

Death Magic 1151

Chapter 1151 Plans for the future

Dionysus's brownish-gold stare blinked back and forth. They took Staxius's words with a grain of suspicion. Such was the look held by the pressed lips. 'Gods don't care about hiding their emotions much. They have the world already at their feet. It's easy to see why, he'd choose to accept the feelings and show them. Thing is, to people like me, it's very simple to lead them into what I want to achieve. The question is how do I play?'

Staxius paused, he looked right and left then exhaled, "-wondering why I readily accepted the kindness?"

"Yeah?" he threw up his arms and sat, crossing his legs at the echoing battlefield, "-who's fighting anyway?"

"Who knows? I sure don't," he lit a cigarette and watched, "-Dionysus, we know the Olympian Gods and I will face off sooner or later. I did steal Athena from under Zeus' feet. There's no telling what he's going to do."

"Well, I don't like how the Olympian gods are doing whatever the Heavenly Council advises. I barely escaped; you know. Falling from heaven and all that."

"Barely escaped," Staxius shook his head, "-are you joking? Did you see the size of your ship?"

"Details, it's whatever. Anyway, tell me, doesn't your friend need help?"

"Oh, no not really," he puffed, "-look, she'll kill them soon." Like clockwork, as Staxius predicated, the battle followed. Fenrir did much of the heavy lifting – champions emerged from the Resistance's ranks. None knew how they procured such firepower. Alas, with Staxius's Necromancy in action – the more died, the stronger he became.

"Staxius, let me warn you. The prince she's fighting is a replica of Gluttony. It's one of the reasons why I left the council. They're experimenting on things that are best left untouched. Prying open nature and destroying the natural balance. When I heard about the tale of one who'd bring balance, I jumped at the chance."

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"You think Fenrir's in trouble?" he chuckled, "-look at her."

Focus panned, Fenrir clapped her hands and called forth a spiritual representation of her strength. A massive wolf sprang to life, she calmly winked and leaped, clawing her way through the Prince to be followed by the gaping bite of the spirit wolf.

"Impressive..."

"Not really," Staxius leaped, Dionysus followed, "-what happened here is a preview of what is to come. I am concerned you're here. However, as a like-minded fellow, I do enjoy the thrill which comes from the unknown. Just not when said unknown plans against me."

"Yeah, you worry too much."

The resistance's assault was over. News of their defeat never left Inux, and such was the decision on the day after the massacre. The leader of said forces was brought in chains by Vengeance, "-leader of the resistance," Staxius held a one-on-one meeting in the dungeon, "-listen," the dim lighting, the smell of rot and filth, the nonchalant expression on the faction leader's face, '-he knows this all too well,' Staxius calmly evaluated the situation, '-I can get what I want from the others. He'll be a tough nut to crack. Best keep our status hidden for a few months until we're ready to march against the occupants of Zalan D'olsak.'

"Good place you got."

"Is it?"

"Yeah, too bad we're not alone."

"No one is truly alone."

"Exions," the man smirked, "-have you heard of them?"

"Not really."

"They're our benefactors. The battle we staged against Inux was primer. The real threat has yet to come. I'll laugh in the afterlife whilst their faction comes and destroys this little town you captured."

"Exions," he leaned back, "-are they not from the Eipea Empire?"

'... how did he know?'

"How do I know?" Staxius echoed the man's thought, "-there are few things left to surprise me. I've taken measures to ensure the safety of what I have and what I need. Besides when all bets are down and you have to gamble," he smiled, "-those are when entertainments at its best."

'I wonder,' blue hair flowed through the field outside, '-why Igna became Staxius. He didn't really talk about why it happened. It's always like that, he'll do something then go quiet, then return as if nothing happened. He's a handful... I was glad he called. Draebala, she warned me about this realm, it's a place with the affinity to ruin any man, no matter the strength they possess,' her lingering gaze fell on an abandoned little settlement, it faced a wild field that seemed to have been cultivated way back when.

Crackle, lightning hit a watchtower. The broken door toppled. "-What a workout," Staxius stretched and bathed in the early morning sunrise, "-Fenrir, over here."

