

## Death Magic 1121

Chapter 1121 Battle of the Academies [Finale] [1]

“Artanos, you seem to be in a grand mood.”

“Lixbin. You’re right, I’m in a great mood. Can you imagine the look on his face as our plan comes to fruition?”

“Yes I can,” out in the distance before the gods grow a rugged landscape of sharp mountains and cliffs. With the heavy moistured air, the impending sense of dread, and the occasional gust, Lixbin and Artanos paused. Cracks echoed behind; the remnants of the battle-scarred fortress breathed its last breath. The latter, a resounding thud from the fallen main pillar.

‘Artanos defeated Formle, we captured the central trading point and advanced. He easily overwhelmed the fortress and swiftly moves to Inux. The Aapith nation’s scared to react. They’ve neutered themselves. Eipea Empire’s the clear winner of this game,’ Lixbin’s memories took him at a time before the heavenly convention. He was abruptly visited by Artanos, who, with a kind smile and meaningful intent, strode across Lixbin’s property, “-visitor.”

Lixbin pulled from his research desk, throwing a half-adjusted regard at the voice, “-visitor?” he echoed, “-Artanos, my, I wasn’t expecting company. Do ignore the scatter.”

Artanos entered with a meaningful glance. The whole shed was scanned and showed misplaced papers, a broken water cup, and blood stains over the couch. A timid but present scent of deception hung in the air.

“I should apologize for the abrupt stop. Lixbin, will you join me?”

“Pardon?”

“I plan on betraying the Aapith Nation, they’ve outlived their use. Instead, I plan on joining hands with Zeus.”

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“Zeus and Lucifer have a concrete agreement of non-aggression. They want the same thing, it’s hard to tear those of similar thinking apar-”

“Won’t be an issue,” he proclaimed. A gleam of curiosity, the dangerous look upon a feline’s gaze as she watches an unknown prey approach, “-you enjoy entertainment. How about we make a deal,” Lixbin pounced, like the feline sensing an opening.

“What sort of deal?”

“The kind that reads, when Zeus forsakes Aapith and joins us, you will let me use Cleopatra, who’s already stationed in Ragno.”

“What about me?”

“The connections between you and Leviathan are yours’ to decide. It sure was a wise move to use a proxy as opposed to revealing thineself. A sudden disappearance, doesn’t that sound lovely?” Artanos left whence he came.

‘The bait he dangles is too scrumptious for me to ignore. It’s too tasty, he knows my weakness and played on it. I love nothing more than for people to find flaws and use them to their advantage. Watching Igna doesn’t bring as much pleasure as it once did. I’m tired of his idleness – he beats around the bushes, goes off onto side jobs, and disappears. It’s no fun, not like Artanos, a man who has a purpose. I digress. Artanos, show me your resolve – and it tis entertaining, I will join the cause no questions asked.’

As he proclaimed, the news of Zeus’ betrayal of the Aapith nation slipped through the grapevines. Familiar footsteps, “-visitor.”

“A visitor?” an overwhelming sense of deja-vue hit, “-Artanos.”

He stood with purpose, “-so, I hear Zeus’ joined your side?”

“It was a simple matter. Our agreement.’

“You can have Cleopatra.”

“What’s the catch?”

“For I to be involved with the proceeding of the plan. I swore, and a god is no man to break a promise.”

“Swearing an oath as a god is as pointless as drinking soup with a fork. You don’t fool me, Lixbin. The moment boredom hits, you’ll leave.”

The god of Darkness gave a silent grin.

“-no matter, I care not for the oath. I’m here for my end goal. You can do what you wish, on second thought, there may be something you can do,” and so, a meeting was called between him, Cleopatra, and Lixbin. Finer details of the plan had the god drooling in anticipation, “-let’s recap. My plan is simple. We will use a fa?ade to hide my true intention. We’ll make it seem like we want Ragno, well, the land is wanted by Leviathan, and he can try to conquer. As for us, we’ll play the part of wanting the Tomes of Control, ones Ereena has hidden. I don’t plan to control time, not yet. Therefore, the tomes aren’t needed. Instead, I want to rule over Draebala, complete conquest. Cleopatra, you will be key in keeping Igna fixated. If I know the man how I think I know, he will become preoccupied with you and turn his gaze towards Dems. I’ll set the scene so the ploy is alluring enough to take Igna’s interest. I expect he will realize our goals – by the time it’s understood, we will have conquered a third of Zayan D’olsak. I predict the final battle to be in Inux.”

“They have the god of war on their side.”

“Leave Formle to me.” Thus, a convoluted method of the, ‘-bait and switch,’ tactic was employed. Wasn’t long before Igna danced to Artanos’ tunes. The slow, haunting echoes of defeat rattled his bones. Facades of grandeur crumbled, Artanos’ plan worked – and there, in the distance, clashes of energy marked the end of Inux.

'Artanos was right,' Lixbin stood beside the maimed body of Formle, '-he defeated the god of war and utterly destroyed their camp.'

"They won't do much damage," Lixbin remembered Artanos' words, "-the army stationed in Draebala are puppets. The moment Formle falls, it's complete victory."

'His words are scarily accurate. We've breezed through their defenses. What remains in the last siege, after which, Artanos will disable the castle's teleportation circle and take hostages. Alas, Igna, he's got you where he wanted. Sathanas' capture has you quivering – what will you think when you see this," a lantern ambered lazily, casting over-stretched shadows upon the rough walls, '-his children,' he raised the flame, casting light upon the faces, '-Draconis, Raphael, and Saniata.'

"WHERE'S CORA, KALEEM, YURIA, AND STARIX!"

"Don't shout," said a figure sitting deeper in the dungeon, "-Cora and Kaleem put up a great fight. Yuria too, she did her best considering her condition. Too bad. Your father is a fool. He never understood the true potential of the Floor Bosses inside the Tower of Aria. Their potential is subjective to their owner," the affluent voice paused and lowered.

"WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM."

"Dead," Lixbin replied, his lantern casting the cage's iron bar onto the prisoners, "-impaled and placed before the castle. Formle died and your army," he turned towards Artanos, "-is defeated."

"Just you wait," Saniata mumbled, "-just you-

"Abandon all hope, children of Igna," Artanos's lean figure rose like long fingers stretching into the darkness, "-teleportation circle is off. I'm no fool to fight that man head-on. Instead, I will make him suffer and the best way to a cruel man's heart is those who have meaning. Therefore," he grabbed the bars, "-children. You will remain still; thy fate is in my hands."

Meanwhile, back in Ragno – the feeling of uncontrol despair had Igna seething inside an empty office. "-How does it feel?"

"Cleopatra?"

"The academy sure is quiet."

"How are you here?"

"Artanos," she lowered her top, "-the mark of the god. You stripped me naked and failed to notice the truth. My lord was true in trusting him."

"I assume you're here in transient form?"

"Right, you are correct. My physical body's already home. I came to have a look at the loser's face," she skipped passed the shelf, past the desk, and landed before Igna, "-that look on your face, the light of retribution burns. I should warn you, Igna-

"Inux's already under Artanos' rule. I lost. Where's Artanos?"

"On his way," cheered Cleopatra.

'I sense him,' he puffed, '-the footsteps,' the presence paused at the door and pushed. Igna rotated his chair and laughed, "-Skeptor of the East."

"Director Igna Haggard," the man shadily rubbed his palms, "-you fell for my trap."

"You played the fool well," he puffed, "-where's Artanos?"

"Right here," a shadow split from the vice-director, "-how did you like my surprise?"

"I must know, when did you use Skeptor?"

"Oh, Skeptor of the East is a member of my information core," he smiled, "-he's a noble born of the demon faction I recruited to check on Ragno. Igna, I must say, that face you have, the one where no matter the adversaries faced thee keep a cool head, it's, honesty, it's beautiful."

"Compliments," he puffed, "-tell me, what of my children?"

"Straight to the point. Draconis, Saniata, and Raphael are under my watch. I won't free them, they're bound. Sadly, at this point, Igna, you have nothing you can use to bargain. I'm not interested in Ragno, nor am I interested in the Shadow Realm. I got what I need and did so without resorting to cheap tricks."

"No chance I'll get them back?"

"No."

"I thought so," he pressed the cigarette and casually looked at Artanos, "-you won."

"That's it?"

"Yeah, you won."

"The victory feels like shit. Igna, you won't even attempt rescuing them?"

"We know it's pointless. Tell me, what of Formle and the attendants."

"Killed."

"Complete defeat then?"

"Complete defeat it is."

"Judging by the look on Skeptor's face--"

"You understand quickly, feels good not needing to explain my words. Effective immediately, you are to forsake thy seat as Director of Ragno and hand over Lucifer's symbol. Skeptor will take your place."

Igna snickered, "-Artanos, you got what you wanted, yes?"

"Yeah?"

"In other words, the events here don't affect your plans?"

"No, it doesn't."

"Despite the scheme to lead two wars. You've won one."

“Where is this headed?”

“Simple,” he glanced, “-Ragno’s fate is yet decided.”

“You won’t dare kill Skeptor.”

“No, cutting off a few limbs shouldn’t be too much trouble. Artanos, you had your victory and came to seek the satisfaction of the triumph, to catch a glimpse of my sorry face. Sadly, Artanos, you won’t get the satisfaction. Ragno will remain mine.”

Skeptor stepped in and laughed, “-we have your children as hostages.”

“And?”

“Are you not-”

“No,” he returned, “-they were captured and must pay for the weakness.”

“You truly are heartless, Igna,” said a woeful Artanos, “-I feel sorry for your children. To have a father who won’t bat an eye at their fate. Suppose I’ll have them sent to work in the heavenly plane. Unlike you, I have a sense of mercy I must uphold, I am, after all, a god,” the shadow imploded, leaving Skeptor to face his fate.

“IGNA HAGGARD, COME OUT OF THE OFFICE – WE HAVE CAPTURED THE ACADEMY!”

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“So long, Igna. I had fun playing with the demons,” Cleopatra winked and vanished.

Satan, Leviathan and Viatnah’s forces stormed the yard. “-you’re surrounded, director. I sold myself to Artanos so I’d have a chance of purifying Ragno and its academy from its filth.”

“IGNA HAGGARD!”

He abruptly stood and walked past Skeptor like he was nothing, ‘-Artanos won. If he defeated Formle and the others, I shouldn’t underestimate their strength. As is now, I doubt the princes would stand a chance against his troops, titans, angels, and the gods. I’m really taking on the whole of reality at this point. I see a single way out of this predicament. If Artanos wants to take over Draebala, I’ll just have to take over the Aapith Nation.’

“You don’t look pleased.” Lixbin’s comment went over Artanos’ head. The gilded halls of Zeus’ palace carried the jestful tease, “-not a complete victory?”

“No,” he clenched his fists, “-Igna didn’t once bat an eye,” and turned to four plainly dressed servants, “-you heard?”

“You know they don’t hear,” said Lixbin, “-poor children and goddess, forced into absolution under the oath of Undaim.”

“He could have shown some concern... no matter. I’ll have my satisfaction sooner or later. Are the forces ready?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“We’ll move into the Aapith Nation’s territory. Draebala will be mine, and with it, Kronos’ testament.”

A harsh wind blew – the quietness cast a haunting atmosphere. A pin-drop silence went across the troops, the director walked out into the field without so much a look of concern, “-Director, you will pay for the sin of slaying my students.”

Chapter 1122 Battle of the Academies [Finale] [2]

“Who?”

“Students you killed.”

“Director of Dems Academy,” he strode onto the field, surrounded by the troops and the ever-distant stare of the two generals, “-they died due to their weaknesses. As a proud woman of the demon tribe, don’t you feel the need for growth. Am I the root of your problems, was I the one who ordered their dispatch into war?” he coldly went over the army of students, “-you preach of the students’ safety in vein. You, who stand before me, are nothing short of a liar. If you cared, they would never have been forced to fight. Look behind, Director, they’re also your students.”

“Enough,” she put her foot down, “-I will not be swayed by the word of the devil. I’m not daft nor am I in the mood of entertaining your speech.”

Zalem Odd, the strange entity slithered onto the field. For a fellow of flexibility, a harsh corset held his upper body. Tentacles strewn from oversized pantaloons. “-Director of Lucifer’s Academy,” came a fluent calming voice, “-we hereby order the complete surrender of the Academy, and the return of Teresa into our care.”

“Zalem Odd,” a gentle gust swayed his clothes, “-the battle has been won by Artanos. I dare say, I didn’t expect such level of conspiracy amongst the hellians. No matter,” he rolled his sleeves and snapped, \*-I beckon the fa?ade between truth and reality to shatter. Widen the gates to a world of unknown, engulf life, and return to naught- Realm Expansion – State of Void,\* nothing – everyone lost sight and sense. Heavy darkness expanded, “-you lost yourself,” a voice resonated from within his temple, the gaspiness of each syllable, each flicker of tone – the echoes tore through their very being. \*Behind the veil of darkness rises the truth, and from the truth comes justice. Alas, for when justice comes, none remains, no watches – only death awaits. Death of confidence, death of power, and reduction of one’s ability – Fool’s whim,\*

‘My strength, what is happening?’

‘I can’t see.’

‘I can’t breathe.’

