

Death Magic 121

Chapter 121: Aceline

Dusk set in, the academy boomed with noise and activity. The hospital, on the contrary, remained stagnant and quiet. Most of the participants were admitted due to grave injuries. Mainly the Starlight duo, they took a beating from Azer and Paige. Speaking of those two, they were sent off earlier than expected – Paige healed both her and her friend; perks of being an adventurer. Huon and Rosalinda were taken to their homes instead – their father insisted. The smell of alcohol and sterile hallways – Staxius didn't miss those at all.

"Where am I?" a voice whispered, the eyes slowly opened. A figure sat right beside her, a figure that she remembered, Eira awoke. Staxius had remained in her room despite Jona asking him to leave. The man was adamant about being the first his daughter saw. "f-father?" she spoke with a feeble tone, "don't strain yourself," he replied and patted her forehead. "I'm glad you're doing well," a smile shone.

"Why d-did you s-stay behind?" Eira tried to continue the conversation. "Because of you," he fired back and stood. "I know not how but I have a gut feeling that you hate the way I always disappear without saying a word," he slowly stepped and stood at the foot of the bed. Her eyes tracked him all the way, never did it leave and wandered off. "Guess, this is where we part," he sighed. "-I honestly enjoyed the time we spend together. May it have been only a few days – I was glad to see that my precious daughter doesn't hate me," he took a pause and gathered his breath. "This is our goodbye then, please stay safe and trust Josiah – that man may be strict but the knowledge he has is a thing of legend. Learn whatever you can, pour your soul into studies and do what you want to. At the end of the day, you're the one responsible for thy own happiness. Thus, if the time arises when my help is needed – I'll rush to your side no matter what." The footsteps echoed slightly, *click,* the door to the dimly lit room opened. "Goodbye Eira, I shall see you another time," it closed, she could not but watch Staxius leave once more.

Hence, Staxius finally said goodbye and not disappear. The time indicated six-thirty as shown on the wall by a large squared clock. 'Guess I have time to spare,' he thought, the feet guided to the outside – where noise from the academy was heard. 'Aceline,' he wondered, '-show me what you meant.' Dressed with a bloodied shirt and slightly ripped pants, Staxius climbed the freezing hill. A gust of wind blew past, it sent shivers down the spine. Tiny pricks that felt like a thousand needles. *Pwoosh,* he blew into the hands that curled into one entity.

The closer the academy got, the louder the cheers grew. It went on, Staxius fought the cold till the first arena where they fought came into view. It felt empty, the lights were off inside but the display outside advertised her new album named; Snow-Flakes. A crowd of diehard admirers wore similar clothes, her name was written on the back of their jackets. 'How famous is this girl?' he wondered whilst trying to secure away inside. The hair tied in a ponytail and with a symbol underneath the eye, Staxius was more than inconspicuous. Many people remember who he was for he had won the tournament not a few hours ago. Some smiled whilst others snarled, though it didn't affect him.

"Hey mister," a childish tone grabbed onto his shirt, "excuse me?" he asked in a formal but friendly way. "Hey mister," the kid spoke yet again, the face felt blissful. "Yes, how may I help you?" the tone remained the same, Staxius waited. "Could you please sign this picture," the child handed him a photo. A photo of himself taken during the fight. A photo that perfectly showed him unsheathing the sword, a

strange mist could be seen around. Said picture was a work of art for the child – Staxius looked very imposing and cool.

“May I ask where you got those?” confused, he inquired. “Oh, my mother took it for me,” he pointed to a lady whomst face remains hidden by the night sky. After checking, he looked back at the kid – it felt strange. That child had an aura to him, something that felt familiar – not to mention the fact that the kid resembled someone Staxius knew. The interest peaked, he tried looking for the mother but the latter had vanished. The kid stood oblivious, “sure, let me help you out,” Staxius replied with a smile.

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The picture got signed, “here,” he showed the boy what he had done. Staxius drew a small man instead of an autograph, a well-drawn one at that. The kid’s smile couldn’t be contained, “Wow mister, that picture is awesome,” the face perpetually held a smile. “My name is Staxius Haggard, what’s yours?” he knelt to make the child at ease, looking up at someone and talking must have been hard.

“I know mister, mother has told me a lot about you,” he paused and looked around. “-she often says that you’re some kind of hero who saves people that are in need.” That statement sent the mind into a state of confusion. “Also, my name is Axius Hag...” a piercing voice yelled. “Sorry but I have to leave,” the boy scurried off and disappeared.

‘What just happened,’ he stood, ‘Axius Hag. I can’t help but think that Axius is taken from Staxius and not to mention the last name, Hag, really?’ the crowd grew bigger, ‘guess I’ll just forget about what happened,’ the second stadium came into view.

“Master,” Avon waved, they stood under a tree. “Good evening,” Staxius greeted, “good evening to you too,” both added. “What’s the situation then, aren’t you going inside to watch the concert?” Staxius stood next to them.

“We wish we could but sadly the fee is a bit high.” Achilles pouted. “Is that all?” Staxius chuckled. “-don’t worry about money. This day is your day off, consider it my treat. Avon, better go get those tickets – we’ll wait.” With a flick of the wrist, he ordered Avon.

The moment he left, Staxius engaged in small talk. Achilles’ fondness could be sensed in the way she spoke. Her eyes had a glimmer that would put anyone to shame. She looked as if a child getting a present. “We best go inside,” Avon signaled them from afar – the tickets were bought.

“So, this is a concert,” a podium was placed square in the middle. People sat and some even stood at the front, up close to all the action. Being himself, Staxius chose to sit rather than stand. Avon and Achilles rushed the middle and waited for the show to start.

A countdown began, the lights cut off. Aceline’s voice could be heard – Staxius watched with arms crossed. *Beep,* it reached zero, the light lit simultaneously and shone onto her, music also began to play. The people jumped and yelled ‘hey, hey, hey, hey,’ in sync with the instruments. The song she sang wasn’t in her album but one that was loved by many throughout the kingdom. Aceline looked like she had fun, they smiled and cheered. The air was filled with happiness and joy, Staxius’s eyes fixed onto the one who made such a change.

Everyone came together with the power of music; she sang her heart out. The musicians accompanying her jammed their life out, the spectators screamed their minds out. 'Amazing,' he grew to like what he heard, not the song in particular but how the people felt.

Minutes turned to hours, Staxius watched – the concert became a huge hit. It surprised him when adventurers and mages alike showed up to watch her performance. Time reached nine, Aceline stopped. It ended; her face glistened with sweat.

"Thank you all for coming here tonight," she spoke, the crowd shouted, "especially the people who fought earlier. This is my way of entertaining those who entertained us prior. Without you guys, I'd have never been able to stand here today. I'm having the time of my life, thank you all for the amazing support. I promise that your lovely radio host will never stop making music," she winked and did a peace sign.

'Reminds me of Avon,' Staxius laughed. "Let's all hope for a better future, together," her hands held up high, fireworks followed and went off. The night sky lit with vibrant color, the mind froze. "Such beauty," he mumbled, the eyes faced the stadium yet again.

"What do you want," Staxius moved his lips without making a sound, Aceline stared right at him. "I can see you," she did the same, Staxius was impressed by her eyesight. "Good job, you've proven your point," he stood and left.

'I told you didn't I, this is what entertainment is supposed to be. Not fight and gore, but music and peace – this is the world I want to create. Enough with all the fighting – even if I have to make this dream on my own. I'll do it, believe me,' Aceline looked to the sky, 'this is for you, mother, I swore that I shall change this world for the better. And change I will, nothing and no one can stand in my way,' the lights shut off.

Though strangers to one another, Aceline was one of the few people who wanted to see the world change. A change that Staxius wanted to make happen but by force rather than dialogue. He had one goal, the goal to have a place where people could roam around the streets without fear. A place where children and women weren't abused, a place where demi-humans were accepted. A place similar to Dorchester, a place that thrived on solidarity and compassion.

The outside felt empty, Staxius waited for the companions to leave. No longer was the need to stay at the academy a priority. Time was here for the party to leave. "Staxius," the shy glass wearing man approached he who crouched under a tree at the back of the stadium. "Who is it?" he asked, with the eyes heavy from exhaustion. "May I have a moment of your time?" he asked, to which Staxius replied with, "make it quick. If it's interesting then I shall think about it, otherwise tis a big no from yours truly," the tone felt snobbish.

"Actually," Scott stepped closer, "tis lady Aceline, she wants to speak to you at this instant." In the background, Avon and Achilles exited, "sure, take me to her," unwillingly, Staxius stood. He waved to Avon who then proceeded to follow them inside.

Knock, knock, the door to her changing room opened. "A bit fancy now isn't it?" Staxius walked in, Avon and Achilles followed. "What is the meaning of this, Scott," she was in the middle of removing all

her make-up. “-I thought I told you to bring Staxius alone.” He didn’t notice the two people behind him. “I apologize,” he knelt and begged.

“Aye, don’t be so pitiful,” Staxius grabbed the collar and pulled him off the ground effortlessly. “So, did you call me here to brag about how popular you are?” he asked whilst holding onto her assistant. “I shall ignore the people behind you,” she stood. “I’ve but a question,” she approached, “how strong are you?” her eyes opened wide, it reeked of vengeance. “I’m average at best, I think you’re overestimating me,” he stepped back.

“I can sense the lies,” she stepped back and turned in a dramatic way. “Ok I’m bored, let’s go,” without hearing her out, Staxius reached for the door. “NO PLEASE WAIT,” flustered, she grabbed his shirt. “Get to the point already,” he faced her square on, “also, trying to make me fall for you isn’t going to work. I’m already married to the best wife one could ever hope of marrying. I must sadly say that you don’t even come close to her,” he pulled out his tongue – somehow messing with Aceline felt like the best choice.

