

## Death Magic 111

### Chapter 111: Questions

Cold air blew around the room. The customers paid no heed till a loud bodily mass hit the floor. It caught their attention; mainly the owner for she stopped her conversation and rushed. Rushed did she by the side of the would-be assaulter; if it wasn't for Avon, said body would have been hers. Though it raised commotion about how a man could have passed out, Staxius took all in hand and calmed their suspicion. He did a good job when covering for the man, neither did he look sketchy nor noncredible. Time was left to spare, the tailor edged him on taking the poor man to the hospice. "What about the dinner," he asked in a regretful tone, the lady replied with, "there's no time to waste. Take that man to the hospice, I'll give you my address; you can come once he is taken care of," she worried for the unconscious fellow. Staxius felt it, the pain when the sight of the man when he came into her view. "No use arguing with you is there," in the end, he chose to take the man to the hospital

Or so what he said to the lady, for when the car started – it drove out of town. Out of Claireville academy and into the capital – the journey would last about four hours. "I really looked forward to having a homecooked meal," he muttered gently, the unconscious body laid beside him. Hands and feet tied; the car continued forth. "Master," half-way into the journey, Avon spoke, "-why did you want to have that meal so badly?" he asked while sitting on Staxius's lap. "There's nothing much to it," he added softly, "-I just wanted to see how people lived around town. I was told the populous lived without fear of hunger but I wanted to see it for myself," he ended. "I guess it won't happen then," Avon replied. The trip to the capital would take more time, "I guess not," his tone changed, the eyes focused onto the road.

Soon, the night made all chilly and shady. From kilometers away, the capital lit brightly, it was like a light in the middle of a dark room. It amazed anyone who approached; technology here had advanced more than the other towns and villages. For once, people had electricity. Not just electricity, anything was possible – Staxius always had his mind blown by how much civilization grew in the last decade. From swords to guns, from battlemages to adventurers, from simple constructions to full-on skyscrapers. It all told how much man-kind could do when given the right condition and materials.

Having lived and spent most of his time in Arda; the differences became apparent. Compared to Rosespire; Arda's technology wasn't that advanced. However, when it came to magic; the Ardanian had the edge over anyone and everyone. A thought, an idea, a fantasy crossed his mind the instant he entered through the main gate. 'What if Arda and Rosespire shared their knowledge. I know not the state of affairs in the other continents, but I'm sure that we would become a continent so powerful we could rule the world. An army of demi-humans and support from Rosespire; a full-on war. But who am I kidding, a war against who?"

Carefully, the car turned here and there and arrived. Their destination, not the hospital but the adventuring guild. He had a gut feeling that said man was important. The sheer size of the guild never failed to impress. Despite it being night, it crawled with people turning in requests and adventurers just chilling upstairs. With the suit now gone, Staxius's crest and guild badge were left exposed to the open. The silver, gold and platinum, reflected most light and so did the dragon. "Who's that man," from the café and to the balcony, he caught their attention. It went around, they were curious about who he was

and the room grew noisier. "What a show-off," lower-ranks hated him, "-how powerful is he?" some asked, "what rank does he have?" the badge was in fact confusing.

"Greetings Staxius," instead of Diane, Melisa received him instead. "Greetings," he returned her act of courtesy, "how may we be of service?" she asked curious to his late-night visit. "Nothing much," he sighed and straighten the posture, "-long story short," he skipped every detail he possibly could, "I have captured a would-be criminal. He was on the verge of committing a homicide, but something tells me that he has more in store than he lets on. The aura around him wasn't normal; it was darker and denser than a normal murderer." Unknowingly he did give out information, but inconsequential ones; her face was stuck in a perpetual smile. Her confusion grew but she smiled and waited. "I apologize," he saw the bafflement in her eyes, "-I just have someone of interest, may I have room to maybe ask some questions?" the tone felt slightly psychotic. "I care not about you asking some questions," her reply stood firm, "-if a room is what you desire, we can provide you with one. But absolutely no torture and no bloodshed; we'll be watching." Her eyes serious, Staxius agreed.

'We'll definitely not make it back for dinner,' he chuckled. The room was painted in grey and black, a single light bulb that occasionally flickered stood overhead. A weird buzzing remained around, behind him a mirror. A one-way mirror to be precise; Melisa wasn't lying when she said they were going to watch. Sat in front of him, the one who he caught, tied and still unconscious. "Avon," he spoke, "how may I be of service?" the spirit materialized, Melisa's fondness grew; she was intrigued by that man – mysterious and unreadable.

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"Can you use water magic?" Staxius asked in a monotonous tone, "master, I've told you before. I can use any type of magic, just say the word." Avon did or didn't say that, who knew – Staxius forgot that detail along the way. "Excellent," Staxius smiled, "splash his face with the coldest water you can summon," and as per his orders – the man was drenched into consciousness. "What is this," he awoke and immediately tried escaping. He looked as if a stray cat had been captured. The attempts in trying to break free were answered back with only a laugh. "W-who are you?" the man asked, Staxius watched with a menacing face. The man continued the frivolous attempts, soon he grew tired and gave in. "What do you want?" the tone felt normal; he hadn't given up yet. "Nothing much, just some information," Staxius smiled, "depends on what kind of information," the man held a conniving smile. "Information about you trying to assault the tailor," his eyes felt piercing, the man felt as if Staxius saw right through him. "I don't know what you're talking about," he replied sincerely, the man was talented – talented into arts of lying and deception. That much became apparent within the first minute of the conversation.

Instead of giving a reply, or any movement to that matter – Staxius sat and waited. Avon leaned against the mirror – Melisa watched intently. Without saying anything, the man spat on Staxius. \*Snap,\* a dark flame evaporated the liquid. "That's a bit disrespectful, isn't it?" he changed his posture into one much more serious and sterner. "From that reaction, I'm guessing you can't do anything to harm me physically," the man smiled, he was correct. Harming him meant having Melisa breathing down Staxius's neck. Nevertheless, Staxius could have cared less. He wanted to resolve this and get information.

"A one-way mirror must be the reason why you can't do anything to me," the man continued to analyze his surroundings. For a would-be murderer, the awareness he showed was masterful. "I've had enough," Staxius added and sighed.

\*As the one whom you're contracted to, I order thy to reveal this man's weakness and how to exploit it. Dark Arts, Sense personality. \*

[Victim: Alan Mame, age 25]

[Personality: Subtle and ruthless]

[Prediction: Part of the Dark-guild]

[Weakness: Being inferior]

[Best Approach: Being more ruthless and psychotic than he]

'More ruthless and psychotic, that's going to be hard with Melisa watching,' he thought. The man continued to ramble nonsense. "Hey, you with the dragon crest." He called out, Staxius raised his eyes menacingly, "-are you going to sit and do nothing?"

"Alright, Alan Mame," Staxius said seriously, "h-how do you know my name?" the man's eyes turned gloomy. "I shan't take much more of your time," he stood, "I've but one question; why did you try and attack that tailoring shop." He leaned closer, 'Avon, summon water magic and then heat it.' Telepathy worked, Avon understood and followed the order. In a matter of minutes, the mirror began to fog up and the view inside blocked. "W-what are you doing?" the aura around Staxius changed, the man grew slightly scared. "nothing much, just asking some questions," he let out a slight grin

\*As the one bounded to my soul, heed mine own call, dearest friend and companion, Fenrir, appear before me.\*

"Greetings master," she jumped and hugged, things never changed. "I want us to use the same combination spell we did when I first met up with Thunderstain." She nodded, and the man was sent into an illusion world. A realm where Staxius reigned as the master. Meanwhile, the fog cleared – Melisa saw Staxius once more, he sat calmly but beside him, a woman. Blue hair, wolf's ears, a tail, and the perfect body. Her beauty rivaled anyone for miles, Staxius's face didn't change the least. Fenrir's tight clothes even made her shy but Staxius didn't pay heed. For him, Fenrir was a friend and a good companion, nothing could ever change that. And to her, Staxius was the same as well as a powerful leader and master.

Behind the scene, in the other realm; the room remained the same. However, Staxius was free to do what he wanted – and thus, the sadist personality came through. Lord Death's appetite to see people suffer and Staxius's perpetual rage let loose. Alan went through hell, torture was least of his worry. From chipping his nails too close to covering his head with a blanket. Staxius put the man on a table and let drops of water drip onto the forehead. Time went faster, the pain of each drop became apparent. In the illusion world, a week had passed, the man's mind felt all the pain and suffering. However, in the real world, only an hour had passed.

The torture didn't stop, Staxius took his time, he burnt, sliced, ripped hair. Tied Alan's body to two-wheel and stretched it, in the end, Alan cried but never said anything. This didn't bother Staxius, the

torture was like playing a game. He enjoyed every single moment, all the blood lust he had was poured into making that man break. From fingers to the nose and ears, Staxius began to sliced them, slowly, millimeter by millimeter using a rusty knife.

“F-fine...” he gave in after two hours, “I-I’m p-part of t-the dark-guild. I-I was sent to a-assassinate the tailor shop owner because she owed us a lot of coins. Today is the night where if she can’t pay the toll, I’d have killed her. But if things went wrong – in the unlikely event that she reached home. Another gang would take over and rush her house. She lives with three daughters the youngest being five years old and the oldest being eleven. T-the d-dark guild d-does not care. If she can’t pay her family will work for it – human slavery, prostitution; you name it.”

\*Clap\* the spell vanished; Alan found himself back in his normal body. Whatever he said was heard by Melisa, Fenrir was transported back to Dorchester. “Thank you for your corporation,” Staxius stood, the aura he gave out was one of someone on the verge of going on a rampage.

The door slammed shut, Melisa tried to approach him but was stopped by his gaze. “I’m going back to Claireville academy,” he left. “WAIT,” before he exited the hall, she caught up, “I’ll put in a request for her rescue, don’t worry, the adventurers can take care of this; the dark-guild is far stronger than you think.” She didn’t want him to go into battle alone, “do I look like I care?” he shook her off and headed outside.

‘Scum, I swear by lord death’s name; he shall receive the soul of the ones who tried to hurt innocents. I’m not a hero, just someone who hates when people think they are above others,’ the car lit, it roared so loud it rattled everywhere, “Avon, go into overdrive.”

## Chapter 112: Silent Death

“Diane, Diane,” the door to the break room opened. Melisa had rushed inside, her face filled with sweat and breathing erratic, “have you seen a ghost?” Diane calmly placed her cup. “I-I its t-that new adventurer,” her breathing grew smoother. “You mean the so-called king?” she asked to which Melisa nodded. “What about him?” Diane stood, “h-he’s o-out to search for the dark-guild.” Her reaction remained static; she didn’t flinch in the least. “Is that so,” she walked to the door, “-have you sent him to his death then?” she said in a tone meant to hurt. “It wasn’t my fault,” the usual soft and calm tone raised in pitch; Melisa raised her voice for the first time. “Now this is a surprise, what’s the matter?” Diane’s interest peaked.

“I just want you to take me seriously, he did, in fact, ran to hunt down the culprit,” she spoke with sincerity. “Fine,” Diane turned around and placed her hands onto the shy girl’s shoulder. “I’ll put in a quest for him; give me the details and the address. I’ll notify the guild master concerning the reward.” A smile resurfaced, “Thanks Diane,” her heartfelt at ease.

In said matter, a quest was placed onto the notification board. [Search and Rescue – Tier 5] the ranking had to be high for the dark-guilds were unpredictable. Despite trying to help the new adventurer, namely Staxius, Melisa’s fear turned for the worst. The realization about where the quest and how long it would take to get there sunk in. The train was available but it was way too late to use said means of transport. Normally it would take around five to six hours, but with Void; the journey cut to four hours. Though it didn’t matter now, the car was in overdrive, it practically cut the journey down to one and a half-hour.

“M-master, are you sure it’s wise to rush and aid someone you don’t even know?” Avon spoke while inside the car, he helped in keeping the car stable and not go out of control. “Honestly, I don’t know. I’ve got some pent-up frustration I need to let out and what better way than to stain my hand with blood. I haven’t killed anyone in a while; I sort of liked that lifestyle – resolve everything with democracy and speech. However, it’s not my style, deep down, the bloodlust and killing intent will never disappear,” he sighed, “-do you know how hard it is for me? I have to hold back every time I fight. Every single time, I can’t use a slight bit of my power, and if I were to go all out; massacre would soon follow. That’s my curse, our curse. Even with Eira being my daughter, when we sparred earlier – I heard it. The voice, the call, the screams, the real me trying to cloud my judgment and accidentally kill anyone who dared point any sort of weapon at me.”

