

Death Magic 1101

Chapter 1101 Who's to blame, who's responsible?

"An Angel of Death," the never-changing sight settled, 'I fear my own strength. The lust, the fulfillment of taking another's life. It felt good, I loved it, every bit of it. I've cautiously navigated between the multiple personas until now, Alfred, Staxius, and Igna, I'm all three of them and they're part of me. I understand that I know what needs to be done, however, why didn't I feel sadness or anguish... I saw my daughter and Lilith be defiled. I saw Asmodeus on his knees before their woe, why did a demon feel sadness whilst I, the one who's supposed to be in charge, their protector, did not feel anything? Staxius, your influence on the way we view adversaries has turned my anger into pure lust for murder. There's no greater sense of justice in this world – I love the world, I love the inhabitants... what are my feelings, what is it I truly desire? Am I simply a pawn to be used by Origin? What is the purpose of these questions... have I fallen?"

"Master..."

"Mammon?"

"Master..." gasped the Prince, "-you're alive, I'm glad."

Time skipped, between the treatment of the injured and the forsaking of Lilith's castle, a few days went by. Day rose over Ragno, the orangish-pink sun covered the academy. Normality regained the populous – with great stewardship, Igna led the construction and provided, the duties of being Director were passed to Skeptor, per Academy tradition. A ray escaped through the room's blinders, landing on Igna's visage with a soft touch. Faint snores and breathing came from the right as well as the left, 'right,' consciousness regained, 'why did I dream of home?' A turn right, '-Vanessa,' he reached and patted her head, '-she's been petrified ever since the incident. I said I'd erase the memories, but she refused.'

The events, her frustration, were still vivid, "Why won't you consider memory removal?" Her wounds were fresh, and her clothes – were a simple hospital gown.

"Because," vacant pupils turned to him, "-because I can't forget the pain. Pops, you were late... I cried and cried, I thought you'd come, but you never did. They did horrible things, they defiled... I couldn't use a single spell, I was neutered..."

"More the reason for me to heal the wounds,"

"No," she slapped his hands as he got closer, "-father, I'm sorry. Please leave me alone!" Since then, Vanessa hasn't been the same. She'd changed. To the left laid Lilith with open mouth and drool, '-so much for being a lady,' he casually paused and caressed her cheeks, '-Lilith exploded with rage.'

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"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Do I look okay? Those assholes dared touch me. They dared touch me, a queen! I will find and castrate them, I swear this on my good name. Bring them before me, IGNA, DO AS I SAY!"

"Lilith, sorry for being the bringer of bad news... I've already killed them."

“WHAT?”

“Comes with the territory.”

“Whatever,” she closed herself in the shower and didn’t exit until the following day. All and all, the events stacked to their current position. ‘Vanesa feels lonely and insecure about the ordeal. Lilith feels rage and anger. Who’s to blame, who’s responsible? Me, Leviathan, or somebody else?’

Knock, knock,

“A minute,” he stepped out of bed, the outside cacophony of waking town pulsed, “-what’s the matter?” he answered.

“Good morning, Director.”

“Good morning, Luci, is something the matter?”

“May we speak in private?”

“Sure.”

A spiraling staircase built near the kitchen climbed to the attic, from there, through a small opening, one could climb out and onto the sloped roof. The view over the town from there was modest, aside from the immediate paths below, the main point of attraction would be the other manors, their adjacent gardens, and the academy towards the north. Such was life in the inner city. As for the noise – a glance showed workers and travelers.

“There you are, director,” she offered a cup of coffee.

“Thank you,” he accepted the gesture, ‘-I can see my reflection. A darkened variant, like the shadows of the people I’ve killed circling my presence.’

“Director?”

“Pardon me,” he sipped, “-tell me, what’s the matter?”

“As your assistant, there are more responsibilities you should know. Draebala, like gods and demons, Ragno has their own property and land in said realm. We’re representatives of the Aapith Nation, therefore, the land falls under our jurisdiction. Since the arrival of Artanos and his army – not to mention the support from Zeus, our army, and I use the term our as a vague representation of the other king’s force, have been taken by surprise. We’re losing place, and the battles intensified. Some of Ragno’s vassals are stressed, they wish to know your standing on the war. Some may consider turning coat, especially the nobles, who I must say, were given to us by Leviathan as a sign of goodwill.”

“And, the other?”

“About my lady the Queen and lady Vanesa, what do you plan for them, director?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t taken their side yet.”

“Suppose it’s time,” she finished her drink and looked forward, “-no time to rest for a teacher. Also, was it wise to put Skeptor in charge?”

“He’ll do fine, I mean, the academy was run by him long before I arrived?”

“I guess you’re right, Director.”

‘And I find myself at a crossroads. Do I prioritize building a base or going on the offensive? If what she says is true, the demons will be surrounded by Gods and Titans. They have the tome of Venera. I can’t seem to escape intrigued, it loves me much. What to do,’ he lit a cigarette, and a flying silhouette went past, ‘-is that?’ wings sprouted, he flapped and appeared instantly, “-WHAT THE!” cried the unsuspecting demoness, “-ARE YOU CRAZY?” she lashed.

“Shut up,” he held the lady by the nape like a cat holding her kitten, and flew back to the manor, “-Ereena,.”

They landed, she pushed his hand and frantically did her hair, “-man, I was ready for school... why did you-”

“I see you’ve changed your outfit.”

“Yeah, well, you did say my outfit was too avant-garde.”

“No, what I implied was wearing a bikini as armor is stupid. You’re neither light nor impervious to damage, moreover, there’s nothing to see-”

“Oh please,” she pinched his cheeks, “-tell me, Igna, what do you want?”

‘Ereena,’ he scanned, she flaunted her long black hair over her pale skin. Ereena, despite the title of Lucifer’s whore, was a very dignified lady, she came across as one when they first met. ‘I remember traveling to Alpha on behalf of Hidros, she greeted our diplomatic envoys with such grace and finesse one of my guards fell head over heels. We spoke and she seemed amiable, her way of speaking reminded me of Scifer... a lady from another world, but no, I was misguided. I thought of her as a friend, someone I subconsciously laughed with... didn’t surprise me when she turned out to be the enemy,’

“Igna, you there?”

“My bad,” her rounded nose and pink lips straightened.

“Shall we catch up?” he leaped off the roof.

“Sure,” she followed, the bystanders watched in awe, ‘-who are they?’

They walked, taking the beautifully clean bricked roads and refined shops towards the academy, “-the town sure seems peaceful. You know, after the whole battle?”

“Ereena,” he purposefully slowed the pace, “-you know why Artanos attacked, don’t you?”

“Excuse me?”

“Artanos and Zeus have allied. They decided on Ragno – the pieces make sense. You’re the reason why they attacked. Before Zeus, the alliance between them relied on a single purpose, the seek the power of alteration. You gained the power to change the past and killed Achilles. I can surmise from that since there haven’t been more occurrences of the past changing – the power must have been locked by

Lucifer. He might come off as arrogant and selfish, add egoist in the mix too... the man was not a fool. He knew the echoes the power could have if left unsupervised."

"Astute as Lucifer said."

"Am I wrong?"

"No, all you said is true," they stopped in front of a shop, "-the power to change the past isn't easily acquired. We had to dig deep and used Miira's soul essence to venture even once through the annals of time. Achilles' death was an unfortunate accident. Think of it like a landing error. The small change resounded throughout history – even the stories pertaining to Achilles' legends were altered. This, of course, didn't stand well with the Olympians, to see one of their fabled heroes be treated so. We were pressured into halting the research, and Zeus was against it at first... with your awakening, they're desperate to have an ace to change the course of history. Take you out or eliminate the very birth of Alfred, who knows what'll come of it."

"Miira's in heaven?"

"I can't say. Last time we met, she had gathered allies throughout the heavenly realm."

"What about her soul essence?"

"To activate the tome of past, present, and future – the necessary energy is required, and thus, after trial and error, the best candidate turned out to be a servant of Kronos. As for why they attacked, we hold the tome. Lucifer asked me to destroy-

"You couldn't destroy it. Let me guess, if I didn't show when I did, you'd have traded the tomes for peace?"

"Can't fault a person for trying. It's our ace, we must keep it close. I don't care about heaven or their crap, my focus has only been on him. And now that he's gone, I have to continue his dream. Ragno will be a haven for angels and demons alike. I won't let them bully us, I won't."

They passed a fountain, Igna took one step and sat on the edge, "-don't you resent me for killing Lucifer?"

"No," she smiled, "-I have the gift of after-sight. I can sense Lucifer and the countless souls you carry, Igna. There's a destination you're headed towards, and they're right behind you. Take them to the final end, take them to their salvation, such is the duty of the Death Reaper. To guide, they hold the lantern for moths to flock – to lead. Or so Lucifer told me."

"Ereena," he lit another cigarette, "-care to join my faction?"

"Sorry?"

"Must I repeat myself?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Will you join the Shadows?"

“Why would I? I’m content being here,” she looked at the academy, “-you have stronger allies waiting home. I’m a relic of the past, I don’t think I’ll be able to move past my lover’s death. I’ll be a burden, I know myself all too well.”

“Well,” he stood, “-what about helping the town flourish?”

“Pardon?”

“Do I have to spell out everything?” he exhaled and stepped away, the fountain spewed water in a curve, “-you’re a diplomat, the responsibility of handling internal affairs. I need to appoint office members to aid in the development of Ragno. War will come again, we need to prepare.”

“Oh right,” she held her mouth, “-you’re the King of Hidros, the one who has Orin in his palm. How powerful are the Haggards nowadays?”

“We control a little over three-thirds of the world.”

“Why would you leave a place where the authority is absolute in favor of here, a place where none realize thy true potential?”

He looked with a mischievous smile, “-because I felt like it.”

‘The king of Hidros... otherwise known as the Whimsical Monarch. With him by our side, I think we can win. Lucifer, should I trust this man? Should I entrust your will to him – what would you do in my place... Ragno, Lucifer’s realm, for their sakes, I’ll do it.’

“Ereena,” he grabbed her shoulders, “-you do what you want, don’t misunderstand, I care for freedom of choice. Think about my offer, and if you don’t accept, it’s fine. I’ll only request you not turn over the tomes. Tis thy responsibility, Lucifer had faith, therefore, so shall I.”

Chapter 1102 Memphe

‘Conjuration here, regeneration there,’ a swipe of the brow, ‘-the whole restoration gig isn’t so hard,’ the clock read 15:40, the conversation shared with Ereena earlier had closed as many doors as it opened. ‘She’s got the tomes of control. They’ve hidden it within Ragno, and so, it’s half of the puzzle. They used Miira – I’ve inherited the sickle, it’s plausible for me to control. Depending on the situation, best not to affect the past. They were defeated and know of my stance. I doubt they’ll launch another attack so soon. We must rally the Aapith Nation, diplomacy in hell will be tough – I doubt the Haggard way of negotiations will affect demons. I wonder if there’s another way of attack,’ he leaned over a magical staff, one half-shaped with an orb and the other like a mop – Igna cleaned and rebuilt, two in one, the working staff was very estranged.

“Don’t you think it’s weird?”

“The director using a mop?”

“I hear the director was a king from another world. I guess the monarchy there do their household chores.”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha.”

“Don’t be so glib.”

“Ah yes,” the crowd of three turned, “-the inheritor of righteousness. How goes it, dearest Mempo.”

“My family’s been responsible for this town’s leadership for decades, I won’t stand by and let it go to waste.”

“Well, Mempo, better get to cleaning,” echoed another, “-as thine monarch hath set example.”

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“Whatever do you mean,” narrowed the classily dressed noble demoness.

“Look outside,” the men pointed, snarling with their firm horns and darker complexion.

‘What in the world?’ she removed her glasses, ‘-is that the Director?’ and she was right. The view from one of the windows giving onto the town-center showed the Director in a worker’s uniform cleaning a restricted monolith. ‘Why is he?’ she forced the window and leaped, her angelic light blue wings fluttered, like an autumn breeze – she landed and scurried.

“Oh-oh. I fear for the Director, none escapes the noble lady’s preaching.”

“Yeah, well, we had fun,” the pleasantries paused, “-we should do our part.”

“Monarch or not, he’s the new director – the man saved my kids. I have to repay the favor.”

“We sure love to tease, don’t we?”

“HA-HA-HA-HA.”

‘-Plan of attack,’ the body subconsciously cleaned, left and right gestures expertly lifted shattered bits into their place of rest. The monolith grew once more to oversee the town square, and the gardens accompanying its beauty were charred, such disaster will live until nature fixes itself, ‘-if not diplomacy, what can I do?’ he mauled and mauled, a figure struck the concentration, “-you there,” it echoed, he watched, dark-brown hair, a jeweled diadem held her hair which parted down the middle, her nose was sharp and dignified, her lips pressed, emphasizing the face’s natural structure – her long eyebrows were bold and neat, ‘-a crest of nobility?’ he caught onto her necklace, “...”

“Excuse me?” she stepped forward, “-I’m speaking to you.”

Igna casually leaned over his mop and crossed his foot, ‘-I sense trouble,’ as such, he returned her shouts with a simple empty stare.

“Director,” her fist clenched, “-why aren’t you speaking?”

He spun and snapped, the monolith’s cracks restored, “-a job well done.”