“Sure...” she replied, “anyways, I wanted to ask you about why you fight. Do you have a special reason?” the conversation turned to one more serious. “Yes, I fight for one reason alone. I fight to protect, and I fight for the ones who are dear to me. I wish to bring about change but for that to happen I must first change myself. Sadly, spilling blood is all I’m good for. Therefore, I shan’t backdown from killing anyone who stands in my way. I’m no hero, I’m the worst person one can hope to meet,” he said what he needed, Aceline stood speechless. “Let me guess, you want to change the world using music,” the hand reached for the doorknob. “It’s a good weapon, I wish you luck,” it opened, “however, my weapon is but a sword. If the time arises where my help is needed – please contact the guild, I’m an adventurer after all,” with a wink – he left.

Chapter 122: Ayleth’s return

Baffled by the answer given, Aceline watched as a very strange man left. Along the way out, the party spoke to one another. Avon cheerfully recounted what he and Aceline had accomplished. Without fail, Staxius praised and seemed genuinely interested. The things he saw during that concert got him thinking. A new way to reach people, instead of intimidation why not use a weapon like hers. However, tis was but wishful thinking – the heir to the god of death could not just run off and become a musician. It would be disrespectful to the people who trained for years and decades. They were warriors in their own right, searching for something farther than anything else.

“Avon,” Staxius spoke, they reached the car. “Yes?” he turned and asked. “Have you seen Alyson or Ayleth during the fight?” the machine turned on. “No I’m afraid not,” Avon vanished, Achilles took the only seat available. “Why do you ask?” the car drove downhill. “It’s a bit weird for them to not come to watch Eira,” with that in mind, Staxius drove to the mansion.

Once at their destination, all were surprised to see that the girls had left. Alyson knew of the fight but decided to not attend. Ayleth’s demeanor changed and to top it off, Adelana had ordered them to return as soon as possible. The butler in charge of said household told all that Staxius needed to know. “Thanks for all the information,” he walked away from the bowing butler. “Aren’t we going to stay the night here?” Avon asked as he sat in the driving seat. “Not really, I want to drive to the capital this instant.”

Thus, throughout the night, at around time for many to get drunk – Staxius set off. Achilles slept like a baby; her face leaned on the window that grew to be foggy. Avon rested in spirit form inside the one who drove. Fatigue ailed, but he gritted and sped through. Time was of the utmost importance – the tailor lady still had the threat of the dark-guilds.

Concurrently in Dorchester, Alyson and Ayleth arrived. Their transport left earlier that day. “This place is always lively,” her eyes filled with relief, Ayleth breathed gently. The hill atop which the castle rested was closed off. The wall was quite away from the slightly sloped hill. Plans for a harbor was made, for the ravine separating the provinces could be used as a passage for boats. They entered, the town wasn’t as noisy as the capital. However, it felt peaceful, people walked around without worry. Guards stationed here and there, the place still was in the planning process. No taxes were being taken from the inhabitants; this was to help in the construction efforts. Many skilled artisans and craftsmen took a liking for the hospitality. Dorchester slowly changed into a trading town – many came from all over to experience the rumored serenity.

Monsters didn’t threaten anyone for Fenrir was present. A need for an adventuring guild became void. Though it helped that some mysterious association helped with the extermination and protection at night. Near the foot of the hill facing Brisnet height, a small hideout got built. Per orders from Adelana, the people living there were exempted from any questioning. The ones who lived there were none other than the Merchants of death. Adelana’s trusty allies – they worked at night, dispatching of any unsightly beings in exchange for a place to hide.

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“Welcome back Ayleth,” the car drove towards the castle, banners were placed all over. Most of the inhabitants came to celebrate her return. Stood atop the castle wall, many shouted and wished her good health. It brought joy to the still weakened heart.

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“Ayleth,” the car stopped, everyone stood before the entrance. Behind, lights and the sound of people drinking. The Silver guardians, Millicent, Julius, Viola, and Fenrir, waited with a smile. “-how much have I missed you,” Adelana darted and hugged the one who returned. “I’m home,” Ayleth replied with a tear flowing. None cared about the half-burnt face – it was unrecognizable. “Ayleth,” the remainder proceeded to rush and hug in turn. “Thanks, everyone,” she smiled. Her hands always stayed near the face, Ayleth was embarrassed about how it looked. Not to mention that it ached from time to time.

“Welcome back Ayleth,” Julius spoke, the crowd around her cleared. “Thanks, Julius,” she smiled, he held a black suitcase. “With the help of everyone here, this is a present for you,” the box opened. “I can’t b-believe it,” her body felt weightless. “This makes me so happy,” the voice felt at ease. “We do apologize for giving you this out here,” Viola whispered, her face remained in a constant state of woeness. “Don’t worry about it,” she lifted her present. A mask, half that covered where she was injured. It was of a white and gold color, the eyebrows sparkled, it shone. It was made by the craftsmen and artisan from all – a collaboration. Embedded with diamonds and precious stones – it could put a crown to shame.

“What is this feeling,” Ayleth wore it, a subtle greenlight manifested. “Don’t worry about that, tis but a regeneration spell. It will help to soothe the pain and bring your face back to normal. However, said

process will take months if not years – the curse from that weapon holds steady.” Viola explained, everyone remained silent. “Thank you so much,” Ayleth’s happiness could not be contained.

The night went on with the same mood, everyone celebrated. Sat away from the main crowd, the council discussed. Normally this serious talk would have taken place the next day, but Ayleth demanded it. “I’m sorry we had to call you back home earlier than predicted.” Julius took charge of the discussion, he explained what happened during the time Alyson and Ayleth were gone.

“The town has been expanding at a comfortable pace. Monsters aren’t an issue thanks to the emerald ranked Fenrir. However, I can’t help but feel anxious. How long will you guys keep on fighting,” he voiced a sound argument, “it has been sixteen long years, and even more. Most of you have reached your thirties – I’m not saying you’re old. However, there comes a time when people have to retire,” this was brought about by Ayleth’s injury. “I know that you Silver Guardians aren’t weak, not even in the least. Sadly, it’s my job as a friend to tell you what I think.” Everyone understood the point he tried to make. “First and foremost, I wish for you all to be happy. All I want is for you to find your own calling. May it be romance, artistry and even teaching, who cares – just don’t step on the battlefield anymore. There’s no need for that, we’ve got the strongest wall to be made as our barrier – and thanks to the alliance with Arda; things are looking prosperous. I know not how Staxius managed but queen Shanna offered to send over some guards to help in defending Brisnet heights from Kreston,” he ended.

“I know what you mean,” Adelana added, “yeah we get it,” everyone else followed. “However, this doesn’t mean we’re to run off and find another path. It’s a bit late for that now, romance might have been on most of our minds. I mean, look at Ancret, she’s courting a Lord who drunkenly stumbled on our town not a few months ago,” the secret was out, “STOP IT ADELANA,” her face flushed. “Not just her, most of us here are already in relationships.” Julius’s breath cut short, everyone shyly looked down. Fenrir and Undrar didn’t look bothered, they focused on the food laid to rest on the table.

“I didn’t notice,” he added with embarrassment, “we figured as much,” Adelana winked. “Most of us aren’t lacking in the looks department,” Annet added in a friendly tone. “Yes, finding out about our private life isn’t something easy. My sisters and I are spies after all,” Ancret boasted. “Therefore, you needn’t worry – when the time comes for us to part ways, we’ll tell you, Julius. For now, let us help build a town for everyone to enjoy – it’s the last quest the Silver Guardians are to finish before retiring,” Adelana added with a smile.

“I’m grateful for you all for being honest and open with me. I feel honored that you all have accepted me,” he took a sip. “Anyways, Alyson – did you get any news about Eira’s fight, her tournament was scheduled for today wasn’t it?” Millicent asked, her drunken state turned sober. “About that, we had to leave before we had a chance to watch. But I would not worry, Staxius came to visit,” she uttered nonchalantly. “Staxius what,” Julius choked, all their stares pierced her. “Is he doing alright, we haven’t heard of master in months,” Undrar asked, her tone felt agitated. “Yes, not since the king’s day of birth,” Julius mumbled. “I think so, I don’t know – that man is always a mystery to me. I’m grateful for his visit – apparently, he paid 80,000 gold coins for Ayleth’s treatment.”

“80,000 WHAT?” the room echoed with their screams, “how the hell does he have so much money, AND WHY WOULD HE?” Questions went off like an open tap. “IS HE INSANE?” everyone added, 80,000 gold was insanity. “Did he really pay that much just for me?” Ayleth’s eyes were wide open. “Guys stop,” Alyson took a sip, “from what I understood, he felt guilty for sending us in that suicide mission – that

was his way of atoning.” It put their heart at ease knowing that somewhere out there, the guardian still watched. The one who they called master, the one who hadn’t come back – he cared.

“Hey, Julius,” a stranger called out from the crowd. “Yeah?” he answered. A strange but familiar man walked closer, “long time no see,” the one standing was none other than Piers Riverty; the princess’s husband. “Long time no see indeed,” Julius stood and hugged the man who seemed partially drunk. “I might have overheard your conversation; therefore, I apologize. However, I have something that might peak your attention.” He pulled a strange device, a phone – one more advance than they ever saw. Technology had leaped exponentially in the last five years, thanks to mages now devoted to implementing magic into everyday life.” The phone laid on the table; it showed the tournament. “Don’t ask how, but I got this sent to me earlier, I think it will be of your interest to see,” a snippet of the end. Everyone watched, “that’s our girl,” it showed the moments before her chest was pierced.

“WHAT?” the clip played the part where Eira got bested. “Impossible,” it ended, “that was Staxius wasn’t it?” they saw what happened. In the last moments of the battle, Staxius fought alongside Eira – not to mention the part where everything ended in less than a minute. “Was that even Staxius?” questions filled their mind further, “...” Viola’s face turned pale. “the thing under the cheeks, it can’t be. Did he really get bestowed with a power symbol,” she thought out loud. “-t-this m-means that lord d-death has d-decided to entrust him w-with everything,” she fell onto her knees. “Hey, are you alright?” Adelana grabbed her shoulders. “Yeah, I’m fine, just a little bit fatigued,” she stood.