A perpetual battle, Staxius knew deep down he wasn’t cut out for living a normal life. Bloodshed was where he thrived, the death of others, that was who he was. The time spent in the company of Xula and inhabitants of Arda help shape who he was. Instead of going rampant, he chose to keep the bloodlust in check. It was voluntary, no one forced him to do so. In order to become stronger, he had to limit himself and tame the beast that fueled his strength. That was how Staxius turned from a merciless killer to a slightly merciful but still a killer. The comfort he felt when that lady spoke to him; the love and compassion he sensed – it made him joyful. He didn’t know that she had been going through such a rough time. Deep down, he wanted to see his mother and sister again. His own flesh and blood; he wanted to see them and say, “mother, I’ve become someone who has the power to change the fate of the people surrounding me. The power to turn this reality into something better and greater. A reality where you and father never had to part ways; a reality where my sister and I could playfully grow together. A reality where war wasn’t a threat – but it was all a fantasy. All but wishful thinking, the reality was far darker than anything of that nature.”

The thought of kids being sold into slavery and prostitution. The mother getting killed, he didn’t want to let her die in vain. She still owed him, and he was one to always take what he deserved. The car drove, it gained speed throughout the journey and they soon arrived. That family wasn’t the only one in a similar predicament, many others were pulled apart due to the dark-guilds. Sadly, their organization remained hidden and secretive for none knew how they operated. Town-square came in sight, rather than going north to where the academy was situated. He headed further to the south-west; the address was a quiet little place within the residential district.

The sheer size of the non-noble’s home put the many mansion to shame. The people were, in fact, rich and lived peacefully. “Master, the house is to the left after we pass this mansion.” As he progressively went further inside, the quality of the homes lowered. They became more common and less flashy, till he arrived at where the lady supposedly lived. ‘is this where she resides?’ before coming close, Staxius stopped. He got out as to not make noise and raise suspicion. He had no clue if the gang had attacked or not. He slowly walked till her house came into view. Tonight, was a moonless night, thus the darkness made all unseeable.

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The moment of truth came, he closed his eyes. The aura of people around began to shine, he could tell who was who. Then came time to check on the lady’s house. What he saw next could not be accurately

put into words. He was too late, the house crawled with red-auras; auras filled with killing intent. In the middle, three slightly dim light shone, and on the top floor, one of a lady who drew her last breath. She laid on the bed surrounded with more red auras than down below; the gang had already made their move. Her aura, one bright and gentle slowly faded, without a noise made, Staxius vanished. 'check the glove compartment, I've hidden away a healing scroll.' The quality, Epic. An experiment to see if he could raise the Rare scroll he made into higher quality.

\*BANG,\* the door broke open, the blade unleashed its death and fury. One by one, in a matter of seconds, heads rolled to fill the whole bottom floor. Upstairs, the aura hanged by a thread, Avon managed to get the scroll; he used speed enhancement to get inside. "WHAT IS HAPPE..." the hooded soldiers didn't know what was going on. All they heard were slash and liquid as well as heavy balls falling onto the floor. From the ground floor, he rushed inside the bedroom and \*Slash,\* it all painted in red. Avon arrived just milliseconds before her life force fully drained. The scroll activated in time; his eyes remained closed. A few stray auras sneaked around the house but he chose to leave them be. They were cowards and less powerful; more like watchmen. "Follow the guard," he asked Avon who promptly attached himself to one of the guards running away. Reason being he saw blood and figures getting dismembered at neck-breaking speeds.

'The smell of iron, how nostalgic,' he turned around and placed his foot onto one of the heads. He treated it as if it were a ball. At last, he opened his eyes to see the one who reminded him of his mother in a pitiful state. "I apologize for entering without saying a word," he mumbled, her eyes were slightly opened. "i-its y-you isn't it?" fatigue caught up to her. "Yes, it's me." He added and walked out of the dimly lit room. 'Cleaning is going to be a mess,' he tiptoed around the corpses he left. The hallways once of a brown and black color were smothered with the blood of many. The daughters were inside the kitchen, he didn't have time to pay attention to them for their mother was on the brink of death. He could not imagine what they saw, a figure and a flash of light that was accompanied by muted screams. They saw skulls rush out each time one of their heads fell.

Nonchalantly, he arrived in the kitchen. The sight of blood became common at this point and so did the heads. "Are you guys ok?" the daughters came into view, "p-please d-don't hurt u-us," the eldest yelled. She saw his sword doused in blood, "oh, sorry about that," he swung in such a manner that the blade cleaned itself. \*tap,\* he sheathed the weapon and hid it with an illusion spell. "Don't worry about being hurt," he smiled, the aura changed from lethal to friendly and approachable. He smiled, the youngest tried to cry when he went closer. "Don't worry, here look," he took a pen and made it disappear, in their eyes, he had done something unbelievable. Then he used his index finger to conjure up a fireball and made it change shape and size, their guard lowered. "W-who a-are you m-mister?" the eldest asked, she stood in front of her siblings. "I'm a friend of your mothers," it took some time and mind games but they believed him.

Seeing all the blood around them, the siblings were left on edge. They didn't quite see the full horror of a dead body, but it was close. Staxius had to walk on a tiny thread; a single glimpse could traumatize them forever. "G-girls?" the lady despite her fatigue stumbled her way down the stairs. "Mother," they tried to rush towards her voice but Staxius moved faster. He picked their mother and took her to the kitchen. "Honestly, you should not be moving about; don't you realize the state of this house?" he added softly, the kids rushed into her arms. "w-why are you h-here?" she asked, "isn't it obvious? I'm

here for my homecooked meal,” he pulled out his tongue. Never mind the fact that he just killed about twenty people in less than a minute; he joked.

“Just who are you?” her face turned gloomy, she had her suspicion and for good reason. “Listen, I don’t care if you don’t trust me. I’ll explain everything later, but you seriously need to move to somewhere else. Maybe a hotel to stay overnight, this place is far too dangerous for your kids to move about. And not to mention the mess I made,” he turned and stared at the corpses he left. “I wish that was easier said than done,” she referred to not having enough coins. “Don’t think of this as a debt, but rather a favor. I’m going to cast some magic; you best take your girls and head to the closest hotel. Don’t worry about the price; I’ll pay for I’m responsible for this mess.” His voice turned from friendly to serious. “I can’t possibly accept,” she was unwilling to trust him. “Listen,” his voice raised, “do you want your kids to be traumatized for the rest of their lives? I care not if you don’t trust me,” he threw over ten gold coins, “just take the kids and leave,” he was desperate to get them out. “I trust you, I’ve told you before, I know these things. I was just checking if you were actually a good person; my doubts have been cleared. No need to worry, I’ve got some relatives living close by, just cast the spell or whatever.” She rose and Staxius used illusion magic to make all the blood and death vanish, “thank you so much,” she ran next door.

‘So, her relatives are her neighbors.’ He finally took a good look at his clothes; they were covered with stains. ‘Lovely, I just wasted a perfectly good shirt,’ he chuckled. ‘time to investigate the extent of the damage I’ve caused.’ One after the other, he checked each dead body for clues linking them to the dark-guild. Nothing was found, not until something crossed his mind. A name he hadn’t heard in ages; Sten Parcyvell – the ex-ruler of Dorchester.

#### Chapter 113: Ancient Hero

‘Why,’ he wondered as the smell of iron grew denser, ‘why would I think of Sten Parcyvell out of all the people I know.’ It baffled him, a name long to the ages but not forgotten by many for the deeds, Staxius knew not why that man came to him suddenly. A gust of wind blew, the door left ajar opened wide. “Must be a storm brewing,” he jested while closing the door. The hallway in front of him was but a bloodied mess. ‘...’ As he stood with his back against said door; he knew why – the reason became apparent. The worst thing a mage could think of doing; necromancy. All the corpses before him, he knew why Sten came into his mind. Such was a similar view whence he entered the torture chamber.

‘An army of dead bodies, raising the undead, controlling their bodies.’ The idea felt somewhat appetizing; though outlawed and shunned by most. The use of necromancy wasn’t rare for many small cults practiced and experimented with. The prospect of experimenting with magic he knew not had entranced him. The search for knowledge, the addiction; he wanted to test out what Sten had researched for many years. The notes he read were still fresh in his mind, Staxius only needed to do a little effort. The effort to channel his mana into a magical circle and connect all the dead bodies to one another. ‘I’ve got it, time isn’t of the essence at the moment.’ He took a deep breath, the eyes focused on a goal. ‘With the papers provided by Sten, I can manipulate any dead body for miles on end. However, it will be a conscious effort and I don’t want that. The preferable goal is to raise them into being with their own conscience. Not enough to question their existence or think to that matter, but conscious enough to fight, outthink, and defeat their foe.’ He clapped and smiled, a brilliant idea came to him, a spark that triggered his imagination.

Thus, for the entire night, with rain pouring outside. He made sure to put all the bodies into one pile. First, he experimented with Sten's long-distance manipulation using their empty mana circuit. They worked fine, Staxius managed to control one of them easily. He named said method the Puppetry, for puppets were controlled by strings, and here the strings were his own mana. Puppetry could only get him so far, he needed them to have their own thoughts. To that end, he thought long and hard, nothing came. However, hope wasn't lost just yet – subconsciously while he brainstormed the endless possibilities to which he could use mana to influence their behavior. Staxius stepped into a familiar dimension, Clarity. Incredibly, he entered the fabled realm where the impossible turned possible.

There it was, the further he walked, the clearer everything got. The answer to the question about putting conscience into dead bodies became obvious. It was simple but immoral; the solution was to give each body a soul. An entire soul for one body basically meant resurrection; that idea to turn the dead into the living became a possibility. Sadly, it wasn't what he looked for, the criteria for it to work was physically impossible to acquire. Qhildir's Heart, the god of philosophy's ring, an item heard in myth only. Myth could not be turned into reality with will only, thus that idea faded into the abyss. The answer laid before him; a soul was necessary – for it's the vessel that carried knowledge acquired in previous lives. 'Eureka,' it dawned on him, that was the solution. A soul, not an entire portion, but a part of a soul. It would not affect anyone or anything that way, it was if taking a cup of water in a river. The result would not be consequential.

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He continued down the path into Clarity, all the quandary sorted themselves. A few hours went by, Staxius changed from leaning to sitting. 'I found it,' his eyes opened, the trance broke. '-the knowledge I sought after have been laid naked before mine own eyes.' The facial expression remained emotionless, \*slash,\* blood dripped from his hand.

\*Heed my call, oh great worrier, I, the god of death demand thee to appear before mine own eyes. I call forth thy soul from the depth of hell, son of Peleus, Achilles.\* The incantation didn't stop, Staxius poured all his mana; everything he had, \*Thou who was slain from an arrow by Paris, guided by God Apollo, come forth for I'm thy master, and thou shall obey the strongest.\* a burning dark flame lit the spilled blood. In a matter of seconds, it grew into an inferno. The pentagram on his arm began to glow as well, all the markings on his body bled, the repercussion of waking an ancient hero, one who none had heard. A hero he knew the existence only thanks to lord's death's library.

The house rumbled, the air changed, the mild showers of rain turned into a full-blown storm. Lightning and thunder followed behind; it came close to hitting the house itself. The air felt electric, Staxius stood, eyes focused and stance unfaltering. The hand rested inches from the sword's handle; a figure began to materialize. "WHO DARES AWAKEN ME FROM MINE OWN SLUMBER," a voice as loud as thunder, yelled. A spirit stood behind Staxius, the face not distinguishable, the body naked and unarmed, the spirit's aura rivaled anything he had ever sensed.

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It took some time, but the spirit eyed Staxius with deep curiosity. "Art thee the one whomst dared summoned me?" he asked with frustration in his tone. Staxius did nothing but stare back with all his might. He didn't falter, the confidence he showed made the spirit cautious. "I'm Staxius Haggard, heir to



the god of death. I've summoned thee from thy slumber to help I in mine conquest." Nothing needed to be said, spirits didn't need to know backstories about the ones they came in contact with. They could speak telepathically and read minds if the summoner allowed it to. Staxius did the same, wasting breath proved to be less useful. Rather than words, he showed Achilles what the motive of his summoning was. "Heir to the god of death, I humbly give mine greetings. However powerful thou might be, I'm but a soul whomst was awakened without mine consent. Prices art to be paid in full," he spoke true, awakening a resting soul was sacrilege. Achilles in his lifetime was revered as the strongest hero who ever walked his realm. Invincible and invulnerable to damage, that was who Staxius stared. "Prices are meant to be paid in full, but art thee ready to face I, one who knows thy weakness?" the sword unsheathed inches by inches. The hero watched Staxius, the resolve to fight showed clearly. The man who Achilles saw before him was worthy to be called king.

"Sheathed thy sword god of death, I haven't come to fight. I but asked for a price to be paid. Not with sword and fight, but with a chance at revival. I ask but this, Staxius Haggard; if thou art willing, follow me to the underworld. Tis a place not for the living, but for a god tis but another matter. Follow me to mine realm, to the place where the object of my revival, Qhildir's Heart; can be found." Staxius nodded and followed, a portal opened; they vanished.