“Director,’ she grabbed his shoulder, “-are you mocking me?”

“No,” he shrugged the hold, “-my intention was never to mock you,” he said over the shoulder, “-rather, it was to ignore you completely,” he raised the staff and moved into the worker’s quarters.

‘Ignore me?’ her mind emptied for a second, ‘-how could he...’

Workers of various races waved, “-done for the day?” said some wiping their sweat.

“Yeah,” he casually returned, “-I’ll leave the rest in Ron’s capable hand,” to which, the foreman tipped his head, “-we appreciate the help, director. Without it, I doubt we’d have finished so early.”

“No bother, trust me,” with a wave, he entered the private quarters, ‘-she’s stuck in place, suppose getting flat-out ignored is new,’ he grabbed a basket, threw the dirtied clothes, and made his way to the showers. One could forsake the idea of privacy, demons bearing their hides and muscular outlines as opposed to the director, a man of pale complexion, a host to many ancient writings and symbols upon his canvas-like skin. ‘The last day of work,’ he finished and hastily dressed in better clothes, ‘-a crowd?’

The cafeteria slowed in motion, “-who’s the chick?”

“No clue, looks like a noble.”

“Don’t look ‘em in the eyes. They’re famed for taking anger on the common people.”

“You think she’s looking for a plaything?”

“Hey, sign up – if you do, it’s the easy life.”

“As if I’d let myself to a woman like that, my wife’s far sexier.”

“Yeah, like a barrel,” one of the adjacent groups laughed loudly – the woman kept her stern gaze, scanning from face to face until a whiff of white hair caught her nostrils, “-DIRECTOR!” she reappeared behind the crowd, ‘-wait, was he not?’ white-hair reappeared outside and headed away. ‘-I’m not giving up,’ she furrowed her brows and vaulted out, ‘-huh?’ a squishy sensation, ‘-don’t tell me,’ she lowered her gaze, ‘-manure... but there’s no garden here...’ she bit her lips and glared, Igna returned her gaze with a wink and a patronizing wave.

Time would eventually reach 19:00, and Lilith and Vanesa’s mental and physical health was most important. A team of medics was called from the Shadows, the rented manor – not too flashy and equipped with a modest lawn wherein a small cabin was erected for experimental medicines and experiments. ‘Pops...’

“Yes, Vanesa?”

“Why are you trying to erase my memories...”

“Because it’s best to forget sometimes,” he patted her head, “-then again, you seem to have recovered. You’re not okay, don’t lie to me.”

“I guess not,” her warm head rested on his shoulder, “-pops, I don’t need medicine. Lilith made me Sloth, I’m Abaddon... a prince of Hell.”

“Are you okay with that?”

“If it’s to help pops, then I’m fine with me,” her body suddenly tensed, “-AHHH, MY HEAD!”

‘Another attack,’ he quickly flipped and placed her onto the makeshift bed, ‘-let’s see if it works,’ he jammed a syringe into her arms and clapped – blank scrolls rose, ‘-I need to erase her pain, even if she

remembers the images, the feeling, I need to remove the emotion hold it might have. The images will be blurry, I'll have her forget, there's no way I'll have her suffer.'

By the Order of the Adjudicator, open the gates of hidden truths, Adjudicator's Call – Mind Rend, '-half of my consciousness slips into her mind,' the cabin's interior disintegrated, the very fabric of reality disentangled and gave birth to flash images of Vanesa's memoirs, '-it's all me and food. She's lived- no don't get entangled, I need to focus,' he caught onto the particular day, '-there,' *Mantia – Untitled Tome VI, Desona, last passage. The mind affects reality, reality affects the mind. The world moves at one's perception, and one perception is defined by the psyche, to define the truth from falsehood, to shun deception from right – reality must disappear, for only where nothing reigns will the truth of the soul resonate; Impression.*

Gasp, an invisible hand pulled, '-I made it,' he gasped and fell, '-so much information's hard to process. My brain is about to explode, it hurts...' mystical shadows disappeared, '-the hand of the lamented. Thank you, Alfred.' Vanesa's sudden movements eased, and her temperature settled, '-she'll need some time to recover. Might have overdone it with the stabilizer,' the cabin opened, '-fresh air at last,' he turned and dropped onto the grass, '-the night here isn't so bad. A dance between blue and red, a fierce battle where purple is born.'

Muffled footsteps ambled, "-master."

"Asmodeus?"

"There's someone at the gates. Will you answer?"

"In a minute, we might as well have the noblewoman wait. Also, is Mammon doing, okay?"

"I think so," he held a pessimistic mien, "-listen, master, I apologize about Sathanas--"

"Apologizes won't bring answers. I have a few people looking for information. Lilith would know if one of her children died. Don't tire yourself with things that you can't change. There's no need to blame, tis a fickle and convoluted game. Could you watch over Vanesa? I'll have dinner ready in a few minutes."

"Understood, as for the lady?"

"Send someone."

Maids cleaned as did the attendants-Asmodeus's harem sure comes in handy,' of which most were excellent retainers. 'Too bad they can't cook,' he stepped into the kitchen, firmed a bandana around the head, and got to work. The days when he trained alongside the chefs in Orin were yet lost to him – an acquired skill lasts forever.

'How dare he make me wait!'

The gates parted, "Lady Memphe," said a beautiful attendant, "-our master welcomes you to our estate. Please, follow me."

There were no fighting Igna's whims. Memphe was forced into the dining hall and witnessed Igna's cooking. They ate silently, shared a few conversation topics, and confidently held their pose.

"A good meal like always. Igna, come to my chambers later, we need to talk."

“I’ll take care of Vanesa, master,” said Asmodeus, “-as for my people-”

“I’ve made plenty, fear not.”

Mammon excused himself, a big vacantness opened into the dining hall, “-tell me, how did you like the food?”

“Very scrumptious, you must have a very talented chef.”

“Ah yes, I prepared the meal. Shall we continue the conversation in my study?” the long chase had finally ended – tiredness filled the arms and legs. Igna poured himself a drink, she refused, “-director, we must talk.”

“Sure, what is on your mind, Memphe.”

‘Wait, he’s reasonable? No, I don’t believe a man who cooks, cleans, and does household chores is fit to be the leader of Ragno,’

“Perhaps the question is whether I’m fit to rule?”

“...”

“Looking at the expression, I’m right. Memphe, you’re a daughter of nobility, a lady from the household of Djeant, Skeptor of the East is your relative if I’m not mistaken. Your family, more specifically, your father, was a close attendant to lord Lucifer, they ruled Ragno. Alas, he was killed in a recent battle. I hear Lucifer placed great trust in him – however, influential as your family might have been, you’re the current head, and as such, are not entitled to his fame or prestige. Tis custom for a new head of a noble house within the Aapith nation to strike out for glory to make his or her claim legit. Such is the way the demons operate.”

“Yes, you’re right. Director, I’m here to ask for you to step down from the position. I heard great things from the general populous... the nobility isn’t pleased. You’ve antagonized one of the arch-demons and have made yourself open to their crosshairs. I came to see thy strength, director, I’m sadly disappointed. A man who’d spend his time doing useless chores is not suited for a leading position. How you act reflects on us, as the position of Director is associated with nobility, the academics. You must surely see how the reputation-”

“Oh please,” he interjected, “-I’ve heard the lecture of reputation and legitimacy a thousand times. I hail from Orin where I ruled as king, I might as well have been crowned Emperor if I wished. I won’t stand and have my character be attacked by a bastard. Your father had an affair with lady Ereena, she told me all about how she gave birth and hid the truth from Lucifer. You, out of all the people, aren’t qualified to lecture me on my bloodline or what I might accomplish. As a resident of the demon realm, have you not realized who was present?”

“No?”

“Queen of Demons, Lilith. Princes of Hell, Asmodeus, Mammon, Beelzebub and Abaddon. There are more who weren’t able to join us today. Surely,” he sipped, “-the question of my legitimacy is resolved with who I have in my household, yes?”

“...”

"The silence is telling," he lit a cigarette, "-I won't bother changing your point of view, Memphe. Do as you please," he stood, "-this meeting is over. I was right to ignore it. Good bye."

Chapter 1103 The Jury

"I have news."

"..."

"This concerns the future of Ragno."

"I'm waiting."

"Director, a ruler can be defined variously. I apologize for my behavior, it was unbecoming of a lady of nobility. You're correct about my lineage. I'm a halfling, the product of a love affair."

"The news?"

"I see I have made a bad impression. Director," she breathed, a moment of thought to gather herself, "-the demon academy has joined Leviathan's faction."

"Where did you get said information?"

"Do not underestimate the power of a noble's network. I have it on good authority. Such be the reason for my visit. I sincerely apologize for my behavior, it was very unbecoming, I'll say so again."

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'They join Leviathan's faction. Trouble,' he stood beside the door, '-my presumption of her persona was wrong. She was testing me, so she'd like me to believe. I need to verify her information, if true, it's trouble. The academy's built at the farthest edge, and our sole point of contact is the trade route that goes through the northeast. It will depend on what strategy... I've yet to know the reason behind the attack on Lilith's castle. They can be acting alone or under orders, I rather they work on a whim. If it's for a greater picture, we won't have time to rest before Artanos launches another strike.'

"Director?"

"I appreciate the information, Memphe. Where do you stand?"

"As head of my family, I won't stand on either side, not just yet. Observation before action, I shall see who deserves my family's support."

"Sitting on the fence, how fitting. Takes care of that, see you around, Memphe," the grand gate opened, and she found herself outside on the pavement with the wind brushing against her visage, '-director,' a faded grunt escaped.

The family gathered in the lounge, "-Lilith and princes of hell. The time is nigh for the truth to be known, *Genesis of the purge, absolution of the end, the cycle of creation and destruction turns, the cogs locks, and the gate shudders. Sinners have done wrong justice, thus opening the last gate towards forgiveness, arise for the Adjudicator takes his seat, Oriantia; Hall of Justice – Expansion.* Wind, somber sky, they reappeared on a circular platform placed high for they could see the horizon and half of the mountains. Twelve seats placed at the hourly markers on a clock stood dirtily, rain and decay took a toll on the

structures – remnants of decadent statues carved out of pillars clambered to stand. Some had their arms cracked, others headless – the roof was nowhere to be seen. The twelve-hour mark faced north, and there, a bigger throne haunted the view.

“Are we at a tribunal?” narrowed Beelzebub, “-hey mother, where are we?”

With a snap of the finger, the somber sky changed to one bright and calm – the deceptively frigid and horrifying display displaced for solace.

“Here,” said a powerful voice, “-welcome to Oriantia, Princes of Hell, Queen of Demons. We’re inside the Adjudicator’s domain, my realm,” Igna crossed one leg and glanced sideways from the main throne, a translucent figure ambled, he transformed into a generic-looking young man and soon placed himself on the 11th-hour seat, “-greetings, Lilith, Asmodeus, Mammon, Beelzebub, and sweet Vanesa. My name’s Igna Haggard, though, it’s irrelevant – I go by another title,” a gust blew, “-Origin.”

They switched focus from Igna and Origin, “-Origin will explain the situation.”

“I’m tired,” Vanesa did as Vanesa would. She crawled up Igna’s lap and napped. Her peaceful expression could but take Origin’s affection, “-please, have a seat everyone,” he summoned a lovely cushion, “-and how about we discuss said matter within the estate,” with a clap, Origin teleported them to a grand castle surrounded by a bustling city and its giant walls. The sheer scale was twice that of Lucifer’s Academy by comparison. Houses, buildings, and roads were clean and immaculate – the looming sensation of loneliness and solitude hung like a dark cloud. The silence was piercing. The tribunal, as Beelzebub so kindly put it, sharpened in the distance; a massive tower that seemingly rose from the ground and clawed into the heavens. Tea was served, and they enjoyed the nice weather in a well-kept garden. The lax environment allowed Origin to deliver the current state of events. Lilith and Asmodeus were most concerned, as opposed to the others. “-As such, the Adjudicator has come to life to make the gods seek forgiveness. We will end reality as it stands and rebirth a new world where magic and otherworldly beings will not stand – this will allow for reality a longer life span without our intervention. To complete our goals,” he looked at Igna, “-sacrifices will be made. I can’t guarantee anyone’s safety – only the adjudicator can pass from one reality to another.”

“Like Origin said,” he took over, “-Asmodeus, Lilith, you saw what the world can become. There are fractures and cracks all over, domains and realms shattering due to stress – the heavenly faction won’t stop for I’m the enemy of existence. The tribunal and the twelve seats are numbered, they’re the jury. Of course,” he opposed Origin’s stare, “-if reality can be mended, if, and only if there is a way to resolve the issue – I suppose there won’t be the need for destruction.”

Origin surprisingly loved the idea, the big genuine smile, and relieved expression, “-if we can revert the changes – we might see the birth of a stable age. I’ll be grateful to see said age come to fruition. I have lived countless lives, the one Igna and the Haggard share are the most fun I’ve ever had. It’s sad to see all that work go to waste. No matter what, saving a work of art in a burning building is tantamount to one’s own death. Even if the building crumbles to ashes, the adjacent buildings will remain.”

“I see,” echoed Lilith, she crossed her regard with Asmodeus, “-there’s no ultimatum, yes?”