“Julius, I have a favor to ask,” to which he responded with a nod. “you said that the town is going to be prosperous and that the hard bit is behind us?” she confirmed what he said prior. “Yes, I’m planning to move a part of my company here – it will help in both defense and commerce, Castle Garsley is pretty much complete.”

“In that case, I feel like my job here is accomplished. For too long have I stayed away from the one who brought me here,” she spoke with confidence. “Are you speaking about rejoining up with Staxius?” Adelana asked. “Yes,” she replied firmly.

“You are free to do what you want, I’m but a friend. In no way have I the authority to order anyone of you around,” Julius added softly. “Thank you, everyone,” her appearance changed, ‘this beating in my chest won’t go away. I need to regroup with Staxius; our pact might have been broken but I’m still the mighty bringer of death.’ Wings sprouted from her back, “I’ll see you guys soon,” it flapped.

Chapter 123: Full-Party

Through the night and through the cold, Undrar flew. Higher and faster, she flew towards the one whomst brought her upon this realm.

The party arrived, Achilles’ face drooled – very ladylike, Staxius thought. The car pulled up against an average looking hotel; tis was the middle of the night. Semi-awake, Staxius guided Achilles towards one of the rooms he booked. Thus, the exhausting day came to an end, peace and quiet. The dimly lit moon entered through the window and basked onto Staxius’s face. He didn’t care, said light gave comfort and a sense of calm. Since always, the night sky had been the refuge, the place to look when answers needed to be sought after.

A self-given task accomplished; he breathed a sigh of relief. Time resumed its course and night went on without interruption. Before dawn, a strange rumbling slightly caught him whose sleep was profound and undisturbed's attention. A feeling of nostalgia, but the fatigue from overexertion remedied the situation. Without fail, sleep caught back up.

Dawn approached; the windows opened. The morning breeze entered as a sign of courtesy. It brought about the cold; the room's temperature dropped. However, this wasn't the owner's doing, Staxius was still asleep. Blonde hair, the eyes caught a glimpse of a friend, "Undrar, is that you?" he mumbled, the fight to wake was lost. "Go back to sleep," the figure replied to which he obeyed.

The town came to life, people moved about. Doors opened, morning chatter and greetings took reign. The street underneath the rented room awoke in turn. Footsteps, kids running around, time was now eight. *Knock, knock,* the door opened, Achilles walked in for hunger had painfully brought her there. "Master," she wiped her eyes using her sleeves. "Who are you?" a feminine voice asked, she sat and rocked back and forth. "The same can be asked about you," Achilles fired back, her eyes turned from sleepy to stern. An intruder, Staxius remained oblivious.

"An adventurer," the blond-haired girl stood, "-how fascinating." Both stood a few inches apart, "an intruder, how tiring," Achilles sighed. "I'm no intruder," they remained well-mannered despite the animosity growing. The anger became palpable, "who is making all that noise," Staxius sat, the eyes adjusted to the morning light.

"Master," by surprise, Achilles dodged the girl's grasp and ran towards Staxius. "Master?" the other spoke with confusion. "Good morning, master," Avon materialized in turn, he stood right beside the ancient hero. Both formed a line that protected the half-awaken Staxius.

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"Now, now," quickly, he stretched and got-up. "No need to threat," the hands caressed both heads. "- That lady there is Undrar," the strange rumbling at night was her. Staxius sensed the unique aura – thus not getting alarmed. Many questions were asked, mainly about who the lady was. Many answers were given, though Undrar remained silent. Guilt whelmed her, she felt responsible for the death of Staxius. The death that brought about change, the death that made him far stronger, and the death that got him acquainted with the God-Slayer.

"In a nutshell, Undrar is my guardian angel. The bringer of death, a powerful dragon who looks just as innocent as a child. Don't be fooled, her job is to take the dead to the afterlife." He sighed and corrected, "-was to take people to the afterlife. However, I brought her on this plain many, many years ago," he stared, her eyes never met.

"Why does she look so sad," Avon asked. "I know not myself," Staxius replied. "I'm sorry," she mumbled, "I'm sorry for not coming to rescue you," Undrar gathered the will power necessary. "I'm sorry for being useless," her eyes squinted, "Whatever do you mean," nonchalantly, he gave her a flick to the forehead.

"B-but y-you nearly died, w-without having the chance to come b-back," the reason to why guilt whelmed, got explained. Staxius stood, arms crossed with the sunray behind. It revolved around the time where he nearly lost all the blessings and power bestowed. The time Undrar's blessing and pact got nullified. The dragon mark had lost itself, tis was but a memory now. The dragon mark had the medium

through which they connected. Sadly, said engraving was lost to the world. After that painful story, Avon and Achilles felt bad – Staxius could not but stare without emotions. He watched and studied, the eyes pierced Undrar’s soul.

“Stupid,” he sighed, “w-what?” her eyes teared up. “You heard me, I said stupid,” the stern posture eased. “-You’re stupid because you thought that a pact would suffice for us to part ways,” he grew closer to her, “Undrar, or should I say sister. You’ve done more than enough, taking care of my daughter when I selfishly imprisoned myself. Keeping my companions together, and not to mention fighting for the good of Dorchester. You and the girls did an awesome job, you took back and got revenge for my home country. I’m deeply grateful, you guys have done so much for me. Whereas, my problems, my quests, my objectives, you took it upon thy shoulder to carry them out. How benevolent can you be, I swear Undrar,” he gave her a tight hug, “I’ve missed you so much, the reason why I ran that night was all because I wanted to grow stronger. I wanted to be more useful and repay the ones who’ve taken good care of my daughter and province for so long. You’ve fought wars just to survive, every day – those regrets ail me. Sadly, I haven’t the right to cry – my job is to move forward. To pave a way for a better future, a singular death isn’t a thing. Who cares, I’m going to make a place suited for all to live peacefully, that’s my goal, my new found objective,” a tear ran down the cheek, it gleamed in the sun.

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“You’ve got it all wrong,” their hug ended, “-It’s me who’s at fault. I was unable to protect you despite being your guardian, forgive me,” she cried in turn.

“Can you guys calm it down with the tears,” Avon and Achilles stood, the emotions shown by those two had affected their minds as well. “Who cares about the past,” Avon added, “live for the present,” Achilles spoke in turn. “And most of all, relish the path that you are to carve out today for it will lead the way for future generations,” they ended in tandem.

The more than woeful reunion ended, Undrar joined back with Staxius. The party now compromised of Staxius, Undrar, Avon, and Achilles. Enough to make an adventuring party. If the need arises where another member was needed, Staxius could summon Fenrir to help out whenever required.

“Alright everyone,” Staxius stood, the atmosphere changed. “We’ve now successfully completed the second prerequisite of starting an adventuring guild. Which is that the guild in question must have three members excluding the leader,” he reached for the door. Blood sloppily dropped on the floor, Undrar formed another blood contract, once more they were connected.

“Hello?” he tried using telepathy, “hello?” she replied – it worked. “Awesome, I’ve missed this feeling of speaking without opening my mouth.”

“Well don’t get too fond of it,” whilst using telepathy, emotions could not be properly interpreted. It felt lacking as opposed to a face to face conversation. “I get it,” Staxius ended. “Here, before we leave, I’ll give you a quick summary of what has happened.”

The party climbed down the stairs, with Staxius in the middle – that crew should have looked imposing but instead, Avon looked like a child. Staxius feeble, Achilles, skinny, and Undrar with a good figure. They looked more like royalty than fighters – each one had their charm, a crew fit for fighting in the business battlefield.

The next stop was the adventuring guild, Undrar needed to be registered. “Master, we’ve got a problem.” Avon voiced. The quandary before them was the lack of space. The car could carry only two people at most. Given that he was a spirit, Avon could care less.

“Oh, its no issue,” *Snap,* Undrar transformed, her body grew smaller. It was as big as the palm, the same form from whence the first step into this realm was taken. “Aren’t you the cutest thing,” Staxius joked around, he messed with her head using the index finger. It got on her nerves to which she pulled his nose. All and all, Undrar looked like a fairy.

The party set off, the journey took a fair few minutes. Melisa looked pleased, whereas Diane looked angrier than usual. Undrar was registered – her guild card was of the same color, and the rank assigned was silver.

“Staxius Haggard,” Diane spoke out while he finished up with Undrar’s rank. “What is it?” he fired back coldly. “How is it that you acquire so many strong companions,” her face might have been peaceful, but her tone yelled of anguish and hate. “Nothing much really, it’s a simple rule. The strong attract the strong,” the reply given was purposefully boastful. It served to make her angry, but her demeanor remained stoic.

“Before you go,” Melisa called out, “why don’t you check the quest board?” it’s due to be updated in a few minutes,” she offered kindly. “I supposed it would not hurt,” he stood near and waited – the rest of the party sat and had pastries while drinking coffee.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Kill Quest: Minotaur – Tier 3]

[Kill Quest: Goblin Lair – Tier 9]

[Missing Person – Tier 10]

[Search and Rescue – Tier 7]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

Everyone flooded towards the guild assistants. Many wanted to get the right to complete one of those kill quests. A quest that is self-explanatory – on top of getting compensated, one had bragging rights and a trophy. All that accumulated into the adventurer’s profile – making him more reliable and prone to more advantages.

“Step away maggots,” a loud voice echoed, “that kill quest is ours,” four well-built guys nonchalantly pushed the adventurers aside. “Hey, move away,” the crowd grew less dense. “that’s one of infantry unit from Shark,” one of the top ten guilds. Their focus is more on the military, using guns, tactics and strategy to take down monsters. It could be seen in their attire, green with massive bags holding guns and bullets.

“Damn, they look impressive don’t they,” Avon whispered, he had jumped onto Staxius’s back. “Can’t you behave more like an adult?” Staxius blew into the ears. “Stop it, it tickles,” Avon giggled.

