, clambering up with blood-soaked clothes, “-he left for hell, I told you.”

Skarla landed, “-situation’s out of hand,” she said after checking the corpses, “-they were hunters working for YWC. We need to skip town.”

“How can you be so at ease,” trembled Ishta, “-look at the massacre, so many of my friends are dead, WHAT NOW?”

“SHUT THE HELL UP!” Kul vanished and slammed Ishta against a wall, “-DON’T YOU THINK I KNOW?”

“Enough, both of you!” fired Skarla.

They returned her gaze, “-we know, yes?”

Kul eased her grip and dusted her shirt, “-Ishta, I’ll explain shortly,” they turned to a haunting site of blood and gore. Dislocated limbs, eviscerated wounds, dismembered members – unlucky few had their guts spat upon the marred street. Red turned brown, the splatter dripped, “-I’ll do it,” exhaled a tense Kul, “-take those two and head to the hostel. I’ll clean up the mess.”

They crossed gaze, took one each, and dragged their fellow luggage out of the alley, “-you sure about this?” narrowed Skarla.

“Sure about what?”

“Her cleaning up, are they, not your friends as well?”

Another burst caught his attention, “-no, I’m, sure it’s fine,” he fought the urge to turn, “-they made their choice and I sealed mine. Come on,” the walk continued, invisible pillars of smoke rose – a fire of pure-white lined with black cremated a pile of bodies.

“May they rest in peace,” she pressed her hands, ‘-Asmodeus, you won’t escape so easily... betrayal is at the sentence of death,’ she stared her hands, ‘-to kill a Prince, I must become stronger.’

On the other side of Hell’s gate rose a warmer atmosphere. Floating islands and continents littered the landscape – the lowest level burnt with a flame that ought to make the sun shy; higher up the plane cooler becomes the temperature until it no longer exists, “-back home,” echoed Charlie comfortably taken to his demonic figure, “-doesn’t it feel amazing?”

“My, this place sure has changed,” he scanned – demons flew from island to island, a glance up told of bigger and better islands as a glance downward spoke the haunting beginning of the end.

“Come on, spread your wings,” the arch-demon leaped off hovering mass of trees and rocks, “-let’s fly,” he said midway, “-we ought to meet her majesty.”

‘This place,’ wings summoned, ‘-I remember everything, my powers, and my heart feels at ease. I guess I did betray my master, oh well, he knows,’ higher one climbs the harder it becomes. The disparity was such to stop the unworthy from climbing lest they grow strong and able to handle the peace and quiet, else a fade for the realm’s higher pressure. Fixed atop the highest point rose a castle, it laid shy from the main continent of which its size couldn’t be quantified. A glance simply took away the existence of lower islands. And so, the climb resumed – pressure beckoned harsher gusts and an ever-increasing weight upon the shoulders.

novelusb.com

“Here,” Asmodeus eventually breathed a sigh and landed. The Castle-isle harbored a tall forest of gradually thinning foliage. A stone-walk way spread across, “-to the east resides the elevator.”

“You could have said so earlier,” exclaimed the prince, “-I’d have kept my energy.”

“What’s the fun in that,” returned a chuckle. Gates hiding the castle opened – higher demons guarded the perimeter, and a sense of royalty expanded. Order and discipline burnt the hearts of the devoted. Fierce red hair flowed past, “-Sathanas!”

“Brother Asmodeus,” she stopped and stared, “-I see you made it home,” hesitation filled the voice, “-expected as much. No matter, go meet mother, she’s in audience with Leviathan.”

“Sathanas, wait,” he horned upon the hesitation, “-why are you lying?”

“Because I don’t want to speak the truth. Go inside, I don’t care,” she threw up her arms, “-fuck off already.”

“Foul-mouthed brat,” gritted Charlie, a sudden burst of energy fueled her curled fist, “-don’t you dare,” she widened her gaze, “-last time ended in near-death, this time I’ll end your miserable existence.”

“Brother,” a swarm of insects carried Beelzebub, “-hello and welcome,” he smiled, “-forgive sister, she’s a bit angry at what happened.”

“What happened?”

“Mother hasn’t told father about her intentions.”

“Enough,” added Charlie, “-best for lady Lilith to speak her mind on the matter.”

“Okay,” he waved and trailed behind Sathanas. The promenade resumed, demons bowed their heads at their sight, ‘-he seems used to the treatment.’ A gloomy outline waited in the shadows of the central staircase, “-carry on,” ordered Asmodeus, “-if mother is in audience, we’ll have to wait.”

“She’ll be done in a bit, don’t make me hurry.”

Asmodeus stretched his long fingers into the gloomy outline’s lowered point of view, “-brother?” it exhaled.

“Mammon, are you well?”

He slid across the bench, Asmodeus followed the gesture and dropped, “-I guess?”

“Gloomy response doesn’t suit my brother, what happened?”

“Mother’s insane... I was having fun for the first time. My plans came to fruition, the greed satiated my heart and I grew in authority and strength... Charlie came and said mother left the Shadow Realm for the Underworld. We finally had a master who was worthy of the name... I want to go back but I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“The vow of sovereignty. Mother holds ultimate power. Without her approval, no one can leave the realm, not even you, brother.”

“Guess Sathanas’ anger is well deserved.”

“No, not that...” he held silence, Asmo could but wait at the increasing pressure.

“...” Mammon gathered his thought and gazed emptyly.

“Will you spit it out?”

“Sathanas is angry because mother’s spreading her legs before the Kings. She hates being tied by ancient tradition, she says mother has a solemn look on her face, she says mother’s bound by a curse or something. I frankly don’t care what happens. Mother accepted a deal and tis the payment. As Queen

she must bear the children of the coming army, she must bear the weight of the demonic world's survival."

"She doesn't have to," interjected Sathanas, "-she was happy in the Shadow Realm, no longer tied by the ancient tradition. Igna and those around him are fun to stay with – we had complete authority over the world and could do what we wanted... now here we are, in the demented realm of damnation, what a fucking joke."

An entourage of greater demons exited, "-oh hello children of Lilith," waved the head of said party, "-Sathanas, your father is waiting for the return. He won't take lightly to the insubordination."

"Shut up, uncle."

"Such anger and hatred, good, very good, you pay your trait well."

"Uncle Leviathan, it's a pleasure to see you again."

"My, Asmodeus, if it's not my favorite nephew. I do apologize for causing your lady mother harm. We need to ensure the demon race's survival. Let's have longer chat someday, see you soon, nephew."

"Condescending prick."

"Inside voice, Sathanas, inside voice. I'll check on mother."

A short walk turned reflection; '-mother's trapped... maybe not. Leviathan came to visit; I doubt mother's spreading her legs at the kings. The demon race is in danger, what's with that?' he skipped the audience room and headed for her bedchambers. A mild touch opened the door – the beautiful Lilith sat at her vanity table, her hair wet with water and the expression drowned in woe, "-mother," it didn't quite reach, and for the second time he called, "-mother," the mirror caught his reflection, she stopped combing her hair and turned, "-Asmodeus, why did you come?"

"Charlie-"

"FUCK!" she threw her comb, "-that piece of shit."

"Wow, mother, what's with the grammar?"

"Shut up, you're an idiot, and so is everyone else. This place is a mess... the kings of hell desperately want to sow their seed and I'm here acting as if I care. I should have never taken that note seriously."

"What note?"

"Listen, Asmo, I'm not here by choice nor the others. Once a demon enters the underworld, no matter the rank, there's no escape lest the four demon kings give their approval. Guess what, those four have never agreed on anything. I spoke to Leviathan and he said he'll accept on condition that I give him an heir, screw that."

"If the queen can't counter the edict, what level of entity forged so?"

"Supreme god," she sighed, "-Lucifer, Zeus, and Artanos have forged an alliance that links the three dominions. War will be waged upon Igna, the prophecy warns of his potential. I fear it'll be a repeat of the Cursed King's tale."

“What then, we just sit here?”

“Shut up, Asmo, you foolishly followed Charlie... he’s a clockwork servant of Artanos. They’ve got us in a right ol’ mess.”

“What about Miira, surely?”

“Don’t even bother,” she rolled her eyes, “-she’s trapped in the Heavenly realm – the bind forged by Lucifer.”

“Mother, we shouldn’t despair.

“Why?”

“Kul,” he returned, “-I had her kill some of my servants. She’ll resent me for forcing her hand. Word will get to master – he’ll come knocking sooner or later.”

“He shouldn’t,” she facepalmed, “-best we escape than force him to enter hell. The kings are readying their forces to crush Igna – Artanos’ thought of everything!”

The pressure of the demonic realm, hell, not to be confused with the Aapith Nation which resides as the core of Hell, eased for the pureness of Dimension Orin. Iyan and Syne were gagged and tied in a desolate room, “-that’s the whole story,” Kul exhaled, “-he forced our hands. Guess Lilith’s truly turned side.”

“We need to send word to master.”

“Not now,” narrowed Kul, “-Operation Wied is a priority, focus on the changeable and not a ghost.”

“What will you do, Ishta?”

.....

“I owe a lot to the king. If Asmodeus truly changed side, I will remain loyal to the young master.”

“Don’t worry, Ishta,” snickered Kul, “-Asmodeus will pay, I’ll make sure of it.”

Chapter 1022: Unlikely Mastermind

“Hm, hmmm,” the chair rocked, “-Hmmm!” muffled harshly. A singular light bulb lit dangled. The air of danger immediately settled. It clanged and banged, resistance through the gag and ties was harsh, ‘-Syne, where are you,’ Iyan’s cacophony opened another light – this time, a door. Two outlines entered, one reached for a toggle and the other skipped onward, “-good morning,” he said. A flash forced Iyan’s gaze. The blinding gust took him by force.

“Ungag him,” narrowed Kul.

“Alright,” the chipper Ishta circled and undid the knot.

“WHERE’S SYNE!”

Smack, a hardened punch landed, “-don’t scream,” Kul shook her hands, “-don’t be a bad boy, we don’t want to ruin the pretty face, not just yet.”

“Kindly, where’s Syne?”

“Oh, she’s in good hands,” added Ishta, “-my followers are taking good care.”

.....

Across the floor rose a similarly structured room, “-Syne,” said Skarla, “-good morning, leader.”

“You,” she bit her tongue, “-what is the meaning of this?” The question fell on deaf ears. Skarla reached for a line and pulled the blinders open to somber dawn, “-where are we?”

“My inn, although not much remains of it. Syne, do you know about the truth?”

“Truth?”

“Yes, truth. There are things in this world that are out of control, facts and features which escape even the strongest and wisest. Syne,” the television toggled; snippets of the war flooded the screen. Casualties in the hundreds, ever-present gunfire, and the screams of haunted echoed. “Which side is winning, who are the real winners – no clue. There’s nothing to be heard or seen – just the echo of a dying man and the grunt of an injured soldier. War is a fickle o’ thing.”

“What?”

“Cynical is a good trait, however, your trust in your own kin will be thy downfall. Syne, per order from my organization, I have been asked to find and kidnap the daughter of Estral’s shadow leader. I had my doubts... more we spoke the more it became a truth. You’re the priestess and guardian of said daughter. Tell me, who is she?”

“As if I’m going to speak.”

“Yeah, I know you won’t,” she snapped, the door barged and a heavily wounded Iyan flung across the ground, “-there’s your proof. We’re ready for anything,” she lowered on her knee and parted Iyan’s bloodied visage, “-Syne, all is fair in love and war. I know all about your little secret, I know everything there is to know about the church of Neos. The virtuous are the most scrupulous – Neos is but a front for human trafficking, isn’t it? Why reluctant in speaking of your relation with Iyan, is it perhaps Iyan never existed, is it perhaps you were never who you said you were?”

Ishta stared at the interrogation, he calmly swapped person to person. ‘Skarla’s a person no to be reckoned with. She steadied last night’s arguments and sought to find the truth. They’ve been asleep for three days and know nothing, a clever ploy to dig further. YWC was willing to talk after the little visit,’ such was a little rendezvous cupped within a quaint café.

Skarla took the front seat at the table, and Kul remained at her side whilst Ishta, at said moment, had a cloud of betrayal and uncertainty over his head. Calm as could be, Skarla rose her hands and asked for a drink, the well-mannered waitress, on returning the gesture, received a considerable tip – the pseudo-smile materialized truthfully. ‘In conflict or negotiations, one should choose a place that is home or closer to said home,’ tidbits of information took on as subtitles on the movie of Ishta’s memory, ‘-thinking nigh, I suppose she made the café her haven and spread a contagious smile to the tables and attendants,’ a dingle marked his arrival. A baret-wearing gentleman ambled towards their table, “-Skarla?”

“Correct,” she smiled, the man settled cautiously – throwing his gaze at the waiters, who, unconsciously, looked at Skarla’s table curiously and smiled. One could imagine what he’d feel to see many faces at him with smirks, ‘-interpretation and narrative.’

“Yonpo,” her calm expression lingered upon the path of aggressivity and foolishness. A hot cup of coffee arrived, she waited until the beverage reached his lips and said “-Charlie took the life of Asmodeus.”

“WHAT!” it burnt his tongue, he jumped, spilling a quarter, “-ARE YOU INSANE!” thundered at the waiter.

“Don’t take your rage out on them,” she echoed, “-they’re doing their job. Please, my dear, don’t worry, accidents happen.”

