

## Death Magic 1091

Chapter 1091 The Haggard's legacy lives on

"Master Igna."

"Yes Kul?"

"I apologize if I'm bothering," she wondered with her words, taking detours with her expression – hesitant, confident then drops to anxious. Igna could but watch, there was a sense of relief in the air, a sense of mysticism.

"You don't need to apologize," he added, "-I should be more careful about the projected emotions. It's true, I'm sad about Lucifer's death. More than anything, his loss hits me harder than when I lost some of my family members," those hard-hitting words, they tackled Kul, she stumbled, catching herself at the last minute by catching a nearby door handle. Igna came at the doorway and stopped – the expanded realm lessened in potency – the fracture in reality yet lived, the sense of nausea and disturbance it exuded was much to their dislike.

"More sorry about his loss?"

"I speak my mind. Kul, I think it's a good time for me to depart from Orin."

"Master?" her heart sank, "-is it about the whole Adjudicator thing?"

"Yeah," he smiled timidly, "-consider me your enemy, Kul."

"Master," she pounced for his hand and pressed, "-master, please don't say anything stupid. We know things aren't always the same, we know life has its highs and lows. You can't simply go about destroying reality on a whim. Tell me, master, was the decision yours?"

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'The sternness in her eyes. A sternness hinting at sympathy and care. She's nothing like I remember, she's no longer the demoness in the dungeon. Kul's grown magnificently. This is what the peak of the world can bring, this is the potential of living without the fear of a higher power thrusting its judgment. I'm the same as the latter, I will force my judgment on them, the reason – Lucifer. I can't believe it myself. Seeing him in that pitiful state, seeing him, hearing his story, Lucifer changed from being my enemy, my rival, into a man I can respect. He did what he had, the ends justified the means – if only we had talked about our disorder, if only we had spoken from the heart, then, then,' the golden orb that followed after Lucifer's death fluttered, the god's soul lifted above the grand hall – there, it darted for the sky. Igna rose his hand over his brows and peered at the grand ceiling, the vision crossed outside where the orb seemed to join into the stars.

"Was the decision mine?" he returned a painful expression, "-Kul, the decision was never mine. I'm forced to act. Honestly, it truly doesn't matter. What needs to be done will be done. The battle will end with victory or defeat. Therefore, Kul, the choice facing us is simple – join or abstain. I'd prefer you remain in Orin, I'd rather you enjoy your life here, enjoy it with the people you met, my family, your family, Julius, and the others. I miss them."

"Master," she grabbed his sleeve, "-what about lady Eira? What about Engratse..."

“She’ll awaken, trust me.”

“Should I take your word?”

“No, you need not do such a foolish thing,” \*Ancient-Arts: Teleportation,\* he disappeared into a comfy room. A mild rusty air blew from the ajar windows. Swaying of the windows – the crispy air, Igna looked out the window to Mount Blanc in the faded distance. ‘-The calmness of Glenda,’ he smiled for they remained within a private estate built for the lord, else, Igna. Far into the forest, protected by guards of otherworldly capability, and home to a river that ran in and out of the estate. ‘A pleasant quiet atmosphere,’ he soon looked towards Eira, “-you, big sister, rather, my little kid, are so much trouble,” and sat by her side, “-to be taken so easily by Engraste’s curse. I know now, the Alchemic God is powerful, he stands beside Artanos. This will be my last act,” he grabbed her cold-hands, \*-Open the record of the forgotten, flourish and bud, for the desert is but a void of nothingness. Horizon holds the answer, the truth lays beyond – thy power mustn’t be contained, thy will is to be obeyed,\* he pressed his index and middle finger into an oval-shaped then pressed said shape against his left palm, \*-by order of the Adjudicator, I relinquish the Alchemic God’s Authority,\* the oval-shape conjured a white-portal, it vortexed inward, \*-thus as the night falls and the day dies, such comes the time of reckoning, Forgotten-Arts: Adjudicator’s Decree,\* a shatter ran across the walls – the mana within the atmosphere dipped – the weather deteriorated, surrounding trees seemingly dropped in vigor – traveling merchants and adventurers fell to their feet, the nausea of mana-sickness brought the hardest to their knees. Eira’s body hopped as if being shocked. Her crest glowed in a vivid white outline, her longer fingertips channeled pure mana, the floor froze, her authority as Guardian of Nexsolium brightened, her white lashes opened, her face, her body, her lungs, the beating in her chest, ‘-she’s come back,’ Igna clenched his fist, “-RISE AND SHINE!” he clapped, the built tension released, mana blasted outwards from the room, the tenuous weather subsided.

‘I did it,’ he gasped, ‘-using my authority to overpower Engratse. Why didn’t I think of this earlier? I know,’ he looked at his hands, ‘-I was running away, looking for the Alchemic god as someone to push my anger onto, just like I did with Lucifer. Funny, it’s very funny, it’s so funny... I hate it.’

“Where am I?” she wiped her eyes and sat upright, scanning the room until locking onto Igna, “-why are you here, brother?”

“Eira,” he jumped into a tight hug, “-welcome back.”

“Igna?”

“I’m sorry,” he sat back, “-it’s just, I don’t know, I thought I had lost you. What’s done is done, I’m glad you’re alive again, Eira.”

“Igna?”

“Yes?”

“Why are we in Glenda, what happened?”

“It’s a long story. You were defeated by Engratse, and now are free from his curse.”

“Igna,” she narrowed on his expression, “-you don’t look well. Are you hiding something from me?”

“Yes, I’m hiding a lot of things,” he grabbed her hands, \*Ancient-Arts: Teleportation,\* and reappeared within the Duquant estate, “-and I rather not disclose unappealing truths,” he reached for the handle.

“Igna.”

“Sister, don’t worry,” he smiled, “-you’re now in control. The soul is freed from Artanos’s control. I won’t ask how or why, my duty as your brother is fulfilled.”

“Igna,” she grabbed his hand, “-we need to talk, privately,” Igna stopped his motion, the darkness lifted into a storage room, “-about the curse. I must confess, it was Artanos. Rather, one of his servants. It happened a few years ago, I can’t recall properly... during the war I think. We were under stress and Markus left to reclaim Alpha. I didn’t know what to do... I didn’t realize someone in my entourage wasn’t who he said he was. He came to me like any other, but, instead of showing respect, the man was rudely charming – a breath of fresh air. I don’t know, there was something about him that drew my interest. I slowly forgot about my troubles, I found comfort, and... regrettably, I might have had intercour-”

“Yeah coming from your mouth, I rather not picture what comes next. Eira, it’s fine. People get lonely sometimes. We’re not immune from moments of weakness.”

“Igna, you’re not angry?”

“Why would I be, I’m not your lover nor your husband. What are we, siblings? Can’t even say that. You’re you, and I am me. We’ve been together since the start – daughter of Gallienne.”

“Igna... why does it sound like you’re leaving?”

“Why you ask?” he sighed, “-many things have happened. You’re free to discover the answer on thy own. Like before, I won’t ask for understanding. Make your own choice, friend or foe, the answer will be known sooner or later,” he pushed the handle, “-they’re waiting for us.”

“Who is?”

“Aunt Elvira and Julius,” he smiled.

The estate opened to familiar faces. Kul brought the others, the new leaders of Istra.

“Cousin.”

“Cousin.”

“Good job,” said Julius, “-you always impress, don’t you, cousin.”

Igna took stock of the crowd, “-cousin, we need to talk,” Eira came out from a side room, Elvira’s expression brightened, and the collective room seemingly lit, “-EIRA!” they cheered, “-YOU’RE ALIVE!” the noise died with them entering a secluded room.

“Cousin, what’s the matter?”

“I need a favor.”

“What favor?”

"I want you to kill me."

"WHAT?"

"I want you to kill me, Julius."

"Igna, stop being a fool, what's going on."

"The time has come for me to die. Julius, you must know about me, don't you? The Adjudicator. My awakening poses problems to this realm. This world needs to be freed of my name, my existence. It would be better for all to think that I have perished. It would be better, trust me."

"Why now?"

"It's a perfect time. Eira's returned, didn't you hear the loud cheers? She's a holder of the royal bloodline. Despite what Hidros has become, the people love their royalty, it's a thing of pride. The world's no longer at threat of war," he extended his hand, "-Lucifer is dead, and so am I."

"IGNA, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!" he grabbed his shoulder, "-just because he dies doesn't mean you have to die too. What are you on about, cousin, this world needs you!"

"No," he smiled kindly at Julius, "-you've grown into a great father, a good man. You have shouldered more burdens than I care to imagine. I'm grateful, without you, I'd have lost my way somewhere down the line. You kept me in check, and for that, I'm very grateful," he lowered his head, "-cousin, I ask you this as a favor."

"I'm not going to kill you," he pressed his grip, "-if you want to die so badly, do it yourself."

A bat-shaped mist materialized, "-can't help eavesdropping."

"Aunt Elvira?"

"The one and only," she threw a v-sign and winked, "-you, my foolish nephew, are a fool. A loveable fool," she jumped into his arms and held tightly, "-you want to end it and have no regrets. You're moving onto greater things, aren't you?"

"Yes, aunt. I don't want to leave behind regret. I want things to end..."

"Well, as your sexy aunt, I have a few words of wisdom."

He nodded.

"Family is important, as important as you are. You mustn't think, you must feel. Some things cannot be resolved by thinking alone. You, Igna, are an overthinker, even now, you think about what's to come. The exhaustion is plain to see. I'll send out the word. If you want to die, I'll gladly kill you, nephew. Just promise you'll visit from time to time. Before you leave, meet with Courtney. She's worried sick. I'll take care of the rest, my dear nephew," she caressed his cheeks and formed a pistol with her index, "-bang," she said, "-king Igna of Hidros died whilst saving his sister."

He fell on one knee and raised his gaze, "-thank you, auntie, thank you," \*Ancient-Arts: Teleportation.\*

"COUSIN!"

“...”

“Why didn’t you stop him, aunt?”

“Julius, my dear. We knew this would happen. The world is at peace, there’s no need for a sword in these times. Igna shoulders much of his burden – he carries a past forged in death and suffering. I remember it now, back when we were poor and he lived as Staxius, Igna would always reach out and do amazing things so that we’d get by. He’s hidden his kindness, and by heart, the child birthed from Dorchester, will always have an amber of innocence. It’s the amber that keeps his heart from freezing completely,” she looked into the hall, “-and you know who’s that amber?”

Julius came up behind, “-Eira.”

“Correct. Igna’s dead on paper. Have the word reach the capital and tell them the body wasn’t found,” she pulled out a signet ring, “-here’s his remains.”

“Isn’t that the ring he sold on auction?”

“Yeah, the buyer was kind enough to return the ring. I’m sure the people will mourn his death, the Haggard’s legacy lives on. Let’s make the world a better place.”

‘The Haggard lives on.’

Chapter 1092 Confession

“Igna, is that you?”

“Hello, mother.”

“How long has it been?”

“I couldn’t say,” the view from atop the capital’s divine tree sent waves of nostalgia. Igna could but watch with widened eyes, the world seemed a perfect mix of harmony – chaos and resets, the ideal combination for a smooth view, “-Arda seems better. Look at the walls.”

“The Great wall of Arda,” she smiled, “-a fortress built by you and your cousin. It’s strange, thinking it suddenly materialized. Then again, we are in a place of magic. Tell me, Igna,” she grabbed his hands, “-are you okay?”

“I am,” he returned, “-mother, I’m here to bid my farewell.”

“You going on a trip?”

“I can’t say it’s a trip. You must know the legend of the three in one?”

“Ahh,” she dropped his hands and grabbed his shoulder, “-you have awakened. If only you had the Death Reaper’s weapon. I might have- well, never mind.”

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“Don’t speak of such things, mother. You are the queen of Arda. Mother, I ought to ask a favor.”

“Ask away.”

“Could Glenda be granted to Alta?”

“Excuse you?”

“Mother, the news of my death will reach the capital any minute. Today’s my last in Orin. I’d like to settle any loose holes there may be.”

“You’re leaving, but why? Couldn’t Orin be converted into a stable base camp?”

“Far too dangerous. My duty is to birth an eventual cataclysm,” he stared at the distant forestry, “-and I would rather not have the world fall. You understand, yes?”

“If you care about the world, why go through the trouble of destroying it?”

“Simple,” he smiled, “-because I want to.”

“Right,” she pulled his arms, “-kneel.”

“Okay,” he obeyed, and soon found the pants against a damp leave-like floor. She jumped and tightly embraced her son, “-do what you must, Igna. Follow the path you sought and don’t have regrets. Such is my wish as your mother, and more than anything, I want you to find happiness. Where will you be going?”

“Me,” he stood, “-I’m going to visit an old place then head off to Lucifer’s domain.”

“Lucifer’s domain. I see.”

“Anyway, mother,” he grabbed her hands, “-thank you for everything. If not for the acceptance, I would have remained a chef, not knowing my past or regaining my memories. You breathed a second life into my idle journey. Like journeys of old, it comes a time when it ends. Thus, I have decided my adventure’s nearing its completion.”

“Good,” she smiled, “-the people you met on the way, the experiences, the friends you’ve made, I’m sure those memories will last centuries to come. Don’t be rash,” she leaned, “-as a Haggard, you must win.” Her words came at the same moment the tree’s flowers dispersed. Petals fluttered – the pieces came akin to his memories – familiar faces on each, the Silver Guardians, Julius, Autumn, Sophie, the list carries on and on without a stop. Good memories are good places to regain one’s lost sense of self. The burden carried over the decades lifted, he breathed a sigh of relief, leaned and kissed Courtney’s head, smiled, then disappeared, \*Ancient-Arts: Teleportation.\*

A rustic breeze anointed with recently cut grass tickled the nostrils. Lines of students headed to school, and the trees prefacing the gates grew into beautiful pink mashes of colors. It’s shed, the trickle of pink added a sense of relief.