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‘Am I going to die?’

\*Ring,\* the void swallowed itself. Worlds hue return, the morose moment of hopelessness instilled the sense of fear, “-the battle is not over.”

“Igna...”

"I had to bid my time," he opened his arms and three orbs shot out, "-Fenrir, Elize, and Vengeance. Make haste," a second, the afterimage, and thus flew heads. The generals, '-I can't move,' were stuck. A slaughter, true to the word's definition, set the tint red and brown. Comrades torn beyond recognition spilled guts and darkened soil. The smell of death, \*I call forth eternal flames of oblivion, heed my voice, bring forth the blaze that purges gods and demons alike; Abyssal Wrath,\* those of stronger mind and body cried – outlines of their faces widen, their mouths and eyes, three dark circles against the pure white of the Abyss' amber.

"Zalem Odd and Henry Grant," the restraints unshackled, " – I forgot to mention," Orenmir's edge flashed, "-the number was never an issue. You see, I'm an army on my own," a haunting skull gathered in a cloud over his head, "-you will rue the day you entered my land."

Fenrir and Elize returned with bloodied mouths and satisfied expressions, the whiteness of Fenrir and Elize's fur, their ornate appearance turned vile and oily, "-did you enjoy the meal?"

"I did," Elize purred, "-master, I'm full. They taste nasty."

"Fenrir?"

"It's no fun killing the helpless," she yawned, "-we took out a third of their forces."

"As you have wished, my master, I have spared the lives of Dems Academy's students."

"Good, very good," he opened his palms, \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* leaving so much life-essence to a vampire, \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* the lines gathered in condensed orbs as well as forming a bloody halo, "-how about we play a little game?" he turned to Henry, "-you, my friend, look very unassuming. How about we settle the differences through a battle?"

"I've spent my years training," he narrowed his gaze, "-all for the day the time would come where I'd show my skills," he courageously clambered using a stray spear, "-and today, the day has finally come."

Igna readied his stance, "-you, director of Lucifer's Academy," the pressure from both sides built a heavy tension, "-I surrender," Henry immediately fell on one knee, "-I'm wise to realize my weakness. Your retainers defeated my army of five thousand like it was nothing. In addition, you used an area-of-effect conjuration spell to manifest a domain for our force. Expanding a realm to suit one's needs is only viable in one on one battles. You, Director, used it on a whole army – I don't dare imagine the mana capacity and power hidden beneath thy persona. More shackles are binding thy strength, as such, I would ask for you to take my head. My lord Satan hates cowards more than traitors. I fall in both categories..."

"Fair," Igna moved his finger, and a razor-sharp line cleanly went across Henry. With a general down, "-Zalem Odd," he strode forth and leaned into the blob of tentacles, "-comes a time where a corset can't handle the pressure put onto your body," he tapped the entity, and they sprang, "-what happened?"

"I see," Igna paused, "-never mind. Zalem Odd, I welcome thee to a private show," he clapped, a white line expanded and closed into a dome.

"Teresa."

The unconscious body lowered into a hovering slab of concrete, "-look here."

\*Watchers, spectators, names ring high and low, us, unknown to the world's reality, unknown to the world's knowledge, have lived in utter solemnness for millennia to come and go. Watcher of the Shadow Realm, beckons my might to be fully materialized without prejudice, the reality is but my playground, neither god nor demon shall overcome my authority, face me in stride, face me in fear, reality's what I wish it to be for knowledge is the true strength: Realm Expansion, Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam,\* pure terror gripped their hearts – bravado was the last of the collective thoughts. The canvas-like property of the scene, the noiseless click of the second hand pushing mindlessly into its stagnant position, “-welcome to my domain,” a blade, a surgeon's scalpel, formed with crystalline blood hidden in the hovering halo, “-bear witness to today's main event.”

\*Come forth: Box of Souls.\*

\*Mana Control: Light Element Variant – Astro Krona,\* shards of light frosted in hexagons across her skin, \*tap, tap,\* “-wake up, Teresa.”

“W-w-where am I?” she lazily turned her head.

“Don't bother with the location,” he pointed forward, “-the rescue party's here. Why not give them a warm welcome.”

A relief grin, “-Zalem,” she said, “-you came for m-”

“My princess-”

A butcher's ax fell made of crystal red fell in between her head and torso. Blood sprayed, “-a clean cut,” he casually held her still conscious head by the hair, “-look,” it dangled before her comrades, “-don't you see the lovely sight a head. Your comrades are most gracious to have to the rescue. I wish I had that kind of support,” came a rather sarcastic remark, “-am I speaking alone?” he tapped her cheeks, “-this is real.”

“AHHHHHHHHHHH.”

“Right, enough of that,” the grip eased, her head dropped, \*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from when you were born and till you die, I, the god of death, hold in my hands the strings which binds you to this world, by my authority, I order thy chains to be severed, spell, Tactus Interitus.\* her whole being faded into mist. \*Living or dead, I invite all to the realm of absurdity, serve me and my companions, and be one of a greater family. Forgo the past and look towards the future, one in which thou art be immortal and without regret. Box of Soul: Shadow Realm Transmigration.\*

“And there she goes,” he hopped onto the slab and sat, Teresa's soul, a purple orb was swallowed by the Box, “-look at you all,” he lit a cigarette and puffed, “-my word, such an attentive audience. Viatnah, Zaleem and the children of Dems Academy. Allow me a soliloquy,” he puffed “-not as you can refuse. Dems Academy, are you aware of the connections between the Kings of Hell and the Heavens? Were you aware Leviathan swore himself to Artanos, the god of wisdom, just to have the opportunity of invading Ragno? Lucifer's academy is predominantly fallen angels. They share morality and a somewhat strange sense of right and wrong. Dems Academy must surely have a moral compass, or so I had thought. Sadly, the teachings, from what I've heard, are based on the seven cardinal sins. Employ desires, manipulate others and make you stand at the summit. Tis all good in word... that's the thing, it's good in word alone. In practice, utilizing the sins is a grave mistake,” he jumped off the slab, turned and

snapped – various magical symbols glowed, “-lest one’s resistant to their temptation, a deal with the devil shall and will remain a fair trade.” \*Mana-control: Threads of Life,\* he fashioned an empty humanoid body from the air, “-living beings can be controlled with ease. Immortality is only granted to the strongest... a matter of fact, immortality is not real. More on that lesson in another class.”

\*Knowledge known to only the watcher, I, master and inheritor of Origin, beckon thee; Mantia, Library of the all-knowing.\*

\*Book of Rue, on the first day of the devil’s awakening – the ancient art of creation falls, for the conjurer is a priest sworn to the gods but led astray by evil. The anti-god, the devourer of angels, the embodiment of evil, cursed King Alfred, reaches the heavens and swallows Creation’s heir, gaining the powers of Creation. Fashion into life a perfect replica, grant the symbol of Creation; Yeve,\*

The humanoid took shape, it articulated with pseudo movements, \*I beckon the souls of the Shadow Realm, be free,\* he snapped, \*Release.\* Teresa’s soul darted from box to hassle, \*Order of the Adjudicator – a symbol of Pride, Lucifer’s wings, from one host to the next, under my contract, I seal the pact and grant Teresa L. Leviathan – the position of Jury and instate her as a Princess of Hell,\* a tempest of pure power shot outwards, the whole realm trembled, \*-Release,\* a flash of bright white took their consciousness far beyond their minds. A checkered room of white and black split down the middle, where a bicolored chair, black and white, waited.

‘Where am I?’ Teresa blinked, ‘-wasn’t I just killed?’

“Welcome,” echoed an all-powerful voice, “-you have been chosen by the master. Teresa L. Leviathan, from this day forward, you are one of Igna Haggard’s blood. You are his daughter for he has fashioned thy body and thy soul. The heart in thy chest beats for his service. As the Representative of Pride, the strongest force amongst the Cardinal Sins, you are to serve him with respect. Betrayal will not be tolerated. If you choose to go against the master, you will answer to me,” a transient form meandered about the chair. By a, it felt more like they, as multiple people could be felt.

“Who are you?”

“I am the one who protects and the one who attacks. I go by many names, I have many names and I have taken the names of many. I am, as all thing is in this world, my master’s blade. I am, the one known as Orenmir, I am, the Devil’s will and his whim.”

\*Clap, clap,\* “-wake up,”

\*Cough, cough,\* she gasped, “-where am I?”

“Ragno,” he moved about the courtyard, “-Zalem Odd. Hear this, Teresa L. Leviathan will forever be known as Teresa of the Lilith Household. She is the daughter of our queen, as such, her position and responsibility are true. Take my words to your leader, take it to Leviathan, I ask that the kings of Hell meet.”

“Understood,” the blob faded into a green vortex, leaving Igna, the students, the director of Dems academy, and Teresa.

“My little sister,” Viatnah trembled, “-what has he done to you, my precious?”

“Sister...” she covered her mouth, ‘-I can’t tell her what I feel. My feelings towards my family are gone, I feel like I could kill her if Igna ordered. What has he done to me?’

“DIRECTOR, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY SISTER!”

“Nothing much,” he winked, “-just the usual.”

Chapter 1123 Teresa

“THE USUAL?”

“Will you shut up? I’m trying to speak...” he paused, checking the massacre left in Fenrir, Vengeance, and Elize’s wake, “-there’s nothing more I can do or hope to accomplish. Those who have moved upon my territory shan’t be spared. Viatnah H. Leviathan. Your students were spared. I asked my companions not to cause them harm. Consider this an act of generosity as one director to another.”

Therein, a bolt of lightning snapped, sending frizzles like sparks around the area. Smoke rose from the smoldering origin point, a figure, one familiar and feminine, existed with a salacious expression.

“Memphe,” Igna narrowed.

“Director,” she bowed and checked the area – there was a sense of intrigue about her person. Perhaps confidence or a change in appearance, the alteration was subtle but clear, “-I’ve come to contest your claim as Director of the Academy.”

“And on whose behalf?”

“On behalf of the noble houses,” she widened her arms as if inviting an embrace, “-the council of demons has gone over your claim, their decision is final,” she gestured a ripping motion, a scroll hovered within her grasp, “-to the pseudo demon, Igna Haggard, we from the Aapith Nation Council refute thy claim. It is in thy best interest to yield and forsake the land of Ragno to Memphe. Any disagreement to our decree will be met by a swift death carried by the hands of the Jyao.”

Jyao, Igna observed a chilling sensation grab the students, ‘-they fear that name more than the threat of death. I wonder how deeply Jyao’s influence-’

Memphe stepped forth obnoxiously, “-Outsider, allow me,” she rudely placed her hand upon his shoulder then shook her head, “-Jyao are an elite group of demons tasked in protecting the Council. They are the peacekeepers. A belligerent populous like Demons will have peacekeepers. Most often than not, those peacekeepers are ones respected by all, feared by their tales, and told in stories. To us, Demons, Jyao is a sacred name used only in moments when the nation stands in peril. To be threatened by them is both a badge of honor and a sure way to failure. Igna Haggard, you have been backed into a dangerous corner.”

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“Memphe, are you done?”

“Excuse me?”

“The decree,” he shrugged off her hands, “-applies if I choose resistance,” and pulled Teresa, “-she bears the wings of Lucifer. As such, the title of Director will be bestowed upon the second incarnation of Lucifer, the holder of Pride, the bearer of Lucifer’s wings, Princess Teresa of Lilith, the first of the seven cardinals.”

“Princess Teresa?” Mephe’s jaw dropped, and she couldn’t believe her eyes. A stutter, a shake of the finger – deep breaths and the overwhelming awkward tension, ‘-this can’t be-’

“Mephe, you said it yourself. Ragno needs to be ruled by one of nobility. This was your goal, was it not? To have the position of Director handed to someone of high birth? There you have it. Teresa is the spawn of Leviathan and Lilith, will this suffice?” like a parent scolding a child for misbehaving, Igna’s tone came across as very parental. The big presence Mephe exuded upon her grand entrance, the crackling of thunder and smoldering of ash; reduced to naught.

“You hear it first,” he addressed the crowd, of which were students and Viatnah, “-Ragno’s leadership falls upon this young princess’ shoulders,” he strode to Viatnah and pulled her chin, short curly purple hair fell either side of her cheeks. She defied his touch by turning her head, “-your fate resides in my hands.” War between Lucifer and Dems academy ended. Igna’s side suffered the most. The aftershock took quite a toll on Igna.