"You finished?" the smell, '-it stinks,' she pulled her nose from the insides.

"Yeah, the man was nice enough to tell me what I needed. Dionysus' information was right," he checked his watch and opened a map, "-if we're to have any hope holding out against the Exions, I will need to gather the seven wielders of Hell's symbol."

"What then, are we just going into the mainland to steal the prince?"

"We don't necessarily need the wielder, what I need is the symbol. Would be impossible to forcefully take said symbol, however, tis not difficult with a few spells."

Turn back the clock to the day or night of the attack – the arrival of Dionysus was rather troublesome. Though none knew his identity, they sensed immense power surging, enough to make the town turn. It was quite the mess to see, and there, without a single shred of doubt, Staxius announced the following, “-to the residents of Inux. We have defeated the coming invaders, we have fought back the waves of soldiers, and we have won against the resistance. They choose to invade this land I protect; they choose their fate and met a timely death. I will not entertain collusion or anything of the sort – traitors will be put to death. I’m not biased to ruling this town with an iron fist, I will become a tyrant shall the need arise. For now, refugees, you’re of mixed blood, background, and social standing. With the fall of Zayan D’olsak’ nobility and rulership – I’ve noticed many noble-born figures wandering the street as normal people. Listen right and listen carefully. I will be fighting the world – they will come for me, such is the fate I have chosen,”

‘-he’s the same.’

‘-typical power-hungry men.’

‘-what a disappointment.’

“-I know what you’re thinking. He’s a war bringer, someone who lusts for battle and craves domination. You know what?” he stared at the crowd, “-I am a battle junkie. I love what it brings and the thrill of experiencing death can never be topped. I also know the pain of being on the receiving side, sitting there, and having no words for the fate of your family or hometown. This is why I’ve decided to march west, to the fallen Duchy of the Emrold, the capital, Emerald’s city. Once the trading route is safe enough – those not wishing to battle will be moved to the Emerald City. The land and resources available will help the famine we’re faced with today. Until that day comes; the Scavengers will be in charge of Inux. Elion will be in charge. If you have complaints, direct them to him – as for the military, that will fall under my domain, my people will handle security. I can promise this, if you’re under my protection, which this town is, you won’t have to worry about your family dying suddenly,” he stared at the town. The message was so clear none knew how to respond – Staxius walked off the podium and into the castle. The people were mind shocked, watching in contemplation of what was to come. Also, having Dionysus manifest his airship above the town, behind Staxius, was a nice way to signal their strength, and there, without showing their hand, reinforced his reputation as strong.

The conversation carried into a secluded cell, “-taking the Emerald City is a tall task.”

“It’s considered one of the greater cities in the whole of Draebala. We’re not going to take it so easily.”

“I beg to differ,” he looked at Fenrir, Hesta, and Dionysus, “-come forth Vengeance.”

He manifested in the shadows, “-master.”

“I sent people to the Emerald City for recon while we were talking about Inux. I kept it hidden in case of the plan failed. However, it seems that Emerald City hasn’t fallen like they’d have us believe. The Resistance is operating from said area and has the ducal family’s blessings. They’ve allied with the Heavenly Convention – I know Artanos, he’s a man of intellect and would rather keep his forces alive rather than kill them. Instead of spreading violence, he spread the word of violence and allowed his men to roam and slaughter people as they came. Basically, an information blackout.”

“I don’t get why he would do that...”

“Dionysus, you’re not exactly suited for the ways of war.”

“...”

“Staxius, you’re not planning of letting this Olympian join us, are you?” Fenrir narrowed.

“We already have Minerva. I’ll leave his fate up to her.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, what’s the harm...”

The olympian rose his arms, “-do I not get a say?”

“No.”

“Fair enough,” he lowered his arm, ‘-guess it’s the same here.’

“Don’t look so out of touch,” Staxius patted the man’s back, “-I know a thing or two about your situation. You’re the only child born from a mortal mother. Your father sure likes to have affairs. I wonder how the pain shows on Hera.”