‘Claireville Academy,’ he smiled and stood one step off the slope headed up, “-the place it all started.”

“Who’s that?”

“I don’t know but he’s very handsome.”

“Yeah, I know, like a movie star.”

“Doesn’t he look a bit like the Empress of Arda?”

“Yeah, the white hair, oh my god, he’s so handsome.”

“Staxius?” came a distant whisper.

He spun, for a second – memories tangled reality, “-Sophie.”

“Igna,” she quickly shook her head, “-my apologies. Are you well?”

“Yeah,” he refocused onto the gates, “-Claireville Academy. I’m surprised you’re not wearing bright red lipstick and stern glasses. It was quite the moment we had, my entrance exam and the following events. I came to relive part of my past. Is it okay if I walk for a bit?”

“Sure,” she strode, “-Igna Haggard.”

“Yeah,” he smiled, she went past to be welcomed by nervous students, “-greetings Director,” they mumbled as the days went on. ‘Enough reminiscing,’ the buildings stood firmly in the distance, Igna paused at the gates. The student’s attention grew tenuous, many of the girls seemed unnaturally energetic. ‘I’ve had enough,’ Autumn’s pinch of his shirt, the misunderstanding that grew a nice relationship between him and Julius, the sad fact that they won’t return – the warm flames of nostalgia burnt. An outbreak sufficed, ‘-the world goes on without my intervention. I’ve seen what I needed,’ \*Ancient-Arts: Teleportation,\* peaceful to chaotic and noisy, “-Rosespire’s Lai, the home of Hidros’ popular showbusiness, vanity-influenced world. Before him rose a skyscraper of peerless proportion, Apexi’s headquarters. ‘-Holy hell,’ he gawked, ‘-Julius must have made a fortune with the agency.

“Young master,” hailed the gatekeeper, “-are you here to see someone?”

“Yeah, I’m here for Synthia, is she around?”

“Yes, yes, the actress should be on her break. Shall I inform her of your arrival?”

“I’ll inform her myself if that is alright?”

“Right on, majesty, please.”

The gates opened, ‘-majesty,’ he shook his head, turned at the guard, and snapped, \*Art of Naught – Memory Dispersions.\*

‘Why the gates open?’ the guard scratched his head, ‘-doesn’t look like anyone’s here,’ he toggled the mechanism. ‘Jin the Ripper,’ marred the hallways, and the place was excitedly on edge with the film. Staff members ran to and fro, and artists had taken many studios hostage. The grit of moviemaking. The director’s guttural orders, and the star’s frightening slumped shoulders, ‘-this looks more like a training facility with the director as a drill sergeant. I wonder how Syhton’s doing,’ he chose a seat in one of the many waiting rooms. This particular one led directly into the shoot – the doors were firmly locked, leaving only a worker tending the refreshment shop.

“What’s the point of a murder mystery without blood,” shrugged a skimpily dressed lady, “-and I went through the effort of gathering the blood of virgins. What a pain.”

"Lady Serene, you must be out of your mind. Using real blood will stain the outfits and isn't cleaned easily. The production crew is vexed."

"Who am I to care," she yawned, "-Apexi's financing the whole movie, I have some leeway in what's to be done," she casually slammed the counter, "-two Deps."

"Coming right up," she flipped against the counter, uncapped her bottle, drank; narrowly caught silvery-white hair, 'is that?'

"Master!"

"How goes it, Serene."

"Lady Serene, you're needed on set."

"I'll be right there, give me a moment," she skipped and dropped beside him excitedly, "-long time no see, master."

"Two Deps, you sure are thirsty."

"Are you saying that because of my outfit?" she winked and crossed her legs, the lack of cloth grew sterner, "-I love my job as eye candy," she sipped, "-tell me, why are you here, master?"

"To talk to Synthia, is she around?"

"Yeah, she should be in her room. Her shoot's not until later. Forget about that, master, you look different."

"Says the one who's grown younger. The blood of virgins, huh?"

"Stop it," her cheeks flushed, "-I didn't mean it that way. I only wanted the youth's energy..."

"Yeah, no," he opened his palm, "-no more, your choice of words is as bad as I remember. Fun," he exhaled, "-anyway, Serene, I should get going. Where's Synthia's room?"

"The upper floors," she threw a tag, "-this'll get through security. We're careful, since the attempted assassination."

"Right, thanks for the head up," a high-five had Igna headed for the lift, '-the attempted assassination of an Apexi' employed star. They choose the wrong people to go after. The response was bloody and merciless, with the destruction of the growing assassination gang. Do not mess with the Dark Guilds,' he tapped, and the rectangle rose.

The corridor was built like those of an expensive hotel. Great space from one to the other, tightened security of which were members of Phantom.

'Syhton's room,' \*tap, tap,\*

"A moment," said a familiar voice, the following shuffles and stumbles soon reached for a click, "-who is it?" the fatigued Syhton pulled the door ajar, her face brightened, "-IGNA?"



“Surprise,” she threw aside the door and leaped into his arms,” -IGNA!” her arms tightened, her cheeks rested on his shoulder, “-I’ve missed you!” guards side-glanced enviously, to which, he nodded and entered her room, “-Syhton, I’ve missed you too.”

No warning or patience, she pounced, they locked lips and made out in the foyer. Her intent was clear, he placed her on a shelf, and she tore at his clothes – passion sprinkled the room in white and pink. The clock snapped to 14:54, and he sat on the bed whilst she got into her clothes, “-Jin the Ripper, how’s the movie so far?”

“I don’t know. I do what the director asks. It’s fun.”

“Good,” he smiled, “-I’m glad it’s working out.”

“What about you, Igna, you look down,” she crossed he regard using the mirror, “-it’s not like you to visit. Did something happen in Istra?”

“Yeah, my job here is done. I came to wish you good luck.”

“Why?”

“I’m headed to another realm, I’m leaving Orin for good, I think.”

“Excuse me?”

“It’s a long story. Aunt Elvira has the details.”

She paused and clenched her fist, “-ask aunt Elvira, are you serious?”

“What?”

“Igna, are you serious?”

“My bad, my bad,” he rose both arms, “-that was careless of me. Come,” he tapped the bed, “-I’ll tell you everything on one condition.”

“What?”

“You won’t quit the movie and come to my aid. I’ll take care of this matter, you live the best life you can, understand?”

“My best life is with you at my side,” she sighed, “-well, it’s not like you’re the only one I care about. I still have to watch over Yuki, your ex-lover.”

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“Don’t bring up her name,” he pressed his forehead, “-it’s awkward and uncomfortable.”

“Fine, fine, whatever.”

Thus, for the next few minutes, Igna went into details about what transpired. The three in one, his awakening, the job he ought to do, she kindly listened with an understanding smile. In said instant, ‘- Syhton’s the best companion I could have asked,’ said deep lingering thought, “-Syhton,” he stopped, “-I love you.”

“Stop it,” she looked away, “-drop a bombshell then sugarcoat it, you’re cruel.”

“I know, I know.”

\*Tap, tap,\* “-lady Synthia, we’re ready.”

“Job calls,” he took her hand, “-Syhton – I’m leaving the castle in your hands. You’re my aid and I trust you wholeheartedly. Send me a message when the movie premieres, and I’ll come rushing,” he opened his palm and summoned a weirdly shaped box; her heart sank, “-Igna?”

He opened, “-Syhton, I know the customs of the mortal realm do not mean much to a goddess. However, the mortal realm has very affectionate ways of showing love and commitment. As a boy of Dorchester, I can’t abandon my mortal ways,” he smiled, “- you were by my side through pain and suffering, I never imagined I’d grow feelings of this nature. You, my goddess, are amazing and kind. You’re everything a man could ever want, this is why,” he went on one knee, “-to show my conviction,” he took out the ring, “-will you be mine forever?”

Syhton held her mouth, the crystal-blue pupils watered, her heart raced, and pins and needles took her extremities, “-Igna,” she shook, “-for someone who takes pride in not letting people close, why?”

“...” nothing, he simply grinned. She lowered her head, “-I swear,” she held her heart, “-you’re the only person who makes my heart race like this,” and leaped into his arms – they fell, “-long as reality exists, Igna, I will be yours,” she straddled his waist and summoned a ring of her own, “-I love you, Igna, I love you.”

“And I adore you, Syhton, my goddess.”

## Chapter 1093 Ragno

King of Hell, Satan’s domain. A landscape riddled by decomposing bodies – monster and inhuman. A perpetual red sandstorm blew, the mountains were tall and skinny, and plateaus stretched from one side to the next. The vision it brought was painful to the naked eye. Walking without protection, usually with a hood placed around the head, was similar to looking at the sun, if not worse. The sand equated to an instant wound – the tiny particles, innocent as they seemed, was fearsome. On days when the wind blew, unfortunate souls trapped in its wake would suffer troublesome injuries.

Routes marked by pebbles led from village to village. The landscape didn’t change much in the King’s domain. The best place for life, partly due to the iron sand, was the alps, the mountain ranges. Unlike the ones on Orin, mountains here carried long stretches of flatland, it looked as if someone had taken a knife horizontally across. Not that the inhabitants complained, most of the demons were holders of thick hides and thicker facial hairs. Beady-red dots illuminated their path, those unlucky to cross said paths would join the crowd of nameless decomposing bones and flesh.

‘Survival of the fittest,’ Sathanas stood at one of the many checkpoints, ‘-only the strong can survive this landscape. A bit too stern on conditioning,’ she fixed her scarf and entered the town, its name carved in demonic writings. ‘Dome buildings,’ she observed – architecture brought by the constant storms. ‘A few kilometers off the capital,’ she firmed her resolve and passed a friendly-looking tavern. Night came upon the Mars-like landscape, thus, with a flick of her thumb, she dropped a few Aeso coins and headed to bed.

Satan's palace, 'the night went by quickly,' she stood at the gates. 'Demons make too much noise when they sleep,' she sighed, 'barely kept my temper. Good thing I left... good thing I left,' two rocks locked an oval-shaped gate. Demons, as portrayed in ancient writings, glared, "-Sathanas, Daughter of Satan. Open the gates."

"Lady Sathanas?" the gates unlocked, the courtyard and its splash of greenness – captured prisoners watched painfully from the cages, high-class rooms. Fair men and women dressed partially. Patrols stomped the gravel paths.

"Please head to the hall," said a passing attendant. Demons flew overhead – smaller in size and stature – the features bordered monster-like. '-I'm here,' she tightened her grip around the case handle, '-I wonder if father remembers me.' Molten lava ran under their feet and was visible through grated covers. The throne hall was unlike those imagined, '-it's like a forge,' she observed, '-a palace carved in the very mountain. The rocks protrude, the guards are fearsome and so are the attendants. This is what my father's doing?'

Two demonic guardians, known for their height and protruding horns held open a sort of entrance, from it, a similarly sized man entered. Pure fury ambered, he side-glanced Sathanas without so much an expression. The throne resounded the moment he sat and settled in a relaxed position.

"Who are you?"

"Sathanas."

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"..."

"..."

"My daughter?"

"Yes, lord Satan, I am your daughter and I have come to ask a favor."

"Would you look at that," he exhaled black smoke through the nose, "-my own daughter has sought out her father. Tell me, Sathanas, why are you sure that I'm ready to hear your request."

She unclipped her briefcase, and the guards moved to be stopped by a gesture from the king, she sensed the commotion and continued, "-here," the case contained parchments and a few flasks of condensed mana, "-these are a few of our supplies."

"What is this?" he narrowed, "-are you here to sell pleasantries?"

"No, father, would you mind shutting up?"

"INSOLEN-"

"No, let her be," he added with a genuine smile, "-temperament runs in the family," and in the same motion, a warning was sent.

'If I get him angry, I'll be in trouble,' she shook her thoughts and firmed, "-what I bring is this," flask into the flask, her hands moved quickly – mana condensed and there, after she covered her contraption with

a parchment, white smoke exuded. She lifted the parchment and to Satan's dismay, a bottle of Ale was presented. "-The finest liquor to be offered by the many dimensions."

"Are you here to trade, daughter?"

"No, father, I came to give this bottle. I know you are very fond of your drinks; therefore, it was the respectful thing to do before asking a favor."

"Would you look at that," he exhaled smoke once more, "-my daughter has experience in diplomatic missions. Tell me, what is it you want?"

"I want freedom, father."

"Excuse me?"

"Lady Lilith and my siblings are trapped. We need an agreement from the four kings of hell to allow our departure."

"Lilith you say," he paused, "-I refuse."

"Father!"

"Sathanas, do not overstay your welcome. You're a traitor who ran from home. I need not remind what happens to those who leave my domain. You're alive because of my kindness, or have you forgotten?"

Memories of her upbringing at the palace jabbed her new-found confidence, "-Sathanas, as your father, I'm glad you're here and in good health. I heard good things from my envoys, your new home looks fun and hospitable. It is good, and I see their diplomacy has grown your intellect. That being said, as King of Hell, I will not accept demands that'll harm Hell."

"You won't accept?"

"No."

"Very well," she picked up the empty case, "-please enjoy the drink, father."

"Sathanas," he thundered at her reaching the entrance, "-there are many ways to obtain permissions from the kings of hell. You must find the answer, and as your father, I make you this promise. If your faction, more importantly, if you show me enough resolve and wit for your freedom, I might accept the request. The effort will have to come from you, Sathanas. Prove that you're worthy of Wrath's symbol, my dearest daughter."

"Understood, father."

A heavy clang stopped the room momentarily, "-majesty, was it right?"