“Depends,” Origin returned, “-if what Igna’s suggested is to be enacted, then I suppose we must act in haste. The lesser the damage, the easier it’ll be to sustain and gradually rebuild depending on the

method we ought to create. I iterate once more, the possibility of remending reality is imperceivable, and not even improbably, I'd say impossible."

"Making the impossible possible is a Haggard creed," said Asmodeus, "-why were we brought here, master?"

"You are astute as always," he gently caressed Vanesa's hair, "-the council of Juries, I want the Princes of hell to join me in my conquest. I've tried and tried again, but the matter won't end, even if I'm overwhelmingly powerful, there is so much one of me can do. Staxius created the Shadows as a home for his allies, the creation of a Realm that one can say is fair and just. The monster army Scifer cultivation has yet been put to the battlefield and so has the puppet army. They're cards I'd rather not resort to – war is a fickle thing, and when we'll call upon those forces, their daily lives will be distraught. The argument of it being their purpose can be made, however, as the Watcher of the Shadow Realm, I rather let them live."

"Then what?"

"Instead of them, I will use the art of necromancy. Turn the enemy into slaves and have them fight the war for us. It's going smoothly, I have made preparations. As for additional help – the gods and demons who have taken shelter will be called to duty. The battlefield of gods and demons is one reserved for the entity of said rank."

"Igna," narrowed Lilith, "-are you going soft on us?"

"Pardon?"

"No, it's just. I don't remember you being so kind towards your own people. I remember a time when it'll be nothing for you to sacrifice thousands of lives for the sake of a single person."

"I don't argue that," he exhaled.

"Master, are you asking for us to join the jury?"

"Precisely."

"Then I, Beelzebub, Prince of Envy, shall kindly accept thy offer, dearest father."

"Mammon, Prince of Greed, accepts the position."

"Vanesa, Princess of Sloth, Aedric Mistress of Plague and Disease, accepts Pops invitation," she gently poked his cheeks and drifted into another slumber.

Asmodeus and Lilith were yet convinced, '-becoming a juror in the Adjudicator's council all for the sake of ending everything. I love my life and I love my harem... what to do. Should I join father or go against him, who do I trust the most?' memories of Vanesa and Lilith struck, '-they haunted my family, they made them suffer... how can I forget, did the peaceful garden take away the truth behind this meeting. They have to pay, they will pay, such is my conviction – I'm a prince of hell,' he firmed the stance and knelt, "-Asmodeus, Prince of Lust, graciously accepts the offer, father."

“What sort of mother would I be if I didn’t join my lovely children? Queen of Demon, Lilith, comes to the rescue,” she playfully caressed Igna’s cheeks and winked, “-you owe me quite a bit, Igna. When the devil knocks,” she leaned, “-let him in,” and whispered.

He stood, *-by the authority of the Adjudicator, I grant thee the power of the Jury,* different symbols of power burnt into their arms. Asmodeus, I, Mammon, II, Beelzebub, III, Vanesa, IV and Lilith, X. “As such, the domain of the Adjudicator is open to your whims. Do as you please here, the land is vast.”

“I feel stronger,” Asmodeus commented, “-what are the advantages of this power?”

“it depends on the user,” said Origin, “-aside from taking your standing from demon to that of a Juror, your rank surpasses that of Gods and enters the realms of the untouchable. The main advantage I’d say is invulnerability, not to be confused with immortality – as a being of a higher standard, no gods nor demons will be able to definitely kill you. You’ll get wounded, have your arm shot off or beheaded, the core will always return you to your state, and in case of the damage taking more than an hour to fix, you’ll be reincarnated here.”

“If I understand,” Mammon took a step, “-our souls are preserved here?”

“Not preserved, I’ll say linked.”

“Cool,” he yawned, “-master, do we have duties?”

“Yes, there are quite a few things to take care of. Sathanas is missing, we need to see if the other kings are willing to negotiate and be ready for the next attack from the heavenly realm. I’ll see to gathering more allies.”

“Leave the kings of hell to me,” said Lilith, “-I’ll need a place at the academy.”

“We want to join the academy,” echoed the children, “-father, please?”

‘Switching from master to father. I suppose they’ve never experienced academy life. They’ll be active in Ragno’s protection. Good, this works out perfectly.’

Puppy-dog eyes begged to join the academy, “-you win,” he exhaled a sigh of defeat ‘-long as the memories of the attack are gone, I don’t care what they do.’

“You also can willingly come and go. Don’t worry about keeping it safe, no one can enter lest the Adjudicator or the jurors give permission.”

“Seems we are all on the same page,” Igna looked at Origin, the latter motioned a stopping gesture, “-before you leave, I’d like to show you something,” they went along the garden, climbed into the castle, and were led to a particular chamber – the highly ornamented corridors put the Rosepire castle to shame, “-here we are,” he pushed a block, “-the Adjudicator’s war room. There are many relics and artifacts in the treasury – most are unusable lest the weapon or gear allows so,” the envy strayed, ‘-power weapons and gear,’ they gushed at the thought, “-focus here,” said Origin, an empty desk stood in the middle, “-please gather and hold our your hand,”

“Verification complete,” it said, “-welcome to the war room, my lord.”

‘Wait a minute,’ he looked at Origin, “-is this what I think it is?”

“Yes,” he winked, “-I know how much you loved having an assistant – this particular relic does the same thing.”

“If that’s true,” he rubbed his hands, ‘-I should be able to connect them... how I’ve missed their voices and sarcastic remarks.’

Chapter 1104 The ‘table’

“The better news has yet come,” Origin purposefully hid the truth, “-Igna,” a satisfied expression landed against Igna’s morose stare.

“Which is?”

He smiled, “-the table can locate and monitor anyone who’s ever braced this reality. There are a few conditions needed. Consider this like one of the satellites back home, the main difference as well as its advantage is the liberty to move freely in three dimensions. We can have a top-down, horizontal, or vertical, no matter the angle, the table will deliver. Also, it’s able to visualize and currently plot the individuals on the selected map.”

“This is good news. Surveillance will be far easier. How does the table work?”

“The authority of the Adjudicator, as the highest being on the ranking, the combined powers allow for the inconceivable to be conceived. A side remark, personal realms, like the Shadow Realm, can’t be invaded. Lest you obtain the specific authority to peer into their reality, the table won’t react. Bear in mind, the margin for the artifact’s inability to use is slim, very slim. What say you, Igna, enjoy my gift?”

“Enjoy?” he looked over, ‘-an artifact of such intrigue potential. Having the ability to mark and track people in real-time, if enemies attack, we’ll have a live feed, and anyone who dares flank or else use tactics will be rendered useless. To think Origin had this ace up his sleeve. I’m impressed, very impressed,’ therein, an idea popped into mind, ‘-tracking a singular person shouldn’t be out of the artifact’s effectiveness,’ he checked Origin, the man, smugly satisfied by the display, perked his lips and nodded.

“You don’t need to ask,” he walked across the room, “-I know, Igna, I know. We can track people too. I’ve already made preparations for Sathanas’ search. To correctly identify her location, we require a personal object, anything by which we may trace her mana link.”

‘Like fingerprints, each person’s mana waves are unique. The variation is hard to decipher under normal conditions, with the technology available at home, despite the development I spearheaded, there’s no way we could identify such minute details about a person’s link. Here, the trouble’s been resolved. The effectiveness will rely on how I use it, talk about pressure.’

“I’ll help,” Lilith added randomly – Origin joined her side and discussed heavily what to use.

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“This is amazing,” the princes of hell looked about, checking the bookshelf, trophies of previous battles, and a strange portrait of a faceless man, “-completely breathtaking,” Asmodeus gawked, “-master, we should take this home. The artwork is sublime.”

“Can’t say,” Beelzebub shrugged, “-it looks too good to be true. Take it down.”

“Don’t be so envious, Beel, you should exercise some self-respect.”

“Coming from you,” he frowned at Mammon, “-you say so with chest whilst casually taking the valuables... might I ask you to not be greedy?”

As inexpressive as he could, Mammon took a larger golden plate, lifted his shirt, and hid the item, “-it is not greed,” he winked, “-I’m only borrowing the item. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“You guys are too loud,” yawned Vanesa, “-pops, what’s the matter with this table?” she leaned on its golden edge, carved to match the crest of various factions who took part in construction, “-it looks funny,” she climbed over, “-I could use a nap. Pops, why don’t we take the table home, this place is too-”

“-Never,” Origin suddenly interjected. Mix regards snapped, he furrowed his brow and breathed, easing the shoulders with an exhale, “-my apologies. I shouldn’t have lashed out. The table can’t leave the realm, otherwise, it would lose the assigned privilege.”

“Care to elaborate?” said Igna, now at the table and patting Vanesa’s tired expression, “-it should work regardless, isn’t that right?”

“No,” he split from Lilith’s side and faced the bookshelf, “-we can’t,” he flipped, walked around to the opposite side, there, he watched their faces and calmed the pace, “-if the table were to be removed, the realm wouldn’t stand as is. Considering the core of the Shadow Realm, Kronos’ sickle, this artifact is in its way the reason why the realm has such authority. The Adjudicator’s power has a huge backlash on the user, for the more he uses the power and the longer he stays without acting, the harsher grows the pain. Tis the plague and the safety mechanism behind any potential revolt staged by the Adjudicator. The table’s a softener, a split allowing for the powers to be evenly distributed and lessening the strain. If Igna wanted, he could take hold of the realm’s entire authority and lay siege, it would take him and the realm without the chance for safety. I’ve said enough, I’ll keep rambling otherwise. Long story short, the table remains, otherwise it won’t work.”

“There, I got it,” Lilith roared, “-Sathanas’ old socks. This should have mana, right?”

“It will do,” sighed Origin, ‘-better than panties. Knowing Lilith, she’d have handed me the most scandalous apparel she might have owned,’ he stared at Igna, “-let’s search for Sathanas.”

They stood at the head of the artifact whilst the others waited on the sidelines. A strange aura built, the war-room hexagonal shape twirled – laser-like lights fell from the ceiling. Cogs and wheels churned behind the walls, “-mana’s getting thick,” said Asmodeus.

“It uses quite a lot of power during the search.”

“So, should I toggle my element?”

“It would be wise if you had a regenerating source of mana. I’m afraid the concentration of the realm is currently lacking. Depending on the search, we may need to call forth power from the Shadows, are you okay with that?”

“Long as she’s found,” Igna rose his hands. A holographic display toggled in three-dimension, and a rectangular box opened, “-put the sock in,” said Origin. The fabric melted, specks of dust and ash

vanished with a square-like pattern, the hovering box lowered, the lasers pointed at the edges of the artifact – orbs twinkled, “-now, pour your mana.”

‘Easier said than done,’ he reached inward, the blue projection snapped – a beam swallowed his hand, “-damn,” he cringed, ‘-it instantly wiped out my secondary reserve. Hunger... it needs to eat, my element won’t suffice,’ he reached to the side with the left arm, *-sever the chains of restriction, cross the boundary of normality, open the gates to the Shadows,* a fire hovered over his palm, *-transference of Mana: Link* ‘-this should quell the deficit,’ *poof,* the rumbling stopped. Origin precariously rose his head, “-Igna, did you fill the table’s reserve?”

“Yeah,” the hands lowered, “-had to take a small loan from the Shadows. Compared to that factory, my element might as well be a simple worker. Shall we get started?”

“Igna,” the tone lowered to a whisper, “-requirements for searching a particular entity is as follows. A mana link and the energy required to filter the realms also need the last known location. It may look fun and easy, but the drawbacks it’ll have are more psychological than physical.”

“Ah, dependency?”

“Correct.”

“It won’t come to that,” he smiled, “-have you found Sathanas?”

The projection filtered, it scanned through thick and thin, “-will take a few hours, days even. I strongly suggest the princes leave for the academy. I’ll keep watch and inform you the moment we hit a lead.”

Curiosity held fatigue, now that the novelty faded, the heaviness of their tiredness pulsed. Yawns and slowed breathing carried the group, “-Lilith, take them to Ragno. Ask for Luci and have her show you to my manor, understand?”

No time wasted, the princes and princesses hurried home, “-Igna?”

“About the assistant. Will it be possible to link éclair and the sister-System to the relic?”

“I strongly advise against the link. If granted enough power, they could usurp the throne and make with it what they wish. I only recommend said action if thee have the utmost trust in the soul who’s to become the new heart.”

‘The soul I have the utmost trust in... this is strange. I didn’t expect that face to come to mind. The world is full of surprises,’ a portal opened, “-I’ll be back in a bit,” Oriantia to the Shadows, ‘-a breath of fresh air,’ he reappeared on the Rosespian manor’s balcony. “-A sight for sore eyes,” he stretched, ‘-the place sure hasn’t changed,’ flying airship, an ever-constant pulse of energy and mana. The castle seemed grander and more refined. Even the manor, decorations, and driveway seemed upgraded, ‘-expensive statues, fountains, and lovely porcelain pots, this place has changed, I was wrong. Shouldn’t have based my impression on the sky,’ he climbed into the attic, rummaged about the dusty boxes, and came upon a test tube hiding a rolled piece of paper, ‘-there, the teleportation scroll,’ he popped open the cork, unrolled the scroll and tapped. A flash blinded the room, “-where the hell am I?” a familiar face rose forth, “-wait, master?”

“Elixia, it has been a while.”

“Master, you’re alive?”

“Don’t go off killing me yet,” he winked.