“She hates him,” he narrowed, “-Hera loves animals, father tried to court her a lot of times. I’m relaying what I heard. Father turned into a distressed cuckoo. Taking pity on the animal, she took him in his arms – where, he transformed and ravished her. I tell you, the tales of my father are worse when I hear them from other people. Ashamed, Hera married her brother, her husband. I don’t see how people venerate him. Still, Hera hated my mother when she got pregnant with me,” he lowered his gaze.

“Hera is a vindictive individual. You didn’t come here on a whim. You escaped, didn’t you, you ran.”

“Yeah,” he untied his hair, “-I ran. Hera sent Titans after me, I barely escaped my assassination. Father said nothing, I left – they hate me for not being born like them. My mother’s just the daughter of a king, someone who had to suffer under Zeus’ lust. Hera doesn’t do anything save get jealous and take out her frustrations on others.”

“Place sounds like fun to live.”

“Ha-ha,” he shook his head, “-I’m sure Athena felt that way.”

“So you see,” he turned to Fenrir, “-Dionysus is a refugee, like the others. I said’ I’d provide a haven for those wanting shelter from Zeus. You’re free to join us, Dionysus. Better yet, how about you relinquish the character of god and live a simple life here in Inux? I could make you a statesman, you’ll handle politics and fall into the same line of work Athena does. It’s not much but it’s a stable place to find love, enjoy what little life we have and see the world reborn, you know.”

“A poetic sign,” he crossed his hands and nodded, “-if you’ll have me, then I’ll join.”

“It’s settled.”

“Welcome to the Shadows, Dionysus.” He didn’t know it then, but entering the shadows was hard, and being allowed to live, was even harder. Before Dionysus began their new life – Staxius conjured the

portal to the Shadow Realm. There, the Supreme Guardian of the Shadows, Intherna, waited with her arms crossed.

‘Where am I?’ he awoke inside a sandy arena. Majestic music played – the crowd cheered, and the almighty Guardian presided over the admittance test, “-welcome to the shadows, Dionysus.”

Thus a week passed from the battle, leading Staxius 1/4th of the way to the Emerald City. The traveling companion, Fenrir, “-any good information then, from the resistance leader?”

“Just bits and bobs. My assumptions were right. The Emerald City is still booming, we’re separated by west and east now. The capital acts like a divider – information and goods aren’t allowed to go east. We take the Emerald City and it’s like having the master key to Zayan D’olsak.”

“Why do you love intrigue so much, any plans going forward?”

“Not a single clue,” he laughed, “-I got an idea, but I need time to cook it, I suppose.”

“Cooking,” she shook her head, “-alright, Alchemist.”

“Don’t you dare-” he snapped, “-no one calls me that anymore, I’m not a chef.”

“Sure,” she laughed, “-black-collar chef.”

“Shut it!”

Chapter 1152 Unexpected Guest

‘Didn’t expect the trip to last this long. I was honestly surprised when Staxius suggested I keep him company. We made a contract long ago, but now, it feels like it doesn’t matter. I have my reservations. I remember the Silver Guardians days fondly –raising Eira and conquering Dorchester. Those days were filled with trouble and heartache. He always had attachment issues. He might not admit it through the cool guy persona, but Staxius is afraid of losing people. He says otherwise and hides the emotion very well, but I know, I felt it, I know how he truly feels. Every death, every action he made resulting in a loved one’s death has chipped away at his core. He cares... but not anymore. The fine line holding his sanity has been dug through,’ they sat around a campfire. Staxius conjured a tent and some supplies to last the night. ‘-we camp like this all the time now,’ she held a bowl of soup and fondly stared at the sky, ‘-you can feel the danger linger. A cold sensation always pressing down your neck. The two moons, their unusual color, and the haunting purple gaze it echoes. There few things I’ve seen so pretty.’

“Fenrir, are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m good.”

“We’re nearly at the Emerald City,” he continued, “-a few days more.”

“Still against the idea of flying?”

“Yeah, I rather keep a low profile. You never know what’s out there.”

“Are you seriously going to try to take the Emerald City using intellect instead of might?”

He paused and stared over his bowl, “-don’t think I’m up to it?”