"My dear advisor, it's not wrong to give false promises. A white lie can often bring the best out of someone you care for. My daughter, as far as I'm concerned," the expression dropped, "-is dead to us. What happens to her is not my responsibility. Send word to the kings, Lilith's making a move, ask Leviathan to put asunder their bravado."

Evening dawned. Igna watched idly from Syhton's room. Her ring sparkled from his ring finger; 'didn't realize I was a romantic at heart. The world works in mysterious ways,' he drew a circle in mid-air, \*Erase the borders of reality, make way a passage across the dimension. By the Adjudicator's order, I decree a portal's opening,\* he pulled an enormous amount of mana,\*Ancient-Arts: Cross-Dimensional Teleportation\*.

'Fire? The smell of battle,' the portal vanished. A raging battlefield grew before him. Pillars of smoke rose from the academy – those of the town ran, airborne entities flapped for safety to no avail – soldiers in heavenly armaments and clockwork soldiers hunted the defenseless. Those of Lucifer's domain, angels, flapped their wings into battle – ancient magic crackled the skyscape – the diversity in color and density seemed like fireworks. 'Artanos' made his move.'

"RUN, FOLLOW ME THIS WAY!" cried students, "-GO, GO," they pointed forward, "-WE NEED TO LEAVE, NOW!"

A clockwork warrior dropped into the town square, "-damn," a band of students formed a line between the evacuees and attackers, "-raise your weapons, my friends, we can't allow them to take the innocent," the central figure, a young boy with short hair and caring eyes tightly held an angelic-staff. His classmate, by looks of the uniforms, huddled with their respective weapons. The warrior smirked, and he leaped – flashing through their defenses and instantly taking out one of the students. "-AMIE!" he turned with staff ready for conjuration, by the time the incantation ended, the warrior was within striking distance, \*EXPLODE!\* he braced, the warrior flung across and crashed, spilling blood and oil in his jitters for survival.

"Good job," came a reassuringly soft voice.

"Professor," the students breathed relief, "-professor!"

"No time to talk," he rose his hands and spread his wings, "-take the wounded and go. I will take care of the attack," feathers turned into golden darts, and he flapped forward, thrusting the bullets into a horde of attackers. More troops arrived on dragon-back – greater magic leveled part of the city, and a massive fire broke to the north in the academy's direction. The professor fought hard. A single man halted enemy advances for crucial minutes – and allowed the possibility of evacuation. The academy guards fell, and a feeling of doom covered the refuge camp, "-we're losing," cried one of the observers, "-we need to evacuate to the outer city."

"If we leave, they'll take control of our lord's domain. We can't have that happen!"

"Think of the students, is it worth the effort?"

"WEAK!" screamed one of the generals leading Artanos' faction. The archangel who'd protected the people was found nearing death, his symbol flickered, taken down by a floor boss. 'So strong,' he coughed blood, '-I can't b-b-b-breathe.'

"Arch Angel Luci's fallen," gulped the makeshift leadership, "-we need to evacuate, otherwise we'll be wiped out. The attackers aren't from this world, they're gods from another."

A lady dressed in white landed amidst the discussion, "-lady Ereena," they bowed, "-we're losing the battle."

“There’s no winning or losing here,” she said, “-take the refugees further up the mountain. Order the mages’ unit to create a protective barrier. I’ll take command of the troops. Send word to the other kings – tell them Hell’s being invaded.”

Death and destruction bubbled on the horizon. The refugees could but watch as the town began to fall. ‘If only Lucifer was here,’ she gritted, ‘-Artanos and Zeus are attacking...’

A heartbeat resounded through everyone, “-this voice,” she blinked, “-Luci?”

“To the people of Ragno, I wish thee a pleasant life,” a massive magical symbol covered the whole town, “-to those lost in today’s battle, you will be remembered.” A hemisphere locked the enemy, “-what is he doing?” cried Ereena, “-THOSE ON THE FRONTLINES, RETREAT!” she gasped, ‘-Causl Destruction... don’t use it, Luci, you’ll die.’

‘No other options,’ he barely held on his knees, “-this is the only way I know to save them. I’m the protector of Ragno in my lord’s absence, YOU WILL NOT WIN SO EASILY!”

“What’s he talking about?” laughed the opposing faction, “-tough luck, dumbass, we’ve already conquered the town. This act of self-sacrifice works only in stories, not here. You’re dead. Kill him,” ordered an angel from Zeus’ vanguard, Emitious.

“Works only in stories?” a strange voice resounded. The vanguard leader rose his hand, and the attackers paused, “-well, it works for me,” a man dressed in a suit landed at Luci’s side, \*Mantia – Book of Restoration, Honzela, Sixteenth passage, for the wounded’s assured restoration, the hardships ought be cleansed. Such flowed the whisper of the healer: Imenia,\* a shoulder-slap healed the archangel, “-who are you?” he shuddered at the way the wounds disappeared. Wind casually swayed Igna’s hair. A monstrous shadow appeared suddenly behind, he ducked, spun \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Daggers,\* and climbed over the monster, “-I see,” he laughed and plunged the weapon into the monster’s neck, “-a floor-boss from my tower,” the latter fell and puffed into smoke, “-so it was Artanos who stole the floor bosses. Well, well,” he casually wiped his hands and walked towards Emitious.

‘He took the beast out without breaking a sweat... to think, to think it nearly killed me.’

“Who the fuck are you?”

“The name’s Igna Haggard,” he smirked, “-spread word to your faction leader,” he pointed at the sky, a five-layer magical symbol covered the entire town, “-the Devil hath come,” \*-I am he who slays without fear, I am he who shall be the last of what thy see. Heed mine call, thou whomst dared to fight the natural order, tis the day thou ought to be destroyed, Ancient Magic – Astral Binding.\*

“Do you understand now?” Igna materialized behind Emitious, “-I’ve yet to use my weapons. I’m the lord of this Domain, the one who clipped Lucifer’s wings. Retreat, otherwise,” every single attacker was impaled by shards of light, “-I’ll turn ’em to ash.”

Chapter 1094 “-start the retreat.”

“There, there, Emitious. No need to be afraid of this man,” a stronger entity fell from the skies, “-I’m here to assist you, my angel, you need not worry,” an opposite aura rippled across the troops, and the astral binding shattered.

“Think you can fight?” Igna whispered, “-Luci?”

“Are you him?”

“No. I’m not Lucifer,” he readied his stance, “-I’m Igna, the Devil,” with a snarky smirk, Igna leaped into battle. Auras crashed into sparks of black and yellow – the potency drew the focus of the stray troops.

“Follow the escapee!” Emitious ordered, “-leave him to us,” the faction split – Asmodeus’s faction went after the refugees whilst Zeus’ army stayed. Emitious, an unknown name in history, bore his fangs as one of Zeus’ acolytes. Attacks came in waves, Igna dodged and skillfully side-stepped; rendering the enemy worse for wear. Constant attack without a hit and no more than a simple exhale was the worse kind of defeat. The scar of invulnerability fractures morale. \*Legendary Skill: Angel Slice!\* Emitious fired projectiles, Igna rose his hand, \*Death Element: Barrier,\* Angel slice exploded, lifting dirt and debris around, “-this is our chance,” those who narrowly arrived rushed for Igna.

The archangel painfully clambered on his feet; ‘he’s fighting to protect us. Artanos... they’re going for the refugees,’ the wings spread, “-Igna, I’m leaving them to you, please protect the city!” to which, Igna casually rose his head from the brawl, an attacker sought the opportunity and struck, or thought he did, crimson threads wrapped and decapitated the man in a fountain of blood, the terror provided a few seconds for him to give a casual thumbs up. Luci flapped.

“STOP THE ANGEL AT ALL COST!” Emitious thundered, those with projectile attacks tipped their weapons, “-ON MY MARK, FIRE!” Igna jumped and slid to a halt, he waved left to right, \*Heed my call, for I, call upon thy strength. Stop all who dare oppose my will, Death Element: Magical Barrier, Pentagram Variant, Hell’s Gate,\* an even more impressive wall of symbols absorbed the damage, he gasped with a sweat-ridden forehead, “-fighting in this heat is making me joyful,” Igna proclaimed. Soon, the suit jacket drifted onto the floor, and he marched forth into the thick of things – rolled-up sleeves and a white shirt partially stained by blood.

Emitious clapped, and a shockwave echoed. The battle paused, “-Devil, tell me, will you stake your life on Lucifer’s realm?”

“Depends.”

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“You must know this realm is without saving. The people will be massacred and the lifeforce turned into fuel for my lord’s usage. You, surely of all people, must understand the meaning of war?”

“I know,” he warmed up his shoulders, “-I haven’t gotten serious yet.”

“Well, Igna,” Emitious broadened a great smirk, “-the greater the height, the harder the fall. This is where you end your journey,” \*Widen, Portal to Eipea, I summon forth minion of the dark-ages,\* helmed warriors of differing sex and race ambled in gladiator armor. The weapons reminisced of the olden war days – maces, swords, shields, spears, the list carried – mobility differed from their weight, nimble wore light, the tough heavy, a visible difference in frame. Within said difference, \*See the unseen, feel the unfelt, knowledge deep within, awaken for I order so; Eye of Truth,\* ‘-demi-gods and spawns of other entities. They don’t look strong, why is he so smug?’ a strange hue caught his attention, ‘-wait a moment,’ he narrowed, ‘-is the lingering energy of a ritual?’

“No more waiting, Igna, FIGHT!” they swarmed the middle, coordinated attacks and well-placed spells carved the ground and narrowly hit his visage, ‘-mother,’ he dipped and punched, ‘-martial-arts is saving me so far,’ he blocked, countered and finished when available, ‘-have to hold them here,’ the white shirt grew red, the bicolored pupils flashed sparks of purple, ‘-I have to kill,’ the vampiric features manifested, \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* he leaped, cast a net over a dozen then pulled – limbs decapitated, the soil drenched in blood and sweat, he landed in the middle. \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* a crimson halo summoned over his head, and there, he casually opened his palm wherein a blood apple manifested, “-tell you, this is a good place to start, isn’t it?”

“Good place to start what?”

“To start the actual battle,” he glared at the angel, who, with similar confidence, returned Igna’s unfaltering poise, “-I’m just getting warmed up.”

“To bad,” he clapped, the dead returned without a scratch, “-look at you and them,” Emitious sat on a tower and crossed his legs, “-you’ll run out of mana sooner or later. They don’t need mana,” he grabbed the nearest guard, split his head and threw it on the ground. The guard unsurprisingly regenerated, “-you thrive on attrition, don’t you, Igna? Too bad your calling card is also our ace.”

“We’ll just have to see how long they last,” \*Hear me, weapon forged in death, relish the thought of slaughter, enjoy the thrill of sufferance, raise from thy slumber, Orenmir, COME!\* cursed screams of the destitute rattled the very air, an aura of pure desolation and ire raged from Igna’s stance, “-let’s have ourselves a battle,” he unsheathed, the captured souls rampaged – taking bites and killing few with low ethereal resistance.

Emitious gawked, ‘-it’s here, it’s finally here,’ he gulped, ‘-the cursed sword, Orenmir. We need its power,’ he glanced meaningfully into what looked to be the void.

‘You can’t outsmart me,’ Igna narrowed onto said void, \*Mana Control: Spatial Disruption\*

“The battle is here,” Emitious saw a flash, blood then nothing, ‘-what happened?’ the heart sank, ‘-am I injured?’ he looked about, ‘-no, I’m fine. Was Death’s killing intent?’ he gulped, ‘-scary.’

“By the way,” Igna pointed his blade, “-you should check inside your robe.”

‘Is that a ploy to take my eye off the battle?’ he snuck a peak, “-careful,” was written on his chest, “-how did you like my sword art?” Igna smirked, “-you’re not the only one with fancy attacks.”

“CHARGE!” he growled.

Another explosion leveled the battleground, “-Luci, you’re here, what’s going on in the city?”

“We got help from Igna?”

“Igna?” she paused, “-that Igna?”

“Yeah, the one and only,” an ill-intent took their caution, “-how’s the evacuation?”

“We’ll need a few more minutes before the teleportation portal is refilled. I’d say around thirty minutes.”



“Don’t think we can last that long,” Luci watched – clockwork soldiers riding winged beasts glared their way.

“Now’s our best chance!” gasped a student, “-lady Luci and Ereena, believe in us, please,” he rose his hand and gestured a spell, “-the third-years will handle this.”

“You students have battle experience; however, this is unlike anything you’ve witnessed before. Tell me, Arde, will your friend stake their lives on protecting the realm?”

“We’ll help,” a stronger demon-like figure stomped his feet, “-you angels are better suited for magic. Help us out at the long-range, we’ll take care of the vanguard.”

“Professor Rake, why are you here?”

“We got news about the academy being under attack. As a rivaling school, we had to help,” said the muscular frame of a man, “-so, let us angels and demons fight off this invasion,” he extended his long sword, and students under his command rushed down the valley, “-better have our backs, Arde!” said the crowd.

“Don’t die on us,” Arde fired back.

“Rake.”

“Luci?”

“We need thirty minutes for the evacuation.’

“We can do that,” Rake winked, “-you’ve always taken things too seriously. More the reason why you’re losing hair.’

“ENEMY APPROACHING!”

Ereena rose her hands, “-ATTACK!”

The demons rushed headfirst for the foot soldiers placed further down the mountain pass. A-rank spells riddled the somber skyline, “-take out the flying beasts.” Luci hovered with crossed legs, “-I will provide regeneration – focus your attack and provide support,” a bubble of pure mana expanded.

“Ay, Rake boss, these soldiers are easy to work,” students clawed and tore guts, the shriek of the dead was music to the professor’s ears. Before they knew it, the demons had pierced through enemy lines and were at the bridge linking into town. ‘We’re out of their support range,’ he turned with a heavy feeling.