"Welcome to the underworld," the portal reopened, Staxius stepped out. Achilles stood before a beast, a three-headed monster with a serpent's tail. "Qhildir's Heart is around Cerberus's neck. None has ever defeated this beast, I can testify that even I, a hero revered by many hasn't the slightest chance at victory. Prove to me that thou have the power and strength to be call mine master, Staxius Haggard; show me thy strength."

Staxius walked, the beast slept. "Master Cerberus without shield or iron," Achilles whispered. Without losing any time, the heir to the god of death approached. 'Master Cerberus without shield or iron,' this was a quote from mythology. Tis was the requirement instated by Hades when Hercules set off to capture said beast. Mythology and history fascinated him, he knew everything about it. This realm, one where many gods and heroes existed at one time, made him envious. Their tales, their adventures, the thrill of the beasts they fought. Staxius's smile could not be constrained. First, he faced off against Fenrir, a wolf from another realm as opposed to one where the Hydra and Cerberus hailed from. 'Knowledge is power; therefore, I'll have to defeat the three-headed demon. I have the luxury of killing Cerberus for I haven't the need to capture him alive.'

It sensed Staxius approached, it growled and swung its paws. The tails almost moved in tandem – the coordination impeccable. Dodging was inevitable, however, the one he faced wasn't normal either. Effortlessly, Staxius jumped and stood on the beast's tail. It's size put Fenrir's to shame. Along its back, Cerberus lashed out all the snakes that waited patiently. Seeing no way out, Staxius leaped and retreated. 'Deadly,' the attack didn't stop, no breathing space was given. The moment his feet touched the ground, the demon pounced and tried to maul away his head. "Excuse me," inches away from his face, Staxius managed to conjure a fireball and blast away the middle head. However, the right and left didn't stand idly by, for they took turns trying to maul him. Left, right, Staxius stepped and dodged and cast magic where it needed to be done. The way he handled the demon, it impressed the hero who watched with eyes fully opened.

"Never have I seen such flexibility and agility," he spoke unconsciously, Staxius fought beautifully. A smile shone, his hair moved from left to right, the sweat dripped off his face gently. The heir to the god

of death truly was one to be seen in person. \*Dark-Arts: UNLEASH AURA,\* the smile broke as he yelled, beast's body lowered massively. With the sheer force of his untamed strength, Staxius managed to make Cerberus falter a little. "I don't want to slay you," he whispered, it howled as if it acknowledged what he said. However, the attack didn't stop, it continued, Staxius tried to keep the damage to a little. The respect he had for him wasn't measurable, he was facing off against a demon renowned and who played a massive part in said realm's history. 'The ring is what I need,' an attack came from the right, he lowered his body and saw the heart. \*Death Element; Shadow-step,\* he vanished, a cling followed and Cerberus fell. "Does this justify my worthiness to become thy master?" he held the ring in front of Achilles. The portal reopened, "thank you for not slaying my precious dog," a voice echoed behind, Staxius left. "Great," he reappeared into a puddle of blood.

'Who would have known that the heart was in the underworld. This has worked out for the better.' No words were left to say, Staxius began to draw a pentagram accompanied by symbols. \*Thou who has been sealed to another realm, I command thee by mine authority to be bound to mine own soul and become mine guard for eternity, Achilles, son of Peleus, I order thy soul to walk this earth in my company: Soul Transmutation.\*

The heaviness in the room increased massively, the bodies began to burn. A black-light engulfed whatever remains laid in the kitchen. All the blood began to turn to dust, it lit brightly, the pile of corpses rose. It grew in height as if a volcano being born -"FRESH AIR AT LAST," the rain outside grew more in intensity. Something caught his attention, the tone wasn't one of a man, but it felt feminine. "No need to look disconcerted, I'm Achilles, but as mistaken in mythology. I'm not man, my true self is one of a woman," the sluggish black liquid began to shape into a humanoid shape. Lightning struck and the darkish face lit, "thanks for bestowing me with the boon of life, heir to the god of death. From today forth, I, Achilles pledge to be thy sworn sword and shield." She knelt, her body naked. 'I've seen this before,' he thought but remained stern. "I humbly accept thy pledge." The ring crumbled, having an object that powerful at his disposal would have been nice. However, its place was in the finger of its owner, thus Staxius smiled at what he accomplished.

From trying to raise an undead army; to acquiring a hero from another realm. The attempt at necromancy served a greater purpose than he ever imagined. He tried to use part of her soul, but instead managed to summon the hero herself in flesh and blood – another ally gained.

#### Chapter 114: Achilles

"Lord Staxius Haggard, though it's unbecoming for a lady such as I to lay naked before thy lordship – may I humbly ask for any sort of attire," she still knelt, Staxius paid no heed. The attention changed to the outside, dawn approached fast. "Achilles, there isn't a need for you to speak in such a formal tone. I'm but your companion now, a team is built on trust and not hierarchy. Thus, I'd humbly ask you to drop the courtesy." The new master threw her a black-hood smothered with blood. "Bear with it for a while longer, acquiring attire at this moment might be a problem." His eyes remained on the road; the rain stopped minutes ago. It was as if he waited, waited for something or someone; an anxious feeling whelmed him. To his statement, Achilles quickly looked around and spoke, "aren't we inside someone's domicile? Am I wrong to assume said person doesn't have any means of clothing?" her eyes squinted in doubt. "Do as you wish, head upstairs, there may be some clothes laying around." He replied nonchalantly, the footsteps quickly climbed up the stairs. "-please make it inconspicuous," he shouted, to which she replied with, "no worries."

A few minutes past, she climbed back down. The door was left wide open, the blood inside had vanished, Staxius was nowhere to be seen. In this manner, the new ally rushed outside to be baffled by the new world she stepped into. The way the roads were made, how masterful some of the houses were crafted. Flying vehicles up above, she engulfed herself in amazement. "Over here," he spoke, Staxius leaned on Void. While she changed, the car got parked beside the house in a tight yard, almost like an alleyway leading to the back garden. "Lordship, am I to assume this thing is thine?" her quick pace lessened, the sight of Void had the same effect on her. "I must say, the way you speak is slowly changing; the archaic nature fades." The door opened, "if you say so," she let a smile slip.

This was the first time Staxius fully saw Achilles. Before, the light blocked his vision, but now, as the sun rose steadily, it became clearer to see how she looked. Her hair was of a dirty blond, the complexion white but not as pale as Eira. A slight tan made it more distinguishable, her face nicely shaped. Her eyes lit of a hazel color. The clothing she wore was an exact copy of what Staxius had. Checkered pants with a long-sleeved shirt. They practically twinned, "I sort of understand why people would think you're a boy," he entered and waited for her to join him. "I strongly disagree," she quickly grasped her surroundings, "- clothes made for men are usually better suited for combat. The liberty of movement as opposed to dresses, spare me," her tone always had a bitterness to it. It pierced slightly but the tone never faltered, it remained monotonous with small intonations when needed.

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The car turned on and headed into town. Claireville academy was the destination, never mind the fact that he has slain people on his night out. The tournament was set for tomorrow. Today was the last day he had to train with Eira. The scenery changed and so did the look on Achilles's face. Fascination, it never left – her eyes always glittered. "We've arrived," they passed the gate and parked near the office building. "Arrived at where?" she turned and faced Staxius who remained calm. "Arrival at the place where I'm to fight tomorrow. We've got much to discuss, however, for today and tomorrow – you shall follow me as if you were my shadow. Ask no question unless necessary." He paused and thought, "- never mind that, ask anything you want. I did bring you from another realm; here the use of magic is available to all. Not just for gods only, and please don't try and fight anyone unless I give the order. You are my shield and sword, but don't be aggressive, people here are on edge." He got out and so did she, their walk continued to the stadium.

Meanwhile, all this happened, Avon still shadowed one of the guards who ran away. He ran to the south-east. A good distance away, inside a rocky plain. The terrain changed drastically from urban and civilized to dense forest. It followed with a small swamp and arrived at a secluded area. No living being could be sensed from miles on end. Secluded was an understatement, however, the man continued to walk as if it were his playground. Hours onto hours, he walked and walked, till a strange red symbol engraved on a tree trunk caught his attention. A quick press onto said symbol revealed a hidden trapdoor. It was located just before a massive cliff, amidst a plethora of thorny and potentially poisonous plants. 'This is where the hideout is,' Avon returned to Staxius.

Also, concurrently in the capital, the quest about the search and rescue didn't grow in popularity. People were aloof to the fact that someone could have died due to the dark-guilds. Sadly, the adventurers didn't want to risk endangering their family over some quest. The underground guilds had a far deeper reach than anyone could ever imagine. Even if anyone were to set off to Claireville Academy, it wouldn't be worth the effort. The ranking for said quest was a tier was only a few individuals could participate.

Tier five, otherwise known as Ruby rank; a rank just above Fenrir's. Melisa had her hands full with updating the noticeboard, Diane being herself decided to not let anyone take the [Search & Rescue] task. She firmly stood behind the fact that only tier five adventurers should be allowed to set off. A part of tier-six adventurers tried to undertake said challenge. However, their frivolous attempts were shut without arguments.

Time went on without fail, the capital strolled through as if nothing happened. Claireville academy was where the activity buzzed. The anticipation for the two versus two tournament made itself known. Five teams were to test their might against each other. It was all confusing, the tournament instead of being a normal elimination match between teams turned into a point-based game. Seeing one of the teams had to drop out due to unforeseen turn of events. Five teams were left to battle each one out.

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The tournament was as followed; five teams with each one having three chances at being defeated. All started with five points – the duels were picked. It didn't matter if a team fought three times in a row or never fought, it was all random. This was the way how the Academy avoided any false claims over foul play. With three points at their disposal, the team who won a match was transferred over a point from the team they defeated. In total, fifteen points were distributed amidst the combatants. If at any time during the tournament a team reached zero, they would be eliminated without question. It was possible for a team to win all their matches and claim all fifteen points. In the more likely event of the points being spread out evenly across; the team with the lowest point would be eliminated at the end of the day.

This would leave only four teams to battle it out in a standard tournament setting. All this information was made available via pamphlets the student council distributed across town. A point game that could decide a winner and end it. This setting was unique to Claireville academy. It was a statement, a challenge if you will. A challenge for the participants to fight with a purpose; defeating all the teams. Not by luck, but with skill, thus why each was awarded three-points. Seeing as having five teams compete would be too long and rather boring. The main arena was divided into two halves' where four teams could battle out without breaks. One duo had to be left out but tis was just fate. Some called it luck while others might have hated it. But at the end of the day, the one who fought was decided by fate. One might never step on the battlefield until one team is eliminated. It was a fair game, a fight to the death.

With that in mind, Staxius sparred and taught Eira a few tricks and tips when it came to combat. They fought till noon; she didn't want to stop but Staxius replied with no. That point-setting was a test of endurance as well as mana conservation. Not only did it test how strong the participants were but also how ingenious they could be. Wit and strength, polar opposites when on the battlefield but if united; its wrath could not be quelled. On looking at the training, Achilles and Ysmay. They say a few seats apart, the latter seemed on edge while the former watched intently. She observed how her master fought and portrayed himself. They stopped, Eira remained adamant about continuing to fight. Having had enough, Staxius pointed to his new companion and called. She stood and vanished, the speed at which she moved left dent marks on whence she stood.

"You've summoned me?" she stepped inside with her clothes matching. "Father, who's this?" Eira watched carefully, the sight of a pretty lady by his side triggered a lot of red alarms. "Calm the

animosity," Staxius spoke, "-this here is Achilles, a new friend as well as my comrade in battle." She nodded with a cold gaze. "Achilles, meet my daughter, Eira," he smiled. Both ladies watched with dead stares, "now, now," he stepped into the line of fire. "Eira, I want you to burn this image into your head. I'll show you the final lightning strike stance," he added confidently. "What do you mean final stance," she was flabbergasted, "- you never use aunt Alyson's stance now do you?" her eyes remained confused.

"Yes," he agreed, "-there's a reason why I don't use it. That stance is too powerful to use and not to mention your aunt's signature move. I didn't want to copy her, for the way for the sword is a way to express yourself." He walked over and grabbed a simple-looking steel weapon. "I shall use this as demonstration," he stepped directly in front of Achilles. "Father, didn't you say that using that move was too powerful?" Eira's sharpness never ceased to amaze. "Yes, but don't underestimate the lady who stands before me. I don't choose my partners lightly," he got into the stance. At first glance, it looked similar but was, in fact, a whole other move. It was inspired by Eira when she tried to use a shadow-element variant long ago. However, it didn't work out as she hoped. Mastering that variant was difficult but she surmounted her own limitations. What Staxius showed her on that day wasn't anything she had ever seen. A move he refined and mastered to the point of perfection.