A frigid gaze washed her face, “-there’s no need to unleash the aura at me,” she shrugged off his energy and continued her meal, “-you’re still the boy I meet in the Alps. Never change.”

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“What do you mean?” he went back to eating, “-and I guess you’re right,” he exhaled, “-compared to Artanos, I feel like my time and energy do not matter. Whatever scheme I concoct he effortlessly counters it. I don’t know anymore, it’s just weird.”

“Not weird, you’re just too weak.”

He held her eye for a bit, and broke the stare with a casual chuckle, “-some more?” he asked reaching over the pot.

“Yeah,” she extended her bowl, “-I’m right, aren’t I?” a breeze pushed the lovely aroma across the forest, “-he is smarter than you.”

“I guess.”

Ruffle, Staxius instantly grabbed Tharis, ‘-heard something?’ he gestured, she nodded and slowly reached for a bottle of accelerant, ‘-on my mark, throw it on the fire,’ he mumbled. She nodded once more.

‘This is going to explode,’ she carefully chose the landing spot, ‘-they shouldn’t have been able to pass my wards.’

The tussles intensified, the steps amplified, ‘-I can’t feel their auras. Is the forest disturbing my detection?’ he gripped Tharis. Golden jewelry spits the forest, a very feminine figure crawled through, “-guys, this is the place,” mumbled a familiar face, “-If you want some, here’s your chance,” she licked her lips and ambled to the fire. Strong guardsmen followed behind with silver armor.

“A campfire in this forest, are they fools?”

“There’s no saving the weak,” said another.

“What will it be, lassy – get on your knees or we’ll strip you over that pyre,” despite the helms, one could easily sense their lust.

“Fine,” the lady stood with her back to the fire, she reached for her top and seductively undressed, the flames shook, “-go!” Staxius signaled; Fenrir threw the accelerant into the fire after poking a little hole.

Hand of Lamentation, he grabbed the lady by the neck and pulled all the while in front of the fire, the explosion caused a blinding glow, “-go to hell,” three pulls of the trigger, three fallen bodies, *Mana-Control: Wave,* he pulled away the energy, such retarding the flames. The lass fell on her bottom and gasped, “-give me some food,” she cried with her arms behind her back and legs spread as if a child cloud gazing, “-didn’t think I’d find you so easily.”

“What are you doing here, Cleopatra,” mumbled a less-than-excited Fenrir.

“Don’t have to be so mean,” the fire pulsed and emphasized her bust and natural form greatly, “-I do have a way of leading men on. It’s one of my many talents.”

“Fair,” he simply extended her some food, “-Lixbin put you up to this?”

“Yes and no. I had a choice. You see, some scouts from the Resistant faction escaped that night. I was sent to track ‘em. I did for a bit, then lost the trail until I came upon these idiots with this,” she reached into her cleavage, pulled out a scroll, then threw – Staxius caught it as did her chest to the spilled soup, “-noble born on military duty. They’re from mid-tier families and should have some way in, you know, political affiliation.”

“How?”

“By becoming their ideal,” she winked, “-in their eyes, a goddess rose from a lake, which was actually me being pushed up by some scavengers, I dawned only my golden jewelry which caught the moonlight. They fell for it as easily as men did in the mortal world. Using my figure and the imagination of what if I could, you know, get their blood to pour downward very effective strategy. I planned to get information and then kill them... didn’t go as I thought. This forest restricts mana. I was a damsel in distress... thought it’d be over until I smelt it, food.”

“Lured over by food.”

“I knew it was you guys,” she winked, “-no one cooks like the Alchemist.”

Fenrir shared Cleopatra’s laugh, Staxius simply shrugged and read the letter, “-Honored citizen of our Emerald City, I, Duke Emri of Emerald City, humbly extend an invitation to a celebration of our city’s triumph and to honor our allies, the Eipea Empire. As such, I graciously extend this offer to my fellow patrons. Those related to the noble bloodline are welcomed. Present the seal on the night of the banquet and passage will be granted. The celebrations will last five days.”

“What does it say?”