“WHAT’S THAT IDIOT DOING!” thundered Ereena, “-did they forget the objective,” she slipped down onto the valley, “-I’ll go on ahead, those with experience with melee come with me.”

The heavy feeling was true – the defeated rose from their ashes – the symbol of Venera lit vibrantly, this time, the attacking vanguard turned and the support charged – Rake and the students were trapped in the middle. Ereena’s assumption was right, she’d be at the back of the retreating vanguard, however, “-they’ve split their forces,” a protection spell summoned, “-they’ve got us beat. Was that their plan?”

Demonic screams hauntingly clawed up the mountain pass, “-it’s a massacre,” she bit her lips, “-fall back!”

“BUT MY LADY!”

“We can’t help them – we’re out of Luci’s range. If we fall, the refugees will suffer. Come on people,” she slowly backed away, ‘-I’m sorry, Rake, I tried.’

\*CRASH,\* a bullet-like projectile slammed right into the face of the mountain. The massacre on the demons halted, and the dust settled from the impact area – one of which birthed a creator, “-mother lover,” a younger gentleman dressed in a white shirt and black pants casually climbed out, “-these guys are not messing around,” he looked at Rake and the fallen students, “-tough luck, you’re a fool.”

“Who are you?”

“The new landlord,” he chuckled, ‘-if he’s a fool, then I’m a greater imbecile. Oh well, it’s been a while,’ he cracked his knuckles and stretched his hands, “-the thrill of the fight. Been a while, it’s been a while,” the bicolor pupils bleached in pure white with crimson flakes ending in purple, ‘-Undrar gave them Venera’s tome. That’s the ritual I sensed. They’re immortal and they wore a kind of immortal. No matter the attack they’ll regenerate – the only way to defeat said protection is taking out the leader – the leader is, if I guess, Artanos or Zeus,’ he casually walked past the fallen, \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* and drew in their blood and flesh, \*crunch,\* “-the blood of a virgin,” he looked at Rake, “-come on, professor, you shouldn’t bring kids out to a fight like this,” he clapped, two entities manifested from his shadow, “-Elize, Vengeance.”

“You finally called,” the lass purred, Vengeance knelt.

“Don’t think I can handle them on my own. As thy master, I order thy limiters to be removed – access to the best of your abilities, my dearest comrades. Seek deep and take what thee must for a massacre is what the devil has ordered.”

“Right on,” Elize licked her lips seductively, Vengeance toggled his flying spell and took to the skies.

‘To fight them on equal footing, I’ll have to unlock the nevermore gates,’ he carried his casual walk, the clockwork soldiers dropped their orders and ran at him, \*Deep slumber, deep rest, awaken for the chance at retribution. Gate of which stands before mine way, open for thy master has come: Nevermore – Hell’s Gate,\* black smoke, dark essence of the corrupt, \*-Shackle the damned, shackle the hated. Bring forth chains binding one’s mortality, Ancient Magic – Sigillum Cadaver,\* chains of provenance to the netherworld shackled the attackers, \*Span across the ages, fear is what held peace, fear is what caused War, fear is the root of evil. I, the harbinger of the ultimate fear, have come to spread and reclaim what is mine of right: Nevermore – Terror Gate,\* “-burn,” the void-flame followed the shackles and lit ablaze the clockwork fighters. Multiple explosions raged in the distance – maimed body parts flew like birds, ‘-I’ll need the powers of a demi-god.’ \*Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power: Nevermore – Annihilation Gate.\* ‘-should be enough energy,’ he reached out emptily – Orenmir flew into his hands, “-time to end this battle,” \*Death Element: Shadow Step.\*

A golden chariot landed, “-I’m here to evacuate the idiots. Climb on, Rake.”

“Cleopatra...”

"I know, I know."

'He restrained the soldiers, I guess Igna is the inheritor of Staxius' powers. I should better keep my presence unknown,' the chariot flew off into the distance.

"Lady Ereena, the demons have been evacuated, what are your orders?"

"We'll make our way back,"

"No, Ereena, you go with them."

"But Luci..."

"I'll stay back, this battle isn't over until we reclaim the town. Ereena, head back and close the gates, the demon academy's waiting for the wounded."

"If you're sure," she clapped, "-start the retreat."

Chapter 1095 Farewell, King of Hidros

"Welcome back, master."

"Welcome back, meowster."

'What's happened here?' Vengeance and Elize had dished their fair share of hurt. Numerous clockwork soldiers were frozen in place, some had their own limbs used as nails.

"Who are you, people!"

"Tough luck, Emitious. This realm belongs to me, I'll be damned if I allow your filth into my domain. A barrier's expanded over the academy town. Most of Artanos' forces are frozen by my chains – the number's dwindled since we began. What say you, angel, shall we end the fight?"

"End the fight?" he laughed, "-how very interesting. You know, I'm under orders not to return lest the battle brings forth profit."

"Too bad, a pawn will always remain a pawn," volatile energy circled, Vengeance and Elize stopped their massacre and sat underneath the only remaining tree, "-call on us if you need assistance."

\*Angel Arts: Thundra, \* lightning struck – the impact caused the very ground to boil.

"No more," a cloaked figure materialized, the gun hoisted over his back and the familiar look was something to ponder.

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"Who are you?"

"I represent Hermes. Emitious, Zeus has express orders for Artanos and his troops to return. We got what we need."

"Got what we need?"

"Yeah, we're done here," wind blew over the hood.

'Mark?' he tipped knowingly; the fallen army choked on their last breath. The time had come to end the fight – such was the thought across the opposition. Having opened the Annihilation Gate, Igna's might could be felt through the very air. Each glance, movement, or blink, brought forth his untamed murderous intent.

'I can't have them leave,' \*-Death Element: Flash movement,\* '-the look on their faces when I suddenly appear behind them. Time flows slowly, I see their expression and clearly analyze their movements. Mark's using the gun I gave him. Good, very good. Look at the angel, a look over their shoulders and I see their army in pure terror. I'm about to kill your leader, this is the truth of war. I don't care if you've accomplished the quest, I'm here to cause some chaos,' he reached out and touched Emitious, Mark leaped back and drew his weapon, \*Mana Control: Ice Element Variant – Frost Breath,\* he swiped upward, a light-blue mist rose, grabbed and pulled the soldier, '-can't move,' \*Mana Control: Drain,\* the light hue turned a deeper red, '-my mana, I can't move...'

\*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from when you were born and till you die, I hold in my hands the strings which binds you to this world, by my authority, I order thy chains to be severed, spell, Tactus Interitus.\* black specks lifted from the angel's right arm. Time was nigh – Emitious's regeneration deactivated, Igna pulled the angel by the left arm, grabbed the right arm wherein the curse slowly climbed his limbs, "-take a message to Undrar and your leaders. The Adjudicator will not stand for defamation of realms beyond thine authority. I would like to resolve the issue as peacefully as I can. Considering my companions and I have taken your army without so much breaking a sweat. I allowed Emitious's life. Magnam Immortalitatem isn't the answer – the weak will never be able to use such power," he pressed and tore the infected limb, "-until I do thee part," \*Ancient-Arts: Cross-Dimensional Teleportation\* massive magical circle lit over the academy – the radiance and beauty in the complexity of the outlines, the power it held and displayed were noticed only by a select few. Funnels encompassed every single invader, '-got their signature. This is the thing when using clones, they share the same frequency. Too bad, Artanos, our battle shall be placed on the back burner. You knew I was coming and chose to send a scouting unit. This attack was nothing more than a preview – well, tis my response.'

They rematerialized inside Zeus' palace within the Eipea Empire, "-HELP US!" cried the many wounded, Emitious barely held his own, the defeat and injury had lessened his fighting spirit.

"Why are you in such a sorry state, Emitious?"

"Master Lixbin," he dropped to his feet, "-I apologize for my worthlessness... I have failed in my mission."

An entourage of high-ranking gods passed, "-why are the fighters in the sacred hall? Have them expelled at once. I dare not sully my lovely view of the garden with those monsters around. Hurry along, maid," they forcibly smacked a passing attendant, "-petty commoners."

"I see he's returned my message."

"Artanos?"

"Pay those gods no mind, Lixbin. We're good. The attack was, how can I put it, a test, yeah. A trial run with the immortality Venera's tome granted. I'll have them transported to the medical quarters. Good job, Emitious."

“No, no. He’s too strong, way too strong. The Devil and his minions were three and still managed to reck our force of two thousand within minutes. No one stands in our way, we can defeat our troubles... the devil, he’s, he’s not real. He’s an entity of unrivaled strength... casting 5-layers spells like it was nothing... please, Artanos. You must be, you must be on guard. He is bad news, the world might as well be the devil’s playground, there is nothing to be done about such power... attrition, fear, hate, it, it doesn’t work”

“...”

‘Touché, Igna. You sent him into a delusion. Casting 5-layer magic. Haven’t heard that since the olden age.’

Back in Ragno; Igna hovered above the wrecked academy.

“It’s done,” Luci waved, “-I got the survivors out. The town is empty.”

“I’ll take it from here. Stand back.”

\*Watchers, spectators, names ring high and low, us, unknown to the world’s reality, unknown to the world’s knowledge, have lived in utter solemnness 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.\* the sheer presence emanating from the Shadows sufficed to turn the very fabric of Ragno into mush. ‘Ragno can’t handle the Shadow’s power. Better make the regeneration quick.’

\*By the power bestowed upon me by the Supreme god Kronos, I, inheritor of the sickle, order for the realm to go by mine pace: Time Control – Pause.\*

\*Present and never changing, present and never yielding. All who wait break and all made are subjected to thine will. I, God of Death, the humble inheritor of thy power; call upon thee to have mine will answer: Time Control – Reversal.\* The battle wound healed.

‘Amazing,’ escaped Luci’s awe.

“Always a pleasure to see the master’s full power in action.”

“Elize, you’re more talkative. Gotten used to the powers?”

“I’m more familiar with the master. It’s a good thing, I never expected someone like him to so carelessly offer me a contract. Goes to show the realms are riddled with eccentric people.”

\*Realm Retraction.\*

\*Shackle mine strength: Nevermore – Full Restraint.\* ‘Done,’ he landed inside the academy’s courtyard. The massive palace was joined by other buildings – most differed in use and design, a church, a cathedral, a dungeon, a training yard, name it and it was probably built. A flap of the wings had him perched atop one of the watchtowers. From here, the view of the town was grand, ‘-this is home for a while,’ he exhaled.

“Good job, master,” Elize purred.

"I see the Shadows have grown most powerful, my lord."

"Well, Vengeance, I saw it's a great thing we came when we did. The place would have been without repair. I need a favor."

"Very well, master, what are your orders?"

"We're ultimately here to seek Asmodeus and the others. As we're in one of the king's domains."

"Look for information about them. Ragno is our new home?" summarized Elize.

"Well spotted," he smiled, "-we have a long journey ahead. I'll grant you the authority of the Shadows. Do with it as you please. Don't make trouble and only use said power if, and only if it is necessary. Aside from that, the end justifies the means, go on and have some fun. I'd recommend Satan's domain first, he's wrath and should be easy to convince using the appropriate tactics."

"Shall we report back weekly?"

"Sense of time feels slower. So yeah, why not. You can contact me using the mental link. Are we good?"

"Yes, master," they leaped and landed in haystacks, '-I've seen that somewhere,' he narrowed to no avail. Vengeance and Elize's quest began – they'd spend quite a long time on the road.

'Authority of the shadows or not, the journey across an unknown dimension will take some time. This is perfect,' he coughed blood, '-I overdid it with the elements. Too much power can ruin a man from the inside. The regeneration's kicking in... I need a way around this body.'

"This is the Ragno?"

"Cruse," he nonchalantly blinked, "-good to see you. How is everything?"

"Come on, Adjudicator, I expected a more surprising reaction. I came to check if you need assistance."

"I appreciate the thought, truly. However, aren't you needed in Orin?"

"Yes, well, I was asked to deliver a message on behalf of éclair, Yui and the many others whomst thee forgot to say bid farewell," he handed a scroll.

"Dear Master, we're writing this letter to voice our anger. Lady Elvira's claiming the death of King Igna Haggard of Hidros. The kingdom fell into shock, and honestly, there was nearly a war between us and the empire. The Emperor was pretty vexed to hear the news of his best-friend passing. Lady Eira had to explain the greater truth – he sends his best regards. The Era of King Igna seems to have taken the world by storm. Many nations banded together and showed their respect to the Haggards. The family's grown more influential than before...the heirs are doing an amazing job. Julius has taken over as head of Raven and Eira, she decided to stay in Hidros and relinquish her claim as Empress of Alpha, even though Markus Sultria has claimed the throne. It saddens us to see you leave, majesty. You shaped the fate of this domain for the better. There's so much a letter can carry, my lord. I only wished I could have been there to wish you farewell. Wherever you are, we, of Orin, wish you luck and fortune. Please visit once in a while, lady Syhton threw a fit – the movie nearly got canceled... at least come for the premiere. This concludes our letter, young master, on behalf of everyone, we thank you for the future you carved. Sincerely, everyone master forgot."

'Always sarcastic. éclair's jaded penmanship hasn't changed. I'm glad Orin's doing well.'

"Lord Igna, hello,"

'Luci?'

"Lord Igna."

"Yeah, that's me," he landed in the courtyard, "-something the matter?"

"We need to talk, my lord."

"My lord?" he scanned the archangel, "-are you not angry that I've come to replace Lucifer?"

"No,' he dropped on one knee, "-Lord Lucifer gave me his word that a worthy director would come to his place. I see I was right, you are his inheritor, are you not, lord Igna?"

"Yes, I'm the new director I suppose. Lucifer was in charge of the academy, yes?"