The body slowly lowered to the floor, he bent forward. A mist emanated from his feet, \*Shadow Element: Lightning strike,\* instantly, the force of his feet sufficed to crack the ground. It looked like an arrow made out of the shadow, it headed straight for Achilles who stood without a care in the world. Eira thought that the girl would die even if she tried dodging. A faint sound of metal breaking followed by a massive explosion. The smoke cleared, she stood without any injury, Staxius's right arm, as well as a portion of his chest, blew right off. "Damn, I didn't expect the move to deflect partly," he turned around with blood dripping. "Achilles," he spoke, "-you truly are a hero aren't you," he smiled. For a second, her face turned gloomy; the sight of him in pieces made her guilty.

"Don't make that face," he added casually, "-I'm heir to the god of death. Each fatal wound makes me stronger," the body regenerated itself. "How can you be anymore reckless," Eira spoke while her face froze into a state of perpetual fear. "Don't worry about your old man. I'm immortal and for my companion here, she's invincible," he pulled out his tongue. "Unbelievable," she pouted, "-as if one of you wasn't enough. You had to go and find someone who has god level talents."

#### Chapter 115: New Party

"Are you alright?" the one responsible quickened her pace, "I'm fine," he patted her shoulder with the healthy arm. "I guess you truly are the heir to the god of death," as if she didn't believe it before, Achilles was now fully convinced. "Pay me no heed," the body healed, "-use that photographic memory of yours and try to implement the final lightning strike. Also, try and think of another name for it, lightning strike shadow variant is a mouthful," he jested and walked slowly to the entrance. "Father," Eira called before he went out of view, "...," he turned and stared. "Let's do our best, that tournament tomorrow is ours," she cheered. 'Don't doubt it,' Staxius but smiled and left; the signature wave.

"Master," Achilles reached out, "drop it," he fired back quickly. "Master," she reached out once more, "drop it," he fired back again. "Staxius," she gave up, "yes," he replied with a smile. "Can you be any more difficult," she added in frustration. "Much more problematic," he winked as if proud. "Where are we headed now?" she asked. Her reply was but him pointing his finger at the office. "What about it?"

they had walked for a few minutes now. "I've got someone waiting," the office faded behind them and the car came into view. Her fix eyes firmly stuck onto Staxius, she waited. Meanwhile, he placed his hand onto the vehicle and channeled his mana. A strange rumbling and hum began as soon as contact was made. "Wake up Avon," Staxius spoke monotonously.

"As you wish," the sparkly spirit materialized. "Did you missh me?" he winked and bit the lower lip in a playful manner. "Gross," Achilles whispered from behind, to which Staxius chuckled. "Are you laughing at me," Avon pouted. Achilles moved closer, "who is that?" she asked. "That's Avon; a spirit who is my bodyguard, aid, spy, and anything I ever want him to be. He's more like a son with that playful and cheeky personality, I do enjoy the company. He has my back on a daily basis. I can't fully recall, but he has, in fact, stopped any sneak attacks directed at me. Whether guns, daggers or people being disrespectful; Avon isn't one to be looked down upon. Feeble and foolish might be how he's perceived but trust me, that boy isn't weak."

"Are you talking about me," Avon asked casually, he crept and knelt under both Staxius and his new companion. "Sadly yes," without warning, Achilles tried stomping the spirit's face, "no, no, no," he vanished, "-don't try and do anything funny. I could kill you in a heartbeat," the childish tone faded into one of a merciless killer. "I told you, don't mess with him," the aura changed back and he hugged Staxius tightly. "Get in the car everyone," he made up his mind to what to do next. Rather than spend time with Eira who took a shower, he decided to head out. "Avon, I need details about where the hideout is," they drove.

"Long story short, their hideout is situated south-east of where that tailors' house was. It's a straight line until you reach the rocky plains. It's then followed by forest, swamps, and forest again, the scenery was everchanging, I could not keep track that accurately," he continued to recount what he saw, the car was headed into the capital. "-once one has crossed all those obstacles. A weird symbol on a tree is what separates you from the destination. A trapdoor leads into their lair – it's luckily marked by a giant cliff. Poisonous plants also run rampant there, a single sting and lord death will take you on vacation," he finished. With that, Staxius took the opportunity to tell Achilles his past, and things that she was bound to know. From the fights he lost, to curses, to his capabilities, Staxius told all. There wasn't a risk of betrayal, that girl's soul belonged to him. Even if she tried to betray, a single snap would be what stands between her and the afterlife.

Minutes turned into hours; the weather remained gloomy since morning. The sun shone occasionally, but rain and cold were what ruled at that time. Mild showers that served to refresh the ever-shining atmosphere. A change of scenery, a good one at that. Rosespire came into view, it thrilled him. The capital was a place filled with mysteries and things to look at. He could never get bored, Staxius adored the way people interacted. That was to say excluding the business district, that place was far from being fun and entertaining. Though it did have its pros – outwitting one's rival could be proved to be fun. Nevertheless, Staxius remained nonchalant to everything, all those feelings floated around his head but they never stuck. The goal was always to get stronger or richer, make more allies and try and change the people around him; change for the better. Manipulation was out of the question – it was a lead by example scenario. He had to guide himself before guiding others. His first duty as King was to establish an adventuring guild for Arda. The first task he tackled with was coin, gold coins. A base of operation was needed, writing scrolls in the car wasn't that desirable.

“How much gold do we have?” Staxius asked out of the blue, “I know not. You spent recklessly, that’s for sure. I mean you paid a gold piece for those bloodied clothes – have you no incline to save and be economic.” Avon went off, Staxius treated coins as if they were toys that held no value. “come on it’s not that bad now is it?” he added playfully. Avon gave in and checked their balance –

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[Gold: 1569]

[Silver: 98]

[Copper: 99]

“Master,” he asked with a serious tone, “yes?” the capital came into view. “Did you use up ten gold pieces when I was away?” a quick flashback to the tailor’s house reminded him that he threw away ten without thinking. “...no,” he tried to lie but gave up in the end. “Yes,” he spoke loud and true, Avon sighed in disappointment. “No matter, we’re closing in on the capital. Achilles, take this opportunity to admire and see where this world’s technology has advanced too.”

The evening closed in, the journey took two and a half-hour. The visit here was to check back up with the guild and buy some blank scrolls. There was also the task of getting a little base of operation to write whatever scroll he needed. A small shop that opened rarely. Staxius knew that selling scrolls frequently would make the prospect of its rarity vanish. He had to be careful about how many he would make and how many he would sell. He needed the value to remain the same, healing scrolls were his only ace. The only way he could make gold easily as opposed to go out and adventuring.

First, they stopped at the main guild. Staxius had some items to sell. The bloodied hoods worn by the members of the dark-guild he had slain.

“Evening Staxius,” Diane spoke courteously, he stared and spoke, “evening Melisa,” once more, Staxius ignored Diane just to make her frustrated. Her reaction was but a sigh, her attention quickly changed to the other adventurers. “Evening Staxius,” her shoulders relaxed; the sight of him in flesh and blood made her blissful. “I’m thankful that you didn’t go into battle against the dark guild,” she spoke without knowing the truth. “...” he watched and sighed, “what’s the matter?” she asked with her voice filled with suspicion. “It’s just that I might have fought them already,” Diane overheard what he said. “Don’t kid yourself, you may be silver but you don’t have the strength to fight off those devils.”

He gave her the cold shoulder and continued, “I’ve heard that the guild collects any and all items right?” Melisa watched intently, “yes, we do unless it’s stolen goods or plain old trash.” He smiled, “then, will this get me something?” Avon walked in with a pile of bloodied black hoods. “There’s also daggers and stuff in there,” Achilles followed behind. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING,” Diane snapped, “THOSE ARE THE DARK-GUILD’S HOOD. BURN THEM, HIDE THEM, JUST DON’T BRING THEM HERE,” her voice echoed throughout. “No value then?” Staxius asked. The adventurers grew curious, “peculiar hoods, but who cares,” the whispers died down quickly. “They have value, don’t worry; I’ll ask the guild for more information,” Melisa asked her supervisors. They gave the green light to collect said items. After all, having evidence of the existence of said organization was paramount. “We can only do about 80 copper per hood,” the offer was made. “Eighty-five and it’s a deal,” Staxius fired back. “Eighty-three,” she

smiled, “done,” the hoods were taken inside. About twenty of them, in total he got sixteen silvers. The current balance indicated –

[Gold: 1570]

[Silver: 14]

[Copper: 99]

“Pleasure doing business,” Melisa thanked him due to habit. “Before we go, I’d like to sign these two behind me as adventurers. Could you get the necessary paperwork filled?” Staxius asked, Avon though a spirit could change into more physical and real shape, Achilles had her heads in the cloud, she watched the ceiling, architecture and beauty of the building. “And they are?” Her eyes looked cautious, “they are my companions. I need to get them the title of adventurers before I can think of making a party.” His answer seemed honest, “as you wish,” she signaled them both to enter. “Twenty golds, pay up,” Diane came over to where Staxius stood. Avon and Achilles were taken inside. “Seriously, making that boy become an adventurer is a bit heartless isn’t it?” she tried to guild shame him. “Don’t try and be moral with me, you guys have kids at the age of fifteen battling monsters. I’d think twice before trying to look down onto someone else. Because most often than not, the shits who try and lower other people to their level are the worst kinds of scum,” twenty gold coins dropped in front of her. It riled him up, how dared she. “No need to cause a scene,” her voice remained soft and quiet. “Just fill out their names and age, we’ll take care of the rest,” it had a change of heart, her fierceness vanished for an instant.

Information was filled rather rapidly. All that remained was to see what rank those two were going to be awarded. He had no high hopes, getting tier-ten would have been enough for him to start a party. So far, there were three members including Staxius, one or two more were needed. Preferably people not from Hidros, for said party was to set off to Arda at some point.

\*Knock, knock,\* the door shook, Diane rushed in without making noise. It felt weird but Staxius stood and waited. Later, both his companion came out, their faces looked gloomy and tired. “What happened,” he walked to where they stood. “...” no response, Melisa walked directly behind. “What did you do to them?” Staxius asked, the tone filled with anger at their pathetic sight. “What do you mean?” it startled her, there had been no foul play. “Standing around was boring...” Avon and Achilles mumbled at the same time. They looked listless, apparently, the time it took made them tired. He sighed and laughed, those two were impossible to deal with.

“I’m guessing you’re the party leader, given that you paid for their fee – the honor of seeing their rank will be yours.” She walked to the counter, where two sheets of paper rested in her hands. “The first one is for Avon,” the first sheet was placed onto the table. “-the rank given to him is Sapphire or tier-seven.” The second sheet placed onto the table, “the second one is for Achilles,” her fingers trembled. “-h-her rank w-was d-decided as b-bronze,” her face turned gloomy. “What do you mean bronze,” Staxius’s tone filled with regret, “-are you sure it’s not Silver or higher.” He was mad, the companion he brought back to life was a living hero. The mightiest of the bunch, how dare they assign her with Bronze rank. “What?” it baffled her that Staxius was angry about her not getting a higher rank.

“No matter, give me their guild cards, we are to head off.”

[Achilles: Bronze]



[Potential: Platinum]

[Avon: Sapphire]

[Potential: Platinum]

The guild cards showed both their potential. It was of a silvery color, just like the one Staxius had. A rare color to which the assistants were left speechless. Normally even getting tier-ten was something to be proud of. Here, in the span of a few days, Staxius got one of the highest as well as getting ranks above tier-eight. The tier was most adventurers were standing due to their lack of strength. Not to mention that getting potential as platinum was unheard of. Most that people got were bronze or silver, but platinum. Nothing changed, they witnessed the birth of a group of individuals who were destined for more.

Far, far away from the main guild, there was also another boy who went by the name of Gurdan. His potential was platinum as well; he had the ability to become someone truly powerful. The one fated to be called the first hero – the guy who is to defeat the god-slayer. That was what Melisa thought until Staxius came along. Nothing was set in stone yet, Plaustan still remained the bed infested with monsters trying to invade. Their immortality has brought about trouble for the individual guilds. However, they didn't falter – the fight went on without the populous knowing. The first and last line of defense, humans against beings that far surpass them in physical abilities.

#### Chapter 116: The symbol

Ranks acquired, items sold, the trip to the capital ended. Staxius walked the street for dusk had set in. Roaming around in a car would be troublesome for many drunks would recklessly step onto the streets. Anticipating a starry night, he looked up to bewhelmed by rainclouds. "This place is truly something amazing," Achilles spoke, their journey took them into the commercial district. "Master," Avon interrupted; "-haven't you got a tournament tomorrow?" Calmly, Staxius turned and answered with a slight nod then continued. "I guess someone's a bit tired," Avon sighed, Staxius's unwillingness to speak made him worry a little.