“I apologize, I must be more careful,” the spilled beverage erased per a swipe of another attendant. Distance grew between worker and customer, she firmed her attention on Yonpo, “-what’s the proof?”

“Proof?” she smugly slid a phone, “-there’s the video. Charlie’s no ordinary human – he’s a demon, an arch-demon. Reports speak loudly about wolves in sheep’s clothing. As an officer, you must also take care of how the organization is represented. The blunder of our capture and this evidence would make headlines I dare say.”

“What do you want?”

“Information.”

“Depends.”

novelusb.com

“Who employs YWC and who’s the true leader?”

“I don’t know,” he said, “-I have no idea. I’m neither a special agent nor someone with authority on such details. Estral’s ruled by the joint guilds.”

“Someone took your picture.”

He turned to a silent Ishta, “-don’t mind me,” he said, “-only taking the necessity,” a slow miasma came from Ishta, “-say cheese.”

“A truth serum,” added Skarla, “-what did you think you were drinking, also, the café is no café, the workers here are members of our guild. Takes one to know another, yes?”

“Damn...” lightheadedness, “-fine, I’ll talk.”

The memory was cut short – reality pulled by a jaw-breaking kick, “-Syne, best start cooperating.”

‘All smokes and mirrors. Skarla’s dangerous.’

“She won’t talk,” interjected Ishta, “-lady Kul...”

“If Iyan has no bearing,” Skarla unholstered RatX and fired – it tore Iyan’s head, the latter exploded, splashing brain matter and blood, “-Syne, poor ol’ Syne,” she rose the pistol, “-choosing death is an

admirable,” *Snap,* a bullet missed her head and hit RatX, “-GET DOWN!” screamed Kul, Ishta jumped and pushed Skarla out of the way.

“Enemy sniper,” gritted Kul, “-I sense more,” they took cover, and footsteps circled Laps’ Mao.

“On authority granted by the Guild, Laps’ Mao and its associates have declared a traitor and sentenced to death!”

“Yonpo’s back in stride,” commented Kul, “-what’s the plan?” the doors, heavier steps ran, “-Syne, we will come,” a magical circle teleported the trio – armored men dashed into the room with guns, “-no signs of them,” nausea hit, “-what the-?” Iyan’s body, the brutality, not for the faint of hearts. Heavy vehicles surrounded Lap’s Mao, and on further investigation, as one of the soldiers reported to Yonpo, “-it’s abandoned. There’s no one here, no trace of life nor trace of them. We did find Iyan’s dead body.”

“They ran,” he slammed the jeep, “-and left Iyan. What a mess. Did you recover the guild tag?”

“Yes,” returned, another arrived with, “-Building’s secure.”

“There’s no point searching. Close off the area and call it a day boys.”

Time skipped later in the afternoon, Syne’s holding cell – a hospital room, emptily stared at her, ‘-she’s going to kill me,’ played in her mind.

“Syne,” a lavishly dressed gentleman entered, “-my daughter, are you well?” Yonpo intimidatingly guarded the door, “-scurry along,” and frightened the nurses.

“Syne, my daughter, are you okay?” the middle-aged man grasped her hands tightly, “-Syne, please my love, tell me, are you okay?” Nothing save the emptiness in her expression returned, “-they’re going to kill me,” she mumbled, “-they’re going to kill me.”

“Who is?”

“You must run, father, you must skip town and protect young Ellia. Where is she, father, where is she?” minutes passed, and a strong-headed doctor invaded and ordered them to leave, her petrified expression eased as medication allowed for sound sleep.

“Yonpo, you must find whoever is responsible and kill them.”

“Stop lying,” he returned, “-if I act on my own it’ll become a scandal. The kingdom must never know of your existence, IVth King of Estral, Frederick Perret.”

“I don’t care, find whoever is responsible and bring them to me,” the blacked-out car lost itself in the coming dusk. “-Yonpo, I’m sorry about Charlie. It must have been hard to deal with the string of murders. Skarla was it, how does she fair in battle?”

“She’s strong, very strong. Hidros might retaliate since he killed one of their own.”

“They did kill my daughter’s guardian; I don’t think it’ll last. Fools don’t realize the truth about Syne not being a victim of human trafficking, I shudder before my own genius. No better place to hide valuable than in the dirtiest place.”

“Once again, you impress, majesty.”

"No majesty, it's your holiness. I'm the archbishop, not the king, remember?" Passing lanterns slowed in speed, the car came to a stop at the edge of town, "-what's the matter, Carl?"

"Father, there's a roadblock," he said, "-no one's responding."

"Pass them will you, they probably broke down."

Yonpo averted his gaze, "-father, I'm sorry."

"What?"

A gun rose to the king's head, "-get out."

"Yonpo?"

"Just get out!"

The roadblock toggled their headlights, blinding the driver. The passenger was held at gunpoint with his hand behind his head, "-good job," said Skarla leaping off the bonnet, "-King Frederick the IV of Estral, on order by our king, you are to come with us." Yonpo suddenly stopped in the middle, he pushed the aim from Frederick to Skarla, "-don't do anything stupid," echoed Kul, "-we had a deal."

"It's no sin to fool the devil!" he side-stepped and fired, "-MAJESTY GO!" the car blasted out of sight, "-SHOOT HIM!" Skarla ordered, the bullets bounced off the car with red-taillight vanishing in the distance, and Yonpo fell with a bullet in his right shoulder.

"Couldn't harm the car."

"Xerxes series," Yonpo laughed, "-I fooled you, didn't I, never underestimate the loyalty of a dog."

Skarla murderously stood over the wounded assailant, "-it's sad," she rose her pistol, "-mastermind, you truly are a person worth our king's respect. I admit it was fun, speak your final words."

"ONWARD ONTO DEATH," *BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG,* the body rocked with each wound, stars reflected against Yonpo's lifeless pupils, "-bastard smiled even in death," commented Kul, "-what now?"

"Operation Wied is not over," she holstered RatX, "-take Yonpo's head," a tap of the ring toggled a special channel, "-SSY Request for Surveillance access," she headed towards the jeep.

"Putting call through," the channel swapped, "-Elixia here, how can I help?"

"Skarla of Unit 04, Nightwalker under his majesty's command speaking."

"Skarla, no need for formal talk, tell me, how can I help?"

"I've placed a tracker, could we have a live broadcast of its location."

"Just so happens the surveillance system's gathering intel for war. I'll send the location on your phone, is there something else?"

"Could you relay a message?"

"Sure."

“To King Igna, Operation Wied was unsuccessful. We were unable to kidnap the monarch’s daughter. Estral’s Yonpo caused quite the trouble,” and as she relayed, a strong light came from the latter, “-he’s coming to life,” the message cut, she pulled her weapon and waited behind the jeep.

“I sense him...”

“Sense who?”

.....

“Him,” glared Kul, “-the real enemy.”

Yellow eyes drowned in a sea of black, “-how amusing... such level of weaponry must not be granted to mere mortals.”

Ishta hastily leaped inside the jeep, “-don’t talk, let’s go.”

“Not so fast,” lightning rods volleyed, “-thee must pay!”

Barrier, cried Kul, Skarla elbowed the back window and fired. The bullets took legs and limbs.

“Orders?”

“We split, Kul go after the king, I’ll stay and fight,” her prediction came true, and the clockwork soldiers regenerated.

“Take this,” flung a red-vile, “-don’t die on us.”

“Yeah, I got it,” she smiled, “-Kul, don’t blame yourself for what happened. It’s all part of destiny,” she climbed out the window, “-LATER!” more lances summoned, ‘-onwards onto death...’ the jeep disappeared, “-foolish girl.”

Chapter 1023: Operation Wied

Skarla landed on her feet, she drew her gun before a giant. Clouds shuffled, allowing the moon’s rays to illuminate the area. As it looked, the gods had placed a spotlight upon the duo – she readied her weapon and steadied her breath.

“I don’t have a name,” echoed the giant, “-I’m only known as Clockwork Soldier Alpha,” the torso glowed, it looked as if someone struck a lightbulb inside and toggled – ribcage, or what it appeared to be projected shadows. Each mild gesture channeled an inner force that breathed smoke. Unlike others, this particular giant held a typical humanoid frame.

“Skarla is my name,” she returned, “-shall we?” A silent cue marked the start – an array of projectile-like weapons materialized from all directions – Skarla pulled the pistol and fired, each press threw her hands under the recoil. Golden-colored pebbles lathered, she side-stepped, leaped and ducked – the constantly summoning weapons took her focus. ‘My bullets destroy his spells,’ a sudden clang ran at her feet, ‘-oh-,’ *BOOM,* an explosion carved the asphalt as suddenly as a bullet hit.

She fell, a massive cloud rose – yellow tint shimmered admits the darkness, ‘-caught me by surprise,’ she coughed, ‘-broken arm and wounded leg,’ she gasped, ‘-my potions.’

"Is she dead?" the soldier scanned the yet settled dust cloud, an empty vile fell at his feet, a distraction that took focus. Equally red pupils fired. 'He won't yield,' she skipped into a nearby bush, *Shroud my foe and confuse their senses; Mist!* dust from the explosion replaced with an ever-present thicket. Despite the fog, a golden lance dove straight from above and took her ankle clean off, "-SHIT!" a whirlwindesque noise spun, "-enough of your tactics," thundered, "-this is no playground. Fight me face to face, little lady," her presence vanished after the attack. A cold shiver of the never-resting gaze grasped Skarla, 'he knows where I am,' another potion healed the bloodied mess, 'I can feel his gaze,' she gripped RatX, the giant took small but imposing steps, each motion rocked the street. Headlights lit from the town's vicinity, "-die," it grunted, a flash of gold, and the headlights exploded into a distant ball of flame.

"Come out, little vampire..." it spun and cleanly took shrubbery of the side-road, "-I thought you were there," he said, talling a fair few meters off the ground.

She cupped her lips and cut her breath, '-stay calm,' the attack came a few meters short of the actual location. 'Take my time and wait, the stronger the person, the more impatient they get – I have to bite my time, don't be threatened, he's only a clockwork soldier, I can take him.

.....

Methodical scans turned reckless spirits, "-where are you," he dashed back and forth, a bystander sent calls of a rampaging monster through the guilds. Curious travelers caught by the explosion – a noiseless ball of flame on the dark street, took to their vehicles for closer examination. Alas, akin to moth to fire, they but drew to their deaths.

"So many innocent lives taken for your cowardice," its guard dropped, Skarla leaped from her spot and fired – bullets hits but did naught. The clockwork expression, cogs of which spun to bring a smile upon the blocky lips toggled, the inner engine whelmed a mighty roar, "-did you think I was slow?" he flashed behind and brought his fist – now a hammer, onto the unsuspecting Skarla, '-what the fuc-' one moment she shot, the next her consciousness drifted. A blurry display of firearms played slowly – Alpha had his arm in a cross, 'he's backing away?' she gasped, 'I can't feel my legs,' a downward glance showed naught but broken bones and torn waist, one of her shins shattered and protruded out of it's resting place. Explosion rumbles from her point, constant gunfire, mild ticks, and the deafening roar of a soldier, a murmur – played in the remaining minutes.

"ONWARD MEN!" tanks exited the town limit; hunters came in full, "-TAKE DOWN THE MONSTER!" helicopters rose, gunners rattled machinegun fire – enormous shells hit square, leaving immense rows of fire and smoke.

"Annoying pests," the cogwheels spun, the engine churned, and silence befell the battlefield. Thuds rumbled, the oncoming mini-army slowed their march, helicopters took safer hovering position – a surprise deluge of destructive weaponry had a habit of marring the battle.

"Hold!"

A pair of yellow tints flashed. It leaped and kicked a bird out of the sky, "-PESTS!" on the returning motion came equally terrifying firepower – a replica of the gunner's weapon and tanks took the street, death and destruction followed. Alpha's power, 'adaptability and replication. My thought's drifting, I

need to take him here and now,' memory served well, '-the vile,' she reached for her pocket. *THUD,* the smoke scattered, a stronger presence echoed from the break, an ungodly entity clambered, her hair froze, her skin on her face peeled – bloated veins containing the nightwalkers essence pulsed.

“Wendy of the Nightwalker’s clan, by not following the code of the nightwalker, I, Daeirq Empress of Luna, Primo Progenitor, deem thy pledge unworthy. As such, you shan’t inherit my blood nor shall you grow – tis the price paid for incertitude. As a mercy, I grant thee five minutes of power which could have been yours, repent.”

The vile fell at her side, '-don’t have to remind me,' her speed increased tenfold, “-hesitation brings regret,” an equally monstrous figure leaped for Alpha’s head, its bite and tore, “-GET OFF!” the soldier spun, the core lit, “-GET OFF!” he shrugged – a distant crash beckoned.

Hallowed hunters watched, Skarla made no rash expression after the crash, “-who are you?”

“No one,” she vanished, '-this could have been mine,' time slowed, her graceful jump arched perfectly – Alpha’s right arm rose in counter, she softly pushed and crossed her legs around his neck, “-sweet dreams, you fucking monster!” *BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG!* silence...

Over the horizon roared the screams of engines, “-are we any closer?”

“Wait a damn minute,” sniffled Ishta, dawn hit the mirrors, “-what car even is that?”

“Xerxes series,” she read with feet on her counter, “-we’ve been driving for hours, just how much stamina does the king have?”

“What’s a Xerxes series?”

“Says here they were the product of the defuncted group of magical researchers. Magic doesn’t work, to stop we must catch him.”