“Banquet,” he returned Fenrir’s question, “-festival starts in two days and lasts five. There’s going to be banquets and all that noble stuff, you know, courting women, enjoying the thrill of a secret fling, an opportunity to grow one’s name and prestige.”

He intently looked at Cleopatra, “-continent. Tell me.’

“Yeah, the three slobes are impoverished nobles from a once prominent family. Sons of said respective family. It’s well known those unable to keep their status and prestige will follow the sword to feed their family. Such is the way of the nobility – based around warriors and adventurers, those who’d stand up against the cruelty of those who’ve plagued Draebala. You get the idea,” she returned to her food, “-they live a day’s walk from here. To the South West, a village called Etolie. Not exactly a village, more like a retreat for the rich. It’s built on a cliff that overlooks a majestic plain of meadows with mountains running in the distance. The monster attack in that area is close to none. Enemies naturally gravitate away – it’s one of the reasons why families set their homes there.”

“Planned it out, didn’t you,” he stood, “-we have the seal and know where the family lives. This turned out great, I appreciate the help, Cleopatra.”

“Just doing what I want,” she dozed off.

“Think we can trust her?” Fenrir narrowed.

"Don't know," he stared the invitation, "-all I know is we have to thank her for the leeway she made. This is going to make everything a little simpler. Go get some rest, we're leaving later."

"Okay."

'As for this,' he carefully examined the letter and provenance, '-the events line up a bit too nicely. Is this a ploy to draw me out?' he lit a cigarette, '-a festival out of the blue, especially with the threat of war. This will announce their allegiance against the Aapith nation and put the Emerald City at risk. The letter looks authentic... Eipea, I must believe Artanos has a hand in how things are going. If I stand a chance, I'll need to get him away from Zayan D'olsak,' he tapped his phone, and an interface widened, "-what is it?" came an exhausted sigh.

"Elixia, are you in Ragno?"

"Yeah, getting ready for the election. We've done what we can, it comes down to voting day now."

"Good – I'll need a favor from the Shadow Realm. Get in contact with Minerva, give her this message," and it read as follows, "-Athena, Great Goddess who owes me many favors, I need to claim one of the said favors. Rally a team of the strongest warriors we have in the Shadow Realm and leave immediately for the main continent – Yui will pick the appropriate location after scanning the area. I want a full-out battle – leave no man standing, I want destruction, the full might of the Shadows. Use relics, ancient spells, anything I have readied in the war coffers – hell, contact Vesper for assistance too. Hit them hard and hit them quick – as loud as you can, decimate and liberate one of the harder strongholds they've captured," the message ended, "-Elixia, get in contact with the Aapith Council of Demon. Send Cruse over as my spokesperson, "-Cruse, you must travel to the council of Demons and relay this message. 'To the demons who have lost the war for countless centuries, I'm here to level the battlefield. A specified location will be provided in a few days – I will strongly consider marching a considerable force to occupy the territory I'm about to free. Signed, the Devil,' like that, the messages were delivered.

Minerva rose from her desk with drool, a somber figure waited in the shadows, "-who are you?" she gasped.

"A messenger from the Devil," the demonic shadow handed the latter and vanished.

Meanwhile, in a Phantom-owned strip club, Cruse received his message with angel's dust on his nose, "-a message from father?" he stepped from the entourage of up-and-coming idols, "-sorry ladies," he grabbed his coat and threw it over his naked top, "-my dad's calling."

"Ditch that old man and come with us," a nude lass purred.

He snapped at regard, "-don't you dare talk down to my father," he tightened his fist, "-you're lucky aunt hates cleaning mess. Otherwise, you'd be a stain on the wall, damned whore," *spat,* he kicked the door and left, '-finally getting called into action. Now this is fun.'

The fire casually crackled, leaving only ashes as morning rose. Staxius, Cleopatra, and Fenrir arrived at Eipea, "-this place is heaven," he blinked, "-nothing like the bleak always death-filled landscape below."

"Climbing the mountains is akin to climbing the stairway to heaven. This is one of the reasons why nobles made it their place." Lovely houses were built on a massive cliff that hung over a colorful valley.