“I know you’re alive,” she dusted her clothes, “-I meant the remark to be sarcastic. Suppose I should work on my sarcasm. Why have you brought me here?” she sniffed, “-the Shadow Realm.”

“Elixia, answer me this with either yes or no.”

“Okay?”

“Are you willing to follow me?”

“No.”

“...”

“Why, master, you look stumped?” she chuckled, “-obviously I won’t follow you. I’m not crazy nor am I strong. You’re way more formidable than I. Depending on where we’re headed, I might not be of use,” she crouched, “-you disappear then reappear asking for help, master,” her expression drooped, “-you must cease with the randomness.”

“Elixia, I’m serious. I require a new assistant who’s to help me in my quests across the dimensions. We’re no longer restraint by boundaries-”

“I get it, I get it. Master, I don’t really have a choice, do I? If I say no, you’ll simply carry on alone, while if I say yes, you might have someone to dump the menial tasks upon. Like you,” she leaned close, “-I seek fun. Like a master like assistant, if the job is fun, I’ll accept. Otherwise, send me home, I rather drink and party with celebrities.”

“Send you home, huh?” he grabbed and pinched her cheeks, “-don’t you take that attitude with me.”

“Lesh me go,” she babbled, “-I hursth.”

“The job is fun,” he eased, “-you have the opportunity to work as my secretary at Lucifer’s Academy. I’m the Director. What’s more fun than watching youth, it’ll be good entertainment, especially as the princes will join the faculty. Why not reign hell in, you know, hell?”

“Interesting,” she smiled, “-my answer is still no. Why did you call for éclair?”

“He’s no longer part of my problems. The man has the responsibility of a nation on his shoulder. I could never bother him, not since he’s worked hard to get where he is.”

“What about me?” she pouted, “-I worked hard making connections... besides, I was helping with lady Syhton’s work. She’s getting ready for the big finale – I hear there’s an intimate scene. The movie’s going to be amazing.”

“Elixia,” he grabbed her nape, “-like it or not, you’re coming with me.”

“COME ON!”

The portal reopened, and a fiery aura carried around the grounds, ‘-Intherna,’ he threw Elixia in the portal and snapped, the latter shut, ‘-I feel her presence.’ A glimpse of red-hot hair threw the balcony door, ‘-it’s her,’ he pushed the door, “-been a while.”

“Intherna, it has been a while.”

“How’s the Adjudicator doing?” she spun, her stronger aura threw Igna off-balance.

“What about you-”

“EMPRESS INTHERNA, PLEASE, WE NEED ASSISTANCE!” cried floating monsters.

“Send the Elementals,” the gaze returned, “-Igna, what are you doing here?”

“Am I not allowed to visit my realm?”

“Who said anything about permission,” her fierceness knew no bounds, ‘-for the first time in eons, I feel a pit in my stomach. Just how strong has she become?’

“Igna, I’ll ask again, why are you here?”

“On a tourist visit?”

“...”

“Say cheese?”

“... always the same, don’t ever change.”

Chapter 1105 White Room

“You’re in no hurry. Follow me.” No space for discussion, a teleportation sequence activated, and the balcony closed into a quaint room. The layout, few couches centered around a lovely table, ornate walls, and decorated curtains cuddled the room – the red-carpet and golden colors were most refined and obnoxious, for they accurately displayed the kingdom’s wealth.

“Take a seat,” she said and offered cigars.

“Intherna,” he accepted, “-tell me, why did they call you Empress?”

“Precisely why I wanted to have the conversation here,” she poured herself a drink, “-time moves according to the realms, therefore, evolution affects us too. The marvel of the Shadows is undefinable, it’s amazing, too true to be real – I place it second to Elysium. Why am I called the Empress?” she slowed her pace and opened her gestures, Igna glued his focus, “-I was forced to take the position. With Gophy, Miira, and Lilith out of the picture, the realm grows unstable. The Shadows are split into four quadrants, each ruled by an assigned guardian. We enjoyed peace and festivities, the power centralized in Rosespire, we enjoyed the days of growth. The settling of the populous, and the growth and birth of the new generation, it was amazing to see. We take peace for granted. Thus, by allowing the times to flow unconcern, problems were bound to arise. The gods we gave refuge spread seeds of deception and greed, the emotions that plagued the mortal realms. The separation brought tribalism – the guardians, albeit we were on friendly terms, didn’t sit right with the more extremist followers. Small fights were often the result – violence over diplomacy. A veil of uncertainty clouded the Shadow. Thank goodness

for the scale of the planet, the disagreements focused on a single area and were easily handled with the four's intervention. They were barfights, one wouldn't call an army to resolve a brawl. Such was the mistake in our thoughts. Time carried on, the place grew mundane, and development and entertainment ravaged the minds – adding currency was a must to control the flow of goods. Vices of the mortal world seeped into the Shadows, we have no laws to prevent freedom, and the place is run entirely on a buddy system. There are more good than bad, and so, we accepted the flow. Well, that was fine until the guardians went missing – a hole in the leadership had the other factions quivering. I mean, I get their fear. If I was the only Guardian, the other sectors would have to follow my orders, and in a way, before that possibility happened – an instigator riled each of the separate quadrants to form their own pact against me. My faction grew unbeknownst to my will or action – my followers are talented orators, reincarnated politicians if you'd believe it. A faction ruled by statemen. A battle broke loose, and the monster's domain chose a neutral stance and acted when the fighting grew overwhelming. Administrator, such was their given nickname. And they hold much weight – there's no denying the monster army, they have ancient beings listed in their ranks. To mitigate the problem, Fenrir willingly offered her services to Vesper. Your children, Draconis, Saniata, and Raphael smartly abstained from the battle. Cora, Kaleem, Yuria, and Starix are more concerned with the state of our troops in Draebala, you can say that realm is the only reason why a full-on battle hasn't blown out. There is trouble in paradise, and tis for its guardian to resolve said issue. Why did I get called Empress? To be honest, the people began calling me the Empress. I took the reigns of my faction, allied with Lilith's faction, signed a non-aggression pact with Miira's faction, and declared war against Gophy's faction. The Goddess of Chaos is a traitor, and so is her people. I don't doubt there are traitor walking amongst us – for the safety of the Shadows, we must eradicate the intruders. Gophy's faction is strong, they hold power where Alphaia would be located in the lower world. The topography gives them ample time to grow the xenophobic culture she's so proud of. The ones we rescued from Zeus's tyranny have joined Gophy's faction. I have spies working on intel. Along the way, I was dubbed Empress and praised by the people for my skills as a leader. I don't know why they'd bother," she breathed, "-guess my powers have evolved."

"Empress Intherna," he grinned, "-I'm glad it's you."

"Excuse me?"

"Intherna, you're my oldest ally. The phoenix robe, you send help whenever I'm in trouble and don't much care for what happens to you. I admit I was a fool. I thought giving was the way to freedom and peaceful resolution. It seems, wherever there is intelligence and awareness, a utopia is impossible. The capacity to think in of itself is the root of today's issue. If the shadows were a dictatorship... no, it would be too simple to rule with an iron fist."

"What should I do?"

"Live up to the title of Empress."

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"Pardon?"

"Live up to the title, must I repeat myself? Intherna, you made something out of nothing. By what you say, the Shadow would have collapsed if you didn't take action. Was it instinctual or did you think?"

“It felt wrong,” she rose her gaze, “-it seemed off. The capital’s vibe seemed gloomy and on edge.”

“How about now?”

“I can’t say, it’s livelier. The people seem healthy at least.”

“Good,” he extended his hand, “-Intherna, I had hoped for you to join me as a Juror. Now, however, I see you’re more needed here than by my side. I wouldn’t force another responsibility.”

“Shut it,” she glared, “-Igna, how many times must I repeat myself, I’m your friend first. We’re past the whole sappy exchange, I know you and you know me. It’s all that matters. You’ve joined hands with Lilith, yes?”

“How did you-”

“I have my means. Igna, let me say this. The Shadows will only grow – to allow the powers to manifest so harshly is a risk. We’re plenty strong to stand against any invasion. The constant evolution won’t harm us physically, it’ll get us strong – there’s no real threat since the cores have strengthened. We need to impose a limit on the power. A place where the excess can be sent, and I think, the Adjudicator’s realm is perfect. If there’s ever a revolution, the entities will escape and cause rampant harm to the outside, no other realm has the power to handle their abilities. We’re monsters, standing high above gods and demons, we’re the harbinger of Death’s whims, Staxius’ legacy.”

“I see,” he took her hand, “-then, will you join my council and include the Shadows in our ranks?”

“You only had to ask.”

“Empress Intherna joins forces. I will contact you with details at a later date. Please have the matter resolved as quickly as possible. Enlist the puppet army if it grows out of control – give me a call if it doesn’t go well. If worse comes to pass, I’ll take them on.”

“They wouldn’t stand a chance – fighting the one who controls their reality, yeah, no thanks. Been a pleasure seeing you, Igna. I hope I didn’t hold you for long.”

“Intherna,” they exchanged a tight hug, “-I’m glad to have you. Don’t change either,” he teleported, leaving Intherna with an unlit cigar and some drinks. ‘Igna’s the Adjudicator, I knew there was the strength behind that frail body. I’ll do what I can,’ the room’s pressure released, “-Empress, we await your orders.”

Elixia reopened her eyes inside the war room. A translucent figure leaned patiently against one of the pillars, “-seems he trusts you.”

“And who might you be, Mr invisible?”

“Call me Origin,” he walked and swapped forms, “-consider me one of the Adjudicator’s close confidants. As for you, Elixia, why are you here?”

“I can’t quite put my hand on it. This place sure is blunt.”

“Excuse me?”

“Could the décor have been less oblivious? Looks like you’re compensating for something. Honestly, the whole royal décor’s grown pretty boring... where’s master anyway?”

A faint spark, “-I’m here.”

“HUH!” she jumped, “-don’t scare me like that, master.”

“What were you talking about?”

“The grandeur of the war room’s decoration,” said Origin.

“Looks normal to me,” echoed a nonchalant Igna.

“See, master’s on the same page.”

“Enough messing around,” he grabbed her hands and walked to the table, “-Origin, we need some private time, would that be okay?”

“Take your time.”

Silence, ‘-master looks serious,’ the table fluttered split images, the hues swayed between cold and warm colors. A looming sense of impending doom hung, and at the center stood Igna, “-something the matter?”

“Master, what are you planning to do?”

“I’m upgrading your system,” he smiled, “-I explained myself earlier, and yes, I won’t be asking for permission. This table has abilities way beyond what we had back home. I’ll need you and your sister, Yui, to handle logistics.”

“Use Yui, why need me?”

“Elixia,” he grabbed her shoulders, “-I need a secretary. Who is better than you? Besides, we’re the same when it comes to having fun.”

“No,” she lifted his grip, “-tell me the real reason. Do you think me a replacement?”

“...”

“I KNEW IT!”

“Don’t jump. I indeed feel lonely sometimes. It’s part of the human experience. I’ve tried to forsake my emotions... emphasis on the tried. Elixia, you’re the closest thing I have to home. I left, and I wish I didn’t have regrets... Man only knows the worth and importance of a person or thing when the latter is sadly gone. Elixia, I jumped with joy, I don’t mind sharing how I felt. The table is an upgrade, able to link the system throughout dimensions. You won’t stay out of the loop with matters in Orin – such is my authority,” he lowered his hand and gave a smug grin, “-the only reason why you’re unwilling to come is...” she gulped, “-a popular drama.”

“How did y-”

“Hey, I have my means. I guarantee you won’t miss the drama, so, will you join?”

“What about not asking for permission.”

“You sure make my life hard.’

“Such is why I exist,” she winked, “-nothing beats teasing the strongest being.”

“You have weird taste. Anyway, I’ve linked the cores, I just need to draw the activation symbols. Are you ready?”

“Yeah.”

‘Her core resides in the Shadows; thus, her soul is granted immunity. By linking the table’s core to Yui, the connection will extend to Elixia, thus creating the three-way link needed to cross dimensions. There’s nothing in Mantia or Origin’s library on how one can achieve my intent. This will be one of my first creations using the Adjudicator’s authority,’ *By my order, disentangle the threads of reality and open the white room* space, time, the concept of being, nothing existed. It was nothing, pure and simple – only his ethereal body floated, *-Creation of a path, activation of ancient symbols, may the way be open for the chosen and closed for the fallen. Cross the boundaries, release the truth from the domain of life and make true my whim and call, unique symbol activation,* ‘-my work starts now,’ dimly colored letters and shapes floated, the meaning to the madness was lost. From those, he drew words, and the words drew sentences, the latter grew into paragraphs that evolved into edicts. ‘Adding a whole new system to reality, this is the true power of the Adjudicator, to be willing to alter how matters are run across everything. Be careful not to make the tunnel accessible – use the highest authority I have and lined the passage with Cruse’s curse,’ a mysterious tome hovered with a dark envelope, ‘-Adjudicator’s time I. It shouldn’t affect reality’s established rules, and to be safe, activation will take place within my domain, if it works, the table will react, and if not, it’ll erase the words. Can’t be too careful.’ *Water freezes, half-truths become knowledge, history settles,* ‘-done.’ A vacuum swallowed all that stood into a tiny speck, it flung upward and rested as one of the stars.