“I know that doesn’t state the obvious,” they rushed through a desert-like landscape, “-where does this road lead?”

“The nearby airfield,” her posture straightened, “-we might have a chance. Cut off the road here,” she pulled onto the wheel and leaped the whole jeep across into the nothingness of dirt, “-WHY?”

“He’s going towards the airfield, I’m sure of it.”

novelusb.com

“How are we going to catch him?”

“Don’t know, let’s drive there, push comes to shove, we might have to drive in front of a moving plane.”

He gulped; “-I shudder the thought.”

Reports of current activities laid before Igna’s desk, “-Skarla’s lifeforce,” he inhaled, “-it’s gone quiet,” jet-black hair and pure blue eyes rose a melancholic nod, “-she didn’t make the cut... Wendy, you idiot,” her last words laid in bold, “To King Igna, Operation Wied was unsuccessful. We were unable to kidnap the monarch’s daughter. Estral’s Yonpo caused quite the trouble,” followed by an audio snippet.

“My liege,” Extria entered, “-success rate of Operation Wied doesn’t look promising. The Kings escaped into a Xerxes series-made car, we’ve lost touch with Skarla and the princess is left unattended. We’ve also lost contact with Asmodeus... I recommend stepping out of Estral. Our focus should be on the invasionary battle of Elendor.”

“Minerva’s controlling those efforts. King Juvey and Ezel will carry the brunt of the force. Send orders to Kul; take the king dead or alive. Make sure he doesn’t escape Estral – in the unlikely scenario he takes to the skies, have my men shoot him down. I’m granting permission for Offe’s squadron to take flight.”

Past a mound of dried rocks shimmered a distant array of hangars, “-there it is,” said Ishta, “-where’s the king?”

“He’s on his way, we’ll just about make it,” binoculars lowered, “-the plane’s already on the airfield... why are my jobs always this stressful. Beeline for the end,” she rose her phone, “-we have a message from the king.”

The unsuspecting bishop slid to a stop. Armed men rushed, “-majesty, please, come with us,” they hastily led him upstairs and into the jet. Hotter outside and the rush of adrenaline subsided, “-I made it, I actually made it.”

“If his majesty would kindly be seated,” the pilots throttled, “-we’re taking off to Yian Dho.”

“It would please his majesty to know prime minister Vuo impatiently waits for our arrival,” a towel and refreshment were served, “-please, my liege, rest.”

“Nice to know my people are always here.”

A tunnel of dirt approached, “-what’s that?”

“A dust storm, we might not takeoff.”

“It’ll be fine, this baby has plenty of juice,” the bird moved – the sense of relief brought the king into a joyous state.

Kul smirked behind the gargling engine, “-Ishta, floor it.”

“This will only end badly,” he smiled.

“You’re having fun too,” she undid her seat belt and reached out the window, “-get ready to jump on my mark.”

“No one said anything about jumping!”

“Have some balls for once,” she knelt on the roof then reached for a sniper rifle, “-are you ready?” he slammed the pedal, crosshair laid onto the pilot, “-die.”

Blood splattered across the cockpit, “-JASON!” cried the co-pilot, an air hostess rushed, “-WE’RE UNDER ATTACK!” he cried, and the jets roared.

“JUMP!” they leaped and tumbled, jeep hit and blew, “-good ol’ bombs,” chuckled Kul, the front tore, semi-burnt corpse landed to the side, “-come on, get up,” she gave a helping hand, “-we did it.”

“Are you crazy, we might have killed the king...”

“Does it matter?” she skipped along, “-some time; I love my life.”

“You love the crazy part,” he muffled a laugh, ‘-I guess Asmodeus’s off her mind.’ He took a look at the front whilst Kul scanned the back, ‘-I’m sorry, Betty, you did good,’ hands pressed before the broken jeep.

“Hey,” rose in the distance, “-Ishta, come here!”

He hurried around, “-what?”

“Look,” she knelt at a gravely wounded king, “-he’s still alive. Operation Wied might just be a success.”

“No, it won’t be,” he facepalmed, “-without him who are we going to ransom the princess too?”

“I don’t know,” she threw a healing scroll at the monarch, “-goes into Igna’s hands.”

The wind rustled, “-not to be a bother, how are we going home?”

“I thought you had an idea.”

“KUL!”

It would take half a day for support to arrive. King Frederick was taken into custody, and Kul and Ishta’s journey back resumed in the vintage Xerxes mobile. ‘-What happened to Skarla?’ pressed harshly.

“Roadblock,” said Ishta, the evening was nigh, “-can’t get further,” he stopped, “-what’s happened?”

“Site of a large battle,” returned a wounded hunter, “-take the long way round, going to be a while before it’s open. You could always skip town.”

“We have business here,” they drove around craters, burnt marks, and wreckages that were slowly being cleared, “-where’s Skarla?”

“I don’t know...”

“Hey!” hailed a familiar face, “-Ishta, is that you?”

“Yeah, it’s me, have you seen Skarla?”

“Oh, you don’t know?” the friendly face paused and straightened his construction uniform, “-sad about what happened. Go to the hospital man, it’s a tragedy.”

Wasn’t long before reality settled, “-how many people died?”

“I don’t know,” they drove towards the hospital, “-the Hidrosian Crest,” car slammed before he stopped, ‘-what’s wrong with her?’

“IGNA!”

“Kul,” returned an ominously quiet demeanor, “-it’s vengeance.”

“What happened to Skarla?”

“She’s dead, the clockwork soldier won.”

“Where’s her body?”

“Repatriation.”

“Where’s the king?”

“He refuses to speak on the matter. I need to know what happened; can you tell?”

“No, of course, I don’t know what happened. Wait, how are you here so quickly?”

“Teleportation. Kul, Ishta, master has asked for an audience.”

“She’s dead,” said a somber Ishta, “-we should have been more careful,” he grabbed Kul’s wrist, “-don’t get angry at Vengeance, we should be angry with... with who?”

.....

“War.”

Chapter 1024: Humanitarian Society of Hidros

‘Everyone has their own problem. Happiness is a fleeting moment, a resting spot through the never-ending climb of life. So many of my comrades have died, and so many people have given their lives believing their death were grand and that their actions would amount to more. The burden of being king, standing at the top is harder than being at the bottom. The latter can send their grievances towards those above them – a prime target for unresolved issues, greed, and lust. Envious of the fame and wealth, envious of the perks, and discouraged with the responsibilities. They won’t understand, they don’t understand, they turn a blind eye to suit their benefit – such is the way the worthless have gained influence. They’re creating trouble, they want the monarchy to relieve some of their power, and they want to form a mutually beneficial alliance. To that I simply say, die,’ the royal transport drove across the expanded Rosespire – little over a year and a half had passed. 3rd August of the year X129 – the whole world sunk into the dark ages. The battle over the fallen Wracian Empire only increased – more nations joined and independent kingdoms sought favors with every nation willing to hear their case. The great divide of the north and south hemisphere, Ulem; provided a natural barrier as in the battle kept confined within the north whilst the south remained relatively untouched.

“Majesty, we’re nearly there.”

“Elixia,” he smiled, “-thank you.”

She held her gaze, “-majesty, are you alright?”

“Yes, been doing some thinking, wasn’t hard maintaining Raven’s growth, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine, I had help, everyone’s been very supportive. Besides, master, you should focus on the greater picture, leave the side-project to me, I am your left hand.”

“Rather say my brain,”

.....

“Thee jests.”

“Suppose so,” momentum slowed, and her unbalanced posture tipped a little. Skyscrapers rose behind the tinted windows, the door opened by a smile of a retainer, “-welcome, majesty.”

“Thank you,” red carpet lined the path forward. The great gray rectangle and windows confidently stood above the buildings around, “-majesty, please follow,” said an energetic Elixia. The windswept outside (brought by bad weather) surrendered to the man-made castle. Suited men and women passed the hall, “-about what we discussed, these men are from the Humanitarian Society of Hidros, HSH, or HS. Please have a minute amount of compassion.”

“Yes, compassion, I’d love to indulge their idiotic idealism. Why wasn’t éclair abled to snuff the growth?”

“They expanded their network across the continent.”

“Showing animosity might endanger our position. I don’t promise much,” the lift carried to a media hall, the place crawled with reporters and cameras. The leader of the HS, a gentleman by the name of Piaso, waited patiently. The noise brought by the king’s arrival served a raise of the brow, and the two crossed stares once Igna entered. A chiller sensation fell upon the room, Igna gave no room for doubt and stared at Piaso until the allocated seat. A small table separated both parties – the podium was set so as to display each person’s attitude and mannerism.

“My king,” bowed Piaso, a modestly dressed man. He sported a bald spot as for the sides grew frizzled grayed hair, the overcoat looked well-worn, darker shade of brown caved for lighter shade per wear and tear. Opposite him waited for the king whose outfit was much to the envy of some. A prestigious tailoring house of prices in the five figures neatly contoured the body’s natural outline.

“Welcome dearest guests,” came a monotonous greeting, “-on behalf of the HSH, we would like to give our warmest of thanks to King Igna for making the trip. It must have been difficult to leave matters unattended,” such came the first strike – of which Igna dismissed the dig and simply stared back. Nervousness bubbled, ‘-feels like he’s going to kill if I keep up the act...’

“Thank you, thank you,” interjected Piaso, “-I’m grateful for your visit, my liege. Today’s event was brought by a growing concern by the people – we asked much to no answers. The only way I saw our grievances to be calmed is to have had the king himself visit and answer said questions.”

novelusb.com

“Piaso, head-teacher at Skeire Highschool, a college prep school for admission to Hidros’ prestigious colleges... I see you’re much of a fighter than other scholars. Tis wise to do one’s research,” he looked to the crowd, “-the HSH movement, as king, I’ll personally see said grievances be answered.”

‘Get ’em, majesty,’ Elixia’s inner joy cheered for her master.

“Our organization’s main objective is the betterment of the world,” Piaso said to the crowd, “-many of the founding members are soldiers from the war, refugees, and businessmen who lost their lives working in the tempest of war. The world’s no longer the same. I dare say many despised the thought of war – to see his majesty so brazenly come to Emperor Essin’s aid was truly an act of kindness and compassion. The heroic display of forgiveness sowed the seed of chaos in our daily lives. Answer me this, majesty, was it necessary to wage war?”

“Yes,” he coldly returned, “-an entire Empire barely hung, would you have chosen the life of one over the lives of many or vice-versa?”

“Putting the spotlight on Wracia doesn’t absolve the fact that our people suffer from the repercussion. The economy is at a standstill, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

“Scholar,” he narrowed, “-tell me, are you a person of intellect or manual labor?”

“What does that mean?”

“Where doth thee see disparity?”

“...”

“You must have an example, or must I provide so?”

“...”

“I see my question’s stumped the bravado. Here’s the thing,” he flung across a hovering disk, it thrust forth a holographic display, “-Hidros’ economy, compared to the world’s stagnant, why is it so?” the graph pushed to show the others, “-compared to them, our economy is doing great, granted the tourism market’s a little underwhelming, we’re still on top of our industrial revolution down in Totrya. Some families and people haven’t the means to survive – their only hope is to join societies like the HSH or ours, the law of Supportism passed decades ago. It states of those unable to sustain their own life per aliment or disabilities, the crown will recompense their activities depending on the level of disability. Let me ask you think,” he turned at Piaso, “-have you taken a look at our healthcare?”

“Pardon?”

“My, do you ever stick your head out of the clouds? Healthcare is a paid service around the world – Hidros demands it to be free. Said sector is always running at a loss... small price to pay for the health of the populous. What about the HSH, what has the organization done, what are you fighting for, and what’s the goal? Give me a concrete level-headed answer, not some abstract description arranged to tug upon the heartstrings. Nothing’s worse than playing with a person’s heart, that I won’t stand for, regardless of one’s reputation.”

“I apologize if I sounded rude, majesty,” he refocused, “-the HSH’s goals differ. We encompass not ours, but others’ goals as well. The answer won’t be as simple as one plus one. As such, my liege, I would like to ask this,” thus followed a debate between the HSH and King – words from Igna came frankly and based. Piaso’s statements were mostly designed to attack behind a cloud of relative safety – when it came to wit, there was no one better than him. Regardless of Piaso’s words or points – the crowd had taken to the King’s charisma and no-nonsense point of view. Acknowledging the wrong, stating ways to circumvent said problem, and speaking on how said the change wouldn’t affect much greatly spoke to the people.

“What about your spending, my king – all the talk about being reserved and saving for the future, are you not simply using the people’s money to indulge?”

“...” silence befell the crowd, Igna calmly reached for a water cup and sipped, “-there’s the HSH’s real purpose. Piaso, it’s shameful that thee live in such a fantasy. The organization’s only intent is to force

the crown to accept and grant a budget for the ‘-supposed betterment of humanity’ give me a break. I could have the little charade put before the supreme court. Don’t you dare question the spending of my money, are you daft, are you an idiot, are you so secluded into your bubble that you don’t see how foolish the words come off? The people’s money goes towards bettering the people, one ought to check the Arcanum, we’ve published reports for the public audit. As for me and my family, that is none of your business,” a sudden glanced at the crowd, “-Hidros’s growing weak, what is the meaning of this Humanitarian Society, what is the purpose of this panel. I pity the fools who thought it funny to waste my time. I say this here and now, anyone who’s unhappy with the state of how Hidros is run is free to leave. Take a trip overseas, live there. I’ll fund the flight, such is my word,” he side-glanced Piaso, “-I suppose talking about HSH’s lawsuits of fraud, not a topic thee wish to hear?” he stood, “-waste of time, all of this,” he shook his head and left.