The place was breathtaking with its meadows and gentle trees. Their vantage point, a hill behind said arrangement of houses felt warm.

"The beauty is lost with those large pillars scattered around the village."

"Warding obelisks," said Cleopatra, "-used to ward off monsters. Come, what we're looking for is over there," the bright and cheery overshadowed the truth of mid-tier to low-tier noble homes. Set on a plain just below the cliff, a place far somber and closer to what they knew, "-the mighty on top and the rabble below," said Cleopatra, "-with nobility too. Well, at least the slope-like arrangement of the buildings is a treat to the eye," and she was true, the stonework was intricately beautiful. Most, if not all the roads were sloped into the valley, a place with signs of terraforming, "-follow me, we're close to their family home. The next step will be yours, Staxius."

"Understood," he tapped his waist, '-nothing need be said.'

They entered the first home, a casual-looking residence with two floors and a spacy yard, similar to the neighbors.

smack, "-You're going to get married and that is final. No more going to the fields, I don't care!"

"Please don't hurt her, she's just a kid."

"Shut up, we need money for the banquet – daughters are meant to be married away, don't you get it?" he cried, "-that's why I get for falling in love with a commoner!"

Chapter 1153 "I broke the man,"

"He looks like a fun dad," Cleopatra commented, "-definitely my type," she phased through the closed gates, entering the open yard. Staxius and Fenrir followed. Cleopatra's dark brown stare studied the home, her gaze darted from angle to angle. Another smack echoed, "-well, you guys better follow me," she stretched her shoulders and knocked on the front door.

"She's going to knock?" paused Fenrir.

"Let her do her thing," said Staxius, "-maybe it'll be entertaining to watch, you know?"

"You and your entertainment," her voice trailed – the lock clicked.

"Who are you?" echoed a loud man, "-I don't take visitors. Wait, how the hell did you cross my gate?"

"Shut it, old man," her golden bangles morphed into a dagger that plunged through his stomach, "-I don't care much for pleasantries," he fell, gasping for air and coughing blood, "-problem removed," she spun and waved her bloodied hands, "-come on in," she gestured.

"Direct approach," said Fenrir, "-you owe me cash."

"Fine, I lost the bet," he shrugged and shook his head, '-anti-climactic.'

"Honey," the wife shuffled downstairs with a belt in her hand, "-please don't beat her again, she's coughing up blood," her nervous gaze landed on the hall headed to the door. Her husband lay in a puddle of blood, three strange figures made their entrance.

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Her heart sank, “-please, don’t hurt my children. Do whatever you want, take whatever you need, just leave my kids alone.”

“Nice,” said Cleopatra, “-you, my lady, are quite an actress. A commoner if I remember correctly, the man sure has a loud voice. Enough about the past, tell me, do you mean your words or is it simply an attempt to rationalize the hurt this monster’s,” she kicked the dead body’s head, “--action?” The wife shivered.

“This the first time you’ve seen death?”

“Probably not,” whispered Fenrir, “-the family photo, look at it. Four children and two of them of the same age. Yet, I feel only one child, and the one I feel is the one who has a twin. I guess the man played a little too hard and killed the poor lass.”

“Please, let us go,” she dropped to her knees, “-I’ll do anything, leave us alone.”

“What do you mean alone?” Staxius stepped forward, “-take this opportunity to start again,” he snapped the body into ash. So on, they entered the living room and were served warm tea.

“A commoner turned wife of a noble. Pretty impressive.”

“I was the cutest girl in my village,” she said with a hint of disappointment, “-I was lucky this one turned out a fool.”

“There you are,” Cleopatra rubbed her hands, “-the wife isn’t a fool after all. No commoner has the guts to think of them as equal to the nobility, you, you have intellect and the means to accomplish your purpose,” the living room warmed by the slow cooking fireplace. Space was abundant but not too empty, the intricate couches were evenly spaced. Firewood crackle added a touch of sense to the rising tension, “-and why are you telling us this?”