“What happened?” the white room disappeared, “-master?”

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” he stretched, “-more importantly, do you have access?”

“It’s been five seconds, what could you have changed-” her eyes widened, “-I have access to the Arcanum. Not that, Yui’s seems more powerful, what did you do?”

“Welcome to Oriantia, Yui.”

“Thank you, my master,” returned the table, “-you have granted me the gift of speech and thought.”

“You made her sentient?”

“Is it fair to hog all the fun?”

She sighed heavily, “-I should have known...”

“Don’t despair,” earrings summoned, “-wear these and let’s get to conquering hell.”

“Easier said than done,” a portal widened, ‘-why am I getting involved,’ despite her thoughts, a grand smile held her mien. On that day, Igna established a rule that would forever alter the course of history, a gamble, a clause that’d decide the faith of reality.

Chapter 1106 Heavenly Convention

“Humble guests, god, and demon alike, I, God of Darkness, Lixbin, shall act as today’s mediator. I welcome you all to the first heavenly convention. In attendance today we have, the supreme god, Zeus, the god of wisdom, Artanos, the goddess of chaos, Gophy, titan Eldrath, god of the sea, Poseidon, and Hermes,” a marvel round table seated the gods. Power hung in the air, powerful auras, and deadlier intent. Once upon a time, some of them might have leaped out of their chairs and ripped the heart from their opponent. “Dear council members, I would attract your attention towards the ceiling,” they glanced, “-today’s meeting is being watched by a representative of Tharis’ church. As such, to provide a stable environment where one might express himself freely, we will have Arshic Knights, as well as Valirias, to keep security. I hope we’re on the same page, yes?” despite appearances, Lixbin’s aura surpassed their collective anguish. A soft glow rained, and each seat basked in said light – the walls and ceiling were painted and decorated, emphasis forged in marble, said to be the reflection of a divine’s soul.

“I have to ask,” Eldrath, a relatively unknown personage, rose his voice, “-why are we gathered. Councils are supposed to exist for mediation, I doubt anyone here’s against the alliance between Zeus and Artanos,” many shared the same thought.

“Eldrath,” Artanos glanced, “-we represent the Titans as well as our factions. Please do not raise undue concern among our guests.”

“There’s a traitor in our rank,” Zeus echoed harshly, “-someone here betray our alliance. News of our secret agreement has reached certain unwanted ears. Therefore, here we stand. Lest the traitor denounces himself, I strongly doubt we will be able to move,” and instantly doubt befell Hermes.

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“Fine,” said the supreme god, “-I say it’s fine. You did provide my forces backup, I won’t complain. Do it your way, Artanos, show me the reason why I accepted our alliance.”

“With pleasure,” the door opened, and a woman with a tan complexion, studded with golden jewelry and Egyptian-like clothes entered the room, her short hair and feline gaze grabbed the hearts of many, “-good afternoon, heaven-bound residents,” she courteously bowed, “-Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator at your service.”

“Coincidentally, Cleopatra’s a devout follower of Lixbin.”

The sudden attention forced the god's hand, "-Cleopatra's a woman of her own desire and will. I only ask for information, she's one of my closest sources."

"It is a pleasure to meet you again, Supreme God."

"Cleopatra," he nodded, "-your presence brings good memories. How Death's inheritor was manipulated and forced into our hands was a work of great skill. I compliment your worth, Cleopatra. Be at ease, members of the council, she's a trusted comrade who's served my cause. Tell me, Artanos, why is she here?"

"A sharp blade must be used and resharpened. Cleopatra's sadly not the one of interest today," she took the cue and approached, "-as the laws of heaven state, those born of demonic origin are not allowed. Therefore, she comes to us as a representative of one of the Kings of Hell."

"Kings of Hell?" the words struck like lightning, '-they've raised their guards. It's expected when one hears that title. What are you planning, Artanos?'

"Hello?" faint taps escaped a mirror-like apparition, "-is this working?" the image remained blurred, "-King of Hell, Leviathan, we hear you."

"Is that you, Lixbin?" sharp stares dug into his soul, "-is it you, can't mistake your sly disposition. I tell you Lixbin, wasting talent like yours on good gods is a shame, the gods sure are comical."

"I'd strongly advise caution, Leviathan," a fiercer aura exuded.

"-If it isn't Zeus, calm your intent, I can sense the coldness from hell, ha-ha-ha."

"Artanos?" Zeus glared.

"Leviathan, please."

"Fine, fine," he cleared his throat, "-it's come to my attention that the Eipea Empire wants to take over my dear old brother's realm. Ragno, was it? it is too bad. I hear your forces suffered a great loss at the hand of the new Director's hands. The Devil's returned, and this time, the Adjudicator stands in place of Lucifer. I didn't mind the academy at first... however, now, that I've received news of my students being killed in action, I can't stand by and watch. Cleopatra related the incidents – she says they were killed by that new director. The century-long relationship between me and Lucifer's Academy has toppled. A new leadership doesn't always involve the re-establishment of old relationships. To get to the point, I will assist the Heavens to get what they want, that is the artifact Artanos mentioned. In exchange, I will take Ragno for myself. I'm not daft as to allow gods into hell, our realms are sacred and we would rather die than see it be sullied."

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The mirror vanished, Cleopatra left, and silence befell once again. Zeus and Artanos exchanged knowing glances.

"What about us?"

"I will communicate your tasks in the coming days," he looked at Lixbin, "-would you do the honors?"

"With pleasure," he clapped, "-as such, I officially proclaim the first Heavenly convention complete. Snacks and refreshments are served in the next room, please take your time and enjoy."

Time passed, and Artanos and Lixbin found the view from atop Zeus' castle perfect for a drink, "-tell me, how did you get Leviathan to act?"

"The idea came to me during my search into Staxius Haggard. The masterful way how you used his daughter to bring the king's end was a poetic end. Ruthlessness at its finest. And so, it got me thinking... Cleopatra came to mind. With enough people, events can be forged to fit a narrative, the battle in Hell, one where Lilith's castle was breached, Cleopatra reported on the incident – there, a plan fell into my map. Taking Lucifer's place means he's backed into a corner against the other kings. In military or diplomacy, the way he moves will determine the path the others will take. I've made my move – during the battle, the moment I heard we were losing men, I ordered those alive to target demons, specifically those coming as a backup. Leviathan's pride couldn't take the loss, not after his men were destroyed by the Devil. Demons live and die by their pride... it's a simple matter of controlling information – Cleopatra's a great asset, keep her in use. If there are signs of her changing side, take no risks, kill her."

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"We need to control the mana-generating pillars in the towns. We share 60% of all occupied regions, the rest is in the Aapith Nation's hands. Too bad the leadership is split into Kings of Hell and Council of Demons... my job's grown harder. One has land, the other has military and representation, we got our work cut out."

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Artanos observed, like a chronicler of the olden days, '-to witness a battle of wit between the God of Wisdom and Igna Haggard, an undeniable genius of intrigue, is an amazing treat. Artanos took the initiative right from Igna's feet, how will he react – the focus will fall on Draebala. What's the purpose of the Heavenly Convention... I still haven't grasped-' smaller figures ran about speaking the words spoken during the convention, '-Artanos,' he snapped his eyes on the god, '-did he control the flow... getting the heavens on our side, solidifying the trust since Zeus' numerous blunders... his amazing.'

1106 Heavenly Convention

"Humble guests, god, and demon alike, I, God of Darkness, Lixbin, shall act as today's mediator. I welcome you all to the first heavenly convention. In attendance today we have, the supreme god, Zeus, the god of wisdom, Artanos, the goddess of chaos, Gophy, titan Eldrath, god of the sea, Poseidon, and Hermes," a marvel round table seated the gods. Power hung in the air, powerful auras, and deadlier intent. Once upon a time, some of them might have leaped out of their chairs and ripped the heart from their opponent. "Dear council members, I would attract your attention towards the ceiling," they glanced, "-today's meeting is being watched by a representative of Tharis' church. As such, to provide a stable environment where one might express himself freely, we will have Arshic Knights, as well as Valirias, to keep security. I hope we're on the same page, yes?" despite appearances, Lixbin's aura surpassed their collective anguish. A soft glow rained, and each seat basked in said light – the walls and ceiling were painted and decorated, emphasis forged in marble, said to be the reflection of a divine's soul.

"I have to ask," Eldrath, a relatively unknown personage, rose his voice, "-why are we gathered. Councils are supposed to exist for mediation, I doubt anyone here's against the alliance between Zeus and Artanos," many shared the same thought.

"Eldrath," Artanos glanced, "-we represent the Titans as well as our factions. Please do not raise undue concern among our guests."

"There's a traitor in our rank," Zeus echoed harshly, "-someone here betray our alliance. News of our secret agreement has reached certain unwanted ears. Therefore, here we stand. Lest the traitor denounces himself, I strongly doubt we will be able to move," and instantly doubt befell Hermes.

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Chapter 1107 Home?

"This is Ragno," a day and night passed. Igna's entourage of Lilith and the princes of hell walked their first step into a realm unlike anything else. Similar to the real world, the week split into seven days, and here, the weekends were also reserved for rest and pleasure. Sunday rose, a pleasant air of rest and calm demeanor followed.

Whispers turned cacophony, '-who's shouting this early in the morning?' Igna's slumber shattered, '-strange. I can sleep normally sometimes. Too bad the noise's ever-growing,' the door barged, Vanesa and Beelzebub leaped, as if athletes competing in a long-jump competition, and landed, the mattress buckled, and Igna exhaled a deep-rooted humph, "-honestly," he grabbed Vanesa's hair and pulled, "-what's the matter with you?"

She returned his gaze with one equally emotionless, "-pops' stomach is the winning plate."

"Plate?"

"NOOOO!" was heard in the backdrop, "-I barely missed," cried Beelzebub.

"Son, you barely made it across the room," echoed a dumbfounded Igna, "-you fell before jumping." Tears muddied, "-I'm going to tell," he sniffled, the pesky buzz associated with flies rumbled, an aura unique to the princes, '-not on my watch,' he slid outside of the bed and hurried to Beelzebub's side, "-boys don't cry," he leaned over.

"There you are," came a husky feminine tone, "-Igna, Beelzebub..."

"Lilith," father and son blinked hopelessly, "-mother..."

"No more troubling your father," she reached and grabbed the boy by the collar – in that instant, '-a mother cat holding her kitten,' crossed his mind. He glanced over, '-what about Vanesa?' the lass was indulgent in sleep. 'So begins the hectic day.'

.....

"Get ready for work," said Lilith, "-Elixia's hungry, you best get to cooking, Igna."

"You sure are a slave driver," he stood, "-let me clean up."

"I'm no slave driver," she grabbed his shoulder, "-I am, taking care of the kids, aren't I?" her murderous breath froze his spine, '-she's menacing,' he grabbed her hand, "-thank you for the help."

"Awesome," she beamed a grand smile and skipped down the corridor, '-a family of weirdoes. This is my life now,' he stared a mirror and brushed, '-reminds me of the days I spent in the Rosespire manor. The first home I acquired for my family. This is nice, I wake to the gentle, well, to the screaming corridors. Beelzebub and Vanesa are more energetic since we arrived. Mammon keeps to himself. Asmodeus is preoccupied with searching for Sathanas. I have no idea what Lilith is up to. Well, today's a big day for them – their admission process,' once cleaned, he headed for the kitchen, a flick toggled the lights – the sun was barely out. The dim outside shrouded in the haze was foretelling, '-it might rain,' he pulled the sleeves and got to work. An hour later – breakfast and lunch were ready – the mist slowly vanished, leaving for the sun to raise. Footsteps echoed upstairs – everyone was awake, "-the mornings," Elixia yawned, "-I hate it," she limped onto the kitchen counter, "-coffee..."

"You're practically a zombie," he slid her a cup, and she sipped and beamed, just like Lilith, "-coffee makes one whole!" she joined hands with Mammon, each took a serving and went on their merry way. Breakfast together wasn't a requirement – the whole thing was time-consuming – each had their partners they'd eat with, and so, the daily life at the Haggard Household began.

Come 07:30, a meeting was called. Igna sat behind his desk inside the study with Elixia at his side, "-Mammon, Asmodeus, Vanesa, and Beelzebub," Lilith waited patiently on one of the couches, "-Are there any objections you'd want to voice?"

"Objections about what, master?" narrowed Mammon.

"About starting school here," he clasped his hands and slowly blinked, "-is it beneath the princes to attend an academy where, perhaps, the education's lacking?"

"Don't say that master," Asmodeus interjected, "-the academy is fine as it is. Besides, only Mammon and I have had a formal education, we're the oldest. Vanesa and Beelzebub will benefit greatly from Lucifer's academy."

"What about you and Mammon, will you not join?"

"No," he looked at Mammon, "-him and I will join. It is the only way we can supervise our siblings. You need not worry, master, we're looking forward to joining the academy."

"Once again, you're overthinking, Igna."

"Lilith?"

"Let the kids join. They'll be fine, don't worry about it. Ragno's home for now, is it not?" an awkward silence veered its head, and the air thickened and felt harder to breathe.

"Ahem," Elixia interjected, "-with no complaints, I think it's time for us to begin the admission process. Master, you and I ought to check the school, we're transferring four children of noble birth – tis rather... how should I say it-"

"No need," he stood, "-Asmodeus, Mammon, we need to speak privately," they felt the cue, the room cleared and the door locked.