A tsunami took the Arcanum – it took minutes after the broadcast for the panel to go viral. “-king Igna strikes again,” read some titles, “-the Devil of Glenda logically destroys a Humanitarian,” so much for compassion, there was nothing left the organization to say save issue an official apology to the crown.

“Master, I said to have a bit of compassion.”

“Elixia, don’t start,” he sipped whiskey inside the private lounge, “-pathetic really.”

“Majesty,” in came to éclair with Ulgra, “-some people have come forward demanding for the king to pay their ticket out of Hidros. Looks around five-thousand?”

“A lot,” he gulped the beverage, “-have them sent to Elendor, they’ll make good soldiers,” he smiled, “-and if they survive, have them executed.”

“My liege...”

“Make it happen,” he exhaled, “-I don’t have time to waste on them,” Ulgra caught his attention, “-my,” he shook his head and smiled, “-Ulgra, you’re looking beautiful,” she wore a jacket over her performing attire of which came from her leggings and footwear, “-what’s today’s play?”

“Syhton’s love affair,” she smiled, the expression potently displayed an innocent charm, “-today’s the first time I step on stage as the prime ballerina,” her hands trembled,” she looked at éclair – for a kid her age, the growth spur carried her silhouette tall and flexible, “-éclair, take the day off. Ulgra’s debut should be experienced by people closest to her, yes?”

“Uncle Igna,” she fluttered at him and took his hands, “-please, I want you to be there.”

“Ulgra, my graceful and foolish little niece, you’re the gem that sparks the will of curiosity. You’re confident and strong, there’s a heavy burden weighing on your shoulders, and for that, it’s okay. Accept the burden, make it the weight that keeps you grounded – don’t become like us, jaded adults, stay true to yourself and do it for you, not for us, not for anyone else. The family will support the hard work, don’t worry – go there and smile.”

“Majesty, we should go,” interjected Elixia, “-we owe ourselves a break. Syndra and Lizzie are part of the orchestra tasked to accompany Ulgra. I really want to see the Haggard’s perform, please my liege.”

“No need, Elixia, we’ll do it,” he exhaled, “-sure drive a hard bargain. Are the cars readied?”

“Yes.”

“So be it.”

Ulgra’s already big smile lit even more so, the genuine joy served a beacon, ‘-stop living in the past...’

“Thank you, master.”

“Don’t need an apology,” returned Igna, “-éclair, the duties assigned are performed behind the cover of Elixia’s unlimited power. We shouldn’t be worried.”

Kul’s outline crossed their path, “-majesty, where are you headed?”

“The theater, want to come along?”

“...” she paused in thought, éclair continued forward, “-are you sure?”

“Yeah,” he tapped her shoulder, “-people come and go, we must accept the truth. Come on, Kul, let’s go see them in action.”

Chapter 1025: Royal Theater of Arts and Culture

“Money, fame, prestige, respect, authority; driving force of many in the working field – lusted after dames only the minute percent could imagine. The ways of the court, the ways of those ruling entire nations, a playing field where only status and influence mattered – amidst the abundance of nobles, influential whether in religion, magiology, or plain wealth, one name reigned supreme. A royal family of influence far greater than the world had seen. A network spanning continents, pawns of noble blood, and unlimited strength and knowledge to push any invasion which may come – such a name, only written in novels, works of fiction, and works of cinema was present in the real world, the continent of Hidros, birthplace of the world’s first and only dominant power – the Haggards. Previous families ranging from dukedom to empires, none could rival the power this particular name held. Justice in their palms, the underworld in their pocket, the arms trade as their plaything, and knowledge as a mere fancy – none were able to rival their power – such was common knowledge. Don’t misunderstand – my words might come across as preachy and even biased, however, the facts speak for themselves. My judgment, my interpretation and my view on the Royal family are nothing save worthy of praise. Granted there are problems and issues, the educated populous know a world without problems doesn’t exist for if one were to remove the darkness, where would light shine? And so, we come to the opening of the Royal Theater of Arts and Culture – a project of two years in the making. Equipped with an amphitheater, open-air theater, an art gallery, a cinema, multiple restaurants, and infrastructure built over a man-made lake – the Royal Theater of Arts and Culture spanned a considerable size. To admire the past and ravel about the future, said the project was spearheaded by the joint force of Hidros and her allies. The King’s private collection, home to the world’s finest works of arts of renowned names lit the gallery halls in amber tints. Security was grand, personally ensured by the royal guards and Phantom. The opening act of the Royal Theater of arts will be broadcasted live, listeners, I’ll see you live,” the radio faded, Igna held his chin and peered with a melancholic frown. A line of expensive cars carried into a reserved area, “-it’s slipped your mind, didn’t it?” edged a snarky remark.

Car closed with a stout ‘-humph,’ Igna turned side-ways, keeping the same dead expression, “-to be completely honest, I did forget about this. How can I not be – we funded the project almost instantly

and never saw a decline. No one complained and it went off without a hitch, it's scary how organized the crafting guilds are."

"I mean, we are in Lei – his majesty chooses to spend time at the castle as opposed to visit the area around."

"Don't you start," he signaled for silence, "-where's the inauguration?"

Flashes of light, a swarm of reporters, and the curious crowd drew at the entrance, "-my liege," came Hauer, minister of Arts and Culture, "-please do us the honor." A sword was brought onto a red cushion by a squire dressed in period clothing, he dropped on one knee and curled the other as if a curtsy (the olden ways of etiquette) thrusting the cushion way over his shoulders, "-thank you," returned Igna courteously, answering tradition with a salute, 'old customs forgotten at the advent of the age of Arcanum. Is this for show or is the boy truly taught in the olden ways? I did hear about eccentric noble families adamantly asking the royal academy to revert courses to the olden age,' he firmly gripped the bejeweled sheath and slid the blade from its home to a glass-like purity – the blade itself was enchanted by various symbols all to make the appearance of a gem as opposed to a weapon. Applauds thundered, the ribbon dropped and the ceremony ended with flashes and loud cheers.

"The Royal Theater of Arts and Culture finally laid open to the public – or so they thought. First honors are reserved for the royals and a limited guestlist. There is preferential treatment and by the looks of the crowd, only those interested in tradition are here," an official dressed in a suit suddenly intruded upon the reporter's work, "-Pardon me, ma'am," he interjected politely, "-I must ask that the video does not portrait in a propogandaesque manner. We're listening to the broadcast live, there is much unrest to brew if the incorrect words are uttered. I would therefore be honored to speak a few words on behalf of the theater, would that be alright?" the tone, the mannerism, and the politeness – the begrudged reporter handed her microphone to the dismay of the crew. "-To fellow viewers and listeners, on request of the staff, we would like to issue an apology. The theater has indeed been reserved for a chosen few and it's within good reason. There is a level of discrimination and we're fairly informed about how it projects. Even so, it's within the public's best interest not to be present for it's a grand moment for the royal family. Consider this, would you like your loved one's special moment to be shared across a sea of unknown threats or be enjoyed by those who wish only the best? The answer is clear. As remuneration for the show of preference – the entrance fee for the duration of the month will be absolved. Thank you for your patience," he handed the microphone and left, "-seems like it'll be free for the next month," commented the reporter with an awkward shrug.

Lines guided onward towards the amphitheater – an orchestra was readied below the stage – leading the talented musicians was Syndra – Lizzie was spotted as the first violinist meanwhile the orchestra carried familiar faces. Bold red curtains shrouded the known to the unknown.

.....

"Ulgra makes her debut as a prime ballerina as Hidros embraces ballet as part of what makes the world coherent. Merging our musical prowess with the flexibility and prestige of ballet, astute move my liege."

"Don't praise me openly," he shook his head and settled in a private area, "-we have eyes watching, I don't want any disturbance."

novelusb.com

Unbeknownst to him, the cog of the misfortune of which had been only hampered by a spanner churned and recoiled, the cogs clicked and the mechanism reactivated, “-uncle,” came from behind, “-I’m here.”

“Cruse, I’m glad to see you’re here,” he side-glanced, “-and in a rough shape. What happened?”

“Uncle, I’m sorry but there is something of grave importance I must relay,” the age of childish freedom had brought the expression a relative level of openness – under the somber lighting, Cruse’ highlighted features: cheeks, nose, and forehead only brightened, as for the shadows deepened – merging contours against the background. Igna glanced éclair and stood, tapping his shoulder on the way out, “-I’ll be back, praise on Ulgra for me.”

They walked, “-Cruse, the uniform’s worse than before, is there something I must know... are you being bullied?”

“Yeah...”

“And?”

“Don’t worry about it,” he walked with hands in pocket, “-bullying’s a part of a teenager’s life, it’s what the Arcanum says anyway. Forget about my life here, Death Reaper, I speak to thee as the Viper of Misfortune, there is much to be wary of,” they climbed a tower and shortly arrived at a viewing point spanning the whole of Rosespire and beyond.

“Tell me, what’s got you bothered?”

“This,” he leaned off the rail and sighed, “-we’re no longer alone in the mortal world. The Heavenly realm has decided to move. Righteous fellows are often the grimmest and heartless of the bunch. I worry the day isn’t far when the balance in itself is shaken... I have a feeling of impending doom weighing on my heart, I don’t know if it’s me or something else.”

“A revelation?”

“Revelation?” the serpent narrowed.

“Revelation,” firmed Igna, “-I had a dream of chaos, I had the vision of my loved ones being burnt in the holy flame, I had the picture of everything I built crumbling into pieces. Were you not playing a trick on me?”

“No,” returned seriously, “-once I give my word there are no takebacks. I’m grateful for the life you gave... the revelation is something we must take into account. Nothing good ever comes from these visions, especially not if it’s synchronicity.”

“You don’t mean?” and thus came the hammer of fate, *BOOOOM,* an explosion tore through the building as if someone had punched a hole, ‘-what the fu-?’ Igna reacted quickly and leaped, spreading wings into a hover – everything crashed in seconds, there was nothing to be done, “REALM-”

“Don’t!” echoed Cruse, “-they’re here,” he gulped, “-the heavenly vanguard,” angels dressed in golden armor descended from the heavens with spears, swords, and holy bows in possession, “-if you use a domain they’ll know and instantly locate the Shadow Realm’s core.”

“Wielder of Death Magic, the inheritor of Death, Time, and Origin, allow me the honor of a self-introduction, the name’s Earlsa, daughter of Qhildir, a demi-god in service to the supreme god,” sunken facial features – a stature only described as sticks and bones hidden under a cloak and prefaced by loud golden eyebrows, “-you are to come with us to the heavenly realm.” He ignored the angels and landed – panic and screams ensued, the scene played in slow motion, and the amphitheater was taken for everything it had. Wounded were carried over the rubbles, traces of concentrated mana and the smell of foul-play lingered, ‘-éclair... Elixia... Ulgra... Lizzie...’

“IGNA HAGGARD!” the demi-goddess darted forth intent on slaughter,

CLANG! the yard buckled and cracked; Vengeance rose his murderous gaze behind the sheathed Orenmir. Earlsa flapped to gain distance – the same happened with Igna, priority was those inside the mass of dust and debris, a beautiful structure laid in bare remains. Vengeance’s deep aura sufficed – the angels gathered in a semi-circle, “-we shall wait,” they landed, “-after all, the destruction is our doing, we might as well ravish the hard work.”

“Vengeance, the situation’s dire, we need to get the devil out of here. They’ve attacked and only means one thing, the Eipea Empire is ready for war. I’ll check on Igna, you hold them,” the invisible figure skipped across. Sirens and emergency broadcasts hit the nearby stations – ambulances, firetrucks, and even the military were deployed, “-a terrorist attack,” echoed many official channels. The epicenter of the explosion, the stage, was nowhere to be seen. Broken instruments showed signs of the dead, the horrified screams of the departed lingered – a loud neigh and gallops jumped dimensions, “-Igna,” the reaper of souls landed on her feet, “-looks like a lot of people have died,” her armor changed into one resembling her title of dragon.

“Death,” he spotted a stray slab and sat, “-it comes suddenly, what am I to do?” the lack of emotional response came across suspiciously. Undrar stepped one level below and rose her gaze at Igna, “-look at me, are you okay in there?”

“What can I say?” he sighed, “-look,” he pointed at the mangled remains of Syndra’s red-outfit, “-she’s dead. Over there you have Lizzie... those caught in the middle were vaporized instantly... they’re dead, she’s dead, my dear niece is gone. Ulgra... Ulgra,” he pressed his forehead, “-why did it have to happen now, why now!”

“M-master,” éclair mumbled, the gruesome sight of exposed innards matched the state of the area, “-it’s over,” he coughed, “-my daughter’s dead... I don’t think I can, I don’t think I might,” he fell forward into an exposed metal rod which impaled through the mouth and out the back. A desperate Elixia laughed frantically, “-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-HA,” then turned, her burnt expression crumbled as her knees gave and fell. Those at a relatively safe distance were burnt by the holy light. ‘Standing at the top makes one lonely,’ he stood and placed a hand on Undrar’s shoulder, “-guide them to the hall of rebirth.”

“Devil, don’t fight!”