Dems academy returned with exception of Viatnah. Her role as negotiator between Lucifer’s successor and Leviathan would greatly affect relations. Mephe of the house of Djeant, was appointed Chief Counselor of Ragno, a position left unoccupied for decades, one used when the inheritor of Ragno is not of age to fully rule the land. As Igna discovered in the few days after the war ended, “-Mephe’s actions were single-minded. She wanted to restore her family’s fame. Looking at the academy,” he walked around campus, the sun was barely out, few students jogged, others practiced, “-the air seems easier than when I was the director. Skeptor and Mephe, knowing their truth now, work well as a team. Each had their own version of how Ragno should be run. I was an outsider. If this had been a foreign kingdom, the best way to keep the land, considering the three choices cited by Machiavelli – destroy, move there oneself, or let it live with its own laws, the first option would have suited the current need. Destroy the city, end the governing bloodline, and snuff the hope the people had when they first lived. Demons understand only if force is used. They’re a sorry bunch, not worth the time, so I had thought before. Looking at it now – I guess I was never one to be in a ruling position. I need to face the fact, I wasn’t really leader material. Granted, my abilities are sharpened to lead, my truth is simple and anti-climactic, and I rather watch than participate. Most of my peace is found watching others, and guiding those who need my help or advice, it is a great feeling. Such are the few luxuries afforded to me as an immortal. Seeing Hidros grow, and even here, despite the short time elapsed, I witnessed a great change,’ a blooming orchard curved around the campus, from the western wing onto the northern wing – the towers peaked higher than before, such the impression cast by deep lingering shadows. A smartly dressed lady of blond hair, blue eyes, and immaculately fine white wings cut across to the Academic’s building – her entourage, a slightly hunched robed man and an equally smart dressed woman, “-there’s the new director,” escaped a few whispers, “-she’s so pretty.”

“I hear she’s the daughter of king Leviathan and queen Lilith.”

“I know, her pedigree is top-notch. As a noble, I feel honored to be ruled by such a lady.”

“The old director was good but didn’t feel right.”

“I know, he came out of nowhere.”

“Must admit, he was a looker.”

“I KNOW...” such the whispers below, under the shadows of rustic colonnades.

Stronger voices escaped above, through ajar windows, “-the director left.”

“Good riddance.”

“Yeah, I know. He and his children, the princes of hell – have turned the academy upside down. We didn’t need someone like him sullyng the halls where Lucifer once walked.”

“I’m relieved lady Mempo challenged his authority.”

“I know, I was scared. Lord Skeptor did promise he’d make the academy great. We should be fine for now.”

Igna simply carried on the promenade with a cigarette, ‘-the more I watch, the more I see. It’s baffling how taking a step back and facing the greater picture soothes the mind. I do admire the guts of those nobles.’ From the Academics to the Commoners, like a shift only felt when crossing a border – emotions were all over the place, especially from class 3-2, witnesses to the truth.

“Director Igna is the only hope for our academy.”

“The Academics are more obnoxious now, it sucks. They keep harassing our female students. Vanesa and her brothers haven’t returned since the battle. Without them, they grow confident. I swear I’d rip their head if I could, man, this suck.”

“Dig your heels and endure. We can’t respond to every little provocation. Look, people, the academy is biased. Can’t expect help.”

“What then, do we lick each other’s wounds?”

“Sure, why not let me send an invitation to the pity party.”

“Ha-ha, very funny. The new director’s a kid. Skeptor didn’t waste time filling her ears with his sweet words. I have a bad feeling.”

“They’ve hated us from the very beginning.”

“War’s not over, we’ll have to fight.”

“Lilia is right. The next council election is coming up. The director was kind to change the policy so that anyone can participate. If we want to survive, we’ll have to elect a student from our side.”

“A losing battle. We can’t fight against their money, influence, prestige, and connections.”

“Dilemma.”

The clock stuck at 07:30. Teresa buried her frown in a mountain of paperwork. 'Skeptor and Memphe keep harassing me. Why don't they leave me alone... why can't they take the chatter outside?' she lifted her gaze, a pleased smile followed, "-director, is something the matter?"

"No, nothing's the matter," she bit her tongue, '-a bunch of worthless wastes of space. My feelings towards my master have grown. I don't feel like I've changed... then again, I'm wrong about many things,' her legs tapped anxiously, '-why isn't he here yet?'

A gentle breeze whispered outside, "-mayor."

"Not mayor anymore, Graso."

"My apologies, lord Igna. The force of habit."

"Tell me," he puffed, "-how did the town take the news?"

"It's split in your favor, my lord. The nobles are pleased about your retirement from the post of director. Like nobles, they're against the idea of Teresa as a new leader. Her birth is under much scrutiny as Leviathan suddenly backpedaled. He said, and I quote, '-we share no name, thus, her claim to be my blood is void. I will hear none of this situation,' the one who asked was found dead a few hours later."

"I lost. There's no other word around it. Turning Teresa into Pride was a spur-of-the-moment decision. I'm glad she's taken to the role."

"Would you care for reports about lady Memphe?"

"Not today. I'm late as is. Keep watch and inform me as the situation unfolds."

"Understood my lord, I will see you in a bit," the muscular figure left for the distant crowd. He went past the library, where a cat leaped from a window ledge and onto his shoulders, "-morning master."

"Morning Elize, how was the hunt?"

"Nothing so far," she purred, "-good night," and left as quickly as she came. The other building approached, and a lady with light blue hair waited on a bench placed along the path from the library to the academic, "-morning, my master."

"Hello, Fenrir. Did you find anything?"

"I tracked the scent of alteration magic inside Emmie Lens' estate. No leads so far."

"Right, thanks for the heads up. We need to find more, please see to it."

"Understood," she morphed and climbed, reaching the topmost tower and disappearing into the morning sky.

'Emmie disappeared from prison. Convenient.'

With the coming change, a new path widened for Igna's entertainment. He walked the stairs to the director's office, a trek dreaded by those in trouble.

"Director, might I suggest a close acquaintance for the position?"

“No, consider my choices, director. We need people of skill and experience, not the nepotism lord Skeptor so wishes to flaunt.”

“Pardon me, lady Memphe, aren’t you also pushing an agenda down our poor director’s little throat?”

She gripped her pen, and a surge of power pulled the duo’s attention, “-either way, we need someone to replace the vacancy.”

\*Tap, tap,\* gloominess attached to her lingering regard faded, ‘-he’s here.’

The handle turned, “-my bad, I’m late.”

“...”

“WHAT IS HE DOING HERE?”

“MY LADY!”

“Skeptor, Memphe,” he smiled, “-been a few days, hasn’t it?”

“Lady Director, you’re not going against the council’s decision, are you?” Memphe threatened, “-this man has been ordered-”

“Memphe,” chilling fingers tightened around her very being, “-chose the words carefully.”

“This is an abuse of power,” said Skeptor, “-you’re not fit to be here, Igna Haggard.”

To which, he simply kept a nonchalant expression. Teresa rose from her seat and stared down Memphe and Skeptor, “-I’ve had just about enough with your voices. As a director, I’m officially hiring Lord Igna to be a new member of the faculty. As such, I will be granting him the position of Department Head of Arts and Design. I will not entertain reproach. If thee wish to contest my decision, I will put the task to a battle. Lord Igna will fight for his claim – those willing to challenge his authority, by the laws set by our previous director, will need to put something of equal value.”

Chapter 1124 Assignment

“I thought as much. This meeting is dismissed. I have taken the liberty of informing the faculty, you needn’t worry, Skeptor and Memphe.”

Begrudging looks and unsatisfied agendas exited, leaving Igna with the new director, “-the campus is split with the new position.”

“Father,” she deadened her expression, “-you are truly a man who doesn’t care.”

“Correct.”

“I admit, awakening as the heir to Lucifer feels weird. My body, my soul – it shrieks. Do you know what I’m feeling?”

“Excitement,” he added nonchalantly, “-you’re freed from prior engagements. There is no longer the need to hide behind meek, shallow humbleness. You’re fit to be one with the elites. Your initiation as one of my Jurors will wait. Take pride in thy hand and face the world head-on. You have a country to

control, control to save, and perhaps, another to destroy. The academy is yours to rule, Teresa. Do not expect much from my side.”

“What will you do? All teleportation to Draebala and the heavenly realms has been cut. No way to invade far as I remember. What will it be?”

“Who knows?”

“No matter,” she tapped her desk, “-here is your assigned class. It’s nearly 08:00, homeroom. Go on.”

.....

“Alright, supposed I should,” the assignment read, “-Class 3-2.”

‘Class 3-2. The troublemakers. They showed potential, and some of them did at least. I wonder if she did so on purpose. I did hear some complaints about their class being too hectic for any teachers here. Seems good,’ over the yard and into the other building, the same architecture with a different feel. Classes were full, homeroom followed as expected. At 08:01, the door slid – a pensive silence gonged. Igna’s leather boots clopped, and he entered with confidence and prestige, “-good morning folks.”

“Lord Igna!” Arde cried.

Lilia’s beautifully composed expression cracked – blood pulsed extremity to extremity, ‘-lord Igna,’ she quickly hid her hands under the table and lowered her gaze, ‘-what’s he doing here. After what happened the last time, I didn’t think... my heart, it can’t take this.’ Her pleading gaze unintentionally fell on Arde, who, with a conniving smile turned to Lilia and clapped silently, ‘-a pain...’ she gathered her breath, “-lord Igna, why are you here?”

“As of today, by orders of the director, I am to become this class’ homeroom teacher. Also, I’ve been assigned as the Head of Arts and Design. You will do well to heed my warning henceforth, children.”

“But my lord,” other unnamed students voiced, “-we saw you in the war. Defeat, death, are you sure?”

“I appreciate the concerns, however, the last thing I need is students worrying about this old fool. I’m your teacher, thus, I bear responsibility for your class. We’ll take attendance.”

A few minutes passed, “-on the subject of the upcoming student council election, I hear there is talk about class 3-2 choosing a representative. Did I hear correctly?”

“Yes teacher,” said a mundane-looking lass of curly short hair, puffed cheeks, and a slightly chubby outline.

“Annas, yes?”

“Yes.”

“Go on.”

“We discussed the matter of our fate at the academy. If change isn’t brought, our side will surely fall.”

“You mean the resending of commoners?”

“Yes,” a cloud of doom and gloom hung.

“This settles it. We will run for the election.”

“My lord...”

“Teacher.”

“Teacher, we have neither funds nor connections. Winning a war without the proper preparations...”

“Listen. You don’t need to win to affect thy fate. It will be as has been planned. You, my students, need to put forth a strong case and raise hell. There’s fun to be had in conflict, and you will soon learn to thrive off political upheaval. How about this for our first class,” he turned to the board, “-allow me to teach thee the intricacies of politics.”

Rolled eyes, yawns, uncaring regards – such was the mood, one of disinterest and boredom. Igna had much under his sleeves. With a well-timed shot, the class horned onto him. He spoke short sentences, pushing forward the more interesting facts and changing the subject, stringing them in a cohesive retelling of olden tales. They were hooked. Before long, 10:15 arrived, “-and class is dismissed.”

‘Class is over?’ they looked around strangely, “-when did he?”

“Public speaking,” added Lilia, “-our new teacher is a beast.”

“Man, politics makes me want to sleep... this new teacher is nothing like I expected. What say you, class representative, any feedback on the guy?”

“I’d say,” the chubby outline beamed, “-he’s well educated. We’re in fine hands.”

Next step, introduction to the faculty, “-allow me to introduce the new head of arts and design. Lord Igna Haggard. I hope you all will get along?”

“Greetings people,” he waved, “-the name’s Igna. I understand seeing the director as a fellow teacher to be somewhat disconcerting. I say there’s nothing to be worried about. Les thee have ambitions that would endanger my position, I’d say we’re pretty much set for a friendly exchange. Anyway,” he turned to the Director, “-might I?”

“Yes,” they left without another word said.

‘Responsibilities as the head of a department is to lead research in various fields. Compared to a normal teacher, our job is to manage and control – which, in a way, lessens our workload. Paperwork and logistics can be handled by attendants, I have Yui, therefore I needn’t worry. Emmie Hens’ workshop,” built a hefty walk to the east, after the administrative buildings on a plot of land, in the inner district. The walk went through a trail of forest and greenery – particularly, a portion of the land surrounding said workshop was cleared and forbidden for construction, secluded. The lovely walk reached its end, and the foliage cleared into a gentle hill upon which rested a massive tower, an arcane tower if it were to be described. At the feet was a massive compound, the bulk of which was covered with ivy vines. The admiration was cut short. A figure holding an umbrella floated to winds’ mercy, it dipped and settled, and the ride – a rollercoaster of deathly proportions, finally reached climax, “-good morning, master,” said short dark-purple hair. Big rounded glasses hung over the dame’s rounded nose, “-morning, Yui. Why the wardrobe change?”

"I felt like change was in order. I am a full-time attendant for my master's. I claim the position of secretary. Like any secretary worth her salt, I have to be sexually appealing – nothing screams appeal like glasses and tight-fitted clothes."

"Yui. You're watching too many of those dramas again. Why the umbrella?"

"An invention sent from the Shadow Realm. It's convenient, apparently," it closed into a quaint bag, "- shall we?"

"Here about the workshop?"

"Yeah. Tis the device that was jamming my signal. We're close to pinpointing lady Sathanas' location."

'We had a hit, she's in Leviathan's realm. Somewhere in his domain. We need to attack fast and with purpose. If they have time to react, they'll transfer her to a place where tracking is impossible. I've lost plenty of allies – need to check on Draebala, they need proper burials. Here's hoping Emmie has the items we require.' A cobblestone path led to a gate, where, with a flick of a wand, the lock cracked. "- Another win for us."

'Strange,' he slowed his step, '-the compound feels different,' he reached out and pulled Yui's shoulder, "-we're being watched."

"How this place is empty of life," she tapped her watch and toggled a display, "-am I the only one who bothers to transfer information to your interface..."