"Master?"

"Asmodeus, Mammon, I know how you feel. Don't bother hiding secrets. You're worried about Sathanas, and so am I. Yui's making progress, we will find her sooner or later. About the admission-"

"Pops," Asmodeus shot back, "-do you not trust us?"

"Not a matter of trust, Asmodeus. Tis a matter of principle, would you use a sword to cut an apple?"

"If there's no knife around," said Mammon.

"Allow me, master. We're joining the academy for the fun of it. We've experienced life as mobsters and have had immense pleasure in controlling a lot of things in Hidros. We're back to square one – there are enemies around every corner. Depending on how we handle the situation, there will be another battle – also, Draebala, the realm grows unsteady. With us here, the balance of power will shift – I did my

research, and the one known as Skeptor is not so good a person. You have more enemies than allies, Ragno's a newly captured land – think of it like a king in the olden days, a captured territory isn't easily changed – there's the slight possibility of revolt. Don't worry about us," he smiled, "-Mammon and I are excited to join."

"If such is the case," he reached over and held the boys in a group embrace, "-I'll ask of you, my sons, please look out for Beelzebub and Vanesa. they've suffered a lot – I won't stand," the tone deadened, "-if any harm comes to them. They've done harm; if they try anything, I swear, I will rectify the situation."

Coming from Igna, Mammon and Asmodeus' felt a sinking sensation deep in their guts, '-master... he's, he's serious. The day the Devil snap, I doubt his enemies to stand,' and similarly, a simultaneous smile boarded on their faces. *Knock, knock,* "-Master, we're late."

"I should get going," he reached for his jacket, tapped the boys' back, and headed for the academy.

"What now, brother?"

"Mammon, tis our chance to uncover the truth of Ragno. There's a reason why they attacked. I am sure more people are coming. We're stronger," they locked hands, "-Jurors... let's make father proud."

"I want money," Mammon sighed, "-brother, Ragno's like a kingdom, right?"

"I think so."

"Noble demons?"

"Noble demons?" a snarl escaped, "-brother, you're always the same. Demons are not noble, far from it. Lucifer's domain, there should be darker secrets. Let's take the day for adventuring."

"Sathanas?"

"Father promised."

"Why call him father?"

"Related or not, Igna Haggard is the patriarch of the family. Thus, tis only right we get to call him father."
"

Meanwhile, out on the street headed for the academy, "-wasn't there a battle here?"

"Yeah, something the matter?"

"It seems too clean to have been host to a battle, just saying, master."

"I helped in the cleaning efforts."

She paused and stared, "-master, are you well?"

"Why?"

"Cleaning, helping, rebuilding, cooking, you feel more... I don't know, decent?"

"Why you little," he flicked her forehead, "-don't you dare imply I'm soft."

“Well, I don’t need to imply it if it’s true,” the walk resumed, “-what happened, seriously?”

“Vanesa and Lilith,” he whispered, “-I- I don’t want to see them hurt again. The way I felt that day, the way my frustration and anger snapped – if I hadn’t controlled myself, I doubt they’d be alive. I’m not saying so for effect... I truly considered snapping everyone’s neck,” he breathed, “-don’t worry, I’m fine. Getting angry on their behalf means I care for them, I find solace in said thought. As for you,” they walked side-by-side, “-any updates?”

“No idea,” she shrugged and touched her earrings, “-no answer from Yui. She’s searching far and wide, I don’t feel anything yet – Sathanas’ presence’s vanished. It’ll take more time.”

They came up to the gates and entered. Those residents of the student dorms were out and about helping around town. “-Adventuring,” Elixia commented, “-this feels like home.”

“It’s called Monster-Hunting here,” they took the path headed passed the Library, “-demons are spread into two groups, the sentient and not. The latter of the group are called monsters and are often the spawns of other demons who’ve fallen trapped to their vices. As a domain related to the afterlife, humans who’ve done wrong in their lives are often reincarnated as monsters and left to prowl – that’s where the demons come in, they hunt the monsters and suck their souls for self-growth. Of course, there are cases of demons killing another demon to gain power – the academy’s lit amidst the ever-suffocating sin of the underworld.”

“The library sure is a decadent building – curved and home to some great architectural marvel, what’s that about?”

“Oh, those are used by the Academics,” he took out his phone, “-here,” and sent over a few folders.

“My, salacious information.”

“Please don’t drool, it’ll reflect badly on me.”

“...”

“My lovely secretary can’t be seen doing something unladylike.”

“My, thank you for the compliment, my dearest master,” the sarcastic exchange ended with furrowed brows and conflicting side-eyes, “-why are there angels, I don’t get it?”

“I can’t tell you. Suppose it’s from Lucifer’s trusted allies. They did revolt against their god – the fallen angels were sent here and left to procreate at their own leisure. It’s not uncommon to see them around campus.”

Wings flapped, “-Director,” and a charming man landed, “-I was worried you wouldn’t come in, Director,” he took notice of Elixia, scanning up and down her short-pink hair, freckled nose and cheeks, slightly-tanned complexions and tall and slender frame, “-who might this be?” he asked with a crude tone.

“Elixia,” she grabbed Igna by the arm, lifted one foot, and threw a peace sign, “-Secretary extraordinaire.”

Igna gave no response, the awestricken Luci befell silence, neither word nor thoughts crossed the mind, “-my charm’s worked,” she casually tapped her shoulder against Igna and smiled, ‘-Elixia, you’re going to make my life hell, aren’t you?’

‘Such is my revenge,’ the friendly smile spoke war-worthy provocation, ‘-I’ll make your life hell and have fun doing it!’

‘Come on then, Elixia, I dare you,’ he turned an equally friendly yet threatening regard, “-as she said, please meet my secretary.”

Luci snapped to, “-pardon me,” he cleared his throat, “-Director, the post of secretary, I thought I was privy to it.”

“Oh my dear, Luci,” Elixia skipped and held Luci’s shoulder with a lowered glance, “-I’m sorry, my master doesn’t swing for men,” she slowly shook her head.

“Well, that’s great,” he smiled, “-because,” he leaned in and whispered, ‘-I’m a woman.’

Elixia’s shoulder dropped, and she turned at Igna with a hallowed expression, “-revenge tastes refreshing, does it not?” echoed Luci.

‘This guy,’

‘This woman,’

‘I have a bad feeling about them,’ passed their minds.

An unpleasant stare came from the Library, ‘-those pests, what are they doing sully my land?’ narrowed Skeptor, ‘-and the director, what is he thinking, bringing unworthy people into academy grounds? As the vice director, I must endeavor to keep the academy a place worthy of the people’s admiration. I can’t let them sully our reputation further,’ he clenched his fist, ‘-I will do what I must to cleanse the filth... why is he surrounded by beautiful women anyway, is the Director that handsome a man?’ his reflection returned, ‘-I’m equally good looking, aren’t I?’

Chapter 1108 Admission

“Repulsive.”

“Just look at the vice-director, why is he staring so intently.”

“The smile, look at it, just look at it, I can’t imagine anything worse...”

He waved threateningly – an arm-slicing motion, “-my apologies, ladies, is there some way I might help?”

“N-no sir,” they bowed timidly, ‘-he heard you,’ they scurried, exchanging whispers and giggles.

‘It would seem I think highly of my looks,’ the look returned at Igna and the assistants, ‘-I won’t accept defeat, not so easily. Believe me, director, if it comes down to choice, I will further my agenda, trust in this,’ he held against the window with a clenched fist, ‘-I won’t lose, I won’t.’

“Professor Skeptor.”

“If it’s not Emmie, how are you these days?”

“You know, it’s the same,” small talk, how was the day, the night, discussion about the school and their students – passive-aggressive comments on the weaker students; most often being the students, the lower-born.

.....

The same class-room passed aside from the label, “Emmie, you, my friend, are the only noble teacher I respect in this forsaken academy,” they walked, those in class early held their breaths and froze, ‘-it’s the vice-director!’ he gave a simple nod and continued, “-Emmie, tell me honestly, are you happy with the academy’s current affairs?”

“Skeptor, we’ve known each other for a while,” the pace slowed, “-are you worried about the future?”

He stopped and pressed his lips, tightening the expression, “-I worry. The new Director, I fear he might throw tradition out the window and start ruling as he pleases.”

“Such is the way of the hierarchy... long as he stands, the academy is rightfully his. Bearer of Lucifer’s wing is the director – no matter the legacy or lineage, those with the symbol have the right of rulership,” the headless knight pulled Skeptor’s scrawny figure to the side, “-you know,” he whispered, “-there is discourse amidst the teachers and parents. This is off-the-record, however, I’m certain if the strings were pulled just right – distrust and eventual down-fall. Think about it, Skeptor, you’re a man of intellect, surely...”

“No more,” he grabbed her hands, “-you always were my loyal friend. Emmie, how can I ever repay you?”

“Well,” she leaned closer, “-about the admission process for my niece. She’s from a well-off family, a daughter of demonic-nobility, the Aedric blood-line. She has some,” he slowed with mild fluctuation, “-let’s say, personality issues. As gorgeous as she is, the lass is a vixen, one who tore apart the branch family.”

‘Admission to the academy is strenuous, the test is hard and the physical harder. It will be difficult to have a student join on this date. I could sway-’

“Of course, you don’t need to pull strings, Skeptor. She’s nobility, she could always join the Academics, what say you?”

He beamed in disbelief, ‘-just you wait, Director, just you wait.’

And so, as the school day marked its start, time showed 08:00, and the teacher responsible for their classes headed for homeroom. The waiting area reserved for visitors carried quite a few people – and strangely, as Igna, so kindly expressed with an open expression, was surprised at Skeptor’s presence in his office.

“Don’t you have homeroom?”

“Director, I heard from the staff you’re planning to enroll new students?”

“Is that an issue?” he lit a cigarette, “-my dear Skeptor, is the academy, not a learning environment, I’d find it weird for us not to accept.”

“Sir please-”

“What Skeptor means is simple,” said Elixia, “-the school has a long-standing reputation as being prestigious. We count as one of the best when it comes to education. If we were to accept students – the exam would be difficult,” she turned to Skeptor, “-who is she?” he asked.

“My apologies, I seem to have forgotten my manners,” she curtsied, “-my name’s Elixia Haggard, I’m the director’s new Secretary. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Skeptor, I’ve heard quite a few stories,” she took one step, “-you’ve got my intrigue,” she whispered and headed to Igna’s side.

“Per the academy’s tradition, I have taken care of the paperwork, these are their scores in academics as well as physical training. You should take into account their name and rank,” to which, Igna slid a paper – Skeptor’s jaw dropped, ‘-these kids,’ he blinked, ‘-the prince of lust and gambling, Asmodeus, the prince aced the tests,’ next sheet, ‘-Prince of greed and wealth, Mammon. He scored in the upper 90% on the physical tests impeccable,’ next, ‘-prince of envy, Beelzebub, admission for the Scholia division,’ and lastly, ‘-princess of sloth, aedric mistress of plague and disease, Vanesa. She scored the exact mark needed for entry... still, the score needed is the 90%. It doesn’t check out,’ he rose a cynical look over the sheets, “-when did they tryout. I heard nothing of these,” he tapped the sheets, “-to score so highly and excel at their disciple, I must say, the faculty would have surely known about the students, especially since they belong to the upper-echelon of Demonkin.”

Igna blinked slowly. Each motion chipped at Skeptor’s bravado, an awkward silence settled, and slight agitation filled the muffled movement, “-Did I say something wrong, Elixia?”

“No, you didn’t,” she smiled.

“Skeptor, my dear vice-director,” he leaned forward, interlocked his fingers, and peered over, “-I fear sometimes. Someone of thy knowledge must have known, yes?”

“...”

“I will take the silence as a no.”

“But of course, I knew,” he interjected, “- I only asked to compare.”

“Allow me,” he puffed, “-nobility joining the academy is a big deal. We have to treat them appropriately – information can be leaked. The princes can hold their own, I don’t doubt their abilities, what I was worried about is the safety of the students. Let’s say the news was leaked and an ambush saw the already bested Academy thrust into the war. Last time’s fiasco would have compounded...”

“Still, the evaluation-”

“Approved by Luci.”

“The more nobles present, the better I will feel. They’ll naturally join my faction and work towards my end. I’ll get them on my side, once I do, the academy won’t be-”

“As for their assignments, Asmodeus, Mammon, and Vanesa will be joining me in General Studies and Combat Class. I doubt there’s anyone who can teach them more than they already know.”

“Unfair, it will affect our reputation.”

“Skeptor, I will have no objection to their assignments. If we’re under attack, consider the princes as our first line of defense,” he pointed at the door, “-or, if you feel better qualified, please be my guest and spar. I must warn you – the last supervisors were badly injured, only saved by a transit healer.”

“Beelzebub?”

“The Scholia. He’s still underage and won’t be joining the Academy anytime soon. He ought to grow a strong foundation before utilizing the dormant potential.”

“I have to ask, Director, you speak of them so casually, is there a reason why?”

Elixia grinned, “-the seven cardinal princes are the Director’s progeny.”

“EXCUSE ME?”

The door widened, “-here for school, pops,” said a somewhat interested Vanesa.

“The uniforms sure do make my posterior larger,” commented a handsome Asmodeus.