“Serpent, it’s done,” emotionless regard washed over, “-enough playing the nice guy, if they want a devil, I’ll give them one.”

One thought went through Undrar’s mind, ‘-Staxius...’

Chapter 1026: “Devil, for your own sake, don’t fight.”

“Devil, for your own sake, don’t fight.”

“Serpent, it’s about time for silence to settle,” a considerable aura circled, Igna made way forth, the weather seemed to hide their rays into scarce lighting. Golden light emanated. Vengeance held his own, a circle of both gold and darkness locked in a battle for control.

Earlsa thrust her sunken cheeks, bearing wide pupils sternly, “-have thee come?”

“Earlsa,” Igna paused beside Vengeance, “-care to explain?”

“We intervened to put an end to the prophecy. Bringer of Chaos, thou shan’t be allowed life any longer. Consider our offer as thy requiem – for if the heavenly realms were to strive – the mortal realm would suffer. Without a guardian to protect Orin, seeing as Death, Time, and Creation are missing, seems to me the picture is best allowed to speak for itself,” both auras flickered as the diameter to the circle of control – gold sparked against dark, each blow trembled the ground. Neither gust nor outside interference would shake the growing battlefield, none save a single entity, “-Igna, I’m telling you, don’t be an idiot.” To which he turned and blinked, “-And?”

“Stop being a fool,” echoed Cruse, “-take the fight outside of here,” he turned and wailed at the chaos, “-don’t you see the destruction, don’t you see the bodies, there are people who’ve died, there are wounded being taken to the hospital. Igna, don’t be an idiot, help them, it’s the proper way of one with much to account toward. You should take responsibility... am I the only one who sees the trust and faith the people put in you, am I the only one, or are you just a pretender,” a kid told off the king, such an idea would have never crossed anyone’s mind. That being said, despite the small stature, Cruse held his own against Igna for the serpent was he who’d laid the curse of misfortune upon the Death Reapers. By so, the fierce look of embarrassment cut harshly at Igna’s bravado.

“Are you serious... they came for us, I have the right to fight, I have to fight to take them for all they have.”

.....

“You must not!”

“If it’s repercussion, then it doesn’t matter, I can fend off the attack easily.”

“THAT IS THE CORE ISSUE!” a realization hit, the screams blew harshly, “-get it, don’t you?”

‘If I win, nothing changes, they’ll have more reason to fight and take Orin down the path of Draebala. I can’t allow the mortal world to die... protection. Who’d thought such a hypocritical thought would cross my mind.’

“Excuse me,” narrowed Earlsa, “-are you done playing around?” an air of disgust and unpleasantness rose – holy weapons faced Vengeance.

“Master, best you look forward.”

“...” Igna curiously scanned, ‘-I’m talking to myself...’

“Yeah, they can’t see, hear, or sense me,” whispered Cruse, “-this is why I said listen, Igna. We forged a control and I swore on my name. Best not forget the agreement.”

novelusb.com

"Igna Haggard, by order of the god of justice, you are to be brought forth before Tharis herself!"

"First it was Zeus, now it's Tharis?"

"... By their order, you are to come with us," she clapped at one of the angels, "-else we ought to result for more violent displays. The Theater is but an appetizer – if our demands aren't taken seriously – we'll hold the whole of Hidros hostage."

Igna kept a cynical expression, "-and by the look on thy face, Igna, my words must have come across foolish and unintelligent. How in the world could a weak demi-goddess take my continent as a hostage?" she paced with a sarcastic tone, "-not a matter of how, but when. You see, the world isn't so simple – the gods have influenced the mortal world's development, Syhton, Lucifer, demi-gods, heroes of tradition – the tapestry of destiny is woven through the loop of action and reaction. You no longer hold power over us," she smirked, "-we hold power over you," her fingers rose, "-what will it be, Igna?"

'She's right,' he sighed, "-take this message to the ministers and my sister. Hidros are under threat of higher influence. Do what is must, Elixia's creation was so on the day of my departure, she'd amassed enough knowledge to rule our kingdom. She'll become queen regent. éclair's revival ought to be performed by a priest to Athena. I'm unsure as to when I'll return, time flows differently. The empire's faith is in Eira's hand, the rest will be distributed according to the relevant orders issued upon the time of this message."

"Seriously?"

"Yes," he blinked, "-I'm resolute. Cruse, don't disappoint me."

Golden colored handcuffs locked onto Igna's wrist – a heavenly gate opened, "-you there, the spirit of the demented, take a message to the new leader, the heavenly realm will abide by the conditions laid. Dimension Orin will be spared," she took one step, "-for one," and disappeared.

A myriad of rescue vehicles stormed the area. Sirens cried with a downpour from the firefighters. "Disaster strikes the inauguration," read headlines, "-during the inauguration of the Royal Theater of Arts and Culture, a massive explosive brought down the amphitheater by the time the prime ballerina Ulgra would have made her debut as the ambassador of the Wracia's empire's art. Investigation point to a terrorist attack. By the witness report, many high-profile individuals were at the center, more than twenty people are missing, and five were confirmed dead including the name: Syndra Lordon, Lizzie Haggard, and Ulgra Essin. The kingdoms at a standstill – no official reports have come from the castle, King Igna's counted amongst the missing."

An emergency meeting of the Haggard Dynasty followed as soon as Courtney Haggard landed a short while after the news. Her white hair and military uniform stormed Rosespire castle, melancholic listlessness of the retainers and works brushed aside, "-where are they?" she ordered, to which Midne led the angry queen upstairs.

Elvira, Julius, Eira and the just arrived queen were subject to said discussion. The news played upon a holographic display, silence held the room in contempt, "-Eira, Elvira, Julius," Courtney opened the door, "-did I hear correctly?" she dropped on one of the seats, Midne pulled the door softly, "-Julius?" Nothing

came, her vision turned anti-clockwise, “-Elvira?” same again, the latter’s attention seemed more on her tablet against the bare emptiness of Julius. She continued, “-Eira?” the minister held shards of ice in between her palms and fingers, the frost laid a cloud of white, “-WAKE UP!” she slammed.

“Aunt Courtney, my apologies,” nodded Julius.

“See you’ve made it.”

“Grandmother Courtney.”

“Where’s my foolish son?”

A separate pair of footsteps clopped. A flustered Cruse marched into the lion’s den beside Vengeance, they stopped to the side and waited. Courtney dragged her gaze and briefly scanned the intruder, “-Cruse, I take it?”

“Allow me a proper introduction,” he tightened his stance and bowed, “-I am Cruse Ortun, a student at Modie’s private academy and noble son sent to learn the ways of the Hidrosian courtship. Thus ends my introduction if it were concerned with my identity in the mortal realm, my true title is Curse of Misfortune. I have plagued the Death Reapers for millennia and watched as each heir chosen to carry Death’s burden failed miserably. My true form cannot be witnessed nor can it be experienced for it is only through my will and the Devil’s magic that I’m able to stand here today. The Haggard Dynasty is in grave danger, without the proper steps – a legacy forged by the Founder might see itself crumbled akin to the Essin Dynasty. ‘Twould be a shame really.”

“Why are you here?”

“To answer questions,” one step forward, “-the attack is confirmed to have come beyond human comprehension. The gods launched an attack targeting Igna Haggard. Angels descended on the land after said destruction. If not for my interjection, the one revered as King of Hidros might have slaughtered and incurred the wrath of the gods. As the Guardian of Nexsolium can attest, the heavenly Vanguard, else known as the Evangelic Guards, would have made certain Orin paid.”

“He would have easily defeated them, what’s an angel compared to a devil?”

“Upon the wings of the Vanguard’s flutter upon the mortal realm, scatter those in her wake and shriek and destruction which lays in the despair of the righteous,” added Eira, “-an exert from the Holy book of Eyeoo.”

“Meaning the Vanguard come when victory is assured.”

“Hidros’ unsteady as is. If we crumble now, everyone else will feel the pressure. Hidros’ fighting a war on behalf of the Empire, it had to happen now...”

“Lucifer’s taken power in Alphaia,” said Eira, “-he’s vengeful. The ploy must have been a part of his scheme. Once Igna’s out of the picture, I’m sure he’s certain of his victory. The fool could be no less wrong.”

“Haggard is as Haggards do,” followed Julius, “-I’ll create more hosts to help with logistics. Eira, the ministers, and Hidros’ leadership is in thy hand, yes?”

“Correction,” she rose her palm, “-Hidros’ under Elixia’s command. Brother decreed her to become regent.”

“And?” Courtney tilted her head, “-doesn’t matter who’s regent and who’s not. Work ought be done regardless of one’s rank. Eira, you have Arda’s backing. The people need to see a Haggard on the throne in times of need, I’m sure that’s what my son forgot to mention.”

“Actually,” Cruse rose his hand, “-I have a letter addressing this very subject,” the paper slid over.

“When did he have time to write then?” narrowed a suspicious Julius.

“When he left.”

“I see,” they took turns, “-to my dearest family, I’m sure my sudden disappearance comes as a shock. Don’t worry, the letter is mine, have it verified through the blood seal(speaking to you, aunt). To the strange situation, it came from nowhere, and I guess it was a surprise. I planned for a day like this to come, I planned for when everything eventually ended – Hidros would be made to suffer. My job as ruler is to plan, and even if I’m gone, I’m confident the Kingdom will run smoothly. It’s baffling, I couldn’t keep my own realm in check and I’m here boasting about how this will keep Hidros safe. Elixia is the key to the future, she holds everything I ever possessed. True power is knowledge, she’s the culmination of my efforts during the years I spent working at the castle. I dare say she’s everything I’ll leave behind. Elixia’s the key, her entourage is the lock, what’s a key without a door to open? Mother, I know you’d rather have Eira on the throne, believe me, going by my own description, she should be on there... however, it mustn’t happen. No Haggard should be made to carry the burden that comes with leading an entire Kingdom. Elixia is breakable, replaceable, and ever-evolving – I know how hard it is. Sister, you’re more suited for controlling the ministers and leading the politics from a distance. I know Julius is there as well. Brother, if it’s not too much to ask, I request for thy aid in keeping Raven and her associated businesses safe and prosperous. My old pal will be joining the table soon. All the pieces have been painstakingly crafted and placed – I believe my intentions will be made very clear after a certain point. éclair will need convincing before he returns... and about Lizzie’s death, Julius, I’m sorry, take my warm wishes to Shanna. No one should experience to loss of their offspring, no one.”

“What now?” they shrugged.

“We follow the path,” echoed Courtney, “-Arda will handle any internal dispute that may result from the attack. Let’s focus on what we can accomplish, where’s Elixia?”

“Right here,” a newly awakened replica entered, “-the explosion sure was loud,” she laughed, “-and I’ve brought éclair.”

“éclair?”

“Yeah, I’m here,” he walked into the frame of which was the doorway, “-no need for convincing, she explained everything.”

“Guess we’re ready,” Elvira clapped, “-shall we?” A new united leadership sealed their resolve on that very night.

‘The heavenly realm,’ came a cold smirk, ‘Don’t underestimate me.’

Chapter 1027: Heavenly Realm

“What are you smirking at,” a hard push tumbled Igna, “-damn devil,” came a vicious glare. ‘-These binds,’ he stood with hands in tied, ‘-I can’t break from its hold.’ The heavenly realm rose spotlessly amidst the sky; floating isles went to and fro, golden showers rode under rainbows – angelic beings fluttered innocently, ‘-heaven is as they think.’

“Stop gawking,” glared Earlsa, the view swapped for the innards of a prison cell. News of the arrival reached the very top, “-supreme one, the devil has been apprehended,” reported Earlsa.

“Good,” returned a handsome young man surrounded by prettier ladies, “-I will see to him shortly. Go look after your father, he seems distraught lately.”

“Understood,” a bow, and the throne room shut. Palace whispers followed along the way, “Qhildir is at it again.”

“I know, the man’s a deviant. No one’s able to stop him once he starts to laugh,” they scurried as Earlsa’s uninterested glare landed. ‘-Idiots,’ she shook her head and ambled into a lesser clean area – the heavenly image of a palace made of gold and silver swapped for the crude reality of an uncleaned and dull interior. The discrepancy between Zeus’ quarters and what may have come was stark, a clear show of power and position. Her boots went from clean marble to damp carpet – the guards yawned, uninterested at the thought of work.

Knock, knock, “-father?”

“Open,” said a feeble tone, “-are you there?”

.....

“Yes, father, I’ve returned,” she smiled and suddenly stopped her expression, “-why are you here?”

“Am I not allowed to visit a friend?”

“My father is no longer interested in you, woman, Please, get out of his chambers.”

The gorgeous outline breathed a reserved sigh and pressed Qhildir’s hand, “-by my name, you won’t suffer long, Qhildir, I will make good on my promise.”

“Thank you, Syhton, I appreciate the help.”

“Anything for a friend,” she left, not after passing Earlsa’s pathetic frame and embarrassing features, “-word of advice,” came a whisper, “-don’t get in too deep else thee might pass the point of no return.” Fury carried her twirl, alas, the room was already shut by the time her fist clenched, ‘-bitch.’

“Earlsa, why are you there my daughter, please, come to my side.”

She obeyed and took a seat beside the wounded old man, “-I’m sorry about all of this.”

“It’s fine, father, you don’t have to worry. I’m glad you created me, I’m glad I can be of service to my father.”