For a few more minutes, they walked. Achilles hopped from shop to shop, gazing at the numerous apparatus they had on display. Her mind was blown so much that it became a lesser concern. From clothes to weapons to technological gadgets, they walked and talked. Tis was Avon who did all the explaining for Staxius's mind was out of it. He had a pale look, the normally strong stern face had returned to a state of listlessness. "We should probably rest," the spirit suggested. "I agree for Staxius doesn't look that well," Achilles agreed. Despite this, Staxius made no motion whether verbally or physically, he looked as if a blank sheet of paper – empty. "I care not for your troubles," roughly, Achilles took him by the arm and headed into the nearest hotel. A cheap one that costs fifteen copper per night, Avon paid and they rested.

'Why am I acting this way,' though his companions gently put him to sleep, Staxius didn't have the strength to speak nor say thanks. It ailed him, this inability to do anything; something was wrong. 'Is it the backlash from summoning Achilles?' he wondered; his mana had been used far too much in the span of a few days. It had reached the end without recharging. As soon as the lights turned off, he fell asleep.

"Someone is looking worst than anticipated," a familiar voice whispered, "who stands there," Staxius replied. The body felt weightless, a place he visited before. "Don't say that you've forgotten about me?" the voice replied in a carefree manner, its intonation varied quite a bit. "L-lord death?" he asked, the eyes fully opened. A hue of gold, blue, white and black all surged. Before he stood a massive clock, each second, the needle moved and made a loud click sound. Quickly, he checked his surroundings to find nothing, the place was empty. "Worry not," a hand grabbed his shoulder, "-this place is far away from any realms. You're inside the domain of Kronos, the ancient titan and supreme god." Using the grip provided by the shoulder, the voice pulled his body into Staxius's field of view. "Greetings Lord Death," Staxius glanced and continued staring at the clock. "Is that how you treat your master?" he pouted. "Tee-hee," Staxius smiled in an uncommon manner. The only response provided was a loud sigh, "may I know the reason to which I've been summoned?" he asked, the tone serious but friendly.

"I've summoned you because of that thing you did," the voice replied in the same manner. "You're speaking about Achilles?" he asked, to which lord death replied with, "yes, perceptive." The clock continued ticking, "am I going to be reprimanded?" The god of death stared from top to bottom and simply replied with, "no." It dragged on for too long, the heir grew impatient, "what's the reason then?"

"It's nothing, I've called to congratulate you," he paused and waited for the reaction, "-I wish it was that simple," he made a tsk sound. "For summoning an entity who nearly reached god-level status millennia ago, I must say I'm impressed. Though it's not wrong, the backlash of that spell could have killed more people than you could ever imagine. A rampaging hero who has lost all prospect of good and evil, that's trouble you never want to come across. Especially now that apostles have become less frequent." A snap echoed around the emptied room; a plethora of portals opened. "Those are the other worlds and realm in which some gods are assigned. Being the strongest entity since creation itself, I've been ordered to stay out. However, the fact remains that there are millions of worlds out there getting rampaged by demons, humans and more. The world in which Hidros exists is one of the rare ones. This is because many apostles and heroes have been summoned there already." All this information rendered Staxius curious, he waved signaling a question, "are you implying that there are more worlds that need saving compared to ours?"

"Yes and no," the answer felt boorish. "-each world has a god or goddess in charge. They decide who is to become the one to save each domain. Zeus, the current supreme god has control over the Earthly domain. The dimension where you stole, or rather, borrowed, Achilles. All the myths you've read in my library are from that place. The god of old, the ones you know as Apollo, Hades, Poseidon, Zeus and more are from that plain. They are not the only ones for there are also Norse mythology in which Fenrir exists. That's not the point, what I'm saying is that there are other gods, other worlds, other histories out for one to discover. New means of fighting, new ways of thinking, other cultures that are threatened by one thing only, evil," he paused and stared the clock. "What I'm trying to say is that, just like yours, there exist other places. You only need the will and resolve to travel. The use of magic has been revolutionized beyond anyone or anything apart from the legendary beings. This all is but an introduction to what may come next. The path you have taken, the immortality granted and the sheer raw strength you have isn't cheap. One day, once Hidros is saved; you could well be transferred to another world," he swiped and another vortex appeared. "This is Draebala, a world ravaged by the hero who turned out to be the next god-slayer. Heir to Kronos himself, this is what a world can turn too if

nothing is done. The people there are constantly fighting, the way of life is awful. Champions, gods, and heroes, are sent there to fight to the death. All the gods have participated once; even me. We have turned that world into a warzone, and the one who rules there has long left. Kronos made sure to hide the identity of his heir; all the knowledge about time and space is into his hand.”

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“Basically, you gods were infatuated with your own strength and decided to use that world as a testing ground. I mean, it’s not that bad, though I just feel bad for the populous – but tis not my job. I’m but the heir to you, a guy who seeks strength and knowledge. The heir to Kronos could well be my enemy or ally, I could care less. This so-called god-slayer will die soon enough, not by my hands. I’m not a hero, but by the hands of the chosen one – I felt it before; the spirit of a true savior,” all that talk made the thirst for knowledge greater. “What you say is true, there is someone blessed by a goddess in Hidros. Blessed by Athena, goddess of wisdom and warfare,” Lord Death confirmed the speculation.

“More importantly, what’s the clock all about,” the conversation went full circle, “that’s a clock. A clock that is essential in how time is woven into the fabric of reality. This item is so precious that it’s hidden and protected by a legion of low-tier gods. And yes, even the divine beings have a ranking system, low-tier to high-tier with the special title of supreme god as being the best of the best,” they spoke more and more, “what about you, what’s your rank?”

“I’m the second most powerful entity since creation, my ranking isn’t something to be mentioned. Not to boast but if I wished, I could end any domain, god included without breaking a sweat. Trying to rank me is like finding a needle in a haystack, unprecedented and useless,” the sudden outburst made Staxius suspicious but decided to ignore it. “I’ve got a feeling that all that talk was just a waste of time. I did learn a lot of unnecessary information but I thank you for the knowledge. To know that there are more out there for one to discover – it makes me shiver down to my core. Summoning Achilles really did take a lot out of me. This is why you’ve been injecting mana inside me since we came here,” Staxius noticed. Lord Death was, in fact, trying to heal Staxius. “Nothing fails your perception,” the truth was out, “-yes, the immortality bestowed on you grew weak. The meeting with that particular individual had made it less effective and the way you recklessly try and kill yourself just to prove a point has affected it more,” he sighed. “-Not to worry, the way you’ve trained and focused on getting stronger has had a positive impact. The curses, blessings and magical elements have all grown tenfold. I’m proud to say that you’re now far stronger than ever before.” A blackened fireball with a symbol, one of a sickle, manifested before Staxius.

“This is a blessing I’ve been working on since you got attacked. A blessing that only, I, the god of death and Kronos, the ex-supreme god of time, have made especially for you.” It came closer to his head, “you aren’t strong enough to fight anything remotely close to the lowest tier of god. This will prove helpful in your growth, the immortality I once bestowed upon you will be renewed. This is far stronger, I know not if your body or soul can handle it, but this is my gift to you. A gift for it’s the last time we meet; I know not when we’ll speak again, but my heir, do take care. Staxius Haggard, I’ll always watch over you, never fear death for it’s what makes us strong. Death is our potion, death is our privilege, the privilege bestowed onto the wielders of the death elements, all the previous death reapers stand beside you. This is the power that all hope to gain but only the rarest of the rare is bestowed with. Be the light that carries darkness, be the darkness that carries light, impartial and neutral is how we stand. The curse of the death reaper lives within you as well as it’s strength, use it all and become stronger. There are more

worlds for you to see, DIE AND BECOME STRONG.” The sickle snapped onto his face, right underneath his left eye. “IT BURNS,” the area around it burst into flames. Black and white fires surrounded the whole body.

“All that I’ve said has a meaning, but you’ll know it further down the line. Not now, not in ten years, but when time is right, the truth will be revealed. Staxius Haggard, my precious heir, this is where we part. Become strong, death will never be a threat to you anymore – embrace it,” the excruciating pain made Staxius unable to respond. The fire turned both his body and soul into dust, it faded. “Don’t forget about Undrar,” the last sentence got whispered.

“AHHHHHH,” the eyes opened, he awoke, the breathing erratic. Staxius looked around furiously, his hands and feet shook violently. Footsteps run and the door opened, “are you alright?” familiar voices spoke, night’s darkness kept their identity hidden. “I-I’m alright,” he panted, the pain continued, his heart ached, head in agony. Amidst the darkness, a white flame in the shape of a sickle engraved itself. At first, it looked like an ordinary sickle but the symbol changed. From a sickle to wings, to a scythe, it took on many appearances. Each change brought about pain, Avon and Achilles could not but watch. It finally settled, a sickle that embodied all three elements. The blade sharp but also having the properties of wings and not that curved, it had merged properties of a scythe as well. The handle, medium with a skull on the end.

The fire burnt out; a new symbol engraved itself. Lord Death had done something that would have gotten him into a lot of trouble. Staxius was given a symbol of power, one that had three different meanings into it. A symbol that would remain a mystery until the time was right.

#### Chapter 117: The Start

The panting lessened; their faces remained shocked. Avon and Achilles watched though hesitance to ask what happened loomed overhead. It felt awkward and disrespectful. Rushing inside the room was instinctual, a cry from a friend. A cry that anyone would answer for unless said person wasn’t of any importance. Staxius’s dazed state remained, the ability to recognize the people standing near the door disappeared. The pain; one that plagued even after the symbol finished engraving itself – had fully muted his senses. This went beyond what Dark-arts could muffle, that artificial element helped. It helped when the user got injured, the pain wasn’t a concern. A stab felt like a mosquito bite, thus the reason for the calm and composed demeanor. Injuries and pain were foreign until now, it ached. He wailed and yelled; the only thing to come out was but the shortness of air.

“Master,” Achilles had enough, she tried speaking out. “Wait,” Avon interrupted, he feebly sensed what went on. “-he needs to be alone; we can’t do anything to help. The pain he feels this instant is all the accumulated deaths up till now.” The spirit took the hero by hand and both left. What he said was true, the pain Staxius felt wasn’t of the symbol. It was all the time he previously got mortally wounded, all the pain from then and to now, it all rushed him. Calm and collected could be further from the truth, Staxius gritted, the eyes cried of blood. The voice silenced, the aura fluctuating, nothing could be done except to wait. Time went on, Staxius wailed the whole night. The body turned into a wreck. The mental strength needed to keep his sanity could not be described.

The night turned today, the birds chirped, the trees bristled. The air fresh and soothing, he who suffered all night, awoke. The window to the chambers opened, the soft light entered along with the breeze. He

stood with the gaze of a changed man. A gaze that could freeze over the planet. The normal emotionless stare had evolved, it no longer required him to make a physical effort. It set in fully, the man had suffered so much that the prospect of feeling anything began to fade. The return of a state where nothing could bother him was a threat. No love, no compassion and no sympathy, Staxius had stepped into that world once more.

\*Knock, knock,\* the door opened, “good morning,” Achilles tiptoed inside. Avon didn’t care for after the hero walked in, he barged in. The noise it made rattled the first floor. “Keep it down,” whispers from fellow neighbors could be heard. “A lovely day isn’t it,” Staxius turned around. The companions stood in shock, it felt different. “...” Achilles was left speechless while Avon tried to think of a question. “I haven’t felt this way in ages,” Staxius spoke, it was directed at himself. Strange was the way in which he stared at the hands and feet. It looked as if someone else had taken reign over that body.

“Are you Staxius Haggard?” Avon questioned with piercing eyes. “Obviously,” the trance-like state broke, “-are you insinuating that I’m an imposter?” Staxius jumped the gun; something felt off about him. “Worry not,” he sighed, “-the pain I felt last night, the suffering I’ve just been through. I’ve experienced it, death in its full glory. How it ailed me, how much did I cry? My poor pillow has been basked in my own bloodied tears,’ a few light taps on the face, Staxius’s aura changed back to normal.

“Are you sure that you’re alright?” Avon asked again, the anxiousness could not be shaken. “I’m fine,” the tone returned to normal, the gaze remained ice-cold. But within, a faint warmth was felt. “Let’s go have breakfast,” Staxius walked. Before leaving the room, he placed his hands on both Avon’s and Achilles’s shoulders. “Don’t worry, I haven’t changed. Last night revealed a lot of things, things that are now precious lessons. So, I’ll just ask that this subject should not be addressed any further. Do me this favor, it’s a request and not an order,” the tone serious, both gulped. “No problem,” and the day began.

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Back at Claireville academy, the campus awoke early. Preparation for the tournament was to be made by all. Classes were canceled, it was a free day for many students. However, many chose to stay and help. The faculty appreciated the effort, this event was to decide who would represent the school in the inter-magical tournament. Not in one versus one to find the next prodigy, but the two versus two – a subgenre. Although not that flashy nor popular, seeing Eira and some big names participating – it grew to be an event anticipated by many.