"Don't get me wrong," he blinked, the interface appeared and froze, "-I'd love to use the work you proudly crafted... it doesn't work here, we're being jammed," and blinked again, the interface vanished.

"Oh," her tune changed, "-I feel something approaching."

A coldness grabbed their neck, '-I know where you are,' he pulled out Tharis and shot.

"MY EARS!"

A heavy mass hit the ground loudly, "-there you go," he holstered the weapon, "-a clockwork soldier. Injured in the previous battle," they examined the corpse to see steam work innards and a lack of energy generation. '-hell you go,' he stomped the soldier's face, crashing whatever held its brain – and soon the dark aura faded.

"Up to you, Yui."

"I'm on it," she rolled her sleeves and confidently strode to the locked door. Igna took a cigarette break and waited in the shadow of the tower, '-I have to be ready for war. I won't let my anger take over. They have my children and killed people I saw as close – my heart's unbothered. Has the Death Element returned to its previous strength?' he puffed, '-can't say for sure. I need to get Sathanas back. Before battling Artanos and his faction, I need a faction of my own. Maybe I'll bring the Shadows... the last defeat, it's a foul taste, I have to return his kindness in full,' he exhaled, '-these are recently made footsteps. A clockwork soldier, his wounds and relative operation time... I get it now.'

"MASTER, COME UP!" cried from an upper window, "-you were right."

He flicked the bud, headed up the stairs, and entered the main hall fixed at the summit, “-these are the remnants of a device known as the TDT.”

“What again?”

“Transdimensional teleporter,” he said, “-you won’t find records of its existence.”

“How do you know about them?”

“Such is the foresight of Origin,” he walked around and examined the device. Hexagonal shapes containing ancient writing, an orb hovering above four edges of a pyramid and below another pyramid, this time, inverted. More rods were fixed around the device, “-tis the innards of the contraption. She must have worked on it. It’s a mess – suppose you could make it work as is now. The real form of the device is a pyramid the size of a coin, usually worn by those who required such abilities.”

“Don’t know about you, master, whatever we have here won’t fit in a palm.”

“Clever deduction.”

“No more sarcastic remarks...”

“No promises,” he went around for another pass, “-there we are. Bloodied handprints. I was right to assume she’d gotten away somehow.”

“What now, then, master?”

“She escaped with help from a clockwork soldier. It’s not hard when most of the attention is focused somewhere else. She must have stumbled into her workshop, crawled up the stairs, and teleported away,” he waved his hands over a particular hexagon, “-and there.”

“Congratulations!” the room shook, “-Igna Haggard, you figured out the password to the TDT. Sorry, my friend, this device is owned by me, by me, Artanos. Like Skeptor, Emmie Hens was also part of my forces. Don’t bother looking for the source, tis a transmission. And when you’re hearing this, I presume Emmie’s gone? Splendid. I did my part, Igna, you should focus on yourself. Word of advice from thy rival. Once I conquer Draebala, I will march against the Aapith Nation and put an end to your life, Adjudicator. Not much is known about thy powers – tis the only reason why I haven’t attacked. I’m no fool, you’re powerful, perhaps stronger than anyone who lives today... won’t do anything if you can’t protect those around you. Like the foolish king who sought power through conquest, cruelty will return, such as I believe the world’s natural order. I have your children – they will be safe, and I say so with a grain of salt. Depending on how the situation evolves, they may just become fodder for my experiments. Adjudicator, as the bringer of the end of times – for the sake of our survival, you will have to die. I’ll make sure to take what you hold precious one at a time. So long, your friend, Artanos.”

“Master?”

“...”

“Master?”

“Don’t worry,” he exhaled, “-this was planned,” he touched the device, \*poof,\* disappeared, “-and our hope to teleport into a realm without proper reference is shot.”

“What now?” she walked around, “-surely there’s something you can do?”

“Regardless of the form teleportation takes, one constant is a must – a stable and proper connection to the place of destination. Can’t very well jump into Leviathan’s realm – nor can I invade the heavens. Draebala’s under too much strain for us to make the journey safely. We’re stuck – he has us where he wants.”

“Are we giving up?”

“Who knows,” he sat, “-Emmie’s workshop is a good place to stay. I’ll figure out something. Yui, I appoint thee my secretary.”

“I’ll handle the paperwork for the academy, leave the boring stuff to me!”

## Chapter 1125 The Return

‘Between finding a solution to the transporting device’ fix and teaching the students, I find life here in Ragno comforting. It’s been a nice break. Especially from Artanos’ harassment and Cleopatra’s unruly sarcasm. They’re no longer preoccupied with my status as a teacher. Those under my responsibilities have defected to Skeptor – my position as Head of Arts and Designs is in name. Well, they sure love to treat me as head when problems arise – students inadequately performing, breeches against academy policy, and now this,’ Igna towered over two students drenched in sweat and scraps, ‘-trial by combat,’ the right hand rose, “-Hemp of class 3-2 wins.” The crowd deadened, “-per the condition of their contract, class 3-2 is hereby granted financial support set for Theological Research by the opposing club. Congratulation,” muted claps and saddened expression, ‘-trial by combat, for having looked down upon the combat class for so long, the academics finally sense the pressure of their training. Though, class 3-2 is an exception. Most of the Commoner classes and clubs were absorbed by greater entities. The academics are shrewd,’ spotlights darkened. Shuffles marked the audience’s exit. Chatter about the battle, bets, the business of profit and loss. Mammon, Asmodeus, and Vanesa monopolized the gambling aspect – creating a gaming house within the Academy. Director Teresa, in hopes of making the academy’s reputation better with the other Academies, allowed the battles to be public shows, wherein anyone and everyone had the right to bet and watch. She cleverly saw an opportunity – and there, came the split of the arena into quadrats. Four in total, two reserved for students and the remainder for the paying public. The days, weeks, and eventually months flew by.

“Sathanas,” he stared at the transportation device, “-it’s been five months. Five months of torture, sufferance, and solitude. I don’t expect her to be safe. Have I grown heartless to the fate of a close one?” he tapped his cigarette and faced up, ‘-Eira’s wound affected me a bit. I got over the rage and didn’t bat an eye at her state. If I’m honest with myself, I’m losing the thing I hold dear, the feelings of love and affection, the drive to protect, I don’t feel them. My heart’s gotten cold – the death element has returned. I enjoyed those feelings when they mattered. I don’t know anymore. I look upon Mammon, Asmodeus, Vanesa, and even Teresa with reckless abandon. I believe in the strength that comes from protecting someone or something dear. By gaining power, I’ve lost the strength to care,’ he puffed, smoke hovered into a cloud. The emotions felt, the way he was, the meaning of compassion, affection, and love – good emotions felt during his time in the mortal world, the drive and steady growth to create a better life for him and those around him, were just fond memory. ‘I have allies, Fenrir, Elize, Elixia, Yui, and Vengeance... I can count on them, they serve and protect unconditionally. Why do they

watch my actions, why do they entertain the way I treat them? I use and cast aside. I'd have never followed me if I was them. Solitude and envy are what I feel. Even this,' he watched the burnt cigarette, '-like the poison I fondly smoke, is reduced to naught. What is the fate of the Adjudicator, what is my purpose?'

"Igna," a deep suave voice echoed hexagonally, "-my heir."

"Lord Death," he flicked the cigarette and stared at the half-opened portal, "-have thee come to take my life?"

"Of course not," the man casually skipped into the room dressed in a black suit, top hat, and holding an umbrella, "-said position is occupied by Undrar."

"Thus, I'm not one to be called thy heir."

"Details," he shrugged and scanned the laboratory, "-what is this?"

"I couldn't say," he reached for another cigarette, "-an observatory, alchemist tower, researcher's laboratory... or a lavatory for useless tasks."

"Igna," the suave man cut his gaze with a fierce retort, "-are you a nihilist?"

.....

"Suppose so."

"Deary me," lord Death snapped, a tea set summoned above a hovering assortment of bones made vague to match a carpet, "-it will not do."

"Tell me, Lord Death, why have you come?"

"I can't remember if I ever said I came to give your final lesson?"

"Me neither."

"So much for your memory," he poured tea and smirked.

"Never claimed to be a savant," Igna respectfully returned the cigarette and picked up the cup instead, "-Lord Death, I'm not exactly sure what you're after. If it's something I can help, then, I'll be happy-"

"Igna, don't speak. Sip the tea and allow me a monologue."

"Be my guest," he took a seat and smelt the lovely aroma, '-this is heavenly.'

"What I'm about to say might have meaning, or else it might not. Don't take it the wrong way, my heir. You have grown into the epitome of power. You're strong, stronger than ever before. The Death Element pulsing through thy veins generate enough mana to supply a whole domain – which in fact it does. The remnants of thy broken heart, shattered during Persephone's rescue, have gotten so much power it fuels the whole of the Shadow Realm with energy to spare. You chose well. I heard much about the devourers of worlds – Vesper's team, Kronos' heir, and Scifer's monster army. Your journey to now was, let's say, scripted. Would you believe me if I said all the problems and death thee experienced were a result of my meddling in thy destiny?" he stopped and stared, "-neither emotion nor the will to fake an

offended response. You have grown apathetic. Forgive the last comment,” they sipped, Igna understood Lord Death’s test and the latter’s blatant attempt was so bad it seemed effective, “-true power, has been put into your mind by various people, is the ability to protect those you care for the most. I agree wholeheartedly with the need of protecting another. Where you strayed, Igna, is the part where you allow self-growth and independence. True strength is the ability to let go, and there, in the apathetic heart which beats anew, thee hath found an answer. I’m right, aren’t I? you’ve concluded. True power is true power. It is the ability to force any and all outcomes to your advantage. You saw it with Artanos, the battle of Ragno, your defeat. What did you do? You accepted and moved on – instead of Artanos, the focus was placed on those in front of you. The enemy’s army – a force who had your daughter captive. You chose victory over her life and didn’t once pay attention to the companion lost in Draebala. That is true strength. Granted, the definition is depended on a person’s upbringing and priorities. You, Igna, need to forsake the humanity thee so desperately hold. DON’T misunderstand. In no way am I saying to go rogue, what I refer to is the mindset of a human. You have transcended the mortal limits. You’re the Adjudicator, the Bringer of the End of Times. Enemy to reality itself. You don’t need to force thineself into a chosen path. You’re the Adjudicator, and like all things, is the one who decides what becomes of you and your power. Creation, Time, and Death are all yours to command,” the suave man’s face solidified into a white mask. Cracks pushed ash, and it crumbled, revealing a face he’d never expected, “-Creation?”

“Long time no see, heir to Death. I’m Creation,” he held the mask within his palm, “-I’m also Death.”

“Didn’t expect this,” he gulped the drink and blinked, “-were you not enemies?”

“Yes, we are – such a revelation was made to ensure our safety. Death and Creation have been one and the same, two sides of the same coin. If we were truly enemies, didn’t it once cross your mind how you were able to call upon powers of creation effortlessly?”

“Yeah, it’s because of Origin, is it not?”

“No, sadly not. The Power Origin claim as his own, the power of creation, is inherent to you. He simply took the symbol and faked the control. Origin, as all things in the universe, came from us. He’s the true observer placed to watch over the birth and death of realities.”

“What then?”

“Igna, rather, Staxius.”

“...”

“Don’t think you fooled me.”

“...”

“Staxius,” Creation narrowed, “-you’re in control since Igna’s disappearance. No, tis not proper to say you’re in control, you’ve always been in control. One and the same.”

“The secret’s out,” he grinned, “-Staxius, Igna, Alfred, who cares about the name? We’re one and the same, however, if I were to put a name to the one present, it’ll be Staxius.”

“What happened to Igna?”

“The burden of loss. The burden of facing the reality of Sathanas and his close ally’s death. He relinquished his hold over our restraints. I broke loose.”

“Such the reason why I felt the haunting aura of Staxius’ unique Death Element. The epitome of death itself. What happens to Igna?”

“I’ll use his name, it’s very convenient. Though, I doubt Igna to return as himself ever again. A broken glass can never be mended – Igna was a man of good intentions. A perfect representation of what anyone strives for. Upon hearing myself break, I understood,” a frigid energy meandered, “-that, I was not good at dealing with losses. Artanos needs a worthy opponent – sadly, Igna’s ideals and way of life shan’t work any longer. I’m free,” dark lines slithered over his skin – ancient markings, cursed energy, “-for him not to feel sadness, I vow, to myself, I vow to you, Igna, you won’t feel pain again. Let me,” he opened his palm, “-let me show you how one makes reality his,” a white fireball glowed.

“Unfair,” Creation commented, “-here I thought my reveal was amazing. You had to come and ruin my show.”

“My bad. Alas, tis thy fault for revealing a truth I didn’t wish to accept.”

“Accept what?”

“The truth that I’m alive.”

“What does it matter?”

“It does,” he smiled emptily at the wall, “-I gave a last speech and everything. The rest I so longed for is gone. Igna, my innocent other self. You did great for your lifespan. Let me put you to rest,” two sides of him split in the middle, Igna’s friendlier innocent slammed against Staxius’ cold-blooded outlook, \*come forth, Orenmir,\* she blasted through the window and into his grip, “-may thy death bring thee respace,” the sheath slid, howls of the dead screeched – the resonance had the foundation quiver, the handle shook, a red-glow covered the blade, “-your true master hath come,” \*stab.\* clean through Igna’s half, the expression and glow dimmed – the outline disentangled into a single white dot. Staxius grabbed the orb, pinching it closer to his face, “-rest in peace,” he pressed, Igna’s remaining mana exploded into tiny particles.”