“Oh Earlsa, you were always such an angel,” he coughed, the pace slowed considerably as Qhildir’s frame laid as but a shadow of the prior self, “-the price for knowledge is stark. She came back, I had to save her this time, I had to do my best, I’m sorry.”

“Please father, don’t strain yourself,” she patted his hand, “-I successfully brought Igna to the heavenly realm. Forgoing long old tradition of non-involvement was foolish, father.”

“What did you do?” the sunken cheeks hallowed further, it was as if the skin sucked deeper to the point of being one with bone, “-what did you do!”

“I blackmailed Igna, he’s the embodiment of evil, we had to show our resolve.”

“Who did you kill, TELL ME!”

“A lot of people,” she blinked, “-to get to him we had to take hold of the man’s weakness... what greater weakness than the very thing he spent decades cultivating. I’m sure the other gods can take it from here.”

“YOU’RE A FOOL!” roared, “-A COMPLETE FOOL!” the room shook, items levitated – neither table nor bed was spared, potion flask fell, books went awry. She calmly held her finger above his glabella and tapped – the room instantly dropped, ‘-father, I’m sorry, but the old way of doing business no longer applies when dealing with him. I should have taken action long before it grew out of control.’ A darker presence phased into view, “-my lord Lixbin,” she dropped on her knee, “-you should have ordered and I would have come. I don’t deserve such level of attention, my lord.”

“Earlsa, I heard you brought Igna to the heavenly realm?” he floated past the bed and stretched towards her cheeks with long, wrinkled fingers. The lower body seemed a little translucent, though it didn’t matter for he leaned close and narrowed, “-did I hear correctly?”

“Yes my lord, I brought him to the heavenly realm.”

novelusb.com

“...” no reply for he stood straight and scanned the room, “-I see your father’s attacks haven’t stopped.”

“No, it’s getting worse and worse – nothing seems to work.”

“Healing him is a simple matter for the Arch Angel Raphael.”

“Never heard of him.”

“He’s the angel of restoration and humble servant to Igna. The man residing amidst the castle’s dungeon is indeed a person of great knowledge and connection. What means did thee employ?”

“I killed people closest to him and proved my message. He complied when I asked... was rather weird seeing the man for what he was – a lunatic that spoke nonsense at himself. I don’t get why his name is so feared?”

Lixbin hovered back to her side, “-he represents the very essence of death and despair. No one in heaven and/or hell will say they don’t fear what Death’s power represents. From insects to the very essence of the universe and realms – end, else death, will come for nothing is infinite. Gods prolong

their lives and it is in no way truly considered immortality. The pyramid of mortality from which one entity is subject to another's whims shows clearly where gods and humans stand. To them we're immortal, to us, we're just us, gods."

"How does Death relate?"

"List the three most important entities."

"Creation, Death, and Time."

"Good, tell me why they're in that specific order?"

"Creation is the start; Death is the end and time is the flow by which Creation travels to Death."

"Insert the position of a god."

"..."

"Where do gods fit in that loop?"

"I don't know, maybe at the start?"

"Wrong, we're not in that circle, we're not even on the same level. True immortality is when something or someone becomes unaffected by said concept – for us, we see Death as another obstacle, however, true immortality transcends the very concept."

"My lord, I'm confused."

"You killed Igna's closest companions, perhaps a niece or even a daughter. What was his expression, how did he look, was the aura murderous, was it calm or was it unnervingly observant?"

"I guess calm?"

"You haven't observed – you didn't see what was meant to be seen. That man," he laughed, "-is no ordinary entity, since the dawn of all, none has experienced the powers of the trinity as Igna has. He holds Origin, Death, and Time... I'm sure of it."

"You're being cynical, my lord. The implication of my actions having been guided by another power is wrong, I chose this path willingly. Lord Lixbin, tell me, this angel Raphael, where can I find him?"

"Only he knows. Praytell, where is Igna being held?"

"At the Evangelic' dungeon – the maiden of Erien said she'd watch over him."

"DAMN!" the god vanished, leaving the room in a duller state. '-Raphael,' she left for the dungeon.

Loud lashes, the painful sound shattered bone, muffled laughter and sizzling of liquid, "-STOP!" thundered Lixbin, "-Erien, what are you thinking?"

"What?" she stabbed a knife straight into Igna's legs and moved aside, "-I came for payback. No way this fucker's leaving my dungeon unscathed," muffled laughter came from the torture chair, he bit and tore straight through metallic mouth-restraints, "-payback for what I did to Cleopatra?" *spat,* blood

splashed, “-a pleasure to see you, Lixbin. How’s life been, I sure hope great because mine has been God awful.”

“SHUT YOUR MOUTH!” she grabbed scissors and powerwalked with the intent of delivering the final blow, “-stand down,” narrowed Igna, her rage and fury vanished – tremendous power from the gaze alone brought her bravado to a standstill, ‘-what is this?’ she froze, ‘-one more step and I’d have died. Wait, why am I thinking about death, I’m a demi-goddess, I shouldn’t be affected by the fear of termination. Who is this?’ Long fingers grasped her shoulders, “-Erien, don’t do anything foolish. Cleopatra’s punishment was well-deserved,” he continued until Igna’s chair, “-these binds are weak and useless. Why haven’t you escaped?” inquired Lixbin.

“True,” Igna calmly stood and shattered all the previously tied restraints, “-just thought I’d have a go at playing the victim. Try as I might to be scared, nothing happened,” he dusted off his shoulder and exhaled, the wounds healed almost instantly, “-Lixbin, I haven’t forgotten what you did,” he reached for Lixbin’s collar. The god simply returned the stare.

“Got past my defenses... the title of high-deity doesn’t affect you anymore, does it? Tell me,” a macabre grin propped on the demented visage, “-how strong are you?”

“Whatever,” the grip eased, “-congratulation on killing my previous incarnation. Compliments where it’s due. There’s something you said about the punishment, care to elaborate?”

“Yes, yes,” the duo pulled blood-soaked chairs and sat as if reunited classmates, “-Cleopatra entered Orin, said realm is under the strongest authority’s command, thus you. You saw fit as the leader to sentence her to perpetual torture and suffering, I knew full well you’d want to relish the torture. We do share the same sense of pleasure.”

“Don’t group me in with your kind.”

“Deny all you want, Igna – the story has followed a linear path, and let me tell you, the place I see it ends won’t be happy nor will it be sad. It shall be-”

“IGNA!”

“Earlsa?” Lixbin paused, “-why are you here?”

“My lord, why are you chatting so comfortably with the devil?”

“I see, the daughter’s one of your pawns too,” to which Igna threw silent applause, “-poor ol’ Qhildir, how’s the man doing these days?”

“After Eira’s revolt and ascension, old man Qhildir’s slowly losing relevance as she takes to the mantle of Philosophy.”

Heavier footsteps lined the walkway, “-Igna Haggard,” shouted an announcer, “-by order of the Legion of Justice and Truth, you are to come to the Capital of Lawfulness and stand trial before our goddess.”

“Tharis’ gotten involved,” Lixbin sighed, “-well, I shall but say my condolences.”

“So the great god of darkness fears the goddess of judgment.”

A bolt of lightning flashed, “-where’s he going?”

“Supreme one,” everyone except Igna bowed.

“By order of lady Tharis, we’re to take Igna to the capital.”

“No, no, it doesn’t work that way. You’re in my domain, my castle, my land. I will do as I want, yes?” he clapped, “-Igna will be tortured and killed by my hands. The symbol of Time, give it else I tear thee limb from limb!”

Simple threats fell on deaf ears, Igna looked towards the announcer, ‘-he’s shaken and unable to respond to this idiot.’

“IGNA!” the boyish attitude leaned too close, a sharp gust blew, taking Zeus’ fingernails clearly, “-Supreme one,” with said nails in a pinch, “-a god must also be wary of how he looks,” after which the nails fell onto Zeus’ palms, “-announcer, take me to Tharis,” he passed by the guards.

“IGNA!” thundered.

“Don’t bother,” added Lixbin, “-once the goddess of judgment passes her word, none of us has the authority to rival her talent. Best leave it, Zeus, I’ve brought more maidens from the village down south, care for a taste test?”

“My, more maidens,” he licked his lips, “-I’d rather have that other goddess, Syhton. She’s one heck of a woman, I’ve dreamt about breaking her chaste vows for so long, MAN!”

“Something about the unattainable,” returned Lixbin, “-come on, supreme one, let’s have some fun.”

Thus, the moist dungeon air cleared. Earlsa and Erien kept silent, ‘-he attacked without the supreme one’s notice,’ went through Erien’s mind. ‘-He forced Lixbin and Zeus to move to his whims,’ gulped Earlsa, ‘-who the hell is he?’

“Hate to say this but thank you,” mumbled a begrudged expression.

.....

“Doesn’t matter,” they came upon a lovely landscape, “-got bored of the torture chamber anyway, pay me back some other time, Announcer.”

Chapter 1028: Death’s Death

Rumors of the prophecy man hit nooks and crannies around the heavenly realm. Same as breaking news would slam upon the home screens of many houses – some were interested and others unaffected. The simple process of experiencing a concern for a matter beyond one’s reach wasn’t worth the hassle, or so were thoughts.

‘Tharis’ name’s respected,’ observed Igna, the announcer, an angel of timid expression, kept an expression of harshness as to seem in control. The prisoner, Igna, walked and skipped comfortably. Disparity showed the current hierarchy as the scenery turned for the better. ‘This is a stranger feeling. Are the gods true to their words?’ an outlandish idea came to, ‘-Zeus’ feels childish. He held power and authority on the day I died. Why did the previous encounter feel nothing like I remember? I should have

had a feeling of deep hatred, a sensation of willingness to slay... instead, I chose nonviolence, well, my actions were nonviolent. A show of compassion to the announcer's given leeway, kindness goes a long way in the heavenly realm, I should remind so.'

"Strange feeling you say?" whelmed another whisper, "-O' Igna, my dear Igna, the strange feeling was confidence."

'Great, hello my other selves,' a hemisphere expanded to bubblelike texture, '-why the sudden audience?'

Two figures materialized in colored outlines; black and purple. Each a representation of the previous incarnation, "-Igna," said Alfred, "-do you sense the gathered energy?" Staxius, in his comfortable stance, shuffled in the middle as a physical interjection, "-today's the day we decide."

'So, it's come to this,' they stood at the proximity of a triangle – the world kept moving without affecting Igna – a realm within a realm had shattered reality(heaven) into a fissure of displacing colors and fading objects.

Alfred held out his arms and smiled, "-you always knew we would have to decide who is who. What decides our fate and who's the true host? I represent the past, if not for my powers, nothing of the Aapith nation of the very existence of certain worlds would have passed."

.....

Staxius crossed his arms, "-I was the present, the sword made for the slaughter of our enemies. I built Hidros to where it is now, I'm the foundation on which thee stand comfortably. My intellect is my greatest asset. For the chance at more options, I willingly gave my life on that faithful day – if not for me, you wouldn't even exist, Igna."

The third incarnation settled on the ground and crossed his legs. A composed aura rose, "-the past, the present, my allies, and my friends – we speak not of the host but thy pride. Heaven's our collective enemy – you're angry with my docile approach. I've been meaning to say this for a long, long time," he sighed, the pupils drew an uncaring expression, "-throwing away the mask feels good," a mild chuckle escaped, "-Alfred, Staxius, I'm your evolution, a complete being with control over mind and matter."

"I knew it," laughed Staxius, "-always playing the fool, always playing the wandering hero, the man who cares for those around him, the man who strives to better the one who helped," he stopped, the break seemed as if a dagger, "-you were no more than a character playing the game. I truly cried when my daughter was killed, when people around me suffered, I felt it, I wasn't strong to protect nor was I strong to destroy. You, third incarnation, the title of Devil suits thee perfectly. Seeing family die, seeing Katherine's affection and care turn into little more than a farse... luring Syhton's affection and taking her chastity, making her your playmate and lover for the simple reason of her worldly wealth and otherworldly influence. I dare say, Igna, you're an opportunist. A far worse version of us combined," in said description, the words came and went without so much an effect.

"I know," he returned, "-playing the fool is the only source of entertainment I get. It's nice to see my entourage suffer, it's fun to see them climb to a higher standard. Per the boon of the Watcher, I'm duty bound to protect the Shadow Realm and her resident. Tis the reason I can't show my true identity – to me, they are pawns, even you Staxius, Alfred, and myself, we're pawns to my whims."

“The path is unknown,” said Alfred, “-you need comrades, sadly, they’ve left for the respective realms. What now, Igna, what will you do?”

novelusb.com

“When Absolution comes to pass – I will end it my way. Before then, our job is yet done. Staxius, Alfred, keep our emotions in check. I’ve had enough playing these games – perhaps a show of my true intent might trigger a reaction from the gods, it might be fun?” the triangle vanished – the fissure and fading of reality was naught but smoke and mirrors.

“Move,” came a harsh push – they arrived at the bridge to Tharis’ island. A rope bridge led upward, “-trial awaits,” said the announcer whose identity yet remained unknown. Step after step, the chained Igna walked – the previous bravado turned into but a shell of the host – there laid no life between the eyes, something to do with the inner conversation. Said moment of respite and peace, “-we can finally work,” whispered the angel, “-I don’t know what happened... things are bound to get crazy.”

“Alfred.”

“Staxius?”

“Are you sure we should let him roam free?”

“Why not?”

“Igna’s a loose cannon. He’s strong.”