“Why?” the wife looked around, “-I sense your powers. You, people, aren’t normal, I feel gods and greater gods... the strong rule the weak, such is the rule I was taught. I easily got in that man’s favor and became his wife by ending the lives of the other rivals. I had his attention and his assets, that was before the Emerald City imposed a heavy tax on the nobility, citing our failure to bring peace to our lands. Like us, many families were pushed to the brink and forced to move into the lesser nobility. The duke made arrangements for our manors to be built, you know, to carry favor and also impose his dominance.”

“Thus the warning, without me, there’s no nobility, am I right?”

“Yeah,” she nodded, “-but I’m curious. Why would you come here?”

“That, my lady, is a story for me to say,” added Cleopatra. She went into details about how the noble son was slain, the wife simply bat her eyes and nodded, “-that boy was a fool, like his father.”

“Not your son then?”

“No, not my son,” she nodded, “-well, what is it you people want? Surely my life has no value...”

“It has plenty of value,” said Cleopatra, “-allow me to become your son.”

“How?”

“Leave the details to us,” she smiled, “-we hail from Inux, and we have plans to usurp the Emerald City,”

“Shouldn’t have given me that information,” the wife smirked, “-but I see you’re testing me,” she looked at Staxius.

“Yeah, and the words she spoke will forever be a scar etched into your heart. The faintest sense of traitorous motive and your heart will implode. Such the devil’s guarantee. In any case, how about we strike a deal?”

“I decided the moment you stepped in,” she looked at Cleopatra, “-to the one who valiantly ended my tyrant of a husband’s life, I’m grateful. Though the family name, Espo, doesn’t hold much value, it will parve an easier way to your goal.”

“Son of the Baroness Ellan Espo, Cleo Espo,” Cleopatra nodded, “-I will make you proud, Mother.”

“Good, I’ll love to see it,” she smiled, “-why not head upstairs and meet my daughter? She’ll be pleased to have a new brother.”

“Won’t she be confused?”

“No, the lass takes after her mother. She’s wiser than her age,” Ellan, a short but hard-looking woman rose to her feet, her long dress flowed, her kind and innocent face structure boldly hid the truth, a coldly calculated schemer.”

Fenrir looked over the second invitation, “-right, I’ll go look for them, any idea, Ellan?”

“The Eir, they’re quite high-ranking nobles. Why not check the first district,” she reached out the western window and pointed at the cliff over their heads, “-there, you should strike to the first wall, the closer to the cliff’s edge, the more prominent,” she tucked back inside, “-Eir’s are pretty secretive. Not much information apart from their reputation as guardians of the duke’s court. We’re looking at a Viscount.”

Come forth, Vengeance,

“-master.’

“Go with Fenrir, we’ll switch after you’ve discovered their lair.”

“Understood,” he stood, “-lady Fenrir, please lead the way.”

“Okay,” she fixed her tie, “-be right back,” a white shirt, a black tie, black formal trousers, a man’s outfit that completely made her figure ‘-pop’.

“Those were the only clothes I had,” Ellan sighed, “-hopefully it’s not inconvenient.”

“I doubt she’ll hate it,” he stared over the third invitation, “-tell me, Ellan, why were you so quick to accept our invitation?”

She ignored and marched for the door, turned the lock, spun on her heel, and dropped her shoulders, “-I’m not a nice person,” she reached for her back and slowly unzipped her dress, “-and I know I’m not a

nice person. I was born a commoner but gifted with great abilities. My parents thought I could be sold for more, so I took their lives and was soon taken in by this idiot of a lord. From an early age, I could sense and feel things other people couldn't. I'd have strange premonitions at times... they'd come true. I knew when my husband would die, I had the same feeling when he killed my daughter. It's annoying and unfair, but nobility has the power to do what they want," she walked and talked, slowly undressing as the gap closed, "-as for you," she dropped her dress and turned, "-I knew you were the lover of my mistress."

"The mark of Syhton," Staxius blinked, "-you have the divine blessing of the Goddess of Stars..."

"Yes, I was born in the wrong realm. I was once an angel, a high priestess who served my goddess. Alas, due to disturbances and the reawakening of the Titans, my soul was forced into Draebala... I had to resort to underhanded tactics to keep this vessel alive."

"And you can't exactly call out Syhton for help, she's in a strange realm herself."