“Shall I assume Igna is gone?”

“Suppose so.”

“I don’t like the attitude, young man.”

“Neither do I,” he looked around with a stronger build and whiter hair, “-feeling the world anew is strange.”

“Staxius, what is your plan going forward?”

“... what about you, Creation, why are you here?”

“For this,” reality spit, “-come, Makina.”

“Yes father,” a beautiful angel hovered into the room.

“Meet Makina, the angel.”

“Is she the one from before, the babe?”

“Yes, she is. Makina, you see, was raised to evolve reality. Or something like that. From now on, consider her a part of your harem.”

“Not a harem.”

“Keep lying, Staxius, with an entourage of girls, one will assume the said truth.”

“Lord Death...”

“Anyway, this concludes my visit. I appreciate the sportsmanship, Staxius. You’ve supplied enough mana for a world I claim my own, a world where the fallen gods have a place to rest. I call it, Avengela – the new afterlife. Carry the burden well, my heir, I’ll follow the journey closely.”

The portal snapped, ‘-I’m awake, so long after the slumber. It’s going to take a bit of adjusting.’

“Are you my new master?”

“Makina...”

Chapter 1126 Ancient Gifts

“Are you my master?”

“Makina,” the enigmatic stare went over her appearance once again, ‘-she’s tall, long legs and a thin waist. She can retract her wings voluntarily – it’s good. Her mana capacity is something to be praised, she’s on par with lower-tier gods. The curse remains the inability to kill gods without the proper weapon else, abilities. Her eyes are small and almond-shaped, almost like in a perpetual squint – small rounded nose and small pink lips. Now that I think of it, she feels more like a teenager than I’d expect. Braided hair ending behind her ears, long blond hair falling down her back, she will do.”

“Hello?” she waved, her palm inches from Igna’s nose, “-someone in there?”

“Makina, kneel for me.”

Her expression shifted from caution to perplexed, “-why should I?”

“...”

“It’ll get my knees dirty.”

“The floor I clean, I can assure you so.”

“Fine,” she sighed and knelt, “-this better?”

.....

“Good,” he leaned and horned onto her forehead, “-the third eye of revelation. One of the Ancient Gifts.”

“Yes, it was bestowed by my creator.”

'... the ancient gifts,' he gestured, she nodded, got to her feet, meandered to a couch, and dropped with a loud echo, '-ancient gifts. I never thought they would come up. It's ancient... they're the abilities used by heroes of the war in the war between gods and demons, the first battle. It can be said – the combat arts generated from said conflict, and there, evolved through the bloodlines of said heroes – gods, demons, angels, regardless of race, those who took part did, in fact, attain powers to kill the immortals. War, is the ultimate catalyst of evolution. Ancient Gifts can be categorized into three types. The information flows willingly from Mantia,' a somber grin surfaced, '-an ability Igna never really used save during moments of crisis. He wasn't, without being disrespectful, qualified to utilize the powers so carefully crafted and honed. Got to give him props, the man did evolve our powers – a body that will never attain godhood is a blessing. He didn't see the truth behind the facade,' he took up a cigarette and puffed, '-the three gifts – Earned, Crafted, and Bestowed. Depending on the type, a limit is placed upon the ability, as such, by referring to the Ancient Gifts, reference is drawn upon; skills, magic, weapons, items, and all that may encompass an entity's way of fight. Earns, as the name suggests, are earned during battle and training. They're more battle focused – for example, the Destruction Arts Gophy utilizes, was born from carnage itself. My ability to search information from Mantia, using the whole of Origin's knowledge, well, such an ability can be classified as Earned but is not exactly an Ancient Gift, the potency is, frankly, lacking. The limitation placed on Earned is the inability to choose how the gift manifests. Consider it the lottery, gambling at its finest. Next, Crafted. Simple and effective – crafted weapons, armor, and even magical spells, such as incantations made in the spur of the moment. One example of Crafted is Athena's shield – I know how terrifying one of those can be. Contrary to Earned, Crafted are flexible – doesn't really have a weakness save the inventor's lack of imagination. It's a double-edged sword, too powerful the caster dies, too weak, the caster yet dies. Lastly, Bestowed, which is perhaps, the better of the two – with a limitation of single-focus. Whatever is inherited from the previous wielder is limited – though, the gift can be evolved for future generations. It's limiting but condensed. Inherited Gifts, if I were to name one, would be the Death Element,' he perused the texts at lightning speed, '-ancient gifts are uncommon. Aces kept for the worse outcome. Worse, those gifts are unnamed and secretive, there's no real way to distinguish a normal ability from an ancient gift. Even the most mundane fire spell could be an ancient gift...' he locked onto Makina, who confidently browsed books on an elevated shelf, '-the Third Eye of Revelation, classified under Bestowed. It's the only ancient art I know,' he casually puffed, '-because it was I who originated the ability. More specifically, it was Alfred. Like the Hands of the Lamented – his power lay in how he so easily distinguished his enemy and adjusted his power. Makina, she's a vessel for the gift,' a haunted thought crossed, '-I could take the power for myself. Doing so would make me whole again. There's no use building my entourage if they're going to get in my way. Makina's not special, so I would have thought before Igna's whole spiel about empathy and compassion. I can, rather, I might – but,' he sighed and faced the ceiling, '-I won't. Bestowed can only be inherited under the wielder's express permission. And I doubt she's aware of her talents.'

"Master, are you going to kill me for the Eye of Revelation?" her morose face suddenly appeared from behind the chair, \*cough,\* smoke splashed onto her face, she nonchalantly backed away, giving space for Staxius to straighten the posture, "-you want me to kill you?" he inquired over his shoulder, "-Makina?"

"No," she returned with an even greater carelessness if that were even possible.

He made no remark and simply sat facing the door, ‘someone approaches,’ the detection web of mana threads rang, like a spider sensing prey in her trap.

“PROFESSOR IGNA HAGGARD!” the door barged open, “-by order of King Leviathan, you are to come to Meoa Cathedral,” Memphe proclaims with a hint of pride. Her heavy eyeshadow condescendingly fell upon Igna – a dishonored Director.

To her unfortunate cluelessness, Staxius simply lifted his piercing gaze. Memphe’s bravado instantly melted, ‘-what’s with him?’ she held her fear, ‘-my instinct’s telling me to run. Why is he, why is he so powerful? The confidence around... it’s not like before, there’s a looming sense of dread. If I make a wrong move, I feel the wrath of death’s cold fingers around my neck,’ she gulped, ‘-I’ve never felt anything like this before.’

“Meoa’s Cathedral,” he snickered, “-hilarious. Why would a demon king so willingly choose a holy place for prayer?” the cynic furthered his interrogation, “-are you planning my assassination?”

“No?”

“How can I, be sure?” he took one step, and before she realized it, that small stride had him dart around the room and behind her back, “-I may be a professor now, yet, I influence the Director and Graso. Weak links in your climb to power,” he simply tapped her back, “-though, it’s not a concern. I doubt you, of all people, to have the guts to scheme against the one who single-handedly defeated the combined army.”

“What about the defeat from Artanos?” she whispered.

“That?” he turned and grabbed her shoulders, “-is but a simple stain upon my image. One which can be easily washed with the blood of my enemies,” and pulled, “-as such,” he caressed her cheeks and wrapped his grip around and grabbed her nape, “-I’ll gladly cleanse it with you if you’d be so kind to offer,” he seductively mumbled, the charm emulated by Igna, had returned to its prior originator, the man who continually refused to be interested in gathering a harem. Such, the comical relief so many used to jest, especially Serene. “-Oh well, you don’t seem interested,” he turned on his heel, “-come along, Makina.”

“Yes,” she scurried past Memphe and willingly slowed her pace to glare at the trembling mess, catching the lady’s shaken cry, and thus hurried to Staxius. A short jog down the vexingly circular stairs and the bright blue sky breathed a warm, greenish air.

“Master, are you going to kill me or not?” she walked with hands crossed on her back, “-master?”

“Do you wish for death?”

“No, I wish to know my fate.”

“Well, your fate is intertwined with mine. I expect much of your abilities, Angel of Revelation. Henceforth, thou art part of my team. Refer to me however you wish, use my name or my title, I wasn’t keen on proper title and manners, to begin with. You must understand, if I grow tired, I will give you up for a more entertaining toy.”

She skipped ahead, “-a good thing, because,” she looked over her shoulder, ‘-I’ll leave you if you’re boring,” the snappy retort broadened a smile. Time read a few hours after noon, ‘-time to check on the

students,' he made the trip into the academy, class 3-2 was hard at work, and the sound of hammers against wood resounded. The cacophony amplified up the righthand side of the Commoner's building, along a gravel path lined with dirt and muck, "-yo, professor!" an energetic Arde wipe his sweat-ridden brow. The Foundation of the wooden shed now resembled a log cabin, "-how's it going?"

"Only you working?"

"Yeah, the others were called by lord Dementus and lady Yu, he's taken a liking to us running in the election."

"Well, we have a problem," footsteps crackled against the gravel, Lilia and her best friend, Umie, stood with slumped shoulders, "-the administration has refused our participation in the election."

"As ex-student council president," said Umie, "-Lilia can't rejoin the election. It's against the academy's policy."

"And after all the things you've done for me, professor. I apologize I couldn't look up to your expectation."

"Don't lower your head so easily," he coldly echoed, "-Hena from Arch Demon Skeptor's branch family is the next most popular candidate to win. She's most suited to run the academy. I'm sure, with all that's happened, her popularity is through the roof. Skeptor helped in saving the students – big favors owed by prominent families; blank checks waiting to be cashed in," visible discomfort held their pose, "-I wouldn't worry."

A spark rekindled the fading spirits, "-we just need to nominate another student council president. I know just the person."

"Who?"

"Asmodeus," he smiled, "-and you know by now, I'm sure he's had entertaining relations with the young dames of the establishment."

\*Cough,\* Umie reddened, "-and there we have a perfect example," he winked, "-did he do the deed or was it one of his many acolytes?"

Umie embarrassedly lowered her face, "-he did it..."

"Popularity against popularity. Furthermore, Asmodeus is one of the seven princes of hell. The blood is more than adequate for the position."

"Will need to elect other candidates."

"Mammon as treasurer, Vanesa as the disciplinary council, and lastly, Lilia as vice-president."

"Still professor, do you think we can convince the faculty to accept our request?"

"Have you forgotten who I am?" he went over to the unfinished cabin, "-I ought to ask, why are you building this?"

“As a base for our electoral campaign. We have a long six months before the election is held. We’ll need all the help we can – as the strong guy of the class, I had to create a place for us to convene. Our base of operations.”

“Arde has a good idea,” Staxius nodded, “-Lilia,” he noticed her uncertainty, “-I said it before, it’s not right to hold your thoughts back. What’s on your mind?”

“Professor... how’s the girl?”

Makina grabbed Staxius’ shirt, “-master?”

“She’s my niece.”

‘Niece?’

“No!” she echoed, “-I’m the daughter you abandoned, father.”

He physically pulled back, “-pardon?”

“Father, you left me to be with that man... he, he,” she sniffled, “-he did the-”

“Okay enough,” he held her mouth, “-this here is Makina. My long lost daughter. For the record, you weren’t abandoned... it was a boarding school.”

She pulled out her tongue and winked, “-Lilia, you’re still holding back.”

“Professor ... will you please be our advisor?” they rallied.

“No, I might have suggested otherwise in the past – matters have changed. There’s a higher chance of success without me directly involved with your campaign,” he turned and snapped, the log cabin built as a high-class office, going on par with the building’s height, “-your base of operation,” he clapped the hands cleaned, “-appearance is the first key to success. I might not participate, however, I will impart my knowledge – you will know what it means to run a successful campaign. Knowledge is key... after all.”

Chapter 1127 The one who carries death

“Welcome to class 3-2’s newest office building,” he stood before steps leading to automatic double doors. A rectangular-shaped monstrosity levied. Indentures marked space for windows, balconies, and much in the way to break the mundane linear structure. “There are three floors,” he said, “-an elevator and fully furnished space. I made sure to house a cafeteria, a break room, an underground training facility, and some other bits and pieces.”

A shroud of pure energy materialized, “-what are you doing?”

“Elixia,” said Staxius, “-I was creating a base for my students. Why, is something the matter?”

She held her gaze, “-master,” she gulped, “-take a look around,” she gestured towards the windows, there, a frightened expression grabbed the students. The area as a whole was under a spell of considerable potency – the pressure from his element had everyone on their knees, even those of 3-2.

“My apologies,” he waved his hands in a circle and snapped, the pressure released, “-might have overdone it. You know, it happens to the best of us,” he shrugged her complaints and guided the students.

“Professor?” a somewhat cautious Lilia trembled, “-where did this building come from?”

“Oh?” he turned at the doorway, “-it came from within,” and nonchalantly pushed. Confused regards cross the few faces present. Elixia sighed and tapped Lilia’s shoulder, “-come on, let’s go,” and paved the way forward, ‘I never knew master to be so assertive with his power. What’s changed?’