“Diane, we are taking the kill quest for the minotaur, make sure no one else gets in our way.” The leader voiced loudly for all to see. “This is a great opportunity to make our party’s name renowned.” Staxius calmly placed Avon and headed towards Melisa.

They saw Staxius approaching, the three others made a barrier. It prevented access to the assistants. “Excuse me,” Staxius slipped right through, the others were left baffled.

“H-how m-may I help you?” Melisa smiled, her voice trembled, that adventuring crew looked menacing. “Hey there Melisa,” Staxius spoke, the leader looked down and growled. “I’d like to take the minotaur kill quest if you would be so kind,” he asked in a formal way, it got the other’s attention.

“Does he have a death wish?” whispers filled the silent room, “that’s Staxius for you,” Undrar calmly sipped coffee.

“Hey maggot, didn’t you hear that we said that quest was ours?” the leader’s animosity grew. “I’d refrain from using the nickname maggot, it’s a bit disrespectful. Most importantly,” he turned and stared up, “the guild has a policy that quest is for all to sign up for.” The leader laughed -“you need at least bronze to take that quest,” he boasted, “a weakling like you doesn’t have the strength to undertake said challenge.” Going from how Staxius appeared, the man was right, he did look like a weakling. Not skinny but a lean body, though it didn’t show as much. “Therefore, I’ll spare you the embarrassment,” he tried pushing Staxius away. “Please get your hands off me, I didn’t give you permission to touch me,” he didn’t budge.

“No fighting allowed,” Diane spoke, “here’s the quest form. Fill it and leave, the first to complete shall get the reward.” For once Diane did something nice. However, it wasn’t to help but to stop any conflict from growing out of control.

“Tsk,” Shark left, “a bit unnecessary,” Diane voiced, “it’s all good. Have you forgotten who I am?” he winked.

Chapter 124: First Quest

“Welcome back,” the crew gently whispered. Staxius took a seat and sat, the coffee he had ordered prior grew cold. “Damn it,” he voiced the anguish. “Are you sure it was wise to go pick a fight with those guys?” Avon asked. The whole guild watched his every move, though reluctant to stand out, today was different. From the first to the ground floor, people wondered who that man was. Someone courageous or reckless enough to go head to head against one of the top ten guilds. However, that infantry was but a portion and a sliver of the real thing’s strength. More like pawns in this game of chess.

“No need to worry, we had to get people’s attention. This is to help with the fourth prerequisite. Any endorsement though not required by other guilds will greatly boost your chance of being accepted,” the cold cup of coffee finished, Staxius explained what he hoped to achieve.

A long way laid before him and the party, a very steep slope to climb. “Enjoy whatever food you want, we are headed out after this,” *cling,* the guild necklace was dropped onto the glass table. “Undrar,

wear that and keep your guild card with you at all times.” He stood and headed to officially accept the quest.

“Melisa, I’m here for the quest, are the papers ready?” The assistants were given room to breathe. Most of the adventurers left, “give me a moment,” she asked while stumbling through her work. Papers flew all over, she desperately looked for said quest. “Here,” Diane reluctantly slid one of the applications over the counter. “Thanks for the assist,” Staxius winked, he acted smug just to infuriate her.

“Ok here,” she cleared her throat, “I’ll read out the information we have.” Staxius took a step back and waited eagerly. “Kill Quest: Minotaur, request by an unnamed noble. A beast that seems to fit the description of one of the higher tier monsters has been reported north-west from the capital. No correct information about its hunting ground has been given. The beast was spotted prowling around the lord’s estate – within Winterpar. Not only that, the reason the quest has been given such a rank is due to the hordes of other monsters. They seem to be working together with the minotaur, nothing else can be said. The reward for the extermination is about 550 gold. A bit on the cheap side, but that’s how much the beast is worth,” she finished and waited.

“That’s a lot of money for killing a beast,” he smiled, the necessary details were filled.

“Alright everyone,” the paper got slammed onto the table, “we’ve got our the first quest. I do understand that it’s cheap and for a tier 3 quest – it’s unworthy. However, the objective isn’t money but reputation. We need to make our name renowned; people should learn to fear and also depend on our services. Thus, I, Staxius Haggard, formally named our group, Kniq,” a bit unorthodox but it sufficed.

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“Sounds decent,” the crew stood, “let’s head out,” Staxius ordered, Avon vanished, Undrar turned into a fairy, the car started.

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The drive wasn’t rough, not till they reached outside the capital. The road that led towards the lord’s mansion still hadn’t been fully built. The scenery changed, the forest and small hills became more apparent. It showed how diverse Hidros truly was. Thanks to that unstable nature, the journey took longer than expected.

“Look, the mansion,” Avon pointed. Hidden by a white wall, only the upper floors were seen. “Can people be any richer,” he gnarled. “Eyes on the road,” Staxius ordered. They approached slowly; Shark’s infantry was already on the premise. “They arrived far quicker than us,” Achilles stated the obvious. The gates were wide open, trucks were seen parked inside. The Lord spoke and laughed with the same buffed adventurers. “Definitely the place,” Undrar added.

“No time to waste then,” the car headed straight inside. The expression on the noble’s face was laughable at best. The vehicle which parked itself inside was as expensive, if not more than the house. “W-who i-is that?” the middle-aged looking man mumbled, the adventurers tried to reassure him. “Alright,” Staxius exited.

“It’s an honor to meet the lord of this mansion,” he spoke courteously and gently bowed. “The pleasure is all mine,” the lord fired back, the tone regained its dignified tone. “Pardon the sudden intrusion, but

we are here on guild business,” Staxius continued. “You mean the minotaur?” he asked to which Staxius replied with a nod. “If it’s information you want, I’m afraid I have none. Maybe you should ask these gentlemen here,” the lord politely offered – Shark had already probed him with a plethora of questions. It showed on the face, the man was tired beyond belief. “I think you misunderstand,” Staxius’s voice calmed the stressed-out noble. “We’ve come just to acquaint ourselves with the one who put up said quest.” Without any further explanation, the party left on foot.

“Hey big brother, that guy gives me the chills.” One of the big four-spoke, “shut up Carlie, now isn’t the time to get scared.” The elder calmed down the others. The four of them were brothers, born and raised by Shark – for the sole purpose of fighting in the military. “We shall leave as well,” they saluted and left. From elder to youngest, as displayed on their badges; Dickie, Gervis, Jasper, and Charlie.

They as well set off on foot, both parties separated. One headed towards the west while the other towards the east. Their path didn’t cross as the trip went deeper inside the forest. Ambush became commonplace, Shark’s party found it hard adjusting to the terrain. Their movement suffered a loss as opposed to Kniq who walked as if on the grass.

Being a spirit, Avon changed into an ethereal form. Undrar served as an overview of the surrounding, she flew above the forest. Achilles watched the flank while Staxius faced forward. Basically, Avon became support, Undrar surveillance, and the remaining fighters. Carefully, they traversed the forest, from ravines to rivers, no sign of any minotaur was felt.

“Are you sure the beast still resides here?” Undrar spoke through telepathy, “also, a snake on your left.” *Slash,* without looking, the ambushing monster got killed in a heartbeat. Undrar became his third eye, “I don’t know. Maybe yes and maybe no. Tier three does worry me, we should be on guard at all times. So do refrain from idle chitchat, not till we’re out of this dense forest.” Staxius answered.

“As you wish, there’s a clearing a few meters towards the left, a good resting place.” Promptly, they arrived. The ground felt flat and out of shape. The trees bristled, the wind changed, the aura grew darker. “Do you feel it?” Staxius asked; Achilles placed her back against his. “Yes, I sense it, something bad lurks around here.”

“Avon, use shadow magic and set a trap. Anything, just a spell to reduce movement, place it on our blindsides,” Staxius ordered softly. “Here they come,” Undrar yelled, she flew and saw what approached. “Get ready,” as predicted, monsters hidden in darkness and of unknown origin pounced. They targetted blindsides – thus the trap activated. “Move out,” without much effort, Staxius walked at a normal pace and slew the trapped beasts. “Bulls,” he wondered while the bloodthirsty monsters died one by one.

“Man I feel bad for them,” Avon stood in the middle, he used enhancement on Achilles and Staxius. Underestimating the monsters would be a mistake, “Master, this is boring,” the ancient hero complained, the fight felt dull. “Yeah, I agree,” Staxius pouted.

Bang, Bang, Bang, loud gunshots rattled the fairly peaceful surroundings. Birds flew, the trees cried. Instantly, Undrar flew to check what had happened. Another level plain, free from trees and plants. Shark’s party stood, each faced a direction – it looked like they were backed in a corner. The guns went off without care for anything.

“Brother, it’s the minotaur,” Gervis crouched and took aim. He fired at anything that moved, the forest served as a thick cover. A layer behind which hid something awful. “I’ll blow bull into pieces,” Jasper threw grenades. Part of the foliage got blown off but at the risk of attracting other creatures. Dickie stood and waited, assault rifle in hand, eyes down the sight. The ears tracked the movement with the other brothers creating havoc and distractions.

“This is bad,” Undrar caught Staxius’s attention. The monsters were attracted to the sound. “Look they’re retreating,” Achilles mumbled in a dead-tone, her face looked bored. “All that noise and still no minotaur,” Staxius stopped and thought, “why haven’t we seen this beast yet.” Just as the sword sheathed, *Slash,* the sound of trees breaking followed suit.

“MASTER,” Avon yelled, none sensed nor saw it. The minotaur ambushed Staxius and slice the back open using a giant battleax. “WHERE IS IT?” the beast was invisible, “damn, caught off-guard,” he coughed violently. As luck would have it, Avon’s scream reached Undrar who rushed as soon as possible.

Though invisible, the beast attacked mercilessly. Not at Staxius but Achilles who stood without a care in the world. All the attacks returned towards the sender, strike after strike, blood seemed to float. “Interesting,” she crouched, the onslaught continued and the body manifested. It got covered in blood, half the shape of a human and half the shape of a bull. The eyes burnt brightly, “master, are you ok?” Avon asked. “Calm down,” Staxius stood, the wound healed. “I understand why the quest was tier three.”