“We were like that. Staxius, I think we should retire. After Igna’s speech and the show of his true intent, I’m convinced he’ll make the perfect harbinger. Come what may, if the destruction of all is the creed of the man who wields Nothing, then, I must say I’d be grateful to have a seat at the council of the dead. Why are you worked up, Staxius, feeling left out?”

“Not that,” he sighed, “-my plan’s gone to perfect. When the moment’s here, I’ll take what’s mine and make sure everything goes my way.”

Therein an ethereal palm came from the ceiling and slammed him to the ground, “-Staxius, it’s not nice saying those things. We’re one of the same, best thee go to sleep and not wake for a while. When I say you’re free, you’ll be free. Gather thy anger, gather thy hate, fuel my attainment of greater strength for we are the trinity.” A void-like landscape of light-gray sky and dark-gray flatlands expanded around Staxius. ‘-Chain to the infinite nothingness,’ he saw himself restrained on a chair, ‘-why do I bother, I’m no hero. Igna’s the host... I lost my chance at fighting when I surrendered...’

Clop, clop, clop, clop, “-Staxius,” came a familiar voice, “-someone looks in rough shape,” a hazy lantern sparked the blueish fire, “-look at us,” said lantern drew close and shone against a familiar entity.

“ORIGIN!” he exclaimed, “-my, I haven’t seen you for so long. Tell me, where are we?”

“This is the realm of knowledge,” he said with a joyous smile, “-to you, it’s empty and vacant, to me,” *snap,* “-it’s the cultivation of history down to the last particle,” a giant library snuffed all present – there laid no trace of emptiness.

“Is this where you’ve been?”

“Amazing, isn’t it?”

“How?”

“Staxius, we’re no longer a single entity. We belong to a network of greater forces tied by the strength of your souls. Each incarnation gives rise to its own realm, imagine a straight line of bearing (0,1) if it were placed on a graph, now, add another horizontal line, which becomes (0,2) the more the soul absorbs, the more lines are added until the graph transcends the allocated two-dimensional plane and moves beyond into the nth-dimension. I’m origin, as my name states, I’m (0,0) you already knew that. With my arrival in thy soul, we merged to create an entity with stability on the level of multiple universes, yes, the scale is massive and hard to imagine.”

“Igna’s work is our work?”

“No matter how he phrases the sentence, his action and thought process will always depend on us. We’re his mind now, we’re everything he has, the culmination of work for the creation of the perfect being. Like you, I had the idea of becoming a host, however, as time passed, I reflected and understood what was needed. We’re products of a bygone era – true our abilities in a fight or the show of murderous intent may help remove some of the thorns, but it’ll never be enough. Same to take a cup to the sea, no matter how much one removes, the sea will always win.”

“What then?” they walked down the library – a familiar door rose with the insignia of death.

“Choose a path of your own?”

“What path lays before me...” the lock clicked, a loud flash sparkled and familiar faces came too, ‘-my white hair, the vampiric nature,’ he took one step and saw the outfit change into the symbolic Claireville academy suit. ‘-Black hair,’ he entered, ‘-Aceline, Lizzie... father... everyone,’ deep down he knew it was fake, he knew it was an illusion, ‘-I know,’ a smile could but come through, ‘-my sister, my mother, my family,’ the adult-self reverted to when he lived as a child. A warm pat of Tempest Haggard tussled the short hair, ‘-this version of history... this version of the world is the collective understanding of Origin and all that has happened. This is the life of Staxius Haggard who didn’t have to live through war, a simple life as a simple boy in a simple world with simple mechanics.’

“Staxius, my other self,” a golden transparent figure lit amongst the skies, “-tis not the end for it’s only the beginning. We’re one of the same. I know what we want best, I know what we yearn towards, and to that end, my other self, I present thee with life in an alternate timeline. Nothing will change – a callback to our reality will remain as all our powers are shared. You’ll have access to the Shadow Realm but under another identity. We don’t want rumors. What say you, Staxius, doth thee wish a contract with the devil?”

“A contract,” he laughed, “-Igna, you’re a strange son of a gun,” the latter landed, “-I’m stumped to your intent or vision. I know one thing for sure, we weren’t meant for this existence,” an elated expression washed Staxius’ face, the same expression Origin and those called the enlightened held, ‘-what happened to him?’ Igna gulped.

“The truth will be shown sooner or later. I’ll gladly take the offer. Staxius Haggard shall rest his sword for the rise of your true intent, Igna.”

‘Him too?’ a dot swallowed all to a harsh expulsion into the outside world. Tharis’ palace rose grandly. Veneration of the goddess of judgment held weight. Retainers held a more noble disposition, they moved with ease and grace. Igna’s lifeless eyes regained life, ‘-what’s wrong with my other selves, I don’t even want to know.’

“Show respect,” a harsh tap kicked him onto his knee whilst his head was held to the carpeted floor, ‘-I’m inside the palace... Tharis’ on the throne.’

“Raise your head,” thundered loudly, memories and reality intertwined,”-Shanna...” A masked swordswoman dashed, slitting tongue and jaw – blood plummeted below, the gore sent shivers down many observers’ spine, he could but stare at the goddess, ‘-she looks just like her, is she?’ the memories crumbled, focus landed upon stern brown-eyes contoured by her hair tied underneath the golden crown. Pearl necklace added to her prestige and the chin rounded just shy of her small lips. Her rounded nose guided her stare forward, “-think before you act.”

The swordswoman immediately dropped onto all fours, “-I’m sorry my lady... the man threw such a despicable stare that I could but attack,” attention horn onto the troubled apology, “- I will face any measure of punishment. I apologize for the crudeness, my goddess.”

With a snap of his finger, the wounds healed instantly, “-permission to speak, goddess,” it caught them by surprise.

Chapter 1029: “-bringer of our destruction, we sure believe some wild stuff.”

“How dare you!”

“Let him speak,” added the stern goddess. He spurred on energetically, raising both his head and voice.

“Goddess of Judgement, Tharis, it’s a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance. Considering my treatment,” a short but concrete glance towards the angered crowd, “-I’m glad to say your children, followers, are very well behaved.”

“Igna Haggard, you strike me as a man of shady disposition. How do you fair in the world of ours?”

“My lady, surely you jest. I was taken from my home under threat of the destruction of innocent lives.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she descended from her throne at a comfortably slow pace. Her action controlled the room, the follower’s previous actions became a subject of the past. ‘In face of overwhelming power, the first move is key. I need the initiative, I’ve already shown my power via regeneration. Balls in your court, Tharis, show me what sort of person you truly represent.” She walked past, following her nose towards a nicely arranged bar. A handsome bartender kept the glasses clean. Drinks and bottles followed a nice color scheme in which the lighter shades of booze were kept on the outskirts whilst the darker ones were propped in the middle. All and all, the creation reminisced of the eye of truth, so passed the thought.

“Surprised?” she stopped and took a seat, “-this place was built especially to welcome people I deem worthy of knowing.”

.....

"I'm very surprised, the feel has a Hidrosian esthetic. Have you perhaps?"

"My," she tapped and the bartender delivered, "-you ought to have a few questions?"

"Goddess, please, heed our warning. Being left alone with this devil of a man can only spark disaster. We protest at the mere thought."

Igna remained still, "-alas the invitation has gone to waste. I'd have loved to taste lady Tharis' drinks. I am as I was brought to be, a captive. There is truly no concept of respect when faced with a person of lower stature. Heaven is worse than I thought."

"On that, I agree," gesture said, '-scram'. The followers, intent on countering the request stood in a defiant line.

A muffled snicker escaped, "-what is funny?" narrowed the swordswoman, "-what is so damned funny?"

"Nothing, honestly..." the sternness broke into greater laughs.

"WHAT'S SO GOD DAMN FUNNY!" sword escaped its sheath, the sound clicked as suddenly as the blade was placed against his neck, "-you think this is funny?" gritted the woman, her veins bloated and her neck strained, "-one more word and I'll have your head."

Calmly as he could, Igna leaned, there was no care for self-preservation, the blade pierced, droplets fell, "-my head, my arm, my heart, do what you want, I'll enjoy the disappointed gaze as my body heals and my anger builds. Do not test me, woman," he grabbed the blade and clenched – the weapon shattered as if glass.

"Enough," came from the bar, "-I've seen enough," her anger flashed, "-Ade, I said to watch your mouth and anger. Some stand far above anyone else. There are entities of unknown origins abled to terrorize realms and domains, humility and respect are virtues, you should embrace them."

"Goddess," a feeling of rejection followed. Ade, an ardent follower, threw her face at Igna and glared, '-because of you,' said her expression, '-because of you my lady is angry at me!'

"Stop with the nonsense," came again, "-Ade, you've performed your duties admirably, For the loyalty and courage to stand by my side, I should compliment not chastise. There's a thin line between loyalty and disobedience. Please, take the others to the dining hall, food has been served. A little rest will do some good, yes?" Thus the throne hall emptied with Tharis and Igna sharing a drink.

novelusb.com

'Astute lady,' he sipped, '-she didn't take my bait. If she asked why I was laughing, I'd have replied to bring into question the stance of goddess and follower. It'll have given the perfect momentum... Well, it's silent,' they drank, he followed his own pace as did she. There was no sense of urgency, the world was theirs.

"Allow me," she began on her sixth drink, "-there's no hiding the truth. You're here under the folly of the prophecy, '-on the day when three joins one, and one becomes whole, no entity of greater strength shall surpass the might of he who controls the three. By the powers bestowed on the circle of creation

and death – by the rules imposed for the sanctity of reality, and the safeguard of everything; nothing mustn't awaken for if he bears his true intent, all will fall without resistance' it took the heavenly realm by surprise. Understand, there was also another entity with similar potential, Alfred. He killed angels and devoured all in his path. There was no stopping his power until Death and a courageous bunch intervened. History repeats itself, we have seen it time and time again. Forgive the gods for being wary – the fight for preservation starts with adequate protection.”

“I'm going to be tried and killed?” he drank, “-the bar is no commonplace item. The expression and awkward movement tell of a person who's never been to a bar. It's subtle clues. Tapping the counter only happens in movies – as for the butler, good imagination. Serving a screwdriver with an actual screwdriver in it is a well-known joke – though some take it very literally. Misinformation has its way of making the sensible look foolish. Goddess Tharis, when will the trial be hosted?”

A somber outline came into being, “-lady Tharis, if you please.”

Her face dropped, “-Lixbin, why are you here?”

“To play the fitting role of devil's advocate,” he laughed, “-heaven knows him as the man of the prophecy. They view him as a threat. Why not change the perspective and show a snippet of his life?”

“What life?” narrowed Igna.

“Leave it to me,” came a very suspicious smile. The lounge vanished, and the throne hall rose into a scene taken from a classical painting by the hands of Nicolas Poussin, ‘The judgment of Solomon,’ she held the throne. Two sides faced one another; Igna against the Adle and Tharis' close entourage. Bystanders were pushed further back. By push, it referred to a sensible fear, felt by strained looks, whispers, and all-around anxiousness. A moment was granted and Tharis was nowhere seen, “-Lixbin, what are you thinking?”

“Igna... did you signal for my help earlier?”

“I'm not a fool to make a deal with you,” he muffled,” -Lixbin, for the love of what's holy, why do you always make yourself so valuable in my times of need.”

“Don't forget, I did have a hand in your death.”

“Haven't forgotten it. Tell me,” he held onto the god's shoulder and peered deeply, “-what secret doth thee hide, why help, and what's the deeper play.”

A blankness akin to white canvas washed the god, “-I want you to owe me a favor. I want to see the rise of an entity capable of wiping everything from existence. I want the birth of a new age, one where gods and demons don't exist, one where I don't have to live my pitiable existence as some jaded god forced to do the bidding of my whims. I want to be free, I want to have true comrades, I want to experience the brighter side... I want to-” consciousness returned, “-STOP!” he smacked Igna's arm, “-WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?” the hall turned at them uncomfortably.

“A little technique,” shrugged Igna, “-I call the teller of truth.”

“Why did you?” he shuddered, “-I should have never accepted.”

“Well, you did volunteer. Best play the role of my advocate. You want to experience the light, yes?”

“Shut up,” he looked away, “-I don’t want to talk about it. What was that power?”

“Manipulation,” he said, “-rather, a more advanced version. I’m sure you can’t relate but, here’s an example. When a child does something wrong and he lies, the parents usually take a calm approach, this gives the child confidence that the lies have been believed. However, when the soft approach doesn’t work – an order or proclamation crumbles any sense of bravado that might have been felt. In our case, I simply ordered and it was so. When faced by authority, the lesser cracks.”

Rafters shuffled, and Tharis entered. Each side paid respects, she took her rightful place and brought with a sensation of utmost severity. Familiar gods and goddesses lined the upper stances, all eyes were on Igna.

“Welcome esteemed guests,” she said, “-today’s trial pertains to the man of the prophecy. We know of the destruction such an untamed power can bring bedlam to our otherwise peaceful existence.” Two blocks guarding the hall swung – Zeus’ electrified aura pulsed. A look of rage and impatience saw the footsteps amplify.

“Supreme god,” thundered Tharis, “-thee steps foot into my domain.”

“I’m Zeus,” he beelined straight for Igna and grabbed the collar, “-tell me where the symbol of Time resides!”

“Don’t be a fool,” Lixbin reached for Zeus’ arms.