There, on the second floor, the whole of class 3-2 were gathered inside a meeting room. Staxius waited on a podium, carefully taking his time and giving each eye contact. “Welcome my students,” silence befell the audience, “-I will get straight to the point. You’re worried about the building and do not know how to react. It is simple. Consider this a base of operation for your activities. Like other clubs who have their space built in the administrative area, you will have your own space within my office space. I unintentionally made the office a tad bigger. The layout, as you’ve guessed, is not of this world. And you’ll be happy to hear, it’s not. It’s from my domain where I hail. For the duration of the electoral campaign, I grant class 3-2 the whole of the building for your choosing. Also, I will ask the representative to advertise the office as a place where General Studies and Combat Class can relax. Long are the days of looking for space to eat or rest, long are the times when the Academics look down upon your means. This is a direct challenge to their authority and their means. I will back the campaign – consider the funds for thy quest unlimited, on one condition,” the tone deepened, “-each coin will be accounted for,” the wall suddenly lit, four faces appeared, “-candidates are as follows; Asmodeus, Student Council President, Vanesa, Vice Student Council, Mammon, Treasurer, and lastly, Vanesa, Head of the Disciplinary committee. With a new day, comes a new wave. Will you,” he assertively pointed, “-I say, will you, be the ones to carry the burden? Will you take up courage and fight for what is yours? Will you create a space for the next generation? The Academy’s fate is in thy hand,” the display switched – and information about what to do, various scenarios, materialized.

Erection of the rectangular block rose a tsunami of confusion and anguish across the code, the wave eventually crashing within the director’s office. “-DIRECTOR TERESA!” Skeptor barged, “-SOMETHING OR SOMEONE-”

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“I know already,” she stared at the vice-director, “-you need not cause such chaos on the trifling matter,” dark purple hair stood at her side with a confident smirk.

“Lady Teresa... who is that?”

“Yui Haggard,” said she, “-I represent the house of Haggard. An attendant to the service of my master’s kin, lady Teresa. It’s come to my attention – her life has been threatened by the shadows. As one to lessen my master’s burden, I have taken the liberty to watch over her well-being.”

“Sums up her presence,” the director got on her feet, “-vice director, you should mind your manners in the future. I may seem young, but I have lived a few centuries more than you,” and went past his dumbfounded silence, “-I will take the matter into consideration. If it is against school policy, such atrocities will be snuffed, believe me,” the tone came off harsh and unyielding.

A warmth pulsed within Skeptor, ‘-Teresa has fallen for us,’ he drifted into elation, ‘-she has fallen for me. My charm as the vice director has pierced her cold heart. She spoke about the construction like it was an enemy to us... she had grown so much. I must bear the responsibility for her safety... don’t worry Teresa, we’re on your side.’

A few steps carried the duo outside, “-what an idiot.”

“Slow down, Teresa,” Yui whispered, “-no need to be so blunt. Leave the man be, he is very gullible once you know how to press the buttons. Anyway, should you really be out here?”

“I’ve grown tired of paperwork,” she sighed, “-why don’t you handle that for me, as you do for father?”

“No. He expressly said not to aid in your duties.”

She rolled her eyes and eventually landed on the office, closer you got, the prettier it seemed. It stood out like a sore thumb. In a way, the modern architecture associated with Rotherham’s industrial flair was an insult to the immaculate rustic feel of the academy. Square against curves, the office was just a thing. The academy building was an ensemble of creativity and taste. Though, this feeling shared by Staxius and Elixia wasn’t reflected in a bunch of foreigners. The modernity brought by sharp edges, “-it is so thoughtful,” said the curious crowd of academics, “-luxury redefined,” added others.

“Tell me, Yui, is this thing supposed to be good-looking or?”

“Let’s find out.”

Staxius’ meeting ended. The students beamed, ‘-by hiding words of power in my speech, I’ve significantly increased their ability and confidence. They bear my mark, the Devil’s curse. I wish I could give them a blessing instead,’ he exhaled, “-such the plan going forward. The rest is in your hands, students. A guide can only take one so far, you ought to find your own. Don’t worry about falling, fail as much as you can before the big day; I will be there to catch you if thee fall. The meeting is over,” he clapped and the light dimmed. Two smartly dressed individuals waited off-stage, “-Dementus and Yu.”

“Igna,” said Dementus with crossed arms, “-you took our class without a formal request.”

“It sort of happened. Besides, I only used a few minutes. Also, Dementus, I do apologize for what I’m about to say,” he reached forward and grabbed his shoulder, “-you’re the one who’s responsible for their campaign.”

“Pardon?”

“It’s as the professor said,” Lilia followed, “-lord Dementus, will you be our advisor?”

He tapped his fingers nervously. Yu stepped and gently elbowed the man, “-advisor... fine, I will do what I can. Do not expect me to carry the burden alone, yes?”

A relieved exhale crossed the room, “-we should thank-” they turned, and nothing. Igna was gone. “-Strange...” bigger issues were at hand, and so, the first official meeting pertaining to the campaign was hosted thirty minutes later in an elaborate conference room.

A sharply cold wind pierced, ‘-windy,’ he exited the office to two brooding ladies, “-Teresa and Yui, how’s it going?”

“How’s it going?” Teresa sarcastically returned, “-father, you raise a building from out of nowhere and ask how is it going?”

“Yeah?”

“...”

“If it’s not important, I have business to attend.”

“FATHER!”

“Teresa?”

“Please tell me you got permission from the faculty and admiration?”

“You’re the Director, you have the final say. Besides, you wouldn’t want to make your father look like a fool. Don’t worry, the buildings for everyone’s use. There’s a cafeteria outback – we’ll need to redecorate the surrounding mess for a chance at getting customers,” he pointed with a side-eye, “-we need their money to raise funds. Wouldn’t it be great to have them pay for their own defeat?”

“What’s with the sudden change in approach?”

“Teresa. Adaptability is what matters,” he looked at the deserted land, “-there’s a reason why this place was chosen to be the place for combat class. Let me guess, a great tragedy happened?”

“Though it’s unofficial, this area was once cursed by a bit from an ancient demon,” said a gentleman with angelic features.

“Luci.”

“Master,” he bowed, the wings retracted, “-your powers never cease to amaze.”

“The land, I need more information.”

“As you wish,” they stepped into the plant-less dirt – the soil was dried, a sore sight hidden by the commoner’s building, “-less honorable battles are fought here, and before the battle arena, it wasn’t unheard of for students to go missing. We had an open investigation about the death of class 2-1 girl a few years back. Turns out, some high-ranking students at the time decided to practice shooting lethal spells – needed a live target. The audacity of their action – didn’t bother to hide the result. Her entrails were smeared across... should have seen it, everyone had nightmares. Well, that was before the arena. Now, this place is known as a haunted site where plants never grow. Most avoid the area.”

“Very interesting,” he stepped out further and opened his arms, ‘-I wonder if my powers can act on inanimate objects. I could revert this area to a time where the curse didn’t affect... with the passage of time, the curse will act once more when it reaches its time.’ \*Unleash Aura,\*

“Neausea,” Teresa instantly held her stomach, “-what’s this feeling?”

“The pressure,” Luci bearly held on his feet, ‘-what’s happening?’

Staxius turned towards them and smiled, one of coldness and unrivaled confidence, \*Watchers, spectators, names ring high and low, us, unknown to the world’s reality, unknown to the world’s

knowledge, have lived in utter solemnness for millennia to come and go. Watcher of the Shadow Realm, beckons my might to be fully materialized without prejudice, reality is but my playground, neither god nor demon shall overcome my authority, face me in stride, face me in fear, reality's what I wish it to be for knowledge is the true strength: Realm Expansion, Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam,\*

A hemisphere expanded and barred access. 'Let's see if I can heal the land.' \*Eye of Truth,\* the pupils shifted to white within which rested line of purple and flakes of red, 'I knew it,' he pointed to a certain location, 'a guardian of the ages,' he snapped and marked the location with a flaming rod, \*-I am he who slays without fear, I am he who shall be the last of what thy see. Heed mine call, thou whomst dared to fight the natural order, tis the day thou ought to be destroyed, Ancient Magic – Astral Binding.\*

The entity froze – an amber outline fuzzed into reality, \*-I call upon the age-old flames of retribution. Holder of insanity, watcher of the world's end – harbinger of my enemies' death, I call upon a fire, one that burns eternally in my domain, I, Staxius Haggard, the Adjudicator, call forth the flame that purges gods and demons. Set ablaze as I've ordered; Fifth Layer – Abyssal Wrath.\*

"AHHHHHHH," the humanoid shape crumbled into ash, '-the manifestation of the curse,' he dropped on one knee and studied the ground, \*-reveal the unknown,\* a detection wave pulsed, '-many fallen souls... creating a disorder for the natural mana flow,' he stood, the aura of death enrobed his person, \*Souls who've been lost and are bound to this world for perpetual suffering, heed my call for I grant thee salvation. Follow my voice, tis the place where the dead are reborn, tis the place where wrongdoers are to be purged – in my name, those who are to be judged, will be judged, and those who are to be saved, will be saved,\* two orbs manifested, one gold, one crimson, '-be freed.'

#### Chapter 1128 Makina

\*Realm Retraction,\* the abyss, or so they thought, swallowed into a single dot over Staxius' index finger. He casually snapped. Greenery sprouted, 'I used the healing tome, and it did the job,' the one scarred land birthed anew. The wound of the previous generations subsided, leaving the crowd of a few, senseless and dazed.

"What did you do?" narrowed an envious Luci, "-what did you do?"

"I healed the land," he brushed off fallen leaves from the spontaneous forest that just appeared, "-is it not amazing to see mother nature at her finest?" A landscape worthy of a canvas swayed in the mild Ragnorian breeze. One of which was hot and crisp – something common within the underworld. "Lilia," he went and grabbed the lass' hand, "-here are the means to earn funds. A cafeteria with an impeccable view set inside a futuristic office. To your point of view it's innovating," he scowled with arms crossed, '-as for me,' he exhaled, '-it's common and tasteless. To serve the rich and the pompous – one must be decadent and surround oneself with what others envy, such be money, women, or prestige. To obtain, one must use a bait – to get what you need, is to have them think they can provide the solution, and, most important, they ought to think they came up with the solution. Such is the way of leading in negotiations. I hope, and I can only hope, these students have amassed the knowledge I shared. If not, they won't last in the cutthroat world of the high and mighty.'

Excited cheers and muffled plans – the ray of hope, a shining beacon upon the herculean task – to fight for a stop in the student council. Asmodeus, Mammon, and Vanesa so happened to cross the little gathering, "-hey there pops."

“What a lovely surprise,” he returned, “-Asmodeus,” Staxius widened his arms, “-I provided the means, now, get me results.”

“Any restriction on the strategy?”

“No,” he smiled, “-I’ve arranged the gambling transactions to be moved inside the office. Should be better knowing the funds won’t be kept under a desk, god forbid you to lose ’em.”

“Very nice,” he gave a thumbs up, “-as for my harem, am I to use ’em however I wish?”

“Student Council President,” he narrowed, “-you need votes. I will not take defeat kindly,” he scanned each of their faces, Vanesa yawned whilst Mammon remained stoic, preoccupied with the many demons within his thoughts – curiosity, and the likes. A ragtag group of chosen personnel was set, and the meeting resumed as did Staxius’ walk.

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“Why did they call you pops?”

“Makina,” he side-glanced the lass, they left the academy’s confine and were on a dirt path to the cathedral, “-the princes of hell are my sons and daughters.”

“Are they not the spawn of Lilith?”

“They are,” he said, “-as for my title of pops, it need not be biological. I, in my way, forged them, thus, I can call myself their fathers. We need not go into the details, just know, they’re my offspring.”

“So much for being a caring father,” she echoed with an unreactive expression, “-I heard from my father that you abandoned Sathanas, who I remind, is your kin, right?”

“Makina,” he reached and scruffled her hair, “-you’ll be wise not to speak out of terms.”

“Staxius, you don’t scare me,” she brushed off his arm, “-I was taught not to take shit from people.”

“Oh my,” he smiled, “-your tongue is sharp. Such barbarian language from the mouth of a pretty petal,” he reached for a cigarette, “-makes me want to,” he puffed, “-give you an award.”

“AWARD?”

“Yeah. For having the guts to speak so nonchalantly. Such traits are what I look for in a person, especially those who are to join my inner circle. You’ve proven yourself, Makina. If ever the time comes where a choice has to be made, I want you to promise,” deep empty eyes loomed over her emotions, “-prioritize safety over trust or promise. I don’t care if you leave or change sides. I won’t shackle anyone.”

“You say that,” she reached plucked the cigarette, “-but mean,” she inhaled, \*cough, cough, cough,\* her eyes watered, “-what the hell is this?”

“Cigarette,” he took back the item, “-custom made for my magical arts. It’s lined with condensed mana taken from the Shadow Realm. A replenishment for the body that can’t handle the pressure of being my vessel. You were saying?”

“right,” she stopped and leaned against a tree, “-I’m nauseous...”