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“Wake up,” a pair of soft and light hands gently touched. “You’re going to be late,” the voice tried hard to raise in pitch but fell short. It sounded adorable, “in a second,” Eira replied with a yawn. Her eyes wide open, “today’s the big day,” she mumbled. Ysmay smiled as if confirming what she said. “You best get ready; time is of the essence. The director seeks to see you as soon as possible. It’s something about a weapon arriving.” The moment the word weapon rolled off Ysmay’s tongue, Eira jumped out of bed and ran. “Wait for me,” she followed behind. “Wait up,” the entrance to the dormitory came in sight, Ysmay’s voice could barely be heard. “If you go to the office looking like that it will make a dent in your family’s reputation.” Eira heard it, her friend had a point. Sadly, it didn’t suffice for she kept on running. “STANK BREATH,” Ysmay shouted, not that loud but it reached her ears. Instantly she stopped, Eira turned and stared with a look of resentment. “Stank breath...” she mumbled, “really?” she backtracked.

“Does my breath smell that bad?” Eira came close purposefully and blew on Ysmay’s face. “Yes, you best take a shower,” she pinched her nose and replied.

Reluctant, Eira went back and got properly dressed. Meanwhile, Staxius and his crew left Rosespire. The car went into overdrive, their estimated arrival was to be in two hours or less. ‘Last night was complete hell, I’ve never felt such pain before. Being the heir to that god isn’t easy. Not to mention this symbol on my face looks... normal I guess.’ Staxius went through a lot, the feelings he felt towards Shanna and Eira and all his friends nearly died down. It rendered the mind numb, however, a single memory kept said feelings alive. The day he met Eira and the day he met Xula; everything else became void. They had no significant meaning; it came as a surprise that even the memories of his father could not hold a candle up to the new ones. He felt relieved but confused – for so long he hated having emotions. But when the opportunity arose to lose it all and turn into the ultimate killer – the choice became obvious. It was for naught; emotions became integral in the quest to become the strongest.

A blank canvas can never be called artistic unless a stroke of a brush brings it to life. The same applies to the brush, for without a canvas it’s but a piece of equipment. Needless to say, there’s always a third party involved. Paint, without it, neither could stand a chance. Thus, a canvas, brush, and paint have to work together to make imagination into reality. The canvas was Staxius, the brush was the people around him and the paint was the emotions they transferred as well as what they brought to the table. Strength and knowledge was the final masterpiece, that was how he thought. Without neither one of them – the fog of cluelessness would always loom overhead. Staxius learned to accept that he was human – and openly embraced the emotions. That could be seen as childish and commonsense, but Staxius wasn’t normal. The things witnessed in war, the amount of evil experience – in no way was he calm.

A few hours passed, Staxius arrived at the packed campus. People came from all over, it was as if a festival. All looked joyful; most were adventurers. Seeing mages in action was a spectacle to be witnessed by oneself. Amidst the chaos, white hair caught his eyes, It was Eira, she headed to the director’s office. They both met up and went inside. On the table, without any conversations, Josiah laid a great sword. Black and blue in color, with the handle of an emerald hue – her face flushed. She fell in love at the sight of such a beast. Staxius cheered her on, Josiah joked. They spoke for a little, preparations were still underway.

“Alright, I’d like to tell you a bit about who is to fight in today’s tournament.” Josiah interrupted the father and daughter bonding time. “Before you say anything, Staxius, this isn’t an advantage. Everyone knows who is to fight today, but I’m sure that you don’t. Therefore, let me enlighten you,” a piece of paper was placed on the table.

“Look here,” Josiah pointed, “first we have you both. Then it’s followed by Huon Symkyn and Isott Rosalinda. In third place, we have a bunch of adventurers; Azer and Paige. They didn’t want to give out information. Next, Carle and Austin, fourth-year students and lastly, Selova and Beth – also fourth years,” he ended and waited for Staxius to reply.

“Nothing can really be said about their name. No one really stands out. But I must ask about Goliath. What about him? wasn’t he supposed to participate.” That was the work of reasoning. An exhibition match between Eira and Goliath should have had a rematch planned. What better way than the two-versus-two tournament.

“Sadly not, Goliath isn’t to fight today,” the reply quick and simple, Staxius dropped the subject.

“Azer, Paige, Huon, Rosalinda, Carle, Austin, Selova and Beth. Those are our enemies and formidable ones at that. The last four are nearly ready to be made into sorcerers. Their battle prowess isn’t something to be trifled with. Azer and Paige are adventurers, which means that their skill level may be weak but their strength can never be underestimated. Lastly, Huon and Rosalinda, the duo who have been a pain since my admission. I don’t think they’ll be much threat. I mean, father did show them the meaning of true strength,” she chuckled. “Enough chit-chat, we are headed off to prepare. May you enjoy this tournament as much as I will,” Staxius rubbed his hands and smiled. “Good luck to you both,” Josiah closed the door as they headed out.

The excitement around the whole school made all envious. The fights were highly anticipated. Staxius and Eira walked around, merchants and traders had come for opportunities could be found anywhere. Avon and Achilles took off ages ago, they requested to be left to their own self – Staxius accepted.

“Do you see all this,” the stadium came into view, “this is all for you, Eira,” he said softly. “You will be the light that shines today. I’m not one for standing out, I’ll support you however way I can. And honestly, if I were to go all out, that place would crumble into pieces and I’m not overexaggerating,” the tone felt sincere and honest. “Did something happen?” Eira asked. “Not really, just tired that’s all,” he dodged the question. “I still can’t believe how much you’ve grown,” Staxius changed the subject. “I still can’t believe that my father is nearly my age,” she pulled out her tongue. He laughed, “in fairness, that is true. But seriously, I want you to shine as best as you can. Make my dream come true, win that bloody tournament.”

Time went on, lines began to form. The tournament was to be started soon. Staxius and Eira stood in the changing room. They were given special black and blue uniforms to wear. Enchanted and enhanced by magic, small protection to minimize the risk of a fatality. Eira’s great sword looked as tall as Staxius, that girl looked like Adelana. Nonchalantly she juggled the blade from one hand to another. “Showing off is bad,” he added just to tease her. “Stop it,” she pouted and continued to juggle.

“What about me then,” Staxius asked, a slight tap revealed the steel sword. “That’s not a very imposing weapon now is it?” she stopped and stared. “Yeah I guess so,” he unsheathed the blade, an enormous feeling of dread and hatred overwhelmed the room. It suffocated her, “SHEATHE IT,” she yelled, he did as told with a look of confusion. “What the hell was that?” her breathing erratic. “A steel sword?” he answered without knowing what just happened. “That’s no ordinary sword, FATHER,” she gave up, Staxius had always been that way. “And you called me a showoff while you just unleashed hell in this room. That sword isn’t ordinary, it feels cursed and alive – how can you even wield that thing.”

“It’s simple really. I just don’t have the time to go out and buy a new sword. I’ve kind of have a crush on this blade. Every time I take it out it makes me want to end everyone I see. I like that feeling, the ever-flowing bloodlust, it makes me blissful,” he smirked.

“I’ll just assume you’re joking about that,” Eira replied with a cautious tone.

\*Participants, may you all head for the entrance,\* the intercoms spoke, the battle was to start.

The hallway white in color, from the locker room till the fighting grounds- the walk felt long. Staxius and Eira took each step with pride and confidence. The former had the chance to fight in a tournament. A dream that didn't come to fruition but this was good enough. Fighting beside his daughter, the smile could not be kept hidden any longer. Eira, on the other hand, felt nervous. Her heart raced, to test her might against others with Staxius beside her. "Please step this way," a guide took the duo further out. Not towards the stadium but a gathering spot. A place where the other team soon approached. Josiah stood in the middle, he waited anxiously for all to come.

Upon first glance, they all seemed ready. The aura felt tense and heavy, Josiah waited nonchalantly. Eira and Staxius were the last to arrive. This raised the animosity slightly before the fight began. None spoke but glared. Staxius's cold gaze trumped all; none could maintain eye contact with him. The intimidation began before the actual fight.

"Everyone's here," Josiah spoke, all stood in a circle around him. "-today is the day you guys go out and fight. I haven't the time to give a motivational speech. Losers will be losers, and winners will be winners. I won't tolerate any complaints about unfair matchups. Everyone here has been chosen because of their skills and power. Some of you might be stronger than others. To them, I must say that holding back won't help anyone," it weirdly felt directed at Staxius to which he crossed the arms and watched sternly.

"Before we begin, I'd like to give a last-minute run down. The match-ups will be decided randomly. Only four out of you will fight, the last one will have to wait till one is defeated. And defeat is brought about by knocking down or rendering a person unable to move. The three points awarded will be transferred over by the judge's discretion. This is to limit foul play – and to make it fair, I shall be a judge as well. In no way are you to question the ruling. As you see, special uniforms have been given. It comes equipped with armbands that display how many stars the team has. Reach zero and you lose, reach fifteen and you win, the choice is up to you. Just to be honest, I don't want this fight to go into elimination. One of you has to win, a special price will be given if one manages to complete the said feat," he finished. The participants all checked their armbands – it displayed score and team status.

Oblivious to what the others thought, Staxius turn and gave Eira a thumb's up. The overwhelming pressure subsided. Seeing her father in such a good mood changed hers as well. It didn't bode well with the others – this was viewed as a disrespectful gesture. Everyone was worried while he smiled. Azer and Paige didn't seem particularly affected. All the faces were poorly visible. Those who chose had the option to wear a helmet as protection. To which, many accepted apart from Staxius and Eira. All looked the same, except the name and color.

Azer and Paige wore white, Huon and Rosalinda wore gold, Carle and Austin wore brown, Selova and Beth wore grey. Not fully but the borders of the suits given had said particular colors. A necessary action to prevent confusion for the uniforms were identical in every single way.

The silent room broke, the main gate opened. The sound of gears turning, machines working, increased the pressure they felt. It grew ten-fold when the cheers from the crowd could be heard. Most of the combatants were still teenagers and young adults. It got to them, many clapped their hands and faces to snap out of it. No one bothered looking at each other, the goal laid right before them. A stadium divided into two hemispheres; a barrier slowly materialized itself in a dome shape. Above said barrier, four gigantic screens projected in each cardinal corner. It displayed stats, a few shots of the combatants who waited and more.



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“Welcome everyone,” a sharp and piercing voice spoke, it felt familiar. “-we have all gathered today for the highly anticipated two-versus-two tournament,” the crowd went wild, the screamed echoed all around. The reason why that voice felt familiar was because of her popularity. An icon, someone people looked up to, the most loved person in the entire kingdom; Aceline. The radio host, someone Staxius had heard of many times while driving. “As stated by the rules, the match-ups will be decided at random.” A strange device raised from beneath the stadium. It had a circular shape with balls flying around inside. “Each team will be assigned a number,” she pointed towards the giant screen, it displayed –

[Azer and Paige: One]

[Carle and Austin: Two]

[Selova and Beth: Three]

[Huon and Rosalinda: Four]

[Eira and Staxius: Five]

“-with that, the tournament can finally begin,” she pressed onto the button. The balls went around, and the match-ups were decided. “First up we have,” she took a quick look and read, “team three versus team one.” The crowd went ecstatic, team one was one of the favorites. The name Azer and Paige were of adventurers from one of the top ten guilds. The lower half, but still prestigious. The duo against them was Selova and Beth, or commonly known as the Starlight. That name was brought about by their combination in shadow, lightning, light, fire and wind magic. Every time they fought, none knew who did who, it looked like starlight – a formidable foe.

“The next bout will be,” the device started up once more, “team four versus team two,” Staxius’s face changed; he felt betrayed – the urge to fight made him antsy. Eira shook her head and grabbed his hand, Staxius not but stared. Team four, otherwise known as the snob – the name self-explanatory, went against Carle and Austin. They were pretty much unknown however rumor said that they were very powerful. The use of strange spells and enhancement was what captivated the audience.

“Guess the fights have been decided,” Josiah spoke loudly, “all who have been chosen please step forward. Staxius and Eira, you will have to wait until one of the teams is defeated. Rest up and watch, being the only one is an advantage many wanted. Staxius nodded and walked to the viewing booth. “Man, the thrill of the fight is gone,” the door inside to the viewing booth brutally opened. “- watching them fight will be boring. Their strategy and fighting styles will become obvious too soon,” Staxius continued to rant. “Calm down father, it’s not the end of the world. Study the opponents and fight – that is what you told me once didn’t you,” they sat.

“Give it up for the teams who are to battle it out for your entertainment.” They entered; the crowd grew louder than ever before – each step filled with excitement.

“Between you and me, I’m not going to hold back. If death befalls upon you, I shan’t apologize,” team three and one walked beside each other. They trash-talked all the way till the first hemisphere.