"Correct, my lord, the position of Director entails lordship of its town as well. I will do my best as your aid if you'd have me, my lord."

"Good, and drop my lord title. I much prefer master, or even better, young master."

"As you please, young master," he looked at the town, "-what of the destruction?"

"I took care of it," he smiled, "-come, show me to my office, we have a much to discuss, yes?"

Thus began a new chapter in the Adjudicator's quest toward absolution. Not that the Aapith Nation would realize, their true master, the creator, Alfred, had, by some miracle, returned to where he belonged. 'A new opportunity to train troops and ready for war. This is going to be fun,' he lounged into the expensive-looking chair, '-a new start, farewell, King of Hidros.'

#### Chapter 1096 Lucifer's Academy

Ragno, Lucifer's realm. A new place for a fresh start. From a top-down view, there rested two imposing figures in the Academy Town, dubbed Anstro. One, the academy, built in the middle, around which the town expanded, and the cathedral, placed to the north, after crossing a river and ending on a hill. There wasn't much in the way of protection for those two held onto stone walls as the perimeter. Those residents of the outer walls were content with nature. As a whole, the various lands and factions were somewhat separated. Forest dwellers, river folks, mountain people – numerous names for their individual traits. The town is separated into four segments; outer, middle, inner, and central.

From outer to central, the outer referred to outside the town. This meant the forests or fields could be considered the outside, well, all that was outside in simple terms. This included a few villages built to the southwest, the working class; farmers, or otherwise, low-ranking demons. The middle sector, else the start of the residential district. It circled the academy like the other sectors, and here, there was space between houses, a buffer point for import and export. Next, came the wall separating the middle and inner, and afterward, the inner town. Here, real estate was compact and beautifully built. The streets were cleaner and more refined to the view. It had to be for the town's administrative buildings, trading headquarters, guilds, and much of what went into a town's lively hood. It also includes taverns,

inns, and the occasional brothel. The inner sector is also the largest sector width-wise and covers an area twice that of the middle segment. From the inner to the central, there's another wall built for separating's sake. The tightly packed inner town would have spilled onto the academy ground if not for said separation. Built with wood and resting on grass and greenery, one wouldn't guess after the grass rested the prominent academy, which brings the Central section, or otherwise the Academy. Not much to say about the place – used for studying and training, students from all over Lucifer's domain come to study, and counts as one of few learning institutions scattered around.

'Basic layout,' Igna dropped in his chair and puffed, '-a weeks' gone by,' he turned and faced a massive window giving onto the training field. Spells were cast, students cried their hearts, some did lap, '-the school reopens today. The students look scared, are they afraid of another attack?'

\*Knock, knock,\*

"Enter."

"Director."

"Luci, a pleasant surprise. You're here early. You bring me news?"

"Yes, I've compiled a summary of how the school works. Would you care to read?"

He gestured to the table, Luci placed the file, and stood firmly, "-before the report, I must know, how is the reparation coming along?"

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"As Director of the Academy, the burden of town stewardship falls under thy jurisdiction. My lord, you must appoint someone as your secretary, for it was the same for the previous director. Your duties will be split between academy and town, it's an important position."

Igna looked at Luci coldly, "-I asked a question."

"My apologies," he swallowed hard, "-building repairs are complete. The evacuees have returned, and the dead have been buried according to tradition. There's news from the Aedric academy, the loss of their students, one of 'em was the heir to a high-ranking demon in council. They're using their presence to pressure the academy and are trying to foil our reputation. This has caused quite some concerns as our working class are also adventurers."

"Placing the blame of their blunder on us. How pleasant," he puffed, "-I'll handle the town's affair in the evening. Send the word, I think the time's right to make my authority known. Bring only those involved with the town's rulership, I won't stand for outsiders."

Luci's expression, '-he wants to say something,' Igna observed, '-but can't. What is he thinking?'

"Director, I need to know."

"Go ahead."

"Are you going to abandon Ragno after you're done?"

"Pardon?"



“I investigated. I had word from sources about your actions in Orin and how you always placed the burden of work on another. Though tis, not my place to interject, the Aapith nation works differently.”

“Leaving?” he paused, “-it’ll depend on circumstances. Put your mind at ease. Ragno is home,” and spun the chair, ‘-it’s the perfect foothold in conquering the Aapith Nation. I don’t have my connections or influence. If this was Orin, I’d have called éclair for help or just pressure the other nation with our superior forces. Looks like I’ll have to go back to old-school methods. Let’s play it by ear, I’m wary of Zeus and Artanos, they mentioned getting what they needed. I checked and found nothing.’

“Director?”

“Luci, you’re a professor, right?”

“Correct.”

“Did anyone quit their job?”

“No, professors here are also members of the town’s guard force. They’re chosen from the best and have spent a minimum of five years before their certification. It’s a respectable job with good political influence.”

“Have the members meet me in the faculty office in,” a glance at the watch, “-fifteen minutes.”

“Understood,” he tipped and left.

‘Now, the report,’ he opened the file, “-an academy is a place for demons of all races to come and study. Over the years, the prestige of Lucifer’s academy, bolstered by the King of Hell leading the school, brought only the more talented students – a clear hierarchy based on merit sharpened the quality of the students. Au fil du temps the vision changed from quality to ranking – such, the Aedric aristocracy got into the Academy’s pockets. Lucifer, forced to accept their demands – was faced with a tough decision. He opted to allow the prestige of the aristocracy to remain, after all, the nobles want but their wealth and superiority to be displayed. To counter their plan and allow the fine quality of breed, he instate the Merit system, which, allowed anyone to enter after passing their exams. Some say, the idea came to the director after he had a trip overseas.” Igna lifted his gaze, ‘-sounds awfully like Claireville Academy,’ and returned, “-the students, depending on their abilities and craft, will be placed into two factions. Intellect and Practical; the former is based solely on a person’s wit and ability to overcome mental quandaries. These students are referred to as Academics and are led by the Arch-Demon, Skeptor of the East. The Practical students are those with combat abilities; we say gifted but is the dumping area for commoners who entered the academy through the merit system. These students are referred to as Students and nothing else. Some have gone on to become well-known fighters in the Aedric army, and some are under the employment of the other Kings of Hell. As a domain built for fostering new blood, Lucifer opposed creating an army of his own, and instead, in line with keeping the balance of power, allowed the other kings to send and take troops per the chosen’s discretion. As for the Academics, many of them are advisors in noble courts, and as a whole, the Aapith Nation lives off one another. Academy ground, when viewed from above, can be seen as a mirror if a line was placed diagonally. The Southwest L shape building has reflected the northeast. The middle holds the training yard and gymnasium. Southwest and Northeast, the Academics and the Practical. Coincidentally, the director’s office is built in the Academic quarters, as for other administrative buildings, they’re built around the academy and within the Central

Sector. As for those influential within the courts and academy, director, such is up to thee for discover,' the report drifted onto the table, a gust shuttered the window, '-this place is a bad joke. Even here there's the deal of politics and family bloodlines. I do suppose greed, envy, and pride to be more prominent – we're in hell. Good thing I have experience dealing with this sort of thing. Decades of being a nobody to ruler has granted me the best gift anyone could wish for – knowledge and experience. Skeptor of the East's a man not of the academy. Most likely someone sent by the other school to observe our activities. The Academic unit is for nobles and the other for commoners. He did steal the idea of Claireville Academy, or was it the other way around? I don't much care for the answer,' he stood, pressed the cigarette, threw on the suit-jacket, and headed to the faculty office. '-Five floors,' he examined both buildings, '-they resemble one another, yard for the students and a library for the academics, albeit the library is behind this building,' he walked through the corridors and watched through the windows – there, in the yard, a talented young man swung his sword intently, '-a the third year?' he stopped momentarily, '-a fire burns deep within. I remember him, isn't that the kid from the battle?'

"ARDE!" muffled a distant scream, "-we need to shower, come on."

"Yeah, yeah," he rested his sword, "-I'll be there."

'He's popular with the ladies,' Igna narrowed, '-yeah, look at the admiration on the girl's faces, even the boys. He's the real deal,' and before Igna knew it, he was leaned out the window and watching youth in action, '-aren't those?'

"Damned pests. I thought they died in the battle. Why are they still alive?"

"I heard someone new is here to replace the old director."

"The academy is washed anyway, there's no prestige left, not after that fiasco. My father told me to consider transferring."

"You going to transfer?"

"Hell no," they laughed, "-we're at home here. We don't care about prestige, long as we can look down on them, it's worth every penny. Anyway, let's go, lord Skeptor's returning today."

Igna reopened his eyes, '-no prestige, Skeptor. Are they that dumb to accept such a trivial scheme? I'll have to gauge Skeptor first – he strikes me as someone who's bitten more than he can chew, or otherwise an idiot with a thirst for power. The Academics' are no good either, well, if they want to harass the practical, it's fine by me. One must strive to better oneself, and if they don't realize said lesson, I doubt this place would have been standing for all this time. Lucifer, you were conniving until the very end, nothing brings people together like a common enemy, the Academics and physical how very simple and effective.'

The faculty room, built on the third floor on the western wing, carried a sense of pride. The halls leading there were covered in shelves that displayed previous alumni's achievements. There were pictures shared with Kings, '-who are these faces?' he exhaled.

“Why are we convening here, you people have your own quarters to discuss school matters. We’re still unsure about how the academy will move forward. How will the administration take responsibility for the whole dead thing.”

“I understand your concern, however, you must realize, lord Skeptor, we were ordered by the Director to meet. Therefore, by his authority, we obey.”

“I don’t care,” he thundered, “-this school has been run for generations with a clear separation of class for the betterment of the students. Tell me, Luci, where were you when the battle broke, I’m thankful for my quick wit, without me, this place would have been overrun by monsters and my students placed in jeopardy.”

\*Click,\* he slid open the door, Igna entered with an otherworldly aura of confidence. A mixture of class and refinement was about his presence, the bi-colored pupils intently scanned everyone present, he kept lingering pauses at the ladies and short but powerful burst towards the men.

“WHO IS THAT?”

Igna flat-out ignored the outburst and walked at his pace, he joined Luci’s side and stared down the room.

“LUCI!”

He looked at the rude personage emptily, “-who might that be, Luci?”

“Skeptor of the East.”

“I see, Skeptor of the East,’ he ignored the imposing figure and looked towards the others, “-good morning, professors. Starting today, I’m the new Director of the Academy, Igna Haggard, you can call me Death,” a cold, heartless mist befell the atmosphere, ‘-this might be fun.’

Chapter 1097 The New Director

“New Director, by whose authority?”

“By the old Director’s authority of course,” Lucifer’s winged symbol hovered between Igna’s hands, “-as for my title of Death, it comes from my inheritance of multiple symbols.”

“Are you,” Skeptor’s tightened his gaze, “-perchance,” and took time between his words, “-the one responsible for Lucifer’s downfall and eventual death?”

“My word, you must be a very astute individual.”

“Thank you, I don’t get praise often,” he gloated, Igna’s sarcasm didn’t register.

“No matter, let us go around the table for an introduction. Starting with you.”

“Ahia Gron. Professor of the Magical Arts and Physical training, in charge of the Students,” she bore a motherly figure, frizzled hair which seemed to lessen with Age. Crinkles along her mouth and forehead, her rounded glasses, and black hair were hard to miss.

“Denver Jogn,” said another, “-Professor of the Magical Arts and Physical training,” he returned, “-in charge of the Academics,” compared to the previous, he wore classier clothes and carried himself with a lot of dignity and respect. Lighter colored hair and a stubble gave the young man some age, though, in more aspects than one, was very much young.

The introductions continued, many gave their name and didn't have much to say about their position. Subjects were taught according to the departments, and each department had a head, thus, to make the filtration easier – remembering the heads would be simpler with future meetings being organized.

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“My turn,” Skeptor rose with confidence to stare at the new director, “-Skeptor of the East, Arch-Demon under Leviathan. I humbly introduce myself, director Igna. I'm in charge of the Academics. It is customary for the Academy to be split into its respective departments, the fields are spread into four major segments under which more detail and specific path can be taken. General Studies, Magical Research, Design and Art, and lastly, Combat ability. Students are required to take General Studies and are allowed to choose a single department for their studies – and most often go towards Combat Abilities. Clubs activities fall under their teacher's jurisdiction.”

“A segregation of talent. Not that I'm surprised. Tradition is tradition. Four departments and specific paths for each. Might I ask who are the respective heads of what department?”

“In charge of General Studies,” said Luci.

“Head of Magical Research,” added Skeptor.

“Head of Design and Arts,” said a smaller figure with hair tied in a ponytail, “-Emmie Hens.”

“Head of Physical Ed, otherwise known as Combat Class,” firmed a stronger worrier, a headless knight, “-Dementus, and my assistant,” an angel-like figure stepped into view, “-Yu,” she nodded, her long black hair and fair skin had the men of the faculty skip a beat, her almond shaped eyes leveled against Igna's and held for a few seconds before breaking, “-that should be enough for the introduction. Director Igna, as you know, I'm in charge of the Academics, therefore, Magical Research and Design and Arts fall into my duties, you, my lord, are to look over General Studies and Combat Class.”

“Right,” he scanned the room, ‘-the division of responsibility is present for my sake. The Director is in a way the ruler of the town, thus, time is limited. Decentralization of authority is a good thing when there is understanding and respect, similar to Hidros and the Shadow Realm. However, here, where there's clear ambition, Decentralization will seep into the potential of revolt. Centralizing the authority and clearing the roots is a simple solution, one I can't act upon. Feels more like the coming to power of a new land, the teachers are vassals, and the departments the realms. The best way forward is to let the machine run. If it works, it works. No need to care for a greater sense of morality, we don't need equality; changing a well-refined engine for the sake of a few strays isn't worth the effort.”

“Director Igna.”