“Not nauseous, that’s the angel’s dust kicking in,” he chuckled, “-what am I to do with you?” a magical circle glowed beneath her feet, \*Mantia – Book of Restoration, Honzela, Sixteenth passage, for the wounded’s assured restoration, the hardships ought be cleansed. Such flowed the whisper of the healer: Imenia,\* and beamed up, taking her whole body in a blaze of green and sprinkles, “-you’re still a child, Makina. And you will mature at your own pace, no need to rush things. Especially this,” he puffed, “-an addiction in the last thing on that to-do list.” She pressed her back against the tree and slowly lowered onto her bottom, she spread her legs apart and unbuttoned her shirt, ‘-heat,’ her cheeks blushed – sweat visible glistened down her cheeks.

“What did you do?” she gasped at every syllable.

“Nothing much,” he followed suit and sat beneath the shade to her side, “-the view’s rather lackluster.” Before they were rocks and grass, uneven of differing hue and size, leading to a dirt path that hadn’t been maintained as seen by weeds and trash, (mostly clothes and pieces of fabric) which hung on bushes on the other end.

“What should I call you?”

“Must I repeat myself?”

“Is it true,” her tone softened, “-that you created me?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” he flicked the cigarette, “-regardless of how one is brought to life, what matters is the consciousness and what you feel in said moment. I wouldn’t worry about how it happened, and would only focus on how it happened. Makina, before we arrive at the cathedral, you will need to choose. There’re two options I can offer, regardless of what you can accomplish, which by then, is a matter of your own faith and ability.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“You can join me as one of my own, and that would mean being a Haggard. Responsibility as one of the family differs, and to my current need, I need people on logistical support. I have Yui and Elixia, they’re doing the best they can. With so many potential enemies – seeing that we have the entirety of the living universe vowing to end my life, I need personnel to keep watch and give updates.”

“Basically attendants who work in information gathering and other boring tasks?”

“Spot on.”

“Other option.”

“This one coincides directly with my current objective. To gather the seven cardinal sins and take the rightful mantle of Devil,” he opened his palm, an ancient scroll, written in the first language read, “-upon founding the seven pillars of sin, the one who reigns shall have control over hell itself. To be the true inheritor of the Aapith Nation, the one to lead the fragmented kingdom of Hells will first gather her prince and princesses. Only then, when man has ruled himself, will he be worthy of ruling others. Such is the way to the throne, such is the way to the title of Demon King, such is the path of the Devil.”

“Fancy words, what does it mean?”

“Think of it like earning one’s place. The research is incomplete and there are no records of anyone ever gathering the cardinal sins – such as the limitation of having Lucifer, he did not yield. The man was the epitome of his title.”

“What now?”

“It is different.”

“How so?”

“I have gathered six out of the seven. The last is Gluttony, else known as Belphegor. ”

“Am I to take his spot?”

“More or less,” he exhaled, “-listen, Makina. Gluttony’s power hasn’t been used in centuries. It went missing during the collapse of Hell, and the fragmentation of the domain into the factions.”

“You wouldn’t bring up the matter if there wasn’t a solution, isn’t that right, pops?”

“So you chose pops,” he smiled and gave her a helping hand to stand, “-a well-educated guess. You’re correct. I have my suspicion Gluttony’s power is under Leviathan’s control. Haven’t met the man/woman yet, don’t know a thing about them.”

“The journey to the cathedral will change?”

“Yeah,” he interjected, “-also, Makina, I’m expecting a fight. Knowing how I negotiate, the deal will turn into a contract forged in blood. I say it again, you have two choices, Makina; peace and quiet, or fight and death.”

She took a larger step and threw her head over her shoulder, “-I didn’t come here to play receptionist. For better or worse, pops, Creation said I had to return to my creator’s side. I accept his words grudgingly.”

“Are you good in a fight?”

“Why don’t you test it?” she smirked. \*Death Element: Shadow Step,\* he reappeared at her back with a stick in hand.

\*Heavenly Sword-Art: Vaish,\* she dipped into the ground and sprang back up a few feet away, \*Heavenly Sword-Art: Valkyria – A thousand Swords,\* blades surrounded Staxius, ‘-she’s quick and has power coursing through her veins. The heavenly sword arts, there’s something I never thought I’d witness again,’ Alfred’s memories pulsed, ‘-a goddess of combat, the holder of the title – unrivaled in heaven, the sword god’s ancient arts. Her predecessor was the one who took my arm – he’d have defeated me if not for Death’s intervention,’ purple sparks flew, she raised her palm and closed, and the swords dashed.

\*Hand of the Lamented,\* he palmed the ground, \*-Lyo ‘Eh,\* a giant palm slammed, and knocked the swords out of the sky, \*Sword-Arts: Loh,\* he tapped the stick’s end and shot out a blade out the other extremity.

\*Heavenly Sword-Art: Ripple,\* she tiptoed, dodging the blade and firing, \*I call upon the blade of his divine Majesty. Strike from Heaven and kill the weak, manifest in the name of Makina, the Sword Maiden of Ehua: Gargentua!\* a two-handed blade descended from above, the hilt glowed with a golden hue, the blade shimmered with ancient writings, \*Heavenly Sword-Art: Emeltia,\*

‘-Hold on a moment,’ time slowed, ‘-that sword stance... don’t tell me,’ he smirked, Orenmir beckoned his call, ‘-I wouldn’t have guessed her to be here,’ \*Mana Control: Shadow Element Variant,\* he dropped his stance, somewhat like Makina did, “- Lightning strike.\* and dashed, the swords made contact, their energy exploded, destroying everything in a fifty-meter radius, the beam blasted into the skies, tore clouds and ground asunder. He looked at her expression as she did to his, ‘-that stance is the only one I taught Eira, it’s the one we took from Adelana,’ he leaned a little and instantly pushed her stance backward, “-my bad,” he said aloud, “-I went a little overboard,’ her braided blond hair turned a shade of red, her right eye turned a shade of light-blue, she pressed on, pushing his aura with her own, ‘-she’s really trying to kill me,’ he smiled and tilted her attack’s focus, ‘-there,’ he sidestepped, her overwhelming power had her stagger forward with a slash that would have annihilated the path ahead, \*Be reduced to nothing,\* he tapped her shoulder, \*-Niote\* her powers and aura lifted, she fell her on knees, ‘-where’s my sword, what happened?’

“Makina, you sure can hold your own in a fight,” the crimson shades turned blond, her eyes returned to normal, “-the heavenly sword arts, huh?”

“Yeah, I was born with this power,” she stood and dusted her clothes, “-I lose myself sometimes and end up like this,” they stared at the devastation, “-did I say something?”

“No,” he reached out his hand, the yet faded blue eye glared, “... Staxius...” she whispered and shook her head suddenly, “-wha-”

“Man, we sure made a mess,” \*Present and never changing, present and never yielding. All who wait break and all made are subjected to thine will. I, Staxius Haggard, humble inheritor of thy power; call upon thee to have mine will answer: Time Control – Reversal.\* “-and fixed.”

Chapter 1129 Enfia L. Leviathan [1]

Between the time Memphe came to Staxius and till he arrived at the edge of the forest; a mere forty minutes had elapsed. Despite the illusion of hours having gone past, the relativity of each interaction felt slow. This a common occurrence, considering students gawking their watches for classes to end, and, to their dismay, finding a few minutes had elapsed. Unlike what they thought to have been hours.

“There it is,” he took in the cathedral, a lonesome structure, massive and sturdy, perched upon the gentle hill. Makina gasped at the task. ‘Are we climbing?’ said her not-so-subtle expression.

‘I barely feel anyone,’ they entered the compound after a short walk. Makina turned pink, and her fatigue and irritation were square across her forehead.

“Go take a rest,” said Staxius.

“Understood,” she looked over and noticed a pretty garden lined with beautiful statues and benches. A mild stream skipped along the hedges. For a place of worship, the sense of relief and relaxation was

true. A feeling Staxius narrowly escaped. Attendants dressed in white robes lined with golden stripes came to with lowered gazes and respectful tone, “-lord Igna, we’ve been expecting you.”

“...”

“Please follow us,” they said.

He glanced at Makina, she met his gaze and nodded. ‘-The time has come,’ he straightened his tie and gave the go-ahead. They went through an unchanging hallway spaced by arched windows. Shade heavily muted the corners. The walls hung empty canvases – empty armor stands and close to nothing of wealth or prestige. ‘-Put these men against the religious brokers’ home who bathe in wealth and indulges – I’d imagine a church to a demon to be decadent. How good it feels to know paradox are the living bane of existence.’ The robed guides paused at a singular room. Lights sparsely lit anything – a torch bravely coughed, like the sick trying to live, to yield what little light it held. The waves cast broadened an atmosphere of intrigue and mysticism.

“We have arrived,” said the attendant.

.....

‘Suppose I go at it alone,’ he reached for the handle and pushed. A burst of pure energy blasted. The sheer gust shook his suit, the robed figures hung to their outfit to the dismay of their rather revealing leggings and undergarments. \*Snap\* the pressure died, he took a large step, “-quite the introduction.”

A simple desk and table. No furniture nor windows – more of an interrogation cell by how an amber flame hung over the stranger, “-one worthy of the man who’s on the cusp of becoming the devil.”

“Who are you?”

“Who am I?” hands moved openly, “-I was under the assumption that you were smart.”

“Intelligence is subjective. I’m not opposed to a riddle.”

“I don’t much care for wasting time,” they sighed, “-I will say this much, I am one to represent Leviathan in his affair, I am, in fact, the heir to his throne.”

“Memphe, care to drop the act?”

The chair spun. A glistening expression sustained; “-you’ve figured me out?”

“Perhaps I have?”

“Please give me a good explanation, else, I might do something unkind to the one thee seek.”

“I wouldn’t say it was a confirmed guess. Think of it as a gamble. There are but a few people who know what I am, or what my goal is. I make it a priority to switch the stories depending on the person. Thus, depending on who I interact – little details I allow to escape become an identifier for said person. As a great author once said, the devil is in the details.”

“Consider me impressed.”

“No, I consider you an enemy. I demand an audience with Leviathan.”

“On one condition.”

“Speak.”

“As we chat, an army of considerable size has advanced on our land in Draebala. The work of the annoying Artanos, supreme leader of the Titan army. We crumble, Hell’s legion is no longer united. Such was the fate we sought, alas, there’s naught to gain. Our advantage of mutual understanding and goals has been flipped. The council alienates the kings, and the kings strive to conquer – like my father when it came to Ragno. A simple miscalculation on his part, I wonder how long he’d take to understand the one ruling Ragno is not a man to be taken easily. Before you ask any questions, Igna, here are my reasons for coming to you. You’re plenty strong and are not bound to our preconceived notions. Unlike me, inherent unbiased is an asset. Satan and Leviathan have been allies since the very beginning. Leviathan’s always had a clear advantage over Satan, such the reason why his influence has grown within the last century. The growth came at the cost of relations with the council, who I’ve reminded him countless times, are the true entities able to unify the realms. He doesn’t listen,” she interlocked her fingers and rested her elbows on the desk, “-tis a matter of give and take. Take back the stolen land and I promise the safe return of Sathanas.”

“A contract.”

“No need for such extremes,” she clapped, a side door pulsed into reality, “-release her.”

A battered and skinny lass fell onto the harsh ground. The rags barely covered her skin, and her hair, once gorgeous, was cut haphazardly. Dark circles, darker lips, and pale complexion, “-Sathanas,” she said, “-I won’t apologize for how we treat prisoners,” Memphe’s appearance changed. Goat horns grew, and her breast enlarged as did her whole body. The complexion went tan, her eyes turned a shade of brown as did her hair. There was power in her breath, an intensity rivaling those of deities. “My name’s Enfia L. Leviathan. I am the first daughter to serve my father, I am the first in line and the one to succeed his throne.”

“Teresa?”

“The youngest girl within our household. I had her be the head, in name alone. Leading from the shadows is most convenient when one redirects unwanted attention. If I were to ask you, I’d have a book on the subject, isn’t that right?”

“Quite the mistake,” he walked past Sathanas and stood over the table, “-I can take her straight out the main door without batting an eye. You wouldn’t have the strength or power to stop my advance. I say this with confidence, there’s none able to beat me in a battle.”

“Yes, yes, I don’t doubt that statement. Well, that’s like a nuke, isn’t it? big and powerful, used once and discarded after. Does such a thing reflect upon thee?”

“...”

“You’re a smart man, Igna.”

“...”

“Threats won’t give any information. I’m used to strongarm tactics.”

"If strong arms won't work," he pulled a chair and sat, kicking his feet over the table and lighting a cigarette, "-give me the details of your plan. If it sounds interesting, I wouldn't be opposed to signing a contract."

"HA-HA-HA-HA," she coughed, "-my type of man."

"I go people over the consenting age, thank you for the advance."

"Bro, I'm over a hundred years old."

"Bro?" he puffed, "-still too young for me," he snickered, "-no more pleasantries. Tell me, Enfia L. Leviathan, what is it you wish?"

She got up and walked to the center of the room. There, with Staxius's chair turned 180 degrees, she clapped. The walls turned doorways from where robed attendants entered the area, "-Devil," she undid one of her buttons and stripped to nude, "-I offer myself and my attendants as payment for one task," she knelt, "-please, annihilate the heavenly faction. You're the one we've sought after, lord Adjudicator. We are emissaries who serve under thee, my liege."