"The snobs, what a pleasure to fight you," team four and two walked in the same manner. Though Rosalinda remained quiet, Carle continued to edge her on.

The time of truth had come, all were in their corners waiting. The host quickly left and headed to the viewing booth. "Phew, the atmosphere inside that dome is suffocating," Aceline's voice made its way inside the room. \*Click,\* it opened, "I didn't expect to see the fifth team waiting – what a pleasure to meet you guys." She walked and took a seat next to Staxius. "This is going to be fun, especially with Azer and Paige fighting. I'd advise you to watch them carefully, those two aren't only renowned as promising adventurers but also bloodthirsty killers," she spoke casually – a way of intimidation. Aceline was tied to the guilds and company in more ways than one.

"Well I guess that makes three of us then," Staxius leaned closer and added softly, she shuddered. The look in his eyes was worst than the adventurers, "but who am I kidding." The blood lust vanished, Aceline gulped; Eira pinched his knee. "Don't scare off the lady," she added in jest. "fine, fine," he leaned back and waited for the start.

The intercoms came back to life once more – another commentator took over. "Combatants are you ready?" it yelled; a countdown began, the crowd participated. "FIGHT," immediately, the arena began to shake. Spells, arrows, gunshots, all were heard.

In the upper hemisphere, team three went toe to toe with team one, the favorite. It was as said, team Starlight really did have the effect of a starry night. That upper-half got covered with mist with dots of light that looked like stars. The combination was an original spell, an elemental variant that covered the battlefield. Each light was a bolt of lightning that locked on their foe and unleashed each time a certain perimeter was crossed. That wasn't the extent of their prowess, the weapons used were guns. Long-range versus adventurers. For the first leg of the battle, it looked like Starlight held the advantage.

Meanwhile, in the lower hemisphere, Carle and Austin were having a great time. They toyed around with team Snob – obviously, it didn't show but the taunts made Huon more riled up. He lost his concentration and wailed without purpose nor cause. A rampaging typhoon was what he looked like for the element he used was Tempest; a high-tier wind element. Rosalinda, for the most part, stayed back and shot few spells here and there. The crowd's attention was more towards the upper hemisphere – the lower one grew boring. Neither wanted to go on the offensive and fought with caution.

For the most part, Starlight held the advantage. Till Azer decided to fight seriously. Everything changed then, adventurers were superior to mages. A fact not well-known by many. Using the skill he acquired while fighting monsters, Azer started to fight back. The guns became a child's toy as he went up close and personal. He closed the distance with [Flash-step]. A skill that increased the user's speed exponentially. Many variants of that skill were in magic as well but less powerful and less economic. The use of mana required for mages to execute wasn't worth the effort.

Despite this, the fight didn't end. Starlight had more up their sleeves, notably their plethora of spells. It kept the adventurers in a defensive stance – sadly when mana began to run out; the whole battle shifted. One by one, with each potentially lethal strike Selova and Beth took, one-star vanished. Nevertheless, before the count reached zero, the Starlight duo managed to get some good hits in. A point-blank Chain-Lightning, which got both foes on their knees. In said manner, the stars were traded back and forth. The battle grew more exciting by the second.

Nothing worth mentioning happened with the snob-battle. The crowd grew less interested – a boring standoff. “The fight between Snob is a bit lackluster.” Aceline voiced her opinion. “Not really,” Staxius answered. “Oh – please do explain,” it caught her attention. “I won’t argue that the fight isn’t boring. It’s more mental games than physical contact. Both opponents saving mana and using low-tier spells to try and catch the other off-guard. Huon might have gone wild – but he knows what he’s doing. It’s more of a touch and wait sort of situation. They are analyzing how each other think – I didn’t expect this level of wittiness from those two. Rosalinda is someone to watch out for, I just have a gut feeling that something amazing is going to happen,” he ended – Eira thought the same.

“For your sake, I hope that’s the reason. As far as I’m concerned, that fight isn’t worth a sliver of attention,” she added, her mind was made up – the fight was definitely boring. Staxius watched in awe, each fighting style and the stance they took had a meaning. He wanted to know more about why each fought, their reasons and convictions. Long had the thought that someone who fights to protect will always get back up and win. A theory he wanted to test out, many times had a situation arose where protecting someone became a priority. Most notably, the Hydra – Staxius used all to protect the party. A feat that now seemed impossible.

“WHAT IS THIS FROM TEAM FOUR...”

#### Chapter 119: Two-versus-two [2]

The arena’s cheerful demeanor dropped. The lower hemisphere had a change in the aura; team four went on the offensive. Leading the charge, Rosalinda – her eyes and battle strategy grew bolder. Carle’s careful stance focused into one of a more serious approach. Each one had grown tired of the mind games. Armed with only spells and no weapons, Rosalinda jumped straight into the fray. She targeted Austin; from the start, he had a strange look in his eyes. The look of fear and nervousness – he sadly could not drop the pressure from the massive audience. Thus, using Huon who now was a mini-typhoon as cover, she went and aimed for the weakest link. Carle tried his best, from elemental spells to enhancement magic; the desperation to break through ended in naught but disappointment. Rosalinda carefully chose what spell to use. None actually caught what happened; Carle was rendered useless – paralyzed by the ground itself. “What is happening?” he asked with the eyes glaring at Rosalinda. “The Snobs have gotten there way,” she spoke into third-person, the armband vibrated. Carle knelt, the head beneath her feet – he broke. Not physically but mentally, the pressure he felt had blocked out any voices.

“Austin, LISTEN TO ME,” the end was near, Carle screamed with teary eyes. Sadly, Huon didn’t care one bit for the volley of Needle Gale, a projectile spell that mimics the property of a bullet, all hit their target. The barrier Carle put up began to break down, each hit meant a loss in mana. The stars changed from three to one in a matter of seconds, Austin gave up. Carle was depleted, mana had reached the lower limit – if it reached zero, death would be imminent.

“The fight ended earlier than before,” Aceline added in jest. Eira’s gut told her that the fight wasn’t over yet. Not that they would make a come-back, but the fact that Rosalinda didn’t care about their foe. The bloodlust was subtle, Staxius felt it too. “Josiah,” he screamed, Carle’s mana began to drop under the lower limit – it showed for the fairly pale face turned purple. “-we are jumping into the battle; death isn’t what you want. I know you can hear me, so I’ll leave the necessary things to you.” All happened in a

matter of seconds, Josiah got the message. Eira watched in confusion, Carle's life flashed before his eyes.

"Eira, sorry but I'm about to do something stupid," Staxius said while looking forward. "What do you mea..." before the question reached him, the glass broke. "WAIT UP," she realized what he had done. Staxius jumped from the viewing booth; the crowd's cheer grew louder.

\*What is this, team five has unexpectedly broken out of the viewing booth,\* for a second, Staxius looked as if he levitated. Time stopped, Eira was mesmerized. Before the feet landed, whilst still in mid-air, Staxius vanished. The commentators were left speechless and so was Eira. \*Dark arts, Magical Barrier,\* a blackish wall manifested. Carle's eyes had their life back, the onslaught stopped – a star remained on the armband.

"W-who are you?" the dazed boy tried to see who the savior was. Applauses overwhelmed the cheers. It became apparent that Huon had the eyes of a killer – he wanted to kill Carle no matter the cost. "Damn it, Father can be such a pain," using shadow-step – Eira followed behind. Aceline was left baffled, 'Eira and Staxius, what an interesting bunch,' she smiled.

"T-thanks for saving me," Carle spoke, the thank you was heard throughout the stadium. Everyone turns silent, "WHY ARE YOU INTERRUPTING OUR BATTLE?" Rosalinda shouted. The voice echoed in a piercing and distorted manner across. "Battle," Staxius chuckled, Eira arrived at last. "-this is anything but a battle," he caught Eira's eyes and signaled her to attack Rosalinda. Her guard was down – the perfect opportunity.

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\*Clang,\* Eira's great sword stopped. "A summoner," Staxius smiled, a golden sword materialized in her hands. Austin's conscience gave in and the body dropped. Carle's eyes flickered with a ray of hope – the chance to avenge Austin presented itself. "I-I'll f-finish t-the fight m-myself," feebly, the boy stood. The crowd encouraged the effort, everything broadcasted itself. From close up body shots to the conversations happening, the audience saw it all.

"There's more to you than meets the eye," Eira took a step back and used a defensive stance. "I'm impressed that you can wield such a weapon," Rosalinda replied, each complemented one another. The blade she summoned shone; it had the hue of a setting sun.

"F-face me," Carle yelled, Rosalinda shrugged. "Don't get overly confident," Staxius spoke monotonously, it rattled the audience. The breathing stopped, "-I didn't rush in to aid you," \*BAM,\* a massive explosion made everyone look away. One of the Starlight member's body got slammed against the barrier, blood splattered everywhere. \*BEEP,\* a loud alarm rung, it signaled that a team had been eliminated. \*Team five saved team two just to steal their last star, how underhanded,\* the commentators lit the fire even more. The audience got into it – the battle changed from a normal tournament to a full-on story about revenge and betrayal. Carle's head slammed on the floor – Staxius knocked him out using the unsheathed steel-sword.

All the participants stopped for the arena moved. It changed, the sound of gears turning, the barrier getting formed once more. The separated battleground changed into a circle, the wall dividing each

sphere dropped. The field became one, Beth's body sloppily fell onto the floor. That didn't stop her, the fighting spirit burned more than ever before.

"I guess it's an all-out war then," Staxius spoke, everyone heard him. Eira jumped and fell back to his side, "-you best entertain us," she added. The aura coming from them sent shivers down the student's spine. Azer and Paige laughed in turn. "Show us what you got, pitiful mages." What ensued afterward could not be described. The images got burnt in the spectators' eyes. The four-versus-four went on for hours. Neither wanted to give in, the stars were evenly distributed with everyone having four except for Staxius and Eira. They willingly gave one away, in that manner – stars traded amidst each other without a clear winner. What were hours felt like minutes, the fight had been the best thing to ever exist.

\*Huff, Puff,\* Starlight managed to hold their own. The adventurers were tired but ready to fight, the Snobs had nothing else to add, Staxius and Eira waited. "this is getting old," from switching from long range to short, Staxius grew bored. Not wanting to end the battle quickly, he fought with the blade sheathed. The others didn't take it lightly, they felt like getting looked down upon. Especially the adventurers, their morals didn't allow it. For the entirety, they two-teamed Staxius who dodged and parried. Eira focused her attention on Rosalinda while the remainder fought without any care to whom they hit.

Eira's battle wasn't hard, she fought with all her might. However, at times, her posture froze into one more docile. Staxius noticed but chose to pay no heed. "Come on," Rosalinda mumbled, she grew tired. The unwillingness to attack from her opponent made her mad. "Are you doing me a favor by holding back?" Rosalinda added once more, "NO," Eira charged forwards. Swing after swing, the same pattern, and the same unwillingness to hurt her opponent. "AGAIN?" Rosalinda yelled and got a direct hit. She thrust into Eira's stomach; the latter managed to dodge but bled.

'Seriously?' the eyes changed, Staxius's murderous intent began to build up. A single glance towards Azer told everything. The duo backed off -"w-what j-just happened?" they asked, the survival instinct took charge.

"Eira," the man vanished, "-listen to me," a voice came from behind. "Y-yes?" Eira replied and gulped, she sensed it, the coldness in the voice. "I'm desperately trying to not lose control. Do me a favor and get that compassion in control; have you forgotten what I taught you? Remember it, all that we've done in the past two days, it holds the answer. I'll give you five minutes," he sighed, "if you don't do anything by then, everyone here dies," the cold presence disappeared once more.

He went back to fighting Azer, it felt like seconds but for Eira – it was minutes. 'Father is dead serious,' she looked to where he fought, '-the death reaper,' her mentality changed. "No more mercy," with one step, Eira lunged forward and swung down, \*CLANG,\* Rosalinda blocked and the ground below cracked. \*Ding,\* a star was awarded for that strike. Blood dripped onto the floor; Rosalinda's hand got injured. "Finally," she smiled, Eira's eyes resembled Staxius's.

Starlight and Huon grew tired, mana was depleted. Prolonged battles were a mage's bane. "Sorry, but removing weakling's is our forte," Paige dashed towards the tired mages and managed to acquire their stars – all of it. Huon fell back and supported Rosalinda – Starlight's star count reached one. Staxius didn't care, the attention was focused on Eira. She slowly shook her own limits, the compassion of not fighting due to the fear of killing. Her truth strength began to manifest, the blade changed from black

and blue to snowy-white. Her eyes changed from red to light blue. Her magical element enhanced her body and blade.

“Paige,” Staxius parried Azer’s strike and ran. “-you should not leave the mages alone,” with a quick flick of the wrist, Beth fell. The star transferred over. \*There you have it, two teams have been eliminated,\* the commentators screamed with joy.