“Professor Ahia?”

She held her words, ‘-he remembers my name?’

“Professor, is something the matter?”

“No, my lord,” a great impression cast over the faculty, “-we’ve yet discussed the matter of the Student Council. It’s been agreed the council has been run by the Academics – this has given rise to much of the student’s mistrust in the leadership. I don’t mean to complain, the Council has quite the authority over the student body.”

“Ahia,” Skeptor flipped his hair, “-the reason for the council’s Academic only reservation is the preserving quality within the school. The nobles are taught how to lead with dignity, they must set an example for the student body. Accepting the cruder students, and forgiving the bluntness, will be putting the whole balance in turmoil. We can’t decide so liberally,” he turned to the Director, Ahia’s head lowered with waning confidence.

‘Must have taken courage to speak her mind. The way he shut her opinion seems normal. The others don’t mind, or they hide so – there’s a disparity between the teachers. Tis a fine needle to walk – my words will give them a reason to believe my faction. Siding with the Academics will further increase their authority as it will mine. Controlling the Council is another way of making the school much more favorable for them. Can’t gauge the discrepancy in treatment –it may all be hyperbolic.’

“I don’t see a reason why the council should be limited to only the Academics.”

“Pardon?” the room divided suddenly, “-are you taking sides, Director?” Skeptor’s hood darkened with somberness. The man’s long fingers wrapped around his staff and the wrinkled pale skin, which seemed younger or older depending on his mood, was quite the sight. Dark-circled and piercing eyes, such was his defining trait – a gaze that’d glared through one’s soul, “-I suppose it is better-”

“I hate interjections.” The room deadened. Igna’s power indiscriminately paralyzed the faculty, “-Skeptor, I don’t know how the Academy was run before my arrival. I don’t much care for the older power struggle. I’m here as the Director, therefore, I expect a modicum of decency. I don’t demand to be respected, I demand the faculty be true to their profession and show decency, and by that, I mean, manners. Do I make myself clear?”

“I understand Director, my apologies. I got carried away.”

“Where was I?” he paused, “-yes, the council. I don’t see why it should be restricted to the Academic faction. The Academy is merit-based, yes? Why not allow Students to partake in the election? I mean, the better choice is ultimately who will represent the Student Body, therefore, you needn’t worry about quality, for the selection process itself roots impurities. Am I not correct?”

A long pause hung over the faculty, ‘-the director isn’t to be messed with,’ echoed professors under Skeptor.

‘He sees the world differently to what we’re used to,’ Luci grinned, ‘-he may be the correct way forward.’

‘If given the opportunity, Igna might steal my authority. I’ll have to play my cards tightly, can’t allow the director to steal my spotlight,’ a sweating Skeptor closed his prior boldness in favor of Igna’s larger expressive motion.

“Everyone, as is a new start for Ragno and the Academy, we will have to get used to each other. The process will take weeks, months, or even years. It doesn’t matter, our job is to make certain the students can draw their full potential and leave knowing they can survive the outside world. Especially since a war might be on our doorstep. Skeptor, I will count on you to handle the Academics – there’s nothing much to change with the current leadership. Handle affairs as is wished, I will take care of General Studies and Combat Class.”

‘No change?’ they blinked, ‘-this director, who is he?’

Meanwhile, time struck 08:46, students ambled to the assembly – an amphitheater built southeast of the Academy at a ten-minute walk.

“Another school year.”

“We’re back and ready to climb the ranks.”

“Did you hear about the attack on Ragno? I heard students were killed.”

“Yeah, one’s from the commoner faction. They died on the battlefield like losers. We had Skeptor to keep us safe, so much for their combat abilities... ha-ha-ha.”

“They never change,” gritted the other faction, “-always look down on us, I don’t get it, why do they hate us so much.”

“Calm it, there’s no use fighting. We should focus on our studies, yes?”

“Yeah, I know... you saw what happened, didn’t you? You saw the fight, you watched as kids our age died. It was traumatic... the spells I used, it didn’t do anything...”

“Enough, Arde, you’ve said enough.”

Silence gradually swept the assembly. Faculty stood on the stage and waited on the side. A student, a young lady dressed in white and blue, walked across the stage and took the podium, ‘-the Student Council president,’ Igna waited off-stage, ‘-she’s going to retire in a few months,’ their conversation came to mind, “-good morning, director, my name’s Lilia Enns, I’m the daughter of the Arch-Demon Kemsto of Lucifer’s faction. Our family has lost their prestige ever since lord Lucifer’s death. I’m graduating soon as we don’t have the means to continue my studies. Without prestige, no one at this academy can survive, I’m an example, director. Waning prestige and I lost my place as the president. Instead, I expect Hena from Arch Demon Skeptor’s branch family to carry the torch. I wish I could have stayed a little bit longer.”

“Lilia, tell me, what is your wish?”

“My wish?”

“Pardon the phrasing. What is it you wish to see from the Academy, what are your ideals?”

“I want a place where everyone can have a chance to fight. It’s fairer for both parties. I see the pros and cons of my noble birth – I’ve had life relatively easy and I don’t dare compare myself to those who took the test. I want to stay at the academy and fight with my friends. Skeptor threw me aside when father died... we live- I’m sorry, I shouldn’t bring family affairs-”

“Don’t worry,” he smiled, “-think of me as an older sibling or parent figure. I’ll be here to offer my advice. Lilia, you said you understood the pros and cons and made amends with the noble birth. As prestige wanes, you’re forced to quit... however, you’d rather stay and study?”

“Yes.”

“By the way, Lilia, did your father ever go to another dimension to greater Lucifer’s authority?”

“Not just father, my brother went too. He never returned... we got the news they were killed by the Devil.”

“The students, were they the strongest?”

“Yes, my brother and his friends were given the honor of the mask. Lord Lucifer granted them his crest... it was the best part of our family’s history, to be blessed by Lucifer. I heard they wore a mask and became mute to fight the desires... they were proclaimed as heroes by lady Ereena and said they died valiantly on the battlefield.”

‘-Lucifer’s academy having their top students become mute and faceless,’ the strings of destiny, ‘-I killed them. I killed her brother during the assault when Ereena revealed Achilles’ death. Part of my action must have triggered the downfall of her family. To think I’d be reunited with the younger sister.’

“Director?”

“Lilia, I have a solution to the waning prestige situation. It will take hard work and patience.”

“I’ll do anything, director.”

“Let’s discuss it in my office later, understood?”

“Yes, director.”

Lilia’s speech neared its end, “-with that being said, the council expects great things from this year’s new students,” applause, “-I would like to call on our Academy’s new director, Igna Haggard.”

‘My time,’ he climbed the stairs, and the audience went mute. Igna exuded vampiric charm and stoic beauty, the women could but stare, their focus locked on his face and well-refined body. Even the men were impressed by how beautiful the director seemed, the white hair ending in specks of red, ‘-is he a god?’

He stared at the audience and grinned, “-good morning, students, and very warm morning to our faculty. It’s my honor to be your new Director, rather, that’s what I’d love to say. To answer your questions, why am I the new director?” he leaned into the mic, a sense of terror eroded the stage, “-I killed Lucifer.”

Chapter 1098 Coming Invasion

“Asmodeus, Asmodeus, Asmodeus.”

“There, there, why are you in a worry?”

“Leviathan’s forces have begun moving. My forces expect their arrival.”

'Leviathan?' he gazed out a window giving out over the castle walls, "-where is mother, we need to talk."

A council convened, "-here's the status," a map unrolled over the wall, "-Leviathan's army is marching toward us. It'll take at least a few days before a force of that mass arrives."

"What about Sathanas?"

"No contact," added the soldier, "-we've lost contact with our spy. We can only expect the worse."

"What are your orders, lady Lilith?" the dire situation broadened, '-the castle's the only haven for us and the refugees. Getting around their forces might be foolish. The land's not exactly favorable for a preemptive attack. Aside from the moat, if we're to turtle, it'll take a few days to break, and even if they can't break, we'll run out of supplies soon. To survive the kings, we'll need backing from another faction.'

"There's a way," invoked Asmodeus, "-pardon my intrusion, mother," he stood over the council, "-we can't fight as we risk too much. We can't surrender either, the only option is to seek shelter from another King. To choose between Satan, Leviathan, Lucifer, and Belial, is akin to choosing one's death," the council stared, amidst the unfamiliar faces were Beelzebub, Lilith, and Mammon, not counting the castle's lord and representatives of the neighboring villagers.

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"Who's going to support an illegitimate group?"

"There's only one imposter in hell and said title goes to Lucifer. The man's a fallen angel, he has compassion and empathy."

"Not to forget pride," Mammon interjected calmly, "-the man's in hell for a reason."

"Didn't father already defeat him?" added a more innocent voice.

"Beelzebub?" they narrowed; "-do you know something we don't?"

"Brother, mother," he stood over the table in a toddler's body, "-I have news from my servants. Something like this would have happened soon, I envy the kings of hell, I envy their power and status. I had spies stationed in their cities and constantly monitor the political situation. The best bet is Lucifer's realm, Ragno."

"It had to be Ragno," Lilith held her breath, "-the way is through the alps, and the alps require us to cross the coming army. Getting there, we'll require a miracle."

"How about one person?" narrowed Lucifer, "-Sathanas for example."

"What about her?" Lilith examined closely.

"It will take days before they arrive, correct? I'm sure if we ask for reinforcement, they may send help. Beelzebub, what's the leadership status?"

"I can't say," he sat cross-legged, "-my men died after their hatching. My flies have a life span of two weeks max."



“Either way, we’ll die,” Lilith rose, “-have the nearby villagers send their forces. Mammon, you’re in charge of gathering those troops. Asmodeus, you will leave for Ragno and seek out Sathanas. Beelzebub and I will protect the castle at all costs,” she held her stomach and lowered her hand to her womb, ‘-there’s something only I can do as the Queen of Demons. I’m sorry about this, Vanesa.’

“Mother?”

“Worry about the assigned responsibility.”

Time was of the essence, and the siblings separated for their own duties, “-lord Asmodeus, you look a little troubled?”

“Yeah, of course, I am,” he saddled a skeletal horse, “-mother has a habit of overdoing matters. I suppose said quality makes her a queen to be proud of. My duty is to advance and get help,” he swallowed hard, ‘-and I will make sure she gets the help she deserves. Even if this battle kills me, I will crawl my way to the portal, that is a promise, mother, you best not falter.’

Mammon set out to the villagers. Enticed by the prospect of money and a better life, Greed’s ability easily required soldiers, and in the next few long hours – various troops would teleport and station inside the castle.

‘They’re doing a marvelous job,’ she held Beelzebub’s little hands, “-alright, my son. You will protect the castle, yes?”

“Understood, mother,” various barrier spells swallowed the castle, “-out of our family, I’m the strongest spell caster,” he smiled, ‘-please my brothers and sisters, make it home. Mother will need our support.’

She retreated to her chambers, and wouldn’t come out for the next few days. ‘-The secret ritual known to only the queen of demons, to bring forth an heir to carry the title of Abaddon. I’m sorry, Vanesa, I had truly hoped this would be a more pleasant ritual. Alas, I’m not as virtuous as the guardians. I sowed the seed for your eventual rebirth, and today’s the day you come to me, my daughter, rise from the depths, evolve from the Aedric Mistress of Curse and Maladies – awaken thy true force, Aedric Goddess of Malady and Sloth, Abaddon.’

Nightfall. A band of traveling incubus and succubus signaled the passing army, “-what is it?” echoed the front guard, “-the camp is under lord Leviathan’s orders. If you don’t wish to die, please move along.”

“Don’t play hard to get,” echoed one of the ladies, “-we’re demons, aren’t we? Let us work to relieve your forces’ tension. I’ll make sure the price is right.”

“What’s the commotion outside?”

“Lord Lian,” the guard gasped, “-these sex-craved demons wishes to entertain our troops. I’ve asked them to leave... they’re persistent.”

“I see,” he took one look, “-let them through,” the floodgates open, and the night would take on a scene only dreamed by the servants of pleasure. To be ravaged by strong men and women, the night would flow with bodily fluids – copious amounts. One of the high-ranking tents ambered a timid flame. Lord Lian unblinkingly stared, “-no more,” said Asmodeus, “-Lian, I can’t believe it’s you.”

“Neither do I, Asmodeus. Why did you leave Leviathan’s service?”

"The decision wasn't in my hand to make," he sighed, "-I was summoned. You know how contracts work. Lian, you made the rank of High Demon. Congratulations."

"Asmodeus, I hope you understand the troubles ahead. We're the vanguard, you're lucky I found you first. If it had been the other lords, I dare not imagine the treatment of the servants. You needed something?"

"Sathanas. Where is she?"

"Satan's daughter was last seen at her father's estate. We got the news to deploy shortly after. I can't say much else, our orders are to lay siege and control a rebel faction. Our monarch can be quite ruthless when it comes to deserters and traitors. Asmodeus, before the night ends, leave. Take the route around the mountain, it'll lead directly to the portal."

"Lian, you're always a foul liar," he smiled.

"Figured me out?" he rose his hands; guards invaded the castle.

"Guards arrests this man."

Asmodeus made no gesture of fear, he sat and drank, "-you should know not to underestimate me, Lian," \*snap,\* a pink hue covered the camp, "-you're under my authority, Lian, there's no turning back, poor Lian."

"Damn you, Asmodeus," he fell, "-you'll regret leaving me behind, cheater."

"I never cheated," said a soothing whisper, "-you and I would have never worked. You care too much, whereas I don't care as much. Our union would have fallen no matter the compromise. I'm a prince of Hell, Lian."

"Bastard," he coughed, '-I loved you...'

"Right," Asmodeus exited the camp, "-pack it up everyone, you got your fair share of mana and life force. We leave at the crack of dawn, take the night to rest."