Alongside Undrar, Shark’s party followed the sound of the scream. They witnessed everything from start to finish without saying a word. *Clang, Clang,* now that the figure was visible, Achilles fought. She blocked and parried most of the attack, her feet remained stuck in place. “At least look like you’re having fun,” Staxius shouted, the minotaur was but an ant to them. “It’s boring,” she added nonchalantly. “Just play with it for a few more minutes,” out from the back pocket, Staxius took out the notebook and wrote. Description of the beast was given, weakness, “Avon use earth magic,” he ordered. It substantially lowered the bull’s resistance. “Nearly done,” the last stroke ended. “Kill it,” he ordered, “with pleasure,” she smiled, a single swing – invisible to most man; the bull dropped.

“Who the heck are those guys,” the brothers shook with fear. Fear from not the monsters but that party.

“Keep the head as a trophy, the body is going to vanish soon. Everyone, pick up the Qaisars. Loot was dropped, mainly copper coins with the exception of five silvers from that beast. “I expected as much,” Staxius spoke. “Care to explain?” Undrar asked. “This minotaur is but a low-tier monster. The guild was misinformed, if it was a beast truly of a tier-three ranking then a gold coin would have been expected. However, judging by the coins here, it’s but common and useless. Anything, pack it all up – we’re headed out.”

From the path carved out initially, the party returned. “Also, you who hides in the forest. It would be wise to leave as soon as possible; monsters might soon flock the area,” he knew they hid, their presence too predictable.

“Man, that wasn’t entertaining,” Achilles complained about the lackluster fight. “Yeah, I agree, but on the bright side; we’ll get some recognition,” he added with a reassured tone. “Undrar, what do you think about this. The quest feels a bit out of order, and the monster was very unbecoming tier-three.”

Telepathy was used once more. “I agree, that nobleman’s house feels eerier. Not to mention the look on the face when we approached. I’d assume it was due to the car but that doesn’t sit right.”

“Maybe we’ll have someone snoop around,” he thought out loud, “snoop around what?” Avon asked curious about the sudden speech. “Nothing much, Undrar and I were discussing how that quest felt weird. Tier three should not be this easy.” Before reaching the car, the situation was told to all the party members.

“If that’s the case, then let me be the spy,” Avon proposed. “I’m virtually undetected – not to mention that I can instantly travel back to master,” the eyes sparkled once more, he threw the peace sign and winked. “Sounds like a good plan.” Staxius agreed, everyone else nodded. “In that case, Avon, please go investigate that mansion. However, come back before six, I don’t want anyone to stay out later than needed.”

The mansion came into view, the lord wasn’t seen anywhere. A window on the second floor had a small opening, the curtains were slightly lifted as opposed to the rest. “We’re being watched,” he whispered.

Chapter 125: Secrets

“Then leave it to me,” as invisible as water, Avon dashed out. “We better leave,” Staxius spoke lightly, everyone acted as if nothing happened. Thus, the first official quest to be ever completed came to a close. The party headed into the capital.

“What did master get so scared about,” Avon wondered, time was about two in the evening. He walked around the enormous mansion. Opening doors didn’t become an issue for he only but walked through the walls. It came as a surprise when the adventurers arrived conveniently after Knig left. Being curious as well as loving to spy on others, Avon boldly walked in front of the conversation. It turned to be an amusement when none could see where one was.

“Welcome back,” the lord greeted with the palms rubbing against one another. “thank you sire,” the party saluted. “No need to be formal,” the lord interrupted, “-we’ve organized a small feast for thy entertainment,” he gave out a smile that could send shivers down anyone’s spine. ‘Can’t they see that this lord is shady as hell,’ Avon bit the lips in frustration. Why would somebody trust anyone so openly, questions filled the thoughts yet no answers were found.

“Follow me this way, gentlemen,” the demeanor changed to one of authority and power. The lord walked; each step echoed down the endless hall. “Are you sure this is wise brother?” Jasper asked to which the elder replied, “who is to pass on a feast organized by a noble. Do you realize how much good food might present itself to our stomachs?” the mouth visibly watered, the guy was a glutton at heart. Hearing his fantasies about the possible dishes, the others gave in and followed. Not to mention the scent, it smelled like heaven on a plate.

“Thank you for the food,” the adventurers ate, Avon watched, the stomach screamed but he stood. The eyes firmly laid on the lord; he was too sketchy. Nevertheless, a faint muffle caught his ear, it came from below the floor. Normally, none would have heard it, however, Avon wasn’t human. ‘Interesting,’ after a few minutes of walking through walls and doors in hopes of finding a secret passage; he found what he wanted. A door, hidden behind a bookcase, cliché at its peak – to that he let a small chuckle. “One step

for man, one giant leap for..." he stepped through, screams broke the speech. It echoed; the door had successfully blocked out any sound. "Another sadist lord, how lovely," slowly, Avon advanced.

The staircase headed down, it went on and on and on, without end. Avon grew suspicious; to which the discovery of an illusion spell was found. *Snap,* the fake world, a mirror that reflected the stair. This made anyone who dared enter feel like they walked for eternity. "Simple yet effective, good job," he complimented out of jest.

A dark room, multiple cages with the door firmly locked. Eyes that looked perpetually saddened and in pain, the screams came from the ones who were laid to rest partially half-dead. The bodies cried in agony, the lord wasn't simply a sadist, but a murderer. The room reeked of rotten corpses – blood and iron, nothing could be distinguished. As Avon came closer, peculiar necklaces were discovered. Porcelain up to Steel, the cages were littered with those small trinkets. "Is this where all those adventurers went missing?" the eyes turned to disgust. Before anything could be done, a trapdoor opened. Four loud impact sound resounded – the unconscious body of Shark's party.

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'I wish I could do something,' he wondered. "hey you," a feminine voice reached out and startled the still invisible Avon. "Me?" he pointed to himself and asked. "Yes, you," the girl replied firmly, "I won't ask how you can see me, however, I'm all ears," he walked through the caged door and sat. "I was just wondering how you discovered this place," a black hood covered the head. "Sent on orders to investigate, what's the story with you. What's this place?"

She took a seat right beside and spoke, "do you really wish to know the story?" Avon nodded.

"Before we begin, I'd like to show you something," the hood got pulled away, her identity was revealed. "-I'm not human, I'm from Arda – my name..." she shook her head and decided to forgo that information, Avon didn't care. The one who sat before him was unique – a fox-eared girl, revered as a god by some, the God of harvest.

"I can see the look in thine eyes, tis the eyes of a man who thinks I'm a god. Sadly, it cannot be farther from the truth – I'm but a fox-eared demi-human. Nothing more, nothing less, a puny demi," she knew what he thought, Avon's eyes filled with admiration.

"Anyways," her tone changed to more casual, "-I was initially sold as property for many years. From owner to owner, till I grew sick and a slave-trader took me in. There I was sent to brothels and sold as human's plaything. Many tried to have their way but their death made me unattainable. I was tortured for killing their customers, I didn't mind the pain. However, not until recently I was bought by the owner of this mansion. A sadist by heart as you've seen the corpses. Though he didn't treat me anything remotely close to that. I got given food, stale but food. No torture just told to be naked when he walks in. Not even an attempt to lay his hands on me. The man was scared, scared of my curse – though fiction but partly true. From the months I've lived here, I've seen the things that man does. He lures just about anyone to then kill them slowly. The preferred method is strangulation. Though, the prey as he called them died too quickly. A change was brought, he decided to lure adventurers. The first one to succumb and fall prey was a boy – ranked fairly low. The resistance shown was worthy of being called a hero –

though weak and feeble. The boy didn't give, he stood fast and took all the abuse. The lord had him for a few weeks till the boy's body gave,' she paused, Avon took all in. Their conversation went for hours on end – the more she spoke, the more information he got.

Minutes turned into hours, Avon really took a liking to that girl. She had a weird charm about her, not to mention the supposed curse. They spoke on and on.

Staxius arrived at the guild with a stern face. The trophy was placed onto the counter, "congratulations," Melisa tried to cheer but Staxius refused. "No, I don't want any cheers." The few people who had visited were perplexed. The man completed a tier-three quest and not an ounce of happiness could be seen. "Are you that obnoxious?" Diane walked closer to Melisa, "-can't you just accept things at face value," she sighed.

"I'm angry, and there's a good reason for that," he paused and stared. "that quest was anything but tier-three, the coins dropped were but copper and a little bit a silver. Do you think that is enough for a high-level beast?" he voiced his concern.

"I guess the payout of 550 gold is a bit less for tier-three," Melisa gave into his authority. "Well anyways, a job is a job," he coughed. "Thanks for your service," she placed the reward to which Staxius took without a second thought. "One more thing, I'm doing my own investigation on this matter. If anything comes up, please contact me, I shall be staying at Zer's Dorm for the time being," they left.

"Everyone," he stopped, "-you're free to do whatever. Go take a bath, relax and have some food; I'll look around town for a place to set-up shop. We need more income, adventuring quest won't cut it," the realization that doing errands all day won't get as much money as selling scrolls. Having nothing else to do, Undrar remained in fairy form and sat on the shoulder. "Master, I shall accompany you," Achilles didn't want to leave.

Hence, the crew walked around town, the search for a shop got interrupted by many distractions. Mainly Achilles running off after thieves she sensed in the back-alleys. Her nature as a good-willed individual didn't diminish one bit. What Staxius saw wasn't a girl, but a hero – a true one. He saw it all, the thirst for justice. Her forgiving nature, she walked with her head held up high. No regrets, no doubt, her actions were pure and simple. The small display of heroism here and there gained her a quaint little reputation.

During their stroll, the tallest building to ever be made was spotted. The headquarters for any and all guilds, Staxius looked but the roof wasn't in sight. Questions about its true nature were hard to pass up, thus he walked in with the aura of someone reputable. A quick chat revealed that the upper floors, about five of them were already sold. The top guilds were quick to give in, a symbol of power. However, the farthest upper floor had a price tag as hefty as a block of mansions. It reached into the eight digits, a fortune. In the face of that, he left with a massive grin on the face. That much money was dreams for many, however, this lit a fire.