“It looks fine,” Mammon mumbled.

“What is up,” Beelzebub cheered, “-why’re my clothes different?”

An attendant snuck her hand and pulled, “-apologies, master, the young master ran off,” she said so while running off in turn.

‘Lust, Greed, and Sloth,’ Skeptor gulped, ‘-the power coming from them, how could anyone control-’

“You guys look good,” he snuffed the cigarette and walked to the trio, “-starting today, you will be joining General Studies. The additional is up to you.”

“What department has access to the library?”

“Magical,” said Skeptor, ‘-if they join me I’ll have influence-’

“Then I will join the literacy club,” Asmodeus winked and whispered to the embarrassed vice-director, “-just so you know, I know what you’re up too. I know a rat when I see one.”

“Refrain from making threats,” Igna sighed.

“My bad,” he tipped his head, “-I was only kidding, vice-director.”

“Seeing their potential, as Director of the Academy, I grant Asmodeus, Mammon, and Vanesa unrestrained to Academy’s facilities. You will learn what you want when you want, consider this my way of welcoming such famed individuals to our premises.”

Elixia locked onto Skeptor’s visual disapproval, “-before you interject, the director has the necessary authority for what he asks. There is a record of exceptional students being allowed to do as they wished.

Creed of the Gifted, it can be read in the Academy Regulation, page 666, under the subtitle, “-the Noblesse’s within the court.”

A dumbfounded Skeptor remained inside the office. Igna escorted the new students. He walked past, Class 4-A, ‘-the advanced class allows for them to stay indefinitely lest the condition of their graduation has been met. Being a high-born, a genius, or an exceptional fighter, are the criteria for entry. I’ll have them assigned to Class 3-2 for now, more students and more reason to enjoy the fun. Still, using numbers as the class’s designation is yet another way the Academics prove their superiority. Compared to us, they use both numbers and letters.’

A sliding sound interrupted homeroom, “-Pardon the intrusion, Luci,” he stepped inside, and everyone looked with admiration and curiosity, ‘-the director,’ whispered, ‘-first time I’ve seen him up close. He’s handsome, isn’t he?’

Lilia rose a content expression at Igna, ‘-she fits in. Nothing expected no less.’ Arde kept a stern expression, the class matched his demeanor, ‘-he’s the leader and responsible for the mood. He holds them accountable for the murder of kids his own age. Well, Arde, I hope, for your own good, you get along with them. If not, the class will fall apart.’

“No problem, Director,” he smiled, “-what brings you here?”

He came to the center and relaxed his posture, “-students of 3-2, I hear your class is very problematic. Especially you, Arde, I have a pile of complaints – do you find it fun to fight?”

“...”

“Well, I’m not here to chew anyone out, you can relax. I’m not the vice director, discipline is best learned at once’s pace. You’re old enough to be held accountable. Arde, this goes double for you,” he softened the tone, “-next time you get in a fight, at least do it somewhere without witnesses, okay?” they laughed.

The response took the class by surprise, the smile seamlessly sliced through the tension, opening the way for conversation, “-on a serious note. I have big news. Class 3-2 is getting three additional students.”

“Transfers?” questions floated – Asmodeus, Mammon, and Vanesa entered with strong impressions.

“Handsome,” the girls swooned.

“Look at the other one, he’s mysterious, strong, and silent type?” giggled escaped.

“Man, look at her,” cheered the boys, “-she’s plain looking, wait, what is she?”

To which, Vanesa yawned and leaned against Igna’s shoulder, “-is this over, I want to sleep?”

“She’s got balls,” they echoed, ‘-chick got guts.’

“I trust you’ll take it from here, Luci?”

“Of course?” the shoulders slumped, ‘-dump all the hard work and run off, that’s the director’s duty,’ he turned at cacophonous class, “-right, enough. Why don’t you introduce yourselves?”

The charismatic Asmodeus took the first stand, “-the name’s Asmodeus. My passion, lust, my hobby? Well, you’ll find out soon enough.”

Mammon calmly slapped Asmodeus on the back of his head, “-idiot,” he looked at the class, “-Mammon. No hobbies, I like money.”

Vanesa crumbled at the teacher’s desk, “-Vanes-” and silence, she dozed off.

“Right, please take a seat wherever you want,” they chose closed seats and immediately made acquaintance with their neighbors.

“Arde, we have a couple of trouble maker in the class. What will you do?”

“Lilia, you know I don’t care for much at this academy. Didn’t you hear their names – they bear the title of them the bearers of the Cardinal sins. You don’t think it’s them, do you?”

“Wouldn’t surprise me if it was them,” Arde lowered his head, “-the director’s a strange one. I won’t put it past him, you know?”

.....

“Yeah, I get what you mean.”

Chapter 1109 Chaos

“Professor, professor?”

“...”

“PROFESSOR!”

“What?” Skeptor snapped into reality, ‘-did I doze off in class?’ facing him were students of class 3-A, the elite, “-my apologies,” he left, ‘-he went over my head and accepted four new students. I don’t care if they’re nobility, I don’t care if they’re royalty. The director went over my head.’ Windows went along the corridor and gave onto the field, an upper vantage point to look down upon the combat class. Sweat and shouts, such were their creed and duty. Estranged students, not wise to the common class and raised to be viewed as better, halted their comments. Like earlier, wherein a group badmouthed his appearance – such was the way he remembered, ‘-they’re dumbstruck. The same group of girls,’ the pace slowed – he followed their gaze, ‘-it’s them,’ he narrowed.

“The transfer students... they look too good to be part of the combat class. What is the director thinking?”

“I know, such precious game... compared to boys in our class, they feel refined and mature.”

“Don’t speak loudly, someone’ll hear you. We can’t speak with them, don’t you remember?”

“Why should I care, it’s not like I’m talking to the other filth. I only care for the one with blond hair, the one who looks so charming it’s- I don’t know, my heart sinks with anticipation... Jeena, tell me, what am I feeling?”

“You’re aroused?”

.....

“JEENA!” muffled laughter escaped. Vice-director made his appearance shy of them finishing their exchange.

“Him again, let’s go,”

“Hush, he’ll hear us,” their eyes met, and the girls bowed and carried on past. He remained stuck, ‘-these students, they’re making a mockery of the syste-’

“Vice-director.”

“WHAT-” he turned, “-is it? Emmie.”

She held her expression, “-you forgot we had an arrangement.”

“What arrangement?” he clicked his tongue, the peripheral noticed Asmodeus perform a highly skilled move, the distant applause and cheers interjected.

“Skeptor...” she grabbed his collar, “-don’t you dare make a mockery of me. I know what thee desires, would be best if you-”

“My bad, my bad,” he grabbed her wrist, “-I got lost in the flow. I remember our agreement, admission of new students, isn’t that right?”

“Yeah, she’s waiting downstairs. Don’t make me lose face, because if you do, I will have no other resort,” the relatively short Emmie left, aside from the back and forth of students, the hallway was left empty and silent.

‘Take a deep breath, Skeptor, I need to teach my students,’ with a firm grasp on the emotion, he returned and resumed. Meanwhile, Igna entertained guests from the town’s management, the head, a certain Graso Yrek, a bold man of strong impression – heavy shoulders, big pupils hiding a deep crimson glare and hardly adequate clothing; bear chest with a diagonal stripe of some kind of bag – skin-tight pants ending in a goat leg. The split-chin glared mercilessly across the table, Igna casually puffed and looked towards Elixia for assistance. The interface lit with data for comparison, “-director, monarch, we request assistance. The peasants have voiced their concern about the growing population of lesser demons. If the issue isn’t resolved, we may have a decline in the birth rate.”

“Polygamy and Polygyny.”

“Director, please – having more partners won’t mean much.”

“Graso, please don’t beat around the bush. I hate having my time wasted, I rather it is spent doing something productive, perhaps indulgent. I ought to set the example, shouldn’t I?”

The terrifying demon sighed, “-Director, I lied. The declining birth rate is a problem; however, the issue comes from the naysayers. Many oppose the ascension.”

“Naysayers, are they the common folks or those in power?”

“...”

“Figured as much. Don’t bother, Graso. The council members will have their safety guarantee. Send them this,” he gestured at Elixia, she leaned and placed a letter, “-a letter to be presented to the naysayers. Have them understand that I will not be changing the current infrastructure. They can rest easy,” he glanced forward knowingly, “-besides, changing people in power won’t do anything since I have the say in coming policies. I’m not bothered. Long as I have the people’s support, there’s no issue to be found. As always, Graso, I appreciate the help.”

“If you say so, Director,” he stood, going way beyond seven feet, “-I will relay your message,” the door closed, ‘-the director understood their intent without so much asking a question. He’s a terrifying man, I pity those trying to revolt...’

“Finally,” he stretched and moved to the couch, “-entertaining guests daily gets boring. Elixia, are you having fun toying with the vice director?”

“You noticed?” she leaned against the desk and ate an apple, “-he’s a fool, I think. The man’s gullible and has a high opinion of himself. He thinks he smarter than most – these kinds of people are the easiest to manipulate.”

“He could be playing the fool.”

“Or he’s just an idiot. Who cares, right?”

“Well, if your concerns turn out to be true. The mastermind will pull his string sooner or later. My job here is to focus on Draebala – how’s the map coming along?”

“Interference. I’ve opened a portal – too much fluctuation at the moment. You’re right about reality’s deformation. Should stabilize in a few days.”

“Sathanas. She worries me.”

Lunch break, a few taps broke Igna’s concentration, ‘-didn’t notice time flying by,’ he pinched his labella and closed the interface, “-come in.”

“Director.”

“Vice-Director.”

“...”

“If you’re looking for Elixia, she’s out on an errand.”

“No, not her,” he shook the mild interest and spurred, the face read like a book.

‘He’s easy to read, maybe too easy. Joy and a bit of smugness – coming from his point of view, I went over his authority and admitted my children. Granted the part about marks and tests were half-truths Energy after the humiliation – he’s gotten the upper hand or has an ace,’ he stood before Igna, to which, the director took hold of the pace, choosing when to break the silence after letting Skeptor marinade awkwardly.

“Need something?”

“Director. I have a request.”

“What is it?”

“There’s a special student outside, she’s come highly recommended by the faculty,” behind the kind smile hid a deeper lie, ‘-the faculty agreed with a little pressuring.’

“Why would the faculty be needed? Have her take the exam like the other students.”

“Actually, Director, she’s a transfer from our neighbor, the Dem Academy. You remember, they were the ones who sent help during the battle?”

“Yes, yes, the ones who needlessly died.”

“Correct. They’ve asked for our cooperation in tending to her needs.”

“She must be quite the high-profile. I haven’t received a request from Dem Academy. Though, what sort of director would I not trust in the vice director’s judgment? Have her sent into my office; I’ll conduct the transfer exams.”

“No, no, no” he crossed his arms, “-director, I know you’re a man of action. Please allow me to vouch for her skill and education, she’s come from a prestigious school like ours. We should surely consider her repute before sullyng the girl’s pride as one of nobility.”

‘He unwillingly gave clues. Skeptor, you poor fool. She’s come as a spy or possibly an enemy. No way Dem forgets their dead students and sends us someone normal. The process of elimination leaves one option, she’s one of a complex personality. Their kind, my word, if my impression of her is entertaining, I suppose she ought to become my newest past-time. I sure enjoy breaking strong personalities. Skeptor’s no fun – Elixia can have him, she prefers her prey submissive.’

“Director, allow me to host her exam.”

“Skeptor, I shall see to her personally. You have a class to teach, I wouldn’t dare let the Academics be without their teacher. Do not worry, Skeptor – I will judge her fairly.”

“May I have your word?”

“You may,” he smiled and extended a reassuring handshake, “-please, send for her. I will be waiting.”

Kindness, ‘-the director’s not that bad a person. He thinks about us and the Academy... don’t be swayed by his charm. Skeptor, focus on your objective... that’ll be my test. If the director rejects her admission, I’ll know not to trust him going forward. Otherwise, the director and I might just get along,’ the office emptied.

‘Skeptor, you fool. I know who’s at my doorstep and who she represents. Never estimate the power of good connections. I owe Ereena for this one. She’s sent intel about Cleopatra and Memphe. The latter’s no given on her agenda. Many conspiracy plots brew against my reign. Skeptor, Memphe, and now, Dem Academy. Too bad Skeptor’s not so great a player. The girl’s admission was never an issue, she’ll join the school regardless. Know your enemies – a page out of that damned old book.’

Tap, tap, “-enter.”

A doll-like personage appeared in the doorway. Silky long black hair ran down her shoulders and onto her back – bangs cut across her forehead, over which rose horns. Her skin was pale, paler than a ghost – the teeth sharp and nose a mild red. Her ears were elongated. Her height was above average and her frame was slender and thin. She dawned on a school uniform, a black skirt with white stripes, leading up to a gray-and-white pullover comfortably hiding her white shirt and necktie. “Director,” she curtsied, “-it’s a pleasure to be admitted to the academy.”

‘I nailed the entrance; he’s stunned by my looks. Men are all the same, smile at them kindly and they’ll swoon. The academy has a new queen, watch out ladies, I’m here to crush the competition.’

“Right,” he dismissed her entry, “-take a seat,” he stood, “-I’ll be right back.”