Those events coincidentally linked with Igna's ascension to Ragno's leadership. The speech neared the end, and Igna stared the student body mercilessly, "-I'm a true believer of Survival of the fittest. Fate is in your hand, and thus, as the new Director, I formally remove the restriction of prestige placed upon the Student Council. Those able to show their worth will be chosen. If you think you're fit to lead others, prove yourself. The separation between Commoners and Nobles will remain. If you have issues, please address my assistant, Lord Skeptor. As such, I bid you, students, a warm welcome to Lucifer's Academy," no applause, the whole room fell silent. Never in their years had a director like him taken the mic, an orator worthy of the king's title.

Bell rang and the school day began, \*knock, knock,\* time showed 10:32, "-director, it's Lilia, might I enter?"

"Come on in."

She stood with her feet soaked in some kind of liquid – the heavy scent of perfume masked quite an ordeal, '-her hair's messy, and her clothes crinkled in places. She's getting bullied.'

“Losing authority?”

“Yeah,” she exhaled, “-as you put it, survival of the fittest, director. I don’t have the power to fight the coming tides.”

“You mean to tell me you’re a mere replacement for your brother? That boy was strong, he had the guts to face death in the face.”

“Did you know him?” she crossed her feet, clenched her hand, and gawked, “-director?”

“No. I didn’t know him, since I killed him. There are many people in this world, and some are innately more prone to death than others. Lilia, I killed your brother, I killed your ruler, and I sit here as the new Director. Realize, I was born a commoner, I was raised on a battlefield and chosen to carry the curse of death. No one has it easy, no one has it made – opportunities are what you make of them. This will sound condescending, and I mean for it to sound so. Lilia, you’re losing prestige and don’t have a place to call home. You’ve gotten bullied by your own friends, and the whole world’s turning against you – such is the cruelty of life.”

“Director?”

“I have daughters the same age as you,” he blinked, “-you strangely remind me of them, Lilia.”

“Why did you kill my brother?”

“Because he was in the way,” he echoed, “-if you want answers, seek Ereena. She summoned them. Now, your trouble,” he motioned, she approached, “-will you trust me?”

“How can I, how can I after you killed my brother...”

“Do you want to change, or not?”

“I want-”

“Then choose, Lilia. Will you change or will you not!”

‘...’

“Lilia!”

“TEACH ME, DIRECTOR!”

“Excellent choice,” he lit a cigarette.

“What should I do, director?”

“Request change from Academics to Students. You will leave your course and join Combat Class. Aside from the aspirations of becoming a great mage, I doubt Skeptor has the affinity to teach you, a special case. It’s a well-founded misunderstanding that magic is powerful – it is not. Not in the hands of the wrong person – true magic are those the gods utilize. What you share and invoke are party tricks – a candle within an inferno. Join the Student faction, join us and I make certain you have enough power to take the council by force. There are three months before the next election. I’ll have you challenge the next president and win, am I clear?”

“Director?”

“All you need is to sign this,” he pushed a paper, “-sign and free yourself from the tyranny of the Academics.”

“The students aren’t angels either, Director. They’ll-”

“Ah, don’t worry about that. With Luci and I here to control their frivolous antics, I’m sure we can figure out what comes next. Starting now, Lilia, you are part of the Commoner’s faction. You’ll be in class 3-2.”

A quick uniform change and Igna waited prominently before class 3-2’s combat lesson, “-students, I have an announcement. Lilia Enns will be transferring from Academics due to personal issues.”

Luci stepped forward, “-like the director said, Lilia, will be a new student. Treat her well – or not, that is your choice.”

“I despise those who take pleasure in fighting the weak. If any of you want to take on Lilia, please go ahead, do not come crawling into my office if you’re wounded or on thy death bed. Those who choose violence must accept the consequences.”

The director and Luci vanished, “-greetings, fellow students, my name’s Lilia Enns – your new classmate. Glad to be here.”

“HELL YEAH!” thundered the class, “-WE HAVE A PRETTY GIRL!”

A chant followed, “-Lilia, Lilia, Lilia!”

‘A breach?’

.....

“Director?”

Chapter 1099 Castle siege

‘I sense a breach to the north.’

“Director, is something the matter?”

“I suppose,” the wings sprouted, “-I will be back in a few minutes.”

A muffled explosion rocked the church. Demons scattered, a few perished and some left dismembered. A strange hemisphere is attached. The area limited itself – there, a few familiar auras emerged.

“My god,” said a prettier-looking gentleman, “-I thought I’d never get out alive.”

They locked eyes, “-Asmodeus?”

“MASTER!” he gasped, “-pardon me, master,” the pace of speech didn’t match the pace of the limp, “-we ran into a little bit of a problem. I have to consult with the leader of Ragno. Why are you here?”

“You’re looking at the new leader of Ragno,” he struck a sarcastic confidence pose, “-cancel the barrier,” he observed, ‘-judging at the wounds and the rate of regeneration, he fought a few hours ago. Why was

there an explosion?' the answer echoed when Asmodeus's barrier dropped, "-the teleporter is destroyed!"

"What are we going to do, they'll have our heads..."

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"Contact the bishop or we all die."

"Contact the bishop!" echoed the surrounding.

"Come on, Asmodeus," he help the prince to his feet and snapped, the scene swapped for the office. "-Have some drinks," he threw the wounded on a comfy couch and scoured the shelves for magical potions. Little by little, the blemished skin and stomach-turning openings closed, "-where are we?"

"Lucifer's academy. It has been a while, Asmodeus. Kul sends her regards. Now, of the matter of potential treason, why did you leave the realm in the company of Charlie?"

"I was forced. I heard the lady's mother was in dire straits. Besides, master, the lapse in judgment about the generals was dumb. You ignored them and left them freedom – freedom is no gift, it is the birth mother of boredom and stupidity. Without a goal or task, looking over the Shadow Realm, which I remind is closest to the fabled paradise, is gutting. I'm glad for the time spent in Orin, we had fun and when I left for Hell, by the call of Charlie – I found mother's troubles. She's trapped. We all are trapped. Without consent from the four kings of hell, the binds shan't break."

"And you came here to seek help in said curse?"

"No, we're under attack from Leviathan. An army is on its way to the castle. Mother has rallied the troops and is standing for the coming defeat. They tasked me with seeking help from Lucifer's domain, out of the four, the situation here seemed most likely to bring a resolution. What about you, master, why are you here?"

"I've taken my seat as the Adjudicator."

The prince's jaw dropped. The wounds healed, '-the Adjudicator,' he swallowed, "-master, are you going to destroy reality?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"To bring forth a cleaner world where magic neither magic nor the concept of god exists."

"Where will we remain if everything is gone?"

"That, Asmodeus, is something I haven't thought about. I'm to deliver judgment upon the vile gods who dared ruin their birthplace for greed."

"The words, the conviction," he stared, "-it doesn't sound like you, master. Are you sure tis thine will?"

"Why does everyone say that?"

"I'm sure the reason is evident. You're one to protect and help those who are closest. Laying the foundation for the Shadow Realm, bringing peace and understanding to the already broken Hidros, tis a thing of legend. Master, are you sure you want to wipe all that stands in thy way?"

"Yeah," he reached behind the desk, pulled the drawer, and took out Tharis, "-if I don't clean reality, the latter will buckle under its own impurities. What would you prefer in a situation where death is imminent, to fight and suffer or to go peacefully?"

"The latter I suppose?"

He smiled, "-thus my answer," he inspected the pistol, "-we ought to catch up, dearest Asmodeus."

"Master?"

"I'm coming to help," he waited by the door, "-come on, join me, prince."

They walked down the hallway to the admiration of passing students. "Handsome," said many of the stunning younglings, "-seems you're popular with the ladies."

"Bite your tongue, Asmodeus, I rather not be labeled a lover of budding flowers."

"I thought it is more the rage, yes?"

"Shut it."

Thunder cracked – lightning strikes decimated the barrier, "-get down!" another roar destroyed one of the pillars, "-lift the drawbridge."

"Ready your spells," echoed Mammon, "-raise," the gathered demons lifted their open palms, "-FIRE!" it curved and exploded over the coming army – "-they used a barrier," said Beelzebub, "-brother, we can't do much if they attack. The men you brought are fodder. We can hold out for a few days at least."

"REPORT!" cried a petrified demon, "-master Beelzebub and Mammon, our supplies have been poisoned. We caught the perpetrator."

Beelzebub threw up his hands, "-for fuck sake."

"Did no one bother to guard the supplies?" sighed Mammon.

"We were focused on fortification, my lords."

"Well," lightning crashed vaguely behind Beelzebub, the toddler's body darkened ominously for the few seconds it lasted, "-there goes the fortifications," he clapped, a swarm of flies fortified around the castle. "It should buy us time," lightning neutralized on contact with the barrier, "-they'll physically have to make it over."

"Come out, come out wherever you are."

"It's Charlie," they peered through the battlements, "-Charlie, get out of our land."

"Beelzebub, Asmodeus," he hovered over the lava moat whilst tapping the barrier, "-the moment I go on break you turn around and do something stupid. Too bad your little sister has to pay for the crimes

against our king. I told you, you should have handed over that whore of a mother and let our king procreate. Leviathan is a very giving person, you know that, don't you, Prince of Greed?"

"Just leave."

"This won't do," he placed his hands over the barrier and clenched – white cracks climbed and shattered, "-I'm more than a pretty face," he said with goat horns and the remnants of a humanoid visage, "-I'm also ruthlessly passionate." The vanguard threw ropes, and those able of flight made their way across – the main force drew behind, and at the head was another fabled demon, Menase.

'The aura around him, he's equal to a prince of hell. What's happened to Hell since we left? The demons feel stronger.'

"I know what you mean," whispered Mammon, "-did we get weaker, or are they stronger?"

"We have the Shadow-"

"No. Can't use that power. It's forbidden. Even if we wanted, we'd need the Authority of a Guardian. I doubt mother to betray her promise so easily."

\*ROAR\* a battle cry rattled the very ground. Forces stationed inside drew blanks, "-HELP!"

"The roar of the Megni."

"The tribe died didn't it?"

"No, I hear Leviathan took a liking and made them his personal guards. If Menase's one of the Megni, I suppose we don't stand a chance. They're readying for the siege. What should we do?"

\*Clap, clap, clap,\* "-we go out and meet them."

"Mother?"

"Mother?"

"Sorry my boys, I had to make the best of the situation. Don't worry, I bring you your sister," behind her walked dark-green hair, a face always ready to sleep, a simple white dress, and a teddy in her left grip, "-you know her, don't you?"

"Vanesa?"

"Hello," she yawned, "-mother explained the situation. Hell makes me want to sleep."

"Why her?"

"Look at her symbol," said Beelzebub, "-she bears the mark of Abaddon,' she casually went past and leaned over the battlements, "-look, they have a flying beast. An evolved grosser looking cockroach, "-it's coming for us,"

Plague-ridden mist spewed, \*BARRIER\* Beelzebub conjured, "-holy mother," a speck escaped and fell on one of the soldiers, "-IT BURNS" the skin convulsed and melted off the very skeleton, "-gnarly."

"CIRCLING,"

Lilith rose her hands, \*Arts granted to those of higher power, come forth and paralyze my enemy, Medusa's curse – Petrification,\* the gorgon's snake ridden flashed, and her eyes widened and turned beasts into stone. "On my mark," she wasted no time, "-rush them!"

"YES, MY QUEEN!"

"Lian, are the paths ready for advancement?"

"Yes, my lord."

"GO, CALL FORTH THE POWER OF OUR KING!"

War cries raged on the frontlines – demons held the ground and conjured various spells to cross the moat. "-GO." The castle gates opened – faster units carried those able to cast projectile spells, they ran for the edge, made a sharp turn, and fired consecutively. The opposition replied kindly by firing their own spells – or so they thought. An ominous young girl ambled from castle gates, she yawned, and the aura of misery and diseases went about her person, she walked, her teddy crawled at her side, \*-bring forth the malady of the ages, limit their mana, purge their morale and deliver the greatest sufferance, spell name, too lazy to decide,\* a cloud rained black pebbles – those touched fell in deep slumber, "-GO, GO, GO."

"REPORT."

"Speak."

"Our frontlines are being destroyed. They have talented spellcasters. A plague's taking most of our advance troops."

"Raise the barriers immediately and retreat to the first point. Have another unit seek a different path. They don't have supplies – let's wait and watch."

"Won't it be easier to jump over the moat?"

"We tried," said the messenger, "-gravity is further increased, it pulls any who cross without permission."

"No need for fear, we'll carry on the battle as we wish."

"Understood, lord Menase."

Hours turned days, and hunger and fatigue rose to their most effective. The castle's lack of supplies, "-lady Lilith, the soldiers are rampaging through the poisoned supplies."

"MAMMON, I TOLD YOU TO BURN-"

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"I was unable to, my lady mother. There was a chance the poison grows airborne once burnt."

"Good foresight," she peered out her window, "-look at the enemy force. They number in the 1,500. You think we can win?"

"Last count, we have 150 garrisoned."



“Make that 100,” said another report, “-50 died from poison. We’ll be wiped out in a few days. Lady Lilith, what are your orders?”

“Imprison those who show signs of anguish. If it comes to the worse, we’ll eat one another.”

“Cannibalism,” they gulped, “-I’d go for anything.”

A bright flash lit the church, “-it’s fixed,” cheered the bishop, “-the portal’s ready for service. Director, are you sure?”

“Yes, there’s no other choice,” they entered, ‘-we’ve wasted four days waiting for repairs. I doubt the castle has lasted. No matter, if they’re alive, I can help.’

They crossed, “Master, what’s the plan?” red and heat covered by heavy clouds and tall cliffs, “-can we win?”