"We're your servants," they echoed.

"Enfia, explain."

"My liege. It's a well-kept secret of the Devil's true identity. He is the true harbinger of death and destruction, a destroyer. The heavens refer to him as the ultimate judge, the Adjudicator. A man unbiased with power that is peerless in nature. The one tasked with a fundamental choice of life and death. Our reality has strayed from the path of life and death – the gullible gods and their thirst have led to your awakening. You can say, your birth has been our plan since the beginning. My words are grand – it's not so. We're humble followers who've vowed to serve the true master of hell. This cathedral was built in your honor. No one knows why or to whom it praises, I made certain it remained a secret. Lucifer knew the truth, he and I were friends. Though he and father never saw eye to eye, we had mutual admiration toward the Cursed King. To obtain what we sought, evil needed to thrive. Samael wouldn't have revolted if the gods kept to themselves. He became evil and prideful in order to seek the true judge, to find you. He accomplished his task... well, it was sad to see such a man turn a cloud of his ideals. I chose to stand at his side. Before I realized it, we were here and you were amidst our presence. I led my father to attack and baited Artanos with what he desired. I abducted Sathanas in her goodwill visit to her father – he would have accepted her offer if I hadn't been there. Too bad, I was ready to strike and in my quest, hurt more than I wished. The ends justify the means," she widened her arms, "-I gladly offer my life and soul as repentance. The cathedral was built on the vestige of the great war. The cellar hides a room accessed only by one."

"The cathedral houses a room accessed by the one who made it. you and your servants are one to serve me, and to said end, are willingly going against your father's will?"

"In a way, yes."

"What does it get you, Enfia?"

"Retribution," she seethed.

“What about Memphe, the branch family, the academy, and Skeptor?”

“Lucifer,” she cleared her throat, “-simply created a legend for my disguise. Remember the time I came by your house to visit? It was to see if you were the one I could entrust the academy to... I was overwhelmed to see the princes. It made my heart sing and I barely resisted myself. I kept up the act until you decided on playing along.”

“How did you fool Artanos?”

“He’s a tough one. Which is why I went straight to him and asked for assistance. I told him what I wanted and he scoffed, but, didn’t dismiss me altogether. I said if he wanted something, he ought to do it. I gave him a teleportation scroll to Ragno in exchange for his aid in fooling whoever was in my way. Father went behind my back and made a deal with the newly found Heavenly convention. He sees Ragno as an expansion... you masterfully stopped the growing tension by naming Teresa as the Director, even offering her as the incarnation of Pride. I was stunned... and was forced to continue my act so as not to raise suspicion. I baited and baited, but you never responded. Then it struck... like Artanos, you’re a cynical man, therefore, I arranged our meeting and here we are, the rest is history.”

‘My word,’ he smiled and waved his hand, clothes reappeared over the attendants, “-you, Enfia, are someone who’s not to be trifled with. Making deals with demons and gods, playing them as if they’re your pawns, and even using me for your gains. I’m very impressed. To me, what matters is conviction and the resolve to act out your word. You handed Sathanas over, regardless of state, tis an act of goodwill. I won’t take your life, but I will sign a contract. One of obedience, one which binds thee to my will. Only then will I accept your offer?”

\*With a slice of this dagger and the drop of my blood. I offer myself to you, master, take what’s mine and make me yours. Contract; Blood-Seal.\*

“-I accept your blood,” he took the bloodied dagger, “-and seal the pact,” then slit his wrist, “-welcome to the family, Enfia L. Leviathan,” conjuring a crimson circle with ancient writings.

Chapter 1130 Enfia L. Leviathan [2]

‘Welcome to the family,’ she wrapped herself in the darkness of her intrinsic thoughts, ‘-I’ve yearned for those words. Ever since he came to the palace and preached about the coming of the Devil, my unfortunate master succumbed to his death. I wish he were here to flourish the world with his wisdom. I was born to the King of Hell, Leviathan, a product of his many affairs. I was shunned for my appearance, I don’t resemble him or his concubine. As a shapeshifting demon, I’m viewed as an insult to his blood, my powers, to the wrath of my father, are unworthy to be used. I suffered years of insults, was forsaken to the stables, and was forced to bear the seed of many potential suitors. Unlike me, my other siblings were great, they were talented and had more than I ever could. I spent my days enviously eavesdropping on the palace’s happening. Rejected as I was, my confine was but the stables, maid quarters, and the sewers running down the city. I couldn’t leave – my neck bound by the chains of slavery. I did make father proud. He’d occasionally stumble in the maid’s quarters half-drunk, pluck one of the attendants and force her on her knees in front of my room. He’d then torture the lass and finally ordered me to slit her throat. Once I consumed the lass’ blood, he’d ask me to shapeshift – I would obey, and after that, he’d force me onto my bed... the rest was painful. I didn’t know it was wrong. Honestly, I didn’t care. My powers worked for something, I made father happy for a brief amount of

time. Years elapsed, and I was the plaything of my guardian – the more I satisfied his needs, the better was my treatment. I developed other skills, persuasion, manipulation, and scheming. I was forced to learn the art of deceit. I suffered in the darkness and in a way, my inner demon unleashed her real intent. I rejoiced in trickery, I loved making people bow to my knees. Was it my father's idea to train me like that? To forge a cursed blade by exposure to a monster's venom? The answer's yet unknown. Nevertheless, the pleasure I delivered was nothing compared to what his children accomplished. The tasks they perform, menial as it were, brought pride and joy unlike I'd ever seen. After a certain age, I was allowed inside the palace as a servant. I was to serve one of my younger brothers. The lad wasn't spoiled, unlike his big brother. He was a kind child, an offspring of a maiden from the south – a human. Her tortured soul was brought to our realm by the Harbingers. And there, just shy of his coming of age – the big brother assassinated the lad on his birthday. The banquet rejoiced. They applauded the cruelty and bestowed much of their blessings. I watched. Looking through what limited window I was allowed. It infuriated me, I wanted to make them pay, make them suffer. Father was nothing more than a lascivious bastard. I grew to despise his advances – I refused but was tortured and jailed. I spent the latter half in a closed cell, contemplating my life. The winds of change blew, and the years I spent in jail had taught me a lesson, to trust no one and to use whoever was fit for my growth. To fight a monster one must become a monster, to defeat a monster, however, one must become a demon. I took the words to heart and poured myself into sharpening my craft. I schemed daily, got my hands on forbidden books – created an information network across the realms, recruited dissenters, and eventually crawled my way to my father's feet. I used a new appearance, something he'd never seen, and became one to his court. There, I started what I thought was right, to further my position and avenge the death of the brother who saw me as his own. On an evening like any other, a strange figure ambled into the court. He was met with side glances and angry guards. Unimpressed, the man carried his step with dignity and asked for an audience with the king. As one would expect, he was turned away. Instead, the man returned the day after, this continued for a month. He came at the door, asked for an audience got insulted, and turned away, then repeat. The persistence got through. Father complimented his action despite never knowing who they were. I was in awe at the man's unassuming stance.'

'The audience was granted. A short but influential one. I attended the parle between the king and the curious man. He showed every courtesy afforded to him. Father echoed the gesture.'

"To the Demon King Leviathan, I humbly ask for a moment of your time."

"Go ahead, you have my blessing."

"Hell was founded on the blood and sacrifice of a single man, the one we know as the Cursed King. The true founder of the Aapith nation. His revival is at hand. He has returned to fulfill the prophecy of the end. I'm a simple man of the unassuming stature, birthplace, and ideals. I'm the messenger and I bear no further influence on what reality holds. You, my liege, are one to set the course of the future. I came for a simple purpose, to warn thee and the kings of the return of he who rules from the Shadows. Once the three in one are joined, the Adjudicator shall be born anew. He has shown signs of activity, and I fear, with all my might, if not put to a stop else, guided in the right direction, he may just well forsake reality and force the realm into a new start. I'd hate for reality to end – our timeline has been most fortunate, god and devil spawns, humans and non-humans, the picture-perfect landscape of life has been painted. We mustn't allow it all to crumble."

"Why have you come to us?"

“Lord Lucifer has refused my worries. Lord Satan and Lord Belial are unavailable.”

“How can I be of help?”

“There is a cathedral built north of Lucifer’s academy. The buildings house a great key to locking the Adjudicator’s power if he one day awakens. My liege, I would ask you to conquer Lucifer’s land and stop the menace.”

.....

“And if I refuse?”

“I will accept and move. I must spread the words of wisdom passed from my family, such the way of the voyager.”

“Voyager?” father’s intrigue roused, I never knew him to be so interested in a simple title, “-as in the Voyagers who travel the dimension in search of the forbidden fruit?”

“Yes,” he bowed, “-I am an offspring of the messenger god, Hermes.”

The mention of Hermes sealed his fate. The messenger’s neck was put to the sword and thrown in jail. Father halted the execution – instead my sister, Teresa, was to get information from the man. Her priorities shifted, she cared more for pleasure than information. I don’t know why... something drew me to him. I snuck into the dungeon and had a word with the man. He returned my gaze with an affectionate smile. He was chained and heavily injured. He’d lost some of his fingers and even his teeth, yet, the man afforded me what little courtesy he could.

“My lady, you must not be discovered exchanging a word with a traitor.”

“You purposefully spoke Hermes’ name, why?”

“To die,” he said, “-to be freed from my curse of telling the world of its eventual end. I lied... the heavens are far more sinister than what hell would one believe. I’m a servant to my gods, I have seen their truth and have said no to their evil... the sense of right and wrong don’t apply to an entity of such stature. I am one to obey and do so I shall. They hold my freedom, they hold my life and my purpose. The only freedom afforded to me is how I choose to die. I fulfilled my purpose knowing it was wrong, I spread information about the coming of the Adjudicator and sullied the man’s good name. You, my lady, have the eyes of one who seeks after the truth. I will not be long for this world. My truth and the truth of who the three in one resides in my journal. I was careful to hide it in an inn by the river of Sarl. Ask for the innkeeper and tell her I sent for you.”

“Why?”

“Because I worship the bringer of finality. I’m a devoted follower of the Adjudicator. We’re few and hidden far and wide, we exist to serve our master regardless of his awakening.”

“And you ruin his reputation, what kind of servant does so?”

“The kind who is unafraid to go against his creed. My actions have led me to you, and you to me. You will inherit what I sought to complete, you will, and I see so in thy future, meet the Adjudicator. The choice is yours, Enfia L. Leviathan.”

“Sister?” Teresa arrived as the man drew his last breath, “-did you kill him?”

“No, he succumbed to his wounds.”

“Oh well, whatever. Please take care of his corpse, the dead are always too grimy to play with.”

‘He died with all the truths. Leaving only a simple order to follow. The more I thought, the greater the picture grew. At that moment, my quest to find the truth began. I fought his journal and read about what was real and what was a fa?ade. The world was built on narrow foundations –heaven and its misguided hypocrisy, hell’s unwillingness to fight, and the eternal struggle of the Demon Kings and the Council. No one was ready for the Adjudicator’s awakening. No one will ever be ready. The winds blew yet again, Lucifer disappeared – Draebala, Artanos, the coming of a new troublesome era, and at the center, an unassuming man hailing from Orin, the Wielder of Death Magic.’

She rose her head, ‘-and he stands before me today. The one who my master entrusted to us. He’s the one to lead the realities. Depending on his choices, we may yet survive. A survival that comes at the price of the underworld and Draebala, a survival where gods become the sole ruler of life itself.’

“Enfia.”

“Yes?”

“Why are you drifting into space?” he narrowed, “-was there not a room I’m supposed to visit?”

“Lord Staxius, are you not going to judge my actions for your daughter’s condition?”

“Enfia, I say this again, you’re talented. The way you schemed is unlike anything I have seen. You must have an interesting past. Nothing more is needed to make pique my curiosity. As for the matter of Sathanas,” he stared the lass squarely, her empty eyes was a tell-tell sign of mind-down, ‘-she’s taking a rest. Fought until the bitter end,’ he laid her on the table and caressed her forehead, ‘-shut yourself to perverse thy sanity. Sathanas, my daughter, you are quite a fighter.’

“She’s beyond treatment...”

“Just watch,” he smiled, \*-knowledge known to only the watcher, I, master and inheritor of Origin, beckon thee; Mantia, Library of the all-knowing: Partial Realm Expansion,\* a cocoon wrapped the feeble body, ‘-she’s afflicted with a curse,’ he lit a cigarette,

\*-I am he who slays without fear, I am he who shall be the last of what thy see. Heed mine call, thou whomst dared to fight the natural order, tis the day thou ought to be destroyed, Ancient Magic – Astral Binding,\* sword-shaped lightning bolt hammered in a pentagram around her body, \*-thee who desires power, thee who sealed a contract with the devil, arise anew and face the truth. Thy soul is mine to wield, mine to control and mind to destroy – awaken, Contract Holder, for I, thy master, beckon thee. Contract – Resusio,\*

\*GASP,\* “-WHERE AM I?” she shot upright and coughed, flashing her troubled focus right and left, “-where am I?”

“In hell.”