"What I know is, my goddess, was killed by Zeus. Her energy disappeared somewhere and I was left in despair. Then, it came to me in a dream – I saw you, Staxius, I saw your face, the actions, and the lengths you went to save my goddess. "

"Too big a coincidence," he sipped the now colder tea, "-that's definitely the mark of Syhton, her constellation carved on your back. Ellan, you might have the potential to be more than just a pawn in this game of war."

"I hope I've proven myself," she bowed.

"No," he returned, "-no way, not like this. Tell me, would you believe someone if they just speak and did nothing to prove their worth? Sadly, that is not how to choose to do business. I rather we stay allies than anything deeper. Since you know more about nobility, how about joining us in the Emerald City?"

"For the celebrations?"

"Yeah, the invitation did the extent to all members of the nobility."

"What about my daughter?"

They climbed to the first floor, and Cleopatra slept openly with the girl on her shoulder, "-seems she's taken a liking to Cleopatra."

"Well, the girl is of age," he crossed his arms, "-how about sending her to Ragno."

"Ragno?"

"To Lucifer's academy. She'll be safer at least."

"Well, if that's how it works, then sure..."

"Reservations about why I'd extend the invitation?" he smiled, "-she's got the wings of an angel, I see it," his pupils glowed, "-my eyes, they see a lot," he tapped Ellan's shoulders, "-as for the admission, leave it to me," he smirked, "-I am the Devil after all."

A circular wide chamber, lined by intricate golden drawings noticed by the few rays in the otherwise dark area, led to the center – an altar upon which rested an emancipated man; sacrificed to a deity whose name was unknown yet, whose appearance known for their status rose prominently beside the altar, “-so much for high nobility,” Fenrir shook her head and washed her bloodied hands, “-Eir turned out to be cultists,” she flicked her fingers, “-well, Vengeance, did you find the leader?” only the altar seemed visible, the darkness shrouded the surrounding.

“Yes,” he teleported, and noticed the strong smell of iron, “-here’s the Viscount Eir,” he threw the man on the floor, and looked for the lights, “-as for the others, they’re not here.” The ritual chamber’s marble floor felt slippery as he shuffled, the extent of Fenrir’s cruelty remained unseen but not for long. Vengeance accidentally toggled the lights – torches flamed by small automatic incantations, “-my lady,” he widened his gaze, “-you went overboard,” there was blood everywhere. On the walls, across the ceiling, heads shoved into the ground, brain matter spattered to and fro, limbs torn and viscerally engraved expression, “-people have ugly deaths,” Vengeance shook his head, “-well, I guess this is warning enough for the Viscount,” he turned to see Fenrir chocking the noble

“MY LADY!”

“Tell me everything I want to know.”

“W-W-W-W-W-”

“He gets it,” he grabbed her wrist, “-please my lady, calm yourself.”

“Fine,” she clicked her tongue and threw the viscount, he landed in blood and gore.

Thirty minutes, it would take thirty minutes for the man to return to his sense, “-you’ve broken him,” Vengeance commented, “-even when then he pukes and screams.” They watched from outside the viscount’s room.

“I guess seeing that much death is bound to trigger some reaction, I mean, why wouldn’t it?”

“No,” he narrowed his gaze, “-less the violence more the fact that his whole family was just slaughtered. I don’t know what to do with a broken man, I’ll ask the master to switch.”

“Sure.”

“At least the viscount’s property is considerable in size,” he smiled, a puff of smoke and they switched.

“Staxius, help.”

“What happened?”

“I broke the man,” she shrugged.

“Yeah, I saw, Vengeance, shared the memories. Honestly,” he opened the door, “-you shouldn’t be caring about someone’s mental problems,” he rose his fingers, “-understand that entities with intellect and a sense of morality can be tainted easily, and where one can be tainted, you will always find... me,” *Blood-Arts: Crimson Treads, Mind Control Variant – Erod* lines of silver dug into the man’s skull, the information flowed as seen by the waves of white, “-I see,” he nodded, “-maybe the Emerald City isn’t that simple to take as I thought,” he smirked.