The door closed, ‘-did he just ignore me?’ she dropped onto the couch, ‘-audacity of that man to ignore me...’ her cheeks reddened, ‘-calm down... no need to throw a fit. He must have something urgent... yes, why would anyone ignore me?’

“She’s going to be a pain,” he took a trip to the roof and lit a cigarette, ‘-she’s a narcissist. Thinks the world revolves around her. Her display was meant to take my attention. You don’t fool anyone,’ he puffed, ‘-her upbringing and the mention of a somewhat strained personality. She was brought up thinking the world is hers to rule... why wouldn’t she be. Daughter of Leviathan, first princess Teresa L. Leviathan. They’ve got me in a tight spot. If she gets angry and leaves for her father – we’ll truly force Leviathan into a war against Ragno. Send a diplomat, have your men kill the diplomat, and there, have a reason to initiate battle. Otherwise, capture the diplomat and pressure the opposite faction. If they’re thinking far, we’ll need to change plans,’ the cigarette finished, ‘-breaks over. I sure hope the kids aren’t causing chaos.’

Alas to his fear, Asmodeus shared a few intimate moments in the girl’s washroom. No matter the size, he kindly accepted their request and indulged in his vice, lust. Wasn’t long before he’d slept with the whole class – and there, only a few hours had passed.

“Ready for combat class?” Yu entered a half-awake classroom, “-have I missed something?”

“No, teach. The girls are a bit tired from playing with Asmodeus,” came a sarcastic remark from Arde, “-the man sure is charming.”

“You needn’t be jealous,” he winked, “-passion is meant to be shared. I won’t refuse your advances... tsundere.”

“I don’t get what you mean,” he slammed his table, “-I need to change, is that alright, teach?”

“Yeah, please be ready for the afternoon class. Ladies, please have a shower,” she left the class with slumped shoulders, ‘-what happened to them?’

“Yu,” Asmodeus caught up to the teacher and pressed her shoulders, “-you forget these,” he held her handkerchief.

“Thank you-”

He peered into her eyes intently, “-you have quite a load on your shoulders. It’s difficult, I understand, your students sometimes don’t care because of your rank,” a spark went across his eyes, “-why don’t

you let me," he pulled her aside into the locker room, "let your desires run wild, I have the power to make the stress vanish," she watched hopelessly with her back against the locker, '-handsome,' they locked lips.

"Vanessa, did you see Asmodeus?"

"Didn't," her head laid against the desk, "-probably wooing another woman."

'Asmodeus,' Mammon sighed, '-and just when I needed his talent,' a trail of broke younger men laid on their knees, destitute and deprived of their allowance.

Chapter 1110 Teresa L. Leviathan

'Teresa L. Leviathan. My name's renowned across the underworld, especially in the realms ruled by the four demon kings. Since my birth, peasants have bowed to me and my father. No one dares incur my wrath. The world revolves around me, I get what I want and when I want. Father asked me to oversee Lucifer's realm. He was petty, that one, unlike the other kings, no one in his court made advances on my body or influence. Ragno, it's a disgusting place where many fall under falsehood, bowing to a forgotten notion of justice and righteousness. Who could blame them, a country ruled by a fallen angel is bound to make a purebred like me hurl? I hate the smile on their faces, I hate the comradery some share. It's repulsive. Home is most precious. Father has his underlings on a leash, no one dears smile without his consent. The handsome, fine specimen is sent weekly. Skinning a well-featured demon... is my passion, I love dissection. We captured a fallen angel once, the poor sod was smuggled through the inter-dimensional portal. He was great, the man lasted months – he resisted, holding on faith that his lord would come to the rescue. My, the standard for my games was raised that day, no one's lasted that long, no one, not until she came around,' fond memories came to mind, the empty office and distant noise were akin to a dungeon, the memories invertedly mixed and triggered nostalgia, '...' her visage tightened, '-father had to interrupt my fun. I had to come, it's my duty he says. I-'

Air rushed out, Igna stood in the doorway with a nonchalant expression, "-did I keep you waiting?"

"You sure did, Director," she replied respectfully, Igna took a simple look and glossed over her charm and persona.

"Shall we get to your transfer exams?"

'Transfer exams?' the thought never crossed her mind, '-father's contact said there was nothing to be done. Show up and I'll be admitted... I need to keep my father's word in mind. I have to be cautious of the director... I don't get what the deal is, why was Artanos so adamant- I'll never trust the word of a god, too complicated,' instead, a common smile portraited – Igna returned to his seat, "-join me," he said.

They sat, and both peered over the large table – the distance added a mild touch of superiority. The one behind the desk felt bigger and stronger, a bit of physiological advantage never harmed anyone, such as Igna's thought upon designing his office. 'Borrowing a method employed by Odgar when he conducts interviews. I purposefully left, allowing her mind to stray, she'll get comfortable or awkward, regardless of the sentiment, and I'll establish myself as one who controls the pace. Simple and effective, if she argues against my wasting her time, I'll use the authority I have as Director – she needs something from

me, people are most obedient when they're working towards a selfish request. It'll also be a test. Will my methods used in Orin work?

"Director, I must say, you sure have a way of dealing with your guests."

"Proper etiquette's only viable when faced with someone of equal worth. I see no reason to act otherwise," he pulled up papers pertaining to her enrolment.'

'-when faced with someone of equal worth?' her cheeks crinkled for a second, '-who does he think he is?' she swallowed hard, '-calm down, don't let the anger consume. I have to obey father – the quicker my job's done, the faster I get to enjoy my meal.'

.....

"Why are you transferring from Dem's academy?"

"..." '-why is he asking that question?'

'What should I say?' her thoughts ran amok, Igna patiently waited – fishing rod in hand, bait in the water, '-let the thought eat you from within.'

Her lips pressed, her chest rose – right before she answered, Igna snapped back the rod, taking initiative from her feeble fingers, "-My, did you not prepare for the interview?" Igna purposefully gave a condescending look of pity, "-this is but a formality. I assumed the daughter of Leviathan would be properly educated in how matters are run in a foreign realm," he pushed the papers aside and stared through her, "-Teresa L. Leviathan. You're representing your father. We'd both like to keep the matter calm. Thusly, I'll overlook the matter," he stood, "-you're free to have a word with your father or any assistants. It's lunch break. We'll reconvene in an hour," hands around the handle, "-you will find Skeptor of the East in the faculty office. Have a word with him."

'Why couldn't I return an answer...' *gulp,* '-I swear I've gone through this scenario with my assistants. They always gave me plenty of time to think, I was always praised. Why couldn't I stand against him... he's a simple peasant, no one important. A man who came into power after Lucifer's death, a nobody,' the beautiful princess exited the office, she strolled down the hallway towards the faculty office, '-they look at me with bafflement. Yes, look at me, worthless wastes of space. I'm far above any of the kids here – I am a princess, no one compares.'

'Where's Asmodeus?'

"The storage room," Yui answered.

"Can you keep an eye on Teresa?"

"Already am, master."

The bell rang, swarms of students exited, the peaceful quietness roared, '-the locker room,' he leaped onto the field and went across to the gymnasium/arena, '-Students from 3-2 doing lapse. Mammon and Vanesa are nowhere to be found. They should have had practical fights today,' to which he hailed one of the boys – "-director?" they gasped.

"Where are the others?"

“The girls are in the infirmary,” he answered, “-professor Dementus told us to run, we’ll have combat class after break.”

“Arde,” he hailed, the boy halted his spring begrudgingly.

“Director?”

“3-2 better clean the field. It’s a lunch break, I expect your mates to have proper rest. Look over there,” he pointed, “-they’re crawling. I rather my students have the proper form to whatever they’re doing... just look at it,” he cringed, “-pathetic.”

“Director, I humbly oppose thy comments. They’re working hard, I would stand for anyone speaking ill of the effort. Even if the school looks down on us, even if we’re reprimanded, hard work’s the only medium to aid us in moments of crisis.”

“You speak of the attack?” he grabbed the boy’s shoulder, “-you’re diligent and an example for your class. Although I’m new, I recognize the hard work you put in for your class. In more ways than one, you’re the ideal image of a good student. However – working hard without a purpose is self-indulgent,” he leaned in softly, “-don’t fool yourself, kid. Stop acting like you’re working, it’s saddening, I feel pity for you. If you want repentance, do it somewhere else – I rather them train with a purpose. Professor Dementus asked for the class to run, yes? why is there training equipment on the field? Think twice before acting, Arde. Set the proper example, don’t drag them into your bubble of self-pity, do I make myself clear?” he tapped the boy’s arm twice, “-you’re wise, think about what I’ve said. If you still think I’m wrong, meet me in my office after lunch, understood?”

“Yes sir,” he turned to the class and clapped, “-pack it up people, lunchtime.” a gust of relief rushed at him, ‘-they’re happy?’

Moans and grunts echoed, ‘-Asmodeus, seriously?’ a do not disturb sign hung over the handle. Igna grabbed and pushed, “-AH!” screamed, Asmodeus stood with Yu’s hair wrapped around his wrist and her upper half pushed against a table thrown in the middle, “-hello pops,” he winked, “-you came just in time.”

“No, I think you did,” Igna closed the door and stared at Yu emptily, “-so much for keeping the teacher-student relationship...” the lady’s daze snapped, her consciousness returned, “-DIRECTOR?” she kicked Asmodeus back and knelt, hiding her chest and waist, “-what are you doing her-”

Mana Control: Fabrication, he snapped, a trench coat fell over her shoulders, “-Yu, don’t worry. My son’s a bit crazed with it comes to desires. Have you taken the whole class?”

The prince pushed out his chest proudly and smiled, “-hell yeah I did.”

“Congratulation,” Igna gave muted claps, “-next time, keep the entertainment at a minimum.”

“You worry too much, pops. Was it not the King of Hidros who said, ‘-do as thee please, leave not one witness, such is the price for true freedom,’ I followed the instructions.”

“No,” he shook his head, “-that was Lilith.”

Yu rose her hand timidly, “-can I go now?”

“No,” they returned in tandem, “-get in the shower, then leave,” Igna exhaled, “-Asmodeus, you’re with me.”

“Pops?” they waited behind the gymnasium, “-are we in trouble?”

“No, a special guest’s come. She’s transferring from Dem’s Academy. Teresa L. Leviathan, do you know her, personally?”

“Resa,” he blinked, “-she’s, let’s say, a strange girl. We got along just fine, I think, well, back in the days anyway. I can’t remember how we met or why she was there in the first place. Something to do with Lilith and Leviathan’s affair at the time. You know mother, she gets around and reaches the ends of the earth for her family’s sake. She might be our sibling, now that I think about it. Yeah, she could be one of us, you never know.”

“Great, another headache. I rather she not be a product of Lilith and Leviathan-”

“Well, uncle did come to the castle as if he knew they were compatible. Maybe...”

“A war over a bloody booty call.”

“Ha, literally.”

“...” Igna glared, “-I forgot, have Yu ask Dementus to get the arena ready.”

“Okay, a fight sounds interesting, who’s fighting who?”

“You’ll see.”

Relaxed exhales permeated the faculty office, exhausted teachers regained their desks with much joy, the office split, into a single room, two factions – Academics with bigger desks and better equipment, General studies, modest accommodation, to do with budget cuts, or so they said.

Skeptor fell into his chair, ‘-I can’t shake my uncertainty since this morning. Feels like someone’s breathing down my necks,’ contrary to what he thought, it was no simple ‘someone’ but rather, the whole room – widening their jaws as to sink their teeth and end the tyranny.

“Skeptor,” a soft-spoken voice sliced across the tension, “-how is the transfer coming along?”

“Emmie, you startled me.”

“-Skeptor... I’m waiting.”

“You needn’t worry. I have the situation under control. I have the Director’s word – she’ll be accepted.”

“The director’s word?” she grabbed his thighs, “-the consequences of failing my trust... I’m sure you understand, correct?”

“Don’t worry, Emmie... don’t worry.”

Knock, knock, “-excuse me.”

“A lovely young lady,” they said, “-are you lost?”

“I’m looking for Professor Skeptor, can you help me?”

“Please head on inside, he’s waiting behind that room over there,” the princess drew closer, Skeptor’s eavesdropping allowed for a hasty resolution, “-over here,” he darted out the room to the vacant hallway, “-did you ask for me?”

“Yeah,” she replied with a distracted look, “-do you work for my dad?”

“Hush,” he pressed her lips, “-don’t speak so loud, someone’ll hear us.”

Smack, she slapped his hand, “-how dare you lay a hand on m-”

“Lady Teresa,” said a gentler voice, “-please excuse this vile mongrel’s indiscretion. How might I be of service?”

“Emmie,” her empty regard filled, “-the director...”

“Let us speak privately,” she stepped on the vice director’s foot, “-make yourself useful, give me the key to the meeting room.”

There, the conversation elaborated on how the Director mistreated royalty. Her title, as demanded by Leviathan, was to be kept a secret. Thus, any influence the crown might have brought nullified. And with what she said, ‘-the director knows she’s royalty. He’s testing her will... the man’s shrewd. I’ve seen through the plan, you won’t get the best of the princess so easily. She might be on the overconfidence side – once she knows what needs to be done, you’ll see but flames, director. I’ll enjoy wiping that smirk.’

She returned after the bell, “-I’m ready for the interview, director,” confidence radiated.

“Good, we’re moving on the combat.”

“Huh?”