“TRAITOR!” he snapped, electricity jolted – leaving Lixbin’s arm in a charred state, “-don’t come to me looking for help,” he turned to Igna and shook, “-TELL ME WHERE THE SYMBOL IS!”

‘I can’t afford to kill, not yet. This might be an opportunity to make the gods see my powerlessness,’ the shoulder eased, Tharis’ shout became the empty beat of her lips, ‘-replacing the supreme god will be hard. Maybe Lixbin’s vision of a world without gods or demons might bring a utopia.’

“LET HIM GO!” gavel flickered sparks – transcendent arms rose and separated the duo, “-I said,” her pupils burn with pure golden power, “-don’t interrupt the proceedings in my domain.”

“DON’T TAKE THAT TONE,” Zeus spun and leaped with his thunderbolt, ‘-that idiot,’ Igna disappeared.

“ZEUS, STOP!” the thunderbolt thrust as if a dagger, Tharis’ body froze as did time which moved at a snail’s pace. A domain expanded, the air felt dense in a marred color.

‘My movement’ sluggish.’

“Igna,” a separate entity rose behind. Blond hair and a friendly smile, “-Miira,” he said.

“Time’s stop,” she said, “-the heavenly realm has no special hold on us anymore. I heard about the marvelous job you and Julius performed. The Shadow Realm reigns above everything – a world of many worlds, children are born demi-gods and raised to be gods. They live their lives and are subject to said realm’s cycle of life and death. You’ve created what many sought after... we stand eons above.”

“That is why we can stop time as if we were on Orin?”

“Yes,” she floated to his side, “-I’m sorry about leaving. Someone had to keep monitoring their actions.”

“What of the Shadow Realm? You’ll return, yes?”

“I wonder,” she looked at Zeus, “-considering what I see, the supreme god might have to be replaced. Who is better than the assistant of the previous supreme god? No, Igna, I might not return.”

A moment’s pause followed, “-tell me, Miira, is that choice your choosing?”

“Why ask?”

“To be sure,” he blinked, “-I mean, if killing the supreme god resolves the issues, I’ll be happy to provide.”

“No, don’t show our hand, not just yet. When the time comes for true terror, you’ll know,” the flow regained momentum into a spark, “-THARIS, YOU DON’T HAVE AUTHORITY OVER ME!”

Igna reappeared and took the blow, the bolt went straight through – life drained and he fell headfirst, “-NOT AGAIN!” cried Zeus, “-MY SYMBOL,” he took Igna’s body and shook violently, “-WAKE UP!”

‘He died saving me...’ horror and despair, “-GET OUT OF MY DOMAIN!”

A cold-blooded stare side-glanced, “-this is your fault,” Zeus gritted, “-I’ll make sure you pay for his death.”

“Enough,” an enormous presence served to swallow the hall whole, “-Zeus, best you leave.”

“Miira... Fine,” he turned, “-I’ll be back to collect his corpse later.”

The prophesied man laid lifeless, ‘-he’s dead,’ relief whelmed the masses, “-guess it’s over,” the crowd rose as did the gods. Wings fluttered, portals opened and flight spells activated, “-bringer of our destruction, we sure believe some wild stuff.”

Chapter 1030: Art of Naught – Genesis

It was a cold night. Loop of day and night, all felt on edge and tense. Such feelings weren’t shared by the rest for what laid before Tharis’ throne hall were blood and remnants. By action deemed unjust and belligerent, the supreme god was ordered a stay at home. Whatever the punishment might have been; it never really mattered. Stay at home, else ‘go back and rest.’

‘My authority,’ she pondered. Followers in mass, “-goddess,” they preached, “-it was not your fault,” they prayed, “-it was the supreme god’s action,” some knelt.

‘It’s my responsibility,’ she pondered for said mass of followers were the cacophonous memories left as the dead body was dragged. A whelming scent pressed, “-who goes there?” she gestured in a matter of waves, “-show yourself.”

“Pardon the intrusion,” came a lovely flowery smell, “-I was sent by the one for his prize?”

“...” Tharis’ longing gaze sought justice, for it was her creed. The wall suffered most of the brunt, such a pensive leer could but pierce holes, “-Rosalia,” slowly escaped her pressed lips, “-I’m in no mood.”

“With all due respect,” answered the cloaked emissary, “-I’m here as a messenger. The One wishes to take his share. Where is the body hidden?”

"I don't know."

.....

"It doesn't behoove the monarch of judgment to hide truths."

"And such goes double for our leader, pressing his authority on land which isn't his. I've but the mind to absolve his action and send word."

Rosalia, cloaked in shades of black and red, lifted her gaze; a mask with an embroidered rose settled. The side-to-side line greatly emphasized her almond-shaped eyes, above which the glabella held a petal insignia, "-with due respect, I ask again, will you give us Igna Haggard's body or must we take physical action?"

"Are you threatening me?" Tharis narrowed her lips and firmed her brows, "-you, Rosalia, are sure of such a fruitless endeavor?"

novelusb.com

"My lady," she motioned towards her back, "-I must say it was rude of me," she fell onto her knee and bowed, "-my temper got the better, I apologize sincerely."

"It is forgiven," said Tharis with a golden glow to her presence. "I have no idea where the body has been taken," she solemnly added, "-Lixbin was quite forceful."

"Understood," the masked lady vanished. A bubble erected and captured the current room; one of many gathering places spread about the castle. Tharis slyly signaled, and a portal opened, "-Lixbin."

"Takes care of our promise," came a grave tone, "-by allowing Zeus' action, doubt has been cast upon Tharis' authority. It shames me to involve the goddess of judgment, your stance and decision are neutral and have the faith of justice at its core. Whatever happens, is as fate dictates."

She threw her arms, cutting his dialogue, and fired, "-cut the nonsense," rapid breaths exhaled, "-stop patronizing me, damned agent of darkness. Your reputation precedes you, Lixbin, no matter the intent or sentence, there will always be the option for doubt. No one in the heavenly realm believes in you, no one, Lixbin, no one. Now, whatever the scheme is, I'm not interested," the door slammed. A saddened sigh escaped. Followers of Tharis slowed their march, others scurried. Whispers flooded the castle. He left with much disappointment. 'Word will be out tomorrow,' the portal opened in a desolate land, '-Lixbin was rejected by Tharis and forced into submission. They'll talk and twist the narrative, once more I will be subject to their fantasies of intrigue. What do they care,' he walked, the lonesome crashing footsteps against a forgone era drenched in red and decay halted at a dusty and shattered mirror. A half-broken wall reflected a symbol of rebellion. An entire city laid in ruin, he continued until a kindling of a tree surrounded by a concrete moat. "-Another stain on my name and reputation," he grabbed and threw a bucket of black substance. "-Lixbin's always the harbinger of malice. Why do they hate me, why can't I have a chance."

Shuffles echoed, "-stop with the shouting..."

"Awake, yeah?"

“Yeah, I’m awake,” coughs followed, “-why throw paint at an already dirty wall. Wait for a second,” now at Lixbin’s side, “-throwing paint, buckets of it. No, the stench, that’s no ordinary paint, what is it?”

“Essence of darkness.”

“Care to elaborate?”

“What does it matter,” he shrugged his shoulder and dropped the bucket, “-you’ll leave in a few moments, there’s no point making acquaintance.”

Igna’s silent footsteps found an interesting spot, “-come here.”

“Don’t bother me,” the god has his back against Igna.

“No, no, seriously, come here.”

“What are you on about-” he spun and stopped. The Devil’s cheerful glee at a post-apocalyptic landscape had the feeling of sticking a knife into Lixbin’s chest. In his particular condition, as shown by a smile and willingness to follow, the duo was soon perched upon a yet to crumble wall, after which rose the city of Unsog. ‘-What does he see?’ wondered Lixbin, he sought deeply into Igna’s pupils, latter all but reflected what was there, ‘-what can he imagine, what is he thinking?’

“Little on the nose,” he lowered and took a seat, dangling his feet carelessly over the unstable foundation, “-have a seat, Lixbin, tell me the story of Unsog,” he peered deeply, “-tell me about yourself.”

“Well,” the god could but accept. With the essence of darkness dripping on the very same wall they sat on, Lixbin’s vision narrowed into a random spot. ‘Unsog, rather, this world, is the place I call home. It was once a great land, one akin to your own though on a lesser scale. People here didn’t use magic, they were grounded in reality and had a strong faith in the gods. Lack of knowledge forces much to be left unknown, said unknown came to be known as the gods. Bad weather, the gods, bad luck, the gods. To the inhabitants, there was no representation of evil or darkness – to them, God meant everything. Unsog was different – her people sought answers in the observable and provable. Hypothesis came and went, and the veneration of higher beings lessened as many of the world’s problems could be solved in matters grounded in their reality. There was nothing wrong with how it worked – intellectuals’ thoughts and pondered, they imagined and conquered. They evolved, built countries, expanded, and were faced with pandemics and world-ending catastrophes – I was amazed by the resilience. I was a demi-god by the time this world reached its pinnacle – peace and happiness were present, Unsog cried the beacon of utopic fantasy. Nothing lasts – on the day I attained godhood, tragedy struck. An other-worldly force decided to interfere. The people of Unsog wanted to prove the existence of gods, and the existence of life after death, they wanted the answers a few chosen Orin are fortunate to possess. Guess that’s where my journey truly began. I wanted to experience peace and quiet, to reach the level of tranquility Unsog created for their world,” he shook his head, “-gods decided the world wasn’t worth keeping in their good grace. War was upon the heavenly realm, and the battle against the Titans started – on spark by Zeus’ revolt. Worlds with an affinity for the procreation of heroes, demi-gods, were needed badly. This is what they don’t talk about – the gods needed an army, and to make an army one must bear children. You can imagine what a world without much belief in gods would accomplish. Instead of leaving them on their own – angels descended from heaven and preached the holy word of god. They

wanted proof, and such was proof. Division split the sky; peaceful technology turned deadly weapons. I fought against the angels and realized my position as god amounted to nothing to a venerated angel. The power of belief guided a clear hierarchy, one of which I couldn't hope to climb or conquer. I then struck a deal with the demons – they kept their part of the bargain, well, they kept it literally. One deal led to another, one favor snowballed into more and thus, my title as God of Darkness was born. I climbed as a god, my following increased as people sought the god of Darkness to quench their thirst for vengeance. My sacrifices meant nothing – when I returned as a high-level god, the world was already destroyed. Life was wiped from the face of the planet, they wiped themselves and their whole history from existence. Unsog's beauty, the place I had come to love, was gone. You'll see dark liquid raise from time to time, it's the price the world pays every time my name is uttered in bad faith. Looking at it, I don't regret my action. I became a high-level god and my name is venerated in more realms than one," he turned, "-that tree is the proof life can continue without interjection from the gods."

"Thus the mention of a world without god being better."

"The proof is here," he smiled, "-the proof was always here, it never went away."

"Lixbin," Igna side-glanced, "-the story doesn't make sense."

"How?"

"If belief was powerful enough to give rise to gods – the heavens would be crawl full of 'em. Instead, what was described isn't one of belief but logic and proof. The people of this world became gods in their own way. They did see evidence of a greater being, they did see it, angels. You, Lixbin, were not born a god, you were made one. The culmination of Unsog's knowledge – the evolution of a being transcendent of the laws and belief. You're a puppet, a doll."

"What if I say you're wrong?"

"Then I shan't press the matter. The apocalypse, the described events, and an allusion towards yourself. Remember, I did say I wanted to know more about you, not the world. You misinterpreted, rather, chose to ignore them as it was something you couldn't answer."

"How astute. What does it matter, I'm a high-level god. Lixbin, the one who wields the symbol of Darkness."

"Lixbin, dear ol' Lixbin, I'm glad," he smiled, "-the world was once a beautiful place, what remains are howling winds, a thunderous ceiling, and the jarringly impossible odds for life's restart. The tree says otherwise. I'm relieved," he stood, "-the complete revival of the land is a task beyond the capabilities of normal deities."

"Reviving them was never my idea," he answered, "-I gladly accept the events as the inevitable end. I don't belong... you were right, I was a product of their intelligence. My ability was self-evolution, rebuilding my core until the apex, enlightenment. Are you not surprised?"

"No, not particularly. The advent of your kind is a possibility I considered. Now, it's nothing more than the past – a forgone event. A self-made god and a born deity are totally different creatures," he rose both arms, "-I sadly can't call myself a god, the title is beneath my stature. I much rather prefer the

moniker of the devil,” came a smug grin, “-watch, Lixbin, for this is the power of one who transcends the very foundation of all, the man who resides beyond said realm – Nothing.”

Watchers, spectators, names ring high and low, us, unknown to the world’s reality, unknown to the world’s knowledge, have lived in utter solemnity for millennia to come and go. Watcher of the Shadow Realm, beckons my might to be fully materialized without prejudice, reality is but my playground, neither god nor demon shall overcome my authority, face me in stride, face me in fear, reality’s what I wish it to be for knowledge is the true strength: Realm Expansion, Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam. gates of a greater realm parted, it rained an essence purer than the Heavenly realm. Each droplet devoured, Lixbin’s jaw locked in perpetual awe. *Forged in the flames of my dead enemies, built by the sweat of my predecessors. Arise powers of whomst were sealed, arise and lay waste, for, in the wake of Nothing, everything shatters – as nothing envelops, the feeble life of existence is snuffed. Transcendent Skill; Art of Naught – Genesis!*