“Job well done,” Staxius retreated to Eira’s side. “The fear is subsiding; time to go all out,” he patted her on the back. Her smile told all, she rushed in, the body moved flawlessly. The stance came back, she felt at ease, the snow angel. The natural talent for battle never left, it went against Huon and Rosalinda.

Staxius fought Azer and Paige like usual – the strongest out of the bunch. The fighting style was more defensive than usual. It was to bite time for Eira, the goal was for her to regain that spark.

Someone is getting carried away,” Rosalinda yelled. \*TEMPEST RAGE,\* her magical element, a combination between water and wind, merged. Huon summoned the strongest spell he knew, Tempest Rage. It wasn’t highly damaging, the true fear lived within the speed at which it traveled. \*Clap,\* an arrow-like shape shot out of both, Huon fell – mana depleted. Rosalinda could barely stand; this was their last assault. “What?” without notice, it made contact. Her body was thrown halfway across, it left a trail of blood. She fell and coughed, her eyes turned from blue to red and finally lifeless.

“I’m not done yet,” miraculously Eira stood, her body bled from the thousand cuts. “Neither am I,” Rosalinda darted, her sword made contact with Eira. The protection from the ice broke, it even pierced the armored uniform. \*Cough,\* blood spewed. Rosalinda’s face dripped with liquid. Crimson and dark, she unwillingly had stabbed her foe. The crowd went dead silent, it became real. This wasn’t meant to be, the commentators turned mute.

“I-I’m sorry,” her body fell backward. the impact echoed. ‘I can’t believe it. I was bested even after father trained me. It’s pathetic, I got stabbed without being able to react. I didn’t even drop my guard once. How worthless am I,’ her eyes slowly closed, ‘-it burns, my stomach, it tingles. ‘ Deep down Eira knew that she wasn’t ready just yet.

“Azer,” Paige spoke, the battle momentarily stopped, “yes?” he replied. “Did that man’s partner just die,” she asked in a cocky tone. “I guess so, pathetic if you ask me,” Azer added.

“Ha-ha,” Staxius laughed, “I-I c-can’t believe it,” his hands trembled. Staxius saw everything transpire, from the moment the spell got launched – he saw it but could not move. The feet felt glued to the ground, his precious daughter bled. “Blood,” the chest tightened, breathing became hard. “Blood,” it spoke again, something snapped. The shock of her falling wasn’t the worst thing.

‘I can’t give in just yet,’ using the little strength she had, Eira tilted to face Staxius. He stood as if a statue, nothing could be sensed. ‘Sorry...’ the lips moved; the eyes lost the will to fight. It turned lifeless and closed.

“Blood,” he chuckled, “die.”

Chapter 120: Crisis averted

A pin-drop silence, nothing moved, not a soul tried to break this uneasiness. Her body fell, the arena felt as if it was rendered unconscious with her hitting the floor. A burst of maniacal laughter broke the ever-

present heaviness. \*What is happening?\* the intercoms turned on, it picked up on the commentators whispering. “a-are you ok?” Azer asked out of concern. The one he fought just a few seconds ago had lost it.

“I’ve finally cleaned out the trash,” Rosalinda spoke proudly, she signaled Huon whose smile was filled with pride. “Cut it out,” Paige tried to calm Azer, he became overly obsessed with how Staxius behaved. “No, there’s something wrong with him, I’ve got a bad feeling,” he added with a cautious tone.

“Clean out the trash you say,” the laughter broke into silence, the body moved unnaturally. Their gaze met, “-let me guide you to the afterlife,” Staxius yelled, the sword unsheathed. An aura of dread was sensed by all, participants and spectators alike. “Trash,” he walked slowly, a mist emanated.

“This is bad, get the medics,” Josiah saw history repeating. The first time Staxius tried the exam – he felt the same thing. “Director,” his assistant tried to get answers. “We haven’t got time for this, contact Jona this instant.” They did as told; the medics were informed quickly.

Each step he took, the floor echoed. “Who are you?” Azer asked; the stance didn’t falter. “Death, despair, hatred, hell, destruction incarnate, I know not myself.” From staring at the floor, Staxius changed his target to Rosalinda, “-all I know is that I’m a father. Father to someone special, my daughter, the one who you viciously assaulted. I’d have let you live, but the last remark made my blood boil. Never look down upon someone who has trained their heart out,” \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\*

The temperature dropped; the pressure increased. Breathing became harder, their mind felt lightheaded. What stood before them wasn’t human, a shadow manifested itself on his back, it took on the shape of a skull. The eyes looked emotionless, “calm down, I think we can sort this out,” Azer wasn’t affected that massively. He had the strength to speak, however, \*Whoosh\* a gust of wind blew past him. Two red dots, Azer saw the eyes of a demon. Without a second loss, the sound of something cracking echoed. Rosalinda spewed blood, her face turned purple. Staxius grasp her face tightly and held it up high, “what did I say about not disrespecting people.” The grip got tighter, “I thought I showed you the meaning of true strength. Don’t you remember?” the tone menacing, he didn’t let go. \*Ding, ding, ding,\* the armband vibrated furiously, stars were awarded to him from left, right, and center. \*T-team snob has been eliminated,\* the intercoms came back to life, it added in a sluggish tone.

Since Eira got hurt, the atmosphere changed for the worse. “Not enough, do you think letting us win now is going to be any different,” the rage quelled, fingers touched his legs. “F-father d-don’t,” her face was but a mess of blood, her own. “No can do,” he smiled and winked. Rosalinda got thrown, her body flew till it reached the barrier. Another splatter of blood, the second one. “That leaves you and me,” a faint but monotonous voice spoke from behind Azer. “I guess you’re right,” he shuddered but kept cool.

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“Sadly,” Staxius grabbed Azer’s shoulder. “This battle is over,” using the other hand, the sword sheathed, the feeling of dread subsided. “I can finally breathe,” Paige coughed violently, \*ding,\* the armband rang. \*The winner is Staxius and Eira,\* Azer didn’t realize what happened. His neck burnt, the hands went to check but sadly revealed blood. “W-WHAT IS THIS?” the face froze, “no need to cry, I barely scratched you,” Staxius spoke monotonously. The neck was sliced, not deeply but shallow enough

to keep the victim alive and prove their defeat. If it was a real fight, the man's decapitated head would have rested on the floor. Azer fell due to shock, Paige tried to help but was faced with the face of a broken man. "A-aren't a-adventurers supposed to be powerful?" he asked, Staxius rushed over to Eira's side. "Adventurers are strong, but that man is stronger than us." Staxius's guild necklace showed the silver, gold, and platinum. Paige watched in awe; this was the first time she saw a ranking like that.

"Eira, Eira," Staxius placed her head onto his lap. "You'll be alright, bear with me," he waited for the medics to come. "Thanks for calming me down earlier," Staxius whispered – the bloodlust ran rampant. Not that he disliked it, but killing off the participants would have been a bad idea. A single clap changed everything, one after the other, everyone joined in. The battle ended, what they witnessed was well worth skipping whatever they had in mind. The cheers grew louder and louder that even at the extremities of the campus, people would hear it.

The doctors arrived, all the injured were taken out. The barrier lowered; Josiah approached Staxius who still waited for someone to take care of Eira. "I'm surprised that you managed to calm down," he patted Staxius's back. "It's not like I lost control on purpose; I just wanted to feel that way again," Staxius replied nonchalantly.

He stood, Eira got put on a stretcher and escorted out. "Thanks for letting me fight beside my daughter, I appreciate it." Staxius shook Josiah's hand. "Thank you for helping her combat the fear of holding back," he replied in turn.

"What a tantalizing battle," Aceline's voice resounded, it helped to calm the many people who had doubted about what transpired. "-I was at the edge of my seat," she made her entrance, "wouldn't you say the same?" she asked the crowd who replied with applause. "See that," Josiah whispered as Aceline walked in while entertaining the crowd. "-that's the power of someone loved by all, I present you the power of an icon." The cheers and laughter made Staxius realize that one could have more than one effect on the other.

"Now a few words from our esteemed director," she handed the microphone with a big smile. As soon as he took the mic, her tone changed, "nice battle there," it sounded shady but gentle. "I truly was mesmerized by how murderous one could be. Not to worry, I've already worked my charm onto this crowd. I mean listen to all of them – they adore me," she stepped and stood beside Staxius, "you owe me one, but I'll claim it whenever I fit," she winked. "Good luck tracking me down," he fired back with the same devious manner.

"I must congratulate all who fought today," Josiah spoke, "-whatever the results were. I am proud to have hosted this tournament. Though many of the participants aren't here to properly end the ceremony, I'll just say what most would have." He turned around, "congratulations team five, Staxius and Eira – you fought amazingly well." Everyone applauded, confetti showered the entire arena, fireworks went off – it ended at last.

"What an amazing battle," whispers came from all over, "I nearly lost all my breath." Some were too shocked to even partake. \*Thank you all for attending. The show continues inside the other stadium, our beloved icon Aceline is to debut her album.\* Songs from her album played, it melodiously soothed everyone. One by one, all headed to the other less imposing but equally as a good stadium.



Black silky hair, a perfectly shaped face, cheeks that looked ever so blushed, eyes that resembled honey. Her forehead hidden by bangs, Staxius noticed how pretty she was. Though he chuckled for not in a million years could she beat his wife. "Excuse you?" she asked when the laughter was heard. "Nothing much, don't you have a show or whatever to attend too?" Staxius blew her off.

"The tournament is finally over," Josiah breathed a sigh of relief. The spotlight turned off, "once again, thank you for not turning this place into another graveyard," he smiled with embarrassment.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," he pouted and walked beside the director. "Aceline," a man's voice spoke, Staxius climbed down the stairs. "You're here at last," the man looked confused and shy, he wore a black suit with glasses. "Thanks for waiting, Scott," her voice still subtle and sooth. Without paying heed, Staxius headed to the hospital. "Staxius," Aceline spoke, "what is it?" he replied in a cold manner. "Come watch my show, I'll prove to you that fighting isn't the only way a crowd can be entertained," her voice filled with confidence and pride.

"Sure," he waved and left, "Aceline, you better not grow any closer to him. Afterall, Staxius Haggard isn't a man to be trifled with." Josiah stayed back for he had business with Scott. "You saying that makes me more intrigued," she added in jest. "I'm speaking from experience. It's not that the man is a bad person, it's just that there may be a risk of knowing him. I can't even say I know that man – a mystery that I haven't solved just yet."

The air fresh but filled with the cacophony of a huge crowd, Staxius dodged and weaved his way into the open field. "Master," a familiar voice came from behind, "what a fight," Avon jumped and hugged. "Yes, I was thoroughly impressed by how you painfully held back the killing intent. I was shocked to see that you aren't such a bloodthirsty man," Achilles added with eyes filled with admiration. "Sure, I'm headed to see Eira – you guys are still free to do whatever."

"Thanks, master, we'll be at the next stadium – please join us for the show Aceline is to put on," Avon spoke, his voice faded into the background. 'I've got more to learn about the capital than I thought. I can't believe that Aceline is someone so important that the general populous obey her every whim,' the injured were taken via ambulances. Staxius watched as they slowly made the trip downhill.

"Staxius," one of the vehicles stopped, "jump in," the door opened, Jona held out her hands to which he accepted. "That fight sure was a scary one," Jona spoke, Eira laid before him. "Scary in what way?" he asked, his daughter's situation was in good hands. "Scary in the way that Josiah called me. The tone in his voice, it reeked of fear – I knew something had turned for the worse. But imagine my surprise when I saw you being considerate and not overly brutal towards the others," her lips and hands moved independently, they seemed like two different entities. In one end she could hold a normal conversation while the other, treating her patient.

"Why do you all assume that I only thirst for blood and death. I've changed, slightly but changed." Jona didn't look surprised, "surely you jest," her tone felt serious. "Fine, my initial goal was to kill everyone," he looked down onto Eira. "She stopped me; I feel like she's my limiter somehow. But no matter, what is done is done, we've won the tournament, my job here is accomplished," he smiled.

The show Aceline was to performed had been scheduled for seven pm; in roughly three hours. The fight was done, they won. Eira got over her fear of holding back – Staxius got the chance to fight in the inter-magical tournament. The main task remained at hand, the quest to open an adventuring guild. Progress

so far was slow, the party needed two or more members. Money was an issue and they still hadn't decided on a place to make into headquarters. It felt enough, staying any longer beside Eira would only make a bad impression. Josiah was her instructor – no longer could Staxius teach her anything.

'I'll wait till she regains consciousness; I'll properly say goodbye. I can do as much for my lovely daughter, she hates the way I leave unexpectedly after all. I don't wish to ruin our new formed bond, I'm happy." The scenery changed slowly, Staxius looked out with a gentle smile – the journey wasn't over yet.