What better way to establish one's position than acquiring the unattainable. "Achilles, Undrar, we have to start our business soon. That top floor will be ours one day, however, the start will be small. Not to threat, I've got plans and ideas," he smiled – the person in mind was the wizard in the magical guild. Getting 50,000,000 gold wasn't going to be easy, an insurmountable obstacle.

“Are you insane?” Undrar yelled, “that much money just for a place to call our headquarters. We could make a fortress covered with protection magic and hire the best of the best and sustain them for more than ten-years. Do you really wish to tell me that you plan to buy that thing?” her heart sank, “-that much money could turn Dorchester into a better town, “-are you listening to me?” she argued.

“I hear what you say, I’m not that foolish. That price tag is far superior than anything we can ever imagine. However, I truly don’t think it’s that hard. Imagine a healing scroll with a relic quality. Basically, a resurrection spell for anyone in whatever epoch. Do you know how much that would sell for? It’s priceless; not individuals, but kingdoms and countries would fight over to attain it. Do you understand, I have the possibility to make a national treasure.” When put that way, the prospect became feasible, though the stance remained defensive.

“I don’t think you have the skill required to make a relic level scroll,” Undrar gave her truest thoughts. “What you say is true, I lack the knowledge. However, that can be remedied with a small visit to Lord death’s realm now wouldn’t it,” he winked.

“No, you are definitely not going there again. Do what you want, I’m not taking your sorry ass back into that place again.” She remained adamant and defiant. “Ha-ha-ha,” he laughed out loud, this was the first he heard her cuss and speak rudely. “Very ladylike,” he teased, however, she remained firm.

“What you say is preposterous,” he breathed, “who am I again?” he asked; her eyes rolled. “The heir to the god of death,” she sighed heavily, “still, I’m not taking you there,” her lips pouted. “Are you worried that I’ll stay there and leave you alone once more?” he knew what she felt. History repeated itself, she didn’t want to be any part in him leaving behind all the things he had worked for.

“Fine,” he gave, “I’ll make do with what is available here. With one condition, you are to head into that realm in my stead and get a list of all the books they have. I care not if tis against the law for I’m the next ruler. That knowledge is rightfully mine – I hope you understand what I mean.” The voice turned serious.

“Point taken,” they came to an agreement.

Chapter 126: Jimmy’s Stuff

“No luck,” it came to a close as dust set in. “We better head back,” Staxius voiced, Achilles and Undrar were glued to a small shop’s window. *Jimmy’s Stuff,* the sign vaguely read. It had grown old with the letter S in Stuff practically falling off.

‘Original,’ he thought as the girls’ stare never left. Staxius stood across the street, in a weird part of town. The atmosphere felt ever so dull and boring – people walked by at infrequent intervals. Most looked dead on the inside, some wore nice clothes but had the face of a zombie. “Staxius,” Undrar waved, despite her petite appearance – the voice reached. “Come over here,” the yells continued for he was preoccupied with watching the onlookers.

“What is it,” he asked, they continued to stare deep inside. A small build with no first floor. Amidst the other buildings to which their highest floor reached around three – it felt out of place. An ant amidst giants, the door made of old rotten wood. The walls and windows covered with moss. Skid marks were the only way to look inside. The handprints were fresh as the culprit stood beside Staxius. Her hands filthy, “Master, don’t you think this would be a good place?” Achilles asked while using hands to gesture.

“For a temporary place to set-up shop, fits the narrative pretty well. However, I doubt we’ll have any luck with customers as the current owner.” Staxius spoke, a good assessment for the door was locked and seemed to not have been open for weeks if not months.

Despite this, Staxius continued to examine every aspect of the building. The structure looked stable – it had space between the other buildings. Making a sort of alleyway into the other more popular and noisier street. A place where many came out an ate, affordable and comforting – many drunkards hung, some going as far as one sleeping in the trash. The investigation didn’t end for he circled the whole building. Walking in the alleys, looking for things that seemed out of place. “Pretty impressive,” the trip around back-ended. “What’s your verdict?” Achilles asked – curiosity ate from the inside. Said shop was of her own finding, normally unnoticed, the feeling it gave caught her eye.

“I like it, however, there’s no notice about this place getting sold. It’s just abandoned, we can’t walk in and become the owner – I’ll have to snoop around for a bit. You guys better head to the hotel, I’ll join up later,” the face remained fixed on the building’s door.

“As you wish,” Undrar changed into human form, “-I’ll take Achilles, a visit to the bathhouse might prove useful, that concept remained a mystery to me until yesterday,” her hands reached for Achilles’s arm. “A bathhouse, don’t you have bathrooms already?” he asked in a monotonous manner. “I just think it’s going to be fun,” a smile shone, they left.

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‘Peace and quiet,’ their footsteps grew farther away till it disappeared within the shadows. ‘Alright,’ he sighed, ‘-time to hit up the bars and taverns.’ The time now said five, Staxius walked and watched. Slowly, conversations were made with the locals. For an outsider to ask questions and prowl around in this relatively secretive and reserve part of town, red flags would have been raised. Nonetheless, that prospect didn’t deter the quest for information. The casual and friendly nature made it seem fluid, he spoke to many without their realizing. The perfect grey man, someone who blends into the crowd and surroundings. No attention was drawn, for one hour or so, he walked and drank. Bar after bar, drinks were offered and got offered. The way to an alcoholic’s heart was through the mouth with alcohol as a medium.

‘Oh boy,’ the stance wobbled, an unsteady footing, shaky vision. The world felt as if it went round and round. ‘I’m drunk, I can’t believe it,’ he choked. For about an hour, he drank so much that it would have put a dwarf to shame. Information was scarce about the proprietor of Jimmy’s Stuff. Despite this, the search continued, from middle-aged men to thieves, hoodlums, members of the many secretive organizations, it ended. A young bartender quelled the drunk Staxius.

“If it’s information about Jimmy is what you need, then you’ve come to the right place.’ He spoke, the voice friendly and inviting, a definite lady-killer. Dark-brown hair, dreamy eyes, a face that people would kill to have and the aura of someone dignified. “He’s sitting right over there,” the fingers pointed to a man wearing a top hat. “-watch out, that man is a bit of a weirdo for what the rumor says,” the boy went back to cleaning glasses. “Thank you,” barely conscious at this point, Staxius managed to get it back together and focus on the task at hand.

“Excuse me,” Staxius spoke, the voice stern and formal. “Yes?” the man replied, he turned to reveal a small girl sitting beside. “May I have a word?” the attention remained on the possible owner. “Sure, go ahead and take a seat,” the voice remained friendly, to which he accepted.

The girl beside the top hat shyly looked at and away from Staxius. The latter only but replied with a casual smile, “how may I be of help?” the man asked. “Pardon my intrusion, but I have to ask,” deep breath in, “-are you the owner of a shop named Jimmy’s Stuff?” The eyes stared sharply, he wanted to know more. “Yes, and what of it?” the tone changed to subtly anxious.

“Great,” Staxius sighed, “I was wondering if you had plans on selling the building. It looks old and run-down; I figured it abandoned but my gut told otherwise. Therefore, I’ve been looking,” the intention was made clear, the man breathed a sigh of relief.

“I haven’t thought of selling the place yet, however, it all depends on how much you’re willing to give,” the eyes changed into one shady, greed filled the tone. “I’m willing to pay as much as 500 gold,” Staxius replied. “It’s a bit cheap, how about 1500,” the man fired back. “That’s way too expensive, how about 750,” the man took a pause and thought. “775 and it’s a deal.”

Staxius waited, “come on, 770 and I’ll buy you a drink,” he offered. “Fine, I accept 770 and a drink,” the man gave in, the hunt for a place to set-up shop ended. “Come by tomorrow morning, I’ll have the paperwork ready, meet me at the guild – they’ll go through the whole process there,” a drink was bought. The time indicated six, “I’d better head out, a pleasure doing business.”

“Pleasure was all mine,” the man spoke as he walked by.

As ordered by Staxius, Avon vanished. The fox-eared girl pulled her hood back over the head. “I’ll do whatever I can to help and avenge the people who’ve died to the hands of that murderous bastard.” Those were the parting words, the girl replied with a smile.

“Master, we’ve got trouble,” just outside the bar, Avon manifested. “Yes, big problems,” the alcohol grew too much to keep control. *Ouff,* He caught the drunken mess. “Been having fun I see,” subconsciously, he placed Staxius’s arm around his shoulder and headed for the hotel.

Meanwhile at the mansion, “finally, some new meat to play with.” Heavy footsteps approached, “filthy fox,” he spat, “-why the hell are you still clothed. I need you to undress and witness the art I’m about to create. You better sing-along, otherwise the next to fall is you.” She nodded. The first one to be placed onto the table was Charlie. The others were blacked out, “and it begins,” she sighed with her hands moving on their own. The lord played around with the now conscious Charlie, each time blood spilled, it was thrown onto the fox. “Moan louder,” he yelled, to which she obeyed. Night set in, not that she cared for sunlight never reached down there.

“Let me help you,” Achilles rushed over. She helped carry Staxius who they met on the way back. “He’s truly drunk,” Undrar spoke, her voice felt childish. “First time I’ve seen him drunk,” Avon replied to which Achilles chuckled.

“Well let’s hope tomorrow is a better day,” the hotel came in sight. Average at best, the place didn’t stand out. People came and went, mainly the locals and not to mention the more than affordable price tag. 50 copper per night and per person.

The day came to an end. The first quest completed, slowly, the town went quiet. The night took its reign, the moon shone but slightly for the clouds hid its reach. Adventurers walked; the soldiers made rounds. Everyone remained on alert; the murderer still hadn't been found.