“We will,” wings sprouted, “-you head for the castle and heal the wounded. Give them these,” potions summoned, “-it’ll heal their wounds and clench the hunger.”

“What about you?”

“It’s a war,” he smiled, “-I’ll have some fun before joining.”

The last possible day came, and a sign of cannibalism spread across the dining hall. ‘Demons can’t outlast hunger like a human. They need food otherwise their power and anger deteriorate. If starved for even three days, they’ll go psychotic and kill indiscriminately,’ Asmodeus flew past enemy camp, ‘-and they were correct to starve out the castle. Please don’t be dead, please don’t be dead,’ he landed, and the castle yard drew an eerie silence. There were none present – abandoned army and stained weapons scattered about. ‘Did they leave?’ the doors rocked by the sound of the wind. Soft clicks whispered, he entered – ‘-the hallways are empty, are they gone?’

The sound of fighting pierced, “-the back,” he rushed over, ‘-a massacre,’ the backyard was covered in blood, enemies jumped from oversized bats. ‘-Seriously, a parachuting unit?’

Sword through flesh, sizzling of meat, ‘-it’s a massacre,’ some were crucified, the sight brought memories of ancient tactics, ‘-this comes from Orin, this barbaric way of fighting,’ last of the defenders die, ‘-where’s mother?’

Torn barricades, a pile of bodies led to Lilith’s quarters. He pushed the ajar door – nausea grabbed and tightened, “-Charlie?”

“Oh look, the prodigious son returns,” he loomed over Lilith’s bed, “-too bad, my darling, I’ve claimed your mother’s dignity. Nothing beats ravaging a queen,” a line of demons laughed and pointed. An unconscious Vanesa was chained to a vanity table, bodily fluid and blood ran down her legs, and her closed eyelids were bright red, ‘-my magic.’

“Told you, Asmodeus, we have more power than you’d imagine., This is Leviathan’s authority. You were too late,” he fell, ‘-mother, Vanesa...’ The bed rocked, and the vanity table slid as another pulled Vanesa’s hair, “-AHHHHHHHHHHH!” she screamed from her gut, her vocal cords shredded, “-FATHER!”

“Your father isn’t coming to help,” the demon laughed, “-we own you,” he grunted and pushed, Asmodeus’ heart sank, ‘-my f-f-f-family...’

Chapter 1100 “-he’s my favorite for a reason.”

‘Asmodeus,’ her view rocked, ‘-don’t stare at me, don’t look at me son. I’m humiliated, I was unable to save our people, I deserve the pain, I deserve the suffering. There’s no beating the truth, I screwed us when I ordered-’

Before his arrival, at the cusp of the battle. The defenders were high in spirits and strong against the coming forces. Mammon led his troops well, even going as far as to send forces outside over the moat in a surprise attack. It seemed well – to defend, one must have patience, and the patience required to hold the bloodlust and rage of comrades looking at their fallen – a strong leadership needed to take charge. They found the leadership in Lilith, her brazen attitude and sudden orders brought much randomness to the battle, and the soldiers were glad to fight. Alas, it turned wild upon the announcement of food turning sour. Turtling was the best choice as defenders have the advantage during battle. Even a hundred suffice to scare five hundred.

Chaos brewed. The attackers played mind games. They sent troops over the moat like it was nothing, a visual warning, ‘-we can invade anytime we want.’ In the game of cat and mouse, Mammon suffered a massive defeat. He’d noticed the supply lines of the attackers, and after a few days of starvation, fatigue was high – therein, he staged an operation to attack those supplies. What he didn’t know, ‘-it was a trap,’ the image burnt into memory, ‘-my men are all dead,’ he watched, a single frame atop the pile of familiar faces, ‘-the angels of death,’ he gulped, “-who are you?”

“An angel of death,” she replied, her short hair and gothic allure were quite intimidating, “-are you under orders of Igna?”

After a long pause, she flicked her scythe and licked the blood, “-under the Bringer of Death,” she echoed, “-this is a message to your leader. Give us Lilith and we’ll spare the rest.” Hell’s craggy landscape expanded behind her shoulders – the warm wind and thunder echoed, ‘-forgive me, mother, I have lost.’ Didn’t stop there either, soon as the defeat reached camp, the attackers staged their assault. Fighters were sent on demon back, they flew over, threw an orb of Absolution, and ended the battle there. What followed was the beheading of the rebel army and the torture of important prisoners.

‘I was stupid,’ Lilith clenched, ‘-I was arrogant. I should have used the Shadows; I should have called for help... my pride didn’t allow it. I’m a Guardian, and taking responsibility is one of my duties. If the other survives, I’ll happily become Leviathan’s whore,’ she gathered her strength, “-LEAVE ASMDEUS!”

‘They look promising,’ Igna hovered past the stationed camp, ‘-that should be the main camp,’ he landed, threw over the curtain guarding the entrance, and pulled Tharis, “-where’s the commander?”

A single attendant returned the sudden arrival, “-everyone’s headed into the castle. We won like two days ago.”

“Right, thank you for the kind information,” \*BANG,\* blood splattered, ‘-they won two days ago. No time to waste, if I know the demons well,’ he leaped, breaking the sound barrier and darted like a bullet, ‘-the room,’ \*CRASH,\* the wall shattered, debris flew and took the heads of a few guards. ‘Lilith,’ he

noticed the bed, whimpering to the left, ‘-Vanessa?’ and cries of his daughter, a lump in his throat locked his emotions, and the heart echoed as loudly as the gunshots from Tharis.

.....

“F-f-f-father h-h-help,” painful cries, Asmodeus was chained to a chair and forced to watch, ‘-the reality of battle, I should have been more careful. To the victor goes the spoils. Vanessa, Lilith,’ only a second had past, ‘-I’m too late to comfort your pain, however,’ he took one step, \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* pure rage and anger diffused, the mist took death’s very shape, \*Blood-Arts: Extria,\* blood burst out the demons, they fell, gasped and withered, \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* the lines decapitated those shy of Extria’ range, wind blew in his director, the hair swayed mercilessly – the bicolored pupils turned damp red, sparks of purple swirled, \*Mantia – Book of Restoration, Honzela, fifth passage, broken art be fixed, fixed art be broken, eternal cycle; creation and destruction, the levy for reality changes prospective, watcher watches, creator creates, destroyer destroys, and restorer restores, Hicht,\* Lilith and Vanessa’s wounds healed, as for the mental scars... no one could say, “-Asmodeus,” he stood at the door, “-take them to the Academy,” he placed his hands on the prince’s shoulder, \*-unseal thine strength, may the shadows welcome thee, Limit Breaker.\*

“Master...”

“I know,” he ambled forward, “-do not turn back – tis time they realize who they’re messing with,” a chilling bloodlust followed his move – to see Vanessa be harmed, not even the strongest would stomach the thought of their offspring being abused.

“WHO GOES THER-” clean decapitation, heads rolled, Orenmir’s unsatiated thirst screamed like a banshee, “-GOT YOU,” those fast to get past the sword were thrown straight through the thick walls. The further Igna walked, the fiercer grew his glare – it was over, they’d awakened a part that’d remain dormant for decades; Staxius’ blood-lust.

“Stop him,” Lilith gasped, “-master will self-destruct...”

“No,” Asmodeus held them tightly, “-we’re leaving. There’s no way we can stop his rampage,” even a kilometer away, ‘-I can feel master’s ire. He’s going to take everything... I watched my mother and sister get defiled... I didn’t have the strength to protect, which does not give me the right to join in the offensive. I failed,’ \*Teleportation.\*

“He’s come,” resounded loudly, “-as Artanos predicted. Take his loved ones and the man will reveal himself,” the courtyard’s scale amplified, or so it seemed, the one in control sat with legs crossed over one of the walls, “-welcome to my domain,” he winked, \*Realm Expansion – Arena: Coliseum,\* hell’s reddish, the mars-like landscape had blue and white cover the sky. The castle disappeared as did the bodies of fallen fighters. The oval-shaped coliseum’s tall walls cast shadows upon the battlegrounds. Humanoid, as well as non-humane outlines, broke the silhouette, “-to the winner goes the spoils,” the leader laughed, “-the name’s Menase, member of the Megni tribe,” Igna vanished, the afterimage took the viewers by shock – the representation of death suddenly appeared with sword drawn and a paralyzing intent of harm.

“Leader!” a few soldiers sacrificed their bodies and leaped.

“Don’t make me laugh,” said Igna, the demons laid with heads off their torso, “-no one here has the power to rival my strength,” he held the sword’s tip at Menase’s throat, “-playing with my prey, enjoying the hunt... no anymore.”

“MENASE!”

\*Barrier,\*

‘-how did he see me?’ the concealment spell shattered; Charlie was stuck in place with a spear inch from Igna’s back, “-HOW DID YOU?”

“Don’t bother,” he pulled out Tharis and fired without so much glancing over the shoulder, ‘-my shoulder,’ the attacker fell with hands on the wound.

“Too bad,” the area shifted, Igna stood in the middle, “-should have taken the chance when you had it, Igna. Don’t talk to your opponent, you foul creature. Tis a place for warriors, not murderous demons. I thought we could have a fair match, seems like I don’t need to hold back against a coward,” he rose his hands, “-may you suffer the death of a thousand nails,” soldiers materialized on the vacant seats, they wore armor and were fully equipped for war. Hundred turn a thousand, counting amongst the ranks were few mid-tier demons, ‘-the diversity of strength – that’s their plan. I guess Leviathan has a good head on his shoulder,’ Igna lowered his sword and fixed the sky.

“Giving up?” Menase laughed, “-how pathetic!”

\*Last passage, Chapter three of the book of Ortious’s tale, “-as the wind swept the ocean, as the great wave grunted over the horizon. Ortious raises his head to the god of the sea. Ortious, a man of humble means, a man of weak stature, faces the waves head-on. An unyielding spirit, he glares and screams – the waves crash; rending asunder his home and family. The weak Ortious weeps; deeper darkness corrodes. An unyielding spirit stung and tainted – betrayal at the hand of his god, Persee. The betrayed Ortious stand blessed to never die by the sea’s wrath, before what little remained, nothing. The sea reclaimed what was hers – settlements washed anew. Thus, Ortious calls the devil, not the gods, for the gods have stolen his precious,\*

“What is he mumbling?”

“I don’t know,” the army marched, and the thickening cloud of violence approached.

Igna lowered his gaze, “-the devil asks, ‘-what doth thee offer?’ Ortious replies, ‘-hell,’ mana expelled, the realm’s temperature lowered, \*-thus, the devil delivers Ortious’s request, and so, as Ortious grants his soul, the Devil makes it known – those who oppose the gods have a place within his heart, and for their desires, all realm shall invoke his ire,\* he smiled at Menase, \*Realm Dispersion: Forced Abdication,\* the title of ruler changed, Menase’ influence dwindled – crack marred the skyscape, \*Souls of the dead, thee who’ve sworn to serve me in life and death, come to my side. Blood-Arts: Ghouls Requiem\* dark purple taint replaced the arena grounds, tentacles halted the fighters’ advance, and an army of undead fighters crawled into existence.

“My influence, I can’t feel it. Charlie, Charlie,” he looked to his side, no one, “-Charlie?”

‘Realm Dispersion, forced abdication,’ the arch-demon ran, ‘-Alfred, it’s the cursed King. He’s the founder of the Aapith nation. The whole realm is his, there’s no one above that man’s authority.

Leviathan was wise to be cautious. This is bad – Alfred’s coming to power means the kings and council of demons are at risk. I have to warn them... Menase, I wish you luck.’

A calming breeze settled. The smell of iron, the faint fragrance of ash, “-mercy, please,” Igna stood with Menase’ head under his shoe, “-mercy you say,” he brought a bloodied Orenmir to the man’s face, “-my daughter begged for mercy, she cried and suffered. Your men didn’t listen, and now, when I return for payback, you’ve gone silent and looked for salvation? You will suffer, you will die a painful death, and you will remain in limbo not knowing the truth behind why you did what you did. Such is the treatment of those who oppose me, your soul is mine,” he stabbed, \*I command thee whomst I’ve defeated, I curse thee, soul, to be bound to mine; Box of Soul – Soulfeld,\* Menase bled from the neck, ‘I can’t breathe, my life, it’s fading,’ all the while gasping for air.

\*Once living now dead. O’ thee who’ve lost thine life to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghoul Revival.\*

\*Living or dead, I invite all to the realm of absurdity, serve me and my companions, and be one of a greater family. Forgo the past and look towards the future, one in which thou art be immortal and without regret. Box of Soul: Shadow Realm Transmigration.\*

The outlines turned ashes; “-I feel empty. I forced them into my puppet army. They’ll live like normal people in the Shadow Realm, even those who did my daughter and Lilith’s bad. It doesn’t matter, the souls will be crushed and remolded, demons or not, they’ll die and serve me.” \*Realm Retraction: Dispersion.\* blue turned red – arena into a castle, a haunted one.

Muffled footsteps crossed the courtyard, “-Igna Haggard, Heir to the Death Reaper.”

“Why so formal?” he spun, “-an angel of hell. Are you here to deliver me from my duties?”

“No. I come on behalf of an acquaintance. Here’s your son,” she threw Mammon, “-beware, Igna Haggard, Lord Death doesn’t take lightly to failures. If you wish to repay his kindness, make certain you carry his will to thy destination.”

“What’s your name?”

“It doesn’t matter,” she left, ‘-it’s him,’ and reappeared in the Hall of Rebirth, “-Lord Death, I did it.”

“Good on you, Jessica. You met him?”

“Yeah,” the fa?ade crumbled, “-he’s just like Staxius. My lord, are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure,” he sipped, “-he’s my favorite for a reason.”