"My head," Staxius mumbled, nightmares haunted him ever since the symbol got engraved. The dreams about someones else life grew to be more than just dreams. The pain, the suffering, the regret, everything was experienced. The memories from Daemonum Gladio, the sword fit to be wielded by a god of death. It haunted him again without fail, every waking instant, the headache never stopped. It hadn't fully implemented itself yet, the symbol took time to finally rest. Thus, with many things changing within the subconscious, Staxius gritted his way into tomorrow.

Plaustan's unusually lack of activity made the guards anxious. Totrya's demeanor never changed. The beasts became smarter with each fight. From dying with a single blow to now dodging and ultimately strategizing. They adapted their way of fighting; each death meant more knowledge. The monsters evolved beyond what normal people could face. With each death, monsters weren't the only one who grew, adventurers also gained skill and power. The balance never shifted, not until a beast named Gritt began an onslaught.

The report said of it having the power to manipulate Earth magic, impervious to physical damage – not knowing said information, many lost their lives. It reeked havoc not in Plaustan, but near the border of Oxshield and Arda. Far away from the soldiers and adventurers, free to roam the villages. Small relative town, a place where rich merchants and traders lived. A place filled with meadows of flowers that stretched beyond the eyes could see. A place called paradise by many, somewhere renowned for its peace and quiet. A few lower-ranked individual guilds had used said town as headquarters. However, the beast named Gritt changed everything.

A slaughter of foolish porcelain ranks looking for fame and glory. The town wall stood true, it helped with preventing the beast from advancing. Every night was hell, the constant banging, the sound of walls breaking. Gritt's appeared unpredictably, none knew when it would strike. The central guild stayed in the dark about said incident. None tried to reach for they thought the other guilds had asked for back-up.

"It's here," Gritt appeared on said night, the body semi-transparent. Dirt, soil and small pebbles levitated above its head. A glance was sufficient for a person to die. Each one it looked on died by a small rock. Pathetic at first, however, said rock was as fast if not faster than a bullet. Barriers were enough to stop that attack however the unlucky ones who didn't have a spellcaster in their crew were but helpless sheep. Despite being able to use magic at will, some adventurers didn't have the barrier skill yet, and sheep's they were. Ones who stood before a wolf, their screams echoed throughout the night.

"Contact the main guild," *cling, cling,* the peddles were blocked. A few courageous Porcelain halted Gritt's advancement. "Ask for back-up, this monster is more than us tier ten can take. The inhabitants are in danger, please, someone, just go inform the main guild." *Crack,* the barrier's broke, "run," bodies fell. "This isn't how I die," rage boiled from within, a young-looking man rushed out onto the battlefield. Masterfully, he stopped the rampage, armed with only a gun – Gritt stopped. "I'll buy you time, just retreat," the frequency of the bullets increased, the ground beneath the monster rose. The

gunshots stopped, it vanished. “Not today,” the young adult sighed, “-my eyes hurt,” he fell, tears of blood ran down the cheeks.

“Are you ok?” the remainder rushed; healing spells were used. “Thanks for the help,” he mumbled.

Chapter 127: Masked Murderer

A new dawn, a new day, Hidros awoke mildly to cold weather. Last night’s attack led by Gritt had greatly affected how people thought. All were scared to get out of bed – though none had ever seen the beast themselves, just the image sufficed. Kids were told to stay at home. Many threw tantrums but were easily persuaded by toys and such.

Far too many corpses of porcelain ranked youngsters were covered by cloth, carried on stretchers to the headquarters of one of the smaller guilds. Namely, Swift, a relatively small band of friends, a guild who’s loved and trusted by many. Their leader, Justin was very charismatic and popular – this greatly influenced how people viewed them.

“Over here,” somebody spoke, “right away,” another replied. Rough as it might have seemed, the bodies were taken inside. “Please, this way,” Justin, a middle-aged man dawned in steel armor, greyish hair, and stern face led all who came. “Please, keep our dead comrades here,” the main entrance led into the main hall in which rested lines after lines of old friends.

Tears were shed behind closed doors, screams of agony, yelps, frustration – the atmosphere felt hellish. Justin and the two other guild leaders were forced to stop all their activities. This became too much for the lower guilds to handle, a messenger was sent away. “Alright everyone,” said hall grew jammed pack with other guild members.

The loud and charismatic voice of Justin made all envious. The grievous state substituted for one of curiosity, hearing the relatively popular leader yell – garnered their collective attention.

“I know that many, if not all of you have lost someone precious,” from behind, the other two leaders approached. “-and I’m not here to say stop and hold in thine tears. That isn’t human, cry, lash out, do what is needed – but let the pain out. Thinking about vengeance is the worst thing we can do, revenge clouds one’s judgment. Therefore, to stop any more bodies from piling up – the other leaders and I have decided to stop all our current jobs. Tier-eight and lower are to stay indoors. Yes, this is harsh, many youngsters want fame and glory and someday that opportunity will present itself. However, today, the appearance of this beast named Gritt isn’t to be trifled with. A special band of warriors, the best from each guild will be the ones who take the brunt force of the invaders. Newbies, rest assure and keep your head cool. The townfolks are just as scared, seeing familiar faces doing rounds should take that anxiety away. On that, I’d like for us to pay respect to the fallen ones.” Immediately, right hands rested on each chest, the eyes closed – a pin drop silence followed.

One by one, many left, some stay to watch over the deceased. Guild necklaces, guild cards of the fallen were taken into custody. The guild leaders held onto them; a death count was to be sent to the main branch.

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“A good speech,” one of the leaders spoke, “I must say, that charisma of yours never ceases to amaze,” the other replied. “Stop with the jests,” Justin added in a casual tone, “I just hope that the newbies don’t take it to heart. Vengeance can be a powerful ally and an even more powerful enemy depending on the individual,” his right hand caressed the scar underneath the right eye. “Back-up should arrive in four days,” one added to which the others watched silently as the members sobbed.

“Wake up,” a warm touch swayed the face. “Five more minutes,” half-asleep, he replied, not an ounce of want to wake. “Don’t you have something important to do?” a soft voice asked. “Oh damn,” Staxius’s slumber broke. He sat upright and rushed over to the bathroom. The sound of puking followed, “that’s what you get for drinking for too long,” Undrar added in jest. “It was necessary,” the puking continued.

“Master,” the door flung opened, Avon and Achilles stood with supplies in bags. “We’ve brought over food and beverages,” as they stepped inside, Staxius walked out the bathroom. “Thanks,” he smiled but the face remained tired and beaten. “Who would have known alcohol could bring down the immortal Staxius,” Undrar added once more in jest, “Shut it,” he gritted and laughed.

Everyone sat around on a circular rug. The drinks were laid in the center, they spoke and laughed. Staxius’s body slowly recovered, the hangover disappeared faster than predicted. “On the subject of money,” Staxius added, “I’ve secured the deal to the shop Achilles found,” he took a sip. “Really?” She asked eager to know more. “Yes, I’ll head for the central guild in an instant,” the drink ended, he stood. “Avon, can you keep an eye on Achilles?” he asked to which Avon replied with, “no, master, I’ve got information that might prove to be useful. The gut feeling was right, that mansion truly is vile and decrepit.” Following that, the whole situation about the fox, the murders and porcelain badges got told.

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“Very well,” he thought, “I wonder if that man is the same murderer. We can’t rule out the possibility of two or more bloodthirsty freaks,” he paused, everyone stared at him in a different manner. “Doesn’t he realize that the same could be said to him as well?” Avon whispered, “so I’m a bloodthirsty freak?” it caught his ears. “I-I’m sorry,” Avon apologized. “I digress, worry not.” Avon’s heartfelt at ease. “Nevertheless, we need more information, if that noble is truly the murderer, we can’t just walk in and launch an attack. I’ll have to check with the guild,” the door opened. “You guys take care,” Undrar followed close in fairy form.

Not knowing what to do, the rest followed Staxius. He grew aware of the presence and told both to approach. The party headed to the main guild, the place packed – time was for the announcement of the new quests. The notice board was lowered once more –

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Kill Quest: Minotaur – Tier 3(Completed)]

[Kill Quest: Goblin Lair – Tier 9(Completed)]

[Missing Person – Tier 10]

[Search and Rescue – Tier 7(Completed)]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

In an instant, the completed quest vanished and gave way for more,

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Missing Adventuring Party – Tier 9]

[Missing Person – Tier 10]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

[Kill Quest: Goblins – Tier 10]

[Kill Quest: Hob Goblins – Tier 9]

As always, the rush for information began. Staxius's party sipped coffee while the chaos died down. "Goblins, here we come," porcelain ranked teens ran out the door, their faces gleamed with bliss. "Look at them, happy to go hunt goblins. Little do they know that said relatively small and feeble looking is the worst out of the bunch. Long have I thought that strength is the sole factor ruling over who is more powerful. Sadly, that's far from the truth, adaptability and wit. Those little green devils are very, very resourceful." Whilst speaking, a man wearing a top-hat entered. "That's him," Staxius stood and went to greet the seller.

"Morning Jimmy," he spoke, "Greetings Staxius," Jimmy bowed, the little girl behind remained as quiet as ever. "Shall we proceed?" Jimmy asked to which Staxius nodded. Diane took charge and handled the paperwork; a few minutes was all that needed. Ownership to Jimmy's stuff got handed to Staxius, without uttering another word – the man smiled and left. "Congratulation on purchasing a haunted house," Diane added in jest. "Congratulation on not being arrogant," Staxius winked.

"Melisa," he walked over, "can I have information about the Masked Murderer?" that question raised her eyebrows. "S-sure b-but you h-have to accept the q-quest first," her voice remained as feeble as usual. "If that is what's due, then so be it."

"Alright," she cleared her throat, "Quest: Masked Murderer. Since a few months ago, bodies killed in cold blood have been left out in the open. The report goes on to say that most of the victims were male and slew with a cut to the neck. Vital organs were often pierced with one thrust. The murderer didn't seem keen on making the other suffer – most died a painless death. There are speculations that the individual wears a mask and wields a strange blade. The last reported death was about a few days ago, thanks to a courageous adventurer who died in Diane's arm." Melisa ended, "I see, thank you," he stepped away, "let's go," the others followed behind.

The car drove towards Jimmy's Stuff. "Avon, I don't think that the lord and this murderer are related. The one here wields a blade and kills fast and quick. A painless death, while that other guy prefers torture and strangulation." The shop came into view. "So are we to leave the girl and the adventurers

alone to that man's sadistic tendencies?" Avon spoke out in anger. "No, when did I say we are to leave those people alone?" *Click,* the door to the shop screeched opened. *Cough, cough.* Dust, cobwebs, rats, insects, it shocked them.

This place had become a haven for said creatures, though their peace got disrupted by Staxius. "What are we to do then?" Avon rushed inside and hugged Staxius. "Don't know and I don't care at the moment," he looked inside boxes and checked corners. "Master, are you saying that you are to turn a blind eye to those people who are possibly in need of our help?" Achilles spoke monotonously, her eyes yelled death, the killing intent grew. "Are you sure you want to point that blade against me?" Staxius stopped and spoke. "Are you sure you want to not help those people," *Blade whomst served me in countless battles, I, thy master asked for thy assistance in battle,* a weapon manifested itself, Achilles wasn't pleased.

Slowly, Staxius turned around, the eyes cold and angry. A gentle touch, the steel sword revealed itself. "For the sake of another, you dare to point thy blade at me?" *Bam,* Staxius vanished, Achilles flew and hit the building across. The blade unsheathed slowly, the aura changed, screams and cries of death echoed down the alley's and streets. Without fail, Achilles jumped back and took an offensive stance. "My master or not, the thought of not helping out the ones in need ails me. My heart shudders for I have sworn in the past as in present to always help people who are in need," she fired back, Avon tucked on Staxius's shirt.

"Idiots," he sighed, the aura vanished, the heaviness lifted. "Go and help them," he smiled. Both stood perplexed, "what do you mean?" Avon asked. "I said, go and help them, the people who need help. Avon and Achilles, go become the heroes people need. I'm not worthy to save a life while I've taken many others, go out and help whomst ever you desire." He turned around and entered the shop. "But master, why can't you come with us?" Achilles asked, "heroes are just fancy words for people who help out others. You've helped me and I'm sure that you helped many others. So why don't you come to aid us in battle," her voice trembled as she walked over to grab Staxius.

"Don't," Avon reached out and stopped her, "Don't force master," he replied. "Idiots," Staxius spoke, "don't worry about me. You guys have a quest to accomplish, my job is to help whoever is to help others. My strength isn't needed in this battle, Avon, and Achilles – go help the others." The figure vanished into the darkened room.

"I don't get it, why does he have to act that way?" Achilles voiced her frustrations. "Trust me," Undrar whispered, "-Staxius isn't someone who can be judged with a single glance. He may come off cold and heartless, but deep down, I guarantee if something were to go wrong. In a blink of an eye, that cold-hearted killer will rush to your aid and leave behind a pile of corpses if needed. The safety of the companions and friends will always be a priority in that complex mind of his."

"Let's go Achilles, I can use teleportation." *Snap,* they vanished into a blueish mist.

Chapter 128: Duo

"Was that really necessary?" Undrar asked Staxius continued to examine the building. "Whatever do you mean?" he acted coy, the question referred to his habit of testing and toying with the people closest. The only response was but a smirk, to which she sighed.

The newly acquired store wasn't half bad. Given the outside looked more like a haunted house, with the apparent window cracks revealing itself – a serious remodeling was due. The shop held only two rooms, one upfront and one directly behind. In its prime, the backroom must have served as storage and rest area. A pretty standard layout for something commercial.

"What's the verdict," Undrar asked, countless mice ran across, they screeched. However, each time one came before her sight, it would instantly turn to dust, dragons weren't real fans of those rodents. "For the price I paid, I guess it's a bargain. The structure isn't half bad, a few touches here and there should bring it up to date.

The backroom had a metal door, locked. It showed no incline in opening. Staxius tried the handle far too many times. "This is annoying," he sighed, "-Undrar," the voice reached the main room. She hovered and fried rodents as if a mini-game. "What is it?"

"Come over here," the back was even darker than the front. Despite broad day time, it felt claustrophobic and unnatural. A table laid in the middle; a ton of boxes filled with junk rested. Staxius stared deep at the door handle. "Can you conjure a permanent magical barrier?"

"A bit weird, but yes," her reply firm and unshaken. "Well," *BANG,* the metal door flew, he used magic to blast it open. The latter laid to rest a few meters inside the opposing building's garbage disposal. "As reckless as usual," nothing phased her, a greenish wall blocked the doorway. "Thanks for the assistance," he gave a thumb's up with a stoic face. "Should I laugh at that attempt?" her eyes looked serious. "Probably not," without fail, the cleaning process began.

"Should I help?" she asked, Staxius made quick work of the countless piles of junk. "Not really, you should probably go and check up on the two heroes. Though I doubt our assistance will be of any use," the eyes faced the ceiling. "A bloody spider," he growled.

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Back at the lord's manor, the duo arrived. "This place smells so bad," her stomach turned. "Welcome to the underground dungeon," Avon stood in front and spoke as if he were a guide. "Cut it out," she let a slight smile slip. Deep breath in, both focused.

In the farthest right corner, the still unconscious body of three adventurers laid atop one another. Directly beside, another cage, this time twice the size of the others. A cell accessorized with various torture devices. A place far worse than Sten's play dungeon. Moans slowly reached the ears; a poor man had been laid to rest. The body bled from various cuts, the nails removed, the nose partly cut and the right ear falling off. "What a sight," her eyes squinted in disgust. Though it also boiled her blood, a human should not be treated that way.

"Hey, are you ok?" Avon walked through the iron bars, the fox lady laid peacefully, her body fully exposed to the elements. The legs covered with blood; the face dripped with sludge. "W-who is it," her voice feeble, this wasn't the girl he had met a few hours ago. "It's me, don't you remember?" her head now rested on the childish lap. "Ahh, I remember," the eyes barely opened. "Get out of here, the lord just left – he will be back soon," just as she uttered those words, footsteps echoed from the stairs. "Here he comes," Achilles stood with sword in hand, the stance ready to charge at any sign of movement.

Following the footsteps, whistles, and humming. Whoever walked was clearly in a playful mood. "Hey Fox, you better get ready, it's time for round two," the foot reached for the last step. Expecting to see a quiet dungeon, the noble shuddered. The moment the face laid eyes, the ground imprisoned the culprit. "WHAT IS THIS FOOLISHNESS?" he cried out, Avon's Earth Magic. "What foolishness indeed," Achilles walked out of the shadows, the hands played with the sword as if it were a toy. "Don't you dare approach me," *BANG,* a gunshot, it ricocheted and landed next to Avon. "Impossible," the face turned for the worse, the man proceeded to empty out a whole clip onto her. She didn't budge much less look bothered. The eyes remained firm and unblinking. "J-just w-who are you?" the sound of gunshots awoke the adventurers. They threw a tantrum at the sight of their little brother.

"We are Kniq," those were her only words. "GUARDS, COME TO MY AID," as a last resort, the lord called for help. Countless footsteps rushed, a small platoon of masked maids and butlers arrived. No further orders were given, they rushed straight for the kill, many were stopped by Avon's supportive magic. Achilles made quick work of those would-be bodyguards. One after the other, the men were disarmed.

"I YIELD," the man broke down. "-I a-apologize," tears flowed, the body knelt as the head faced the floor. *Drip, drip,* it hit the ground, "As if," the man chuckled. "YOU WILL DIE WITH M-," the whole body fell. "As if that charade would have tricked me," Achilles stood behind the now unconscious noble. "WATCH OUT, IT'S A GRENADE," One of the Shark's party member yelled, time felt as if it stopped. "Oh crap," Avon muttered, Achilles jumped, the objective was to lay atop said grenade.

Boom, The explosion muffled for she had saved most with her body. "A noble sacrifice," the adventurers saluted, an act of courage and heroism – never mind the fact that their brother laid half dead. "A sacrifice, not in a million years," she stood with her stomach exposed. The clothes ripped, "guess this is over now isn't it?" The legs gave, Avon took over and bonded all the assailants using shadow-magic. Shark's infantry unit was released, the younger brother was still badly injured.

It took about an hour for backup to arrive. The main guild had dispatched a small unit to take in the culprits. Normally, it would have taken about two to three hours more. Going through all the proper procedures would have been a pain. However, none of that was needed, thanks to Staxius's handy work. Half an hour into cleaning, he grew bored and went over to tipoff the main guild about that lord. It wasn't hard for a silver-ranked adventurer who had special privileges. Also, the fact that adventurers were the ones who were killed and slaughtered, nothing further needed to be said.

It took a few minutes, but the guild leader's secretary decided to trust Staxius's words. Given that this operation was independent of the kingdom's reach – no risk for repercussion was to be expected. A mild punishment for barging into private property would be sentenced, but nothing much a small fine couldn't sort.

"Good job on handling and putting a stop to these monstrous activities," a guard approached; one of high ranking at that. The royal guards got involved, it was to not create any uprising amidst the upper class. "As long as that man is given what is due, then nothing is to be worried about." Achilles stood beside Avon with no weapons.

"May we know the name of the ones who are responsible for this?" the same guard asked, "we're an adventuring party known as Kniq," she smugly added. "Great to hear that you all are doing such a good

job keeping out kingdom safe," the tone felt slightly arrogant and sarcastic. Without good-bye, the culprits were taken away.

"What will happen to them?" Avon asked, "nothing much," Diane spoke, she came with the others. "The ones who oversee the peace are the Royal Guards. The only way to act out justice here is to take it into one's own hands. This isn't like the main continent. Over there, rules and regulations are enforced daily, people are free – but with limitations. Slavery was abolished, murder became illegal and life in general improved. However, that is a change not many places are to see in the coming years," her monologue ended. "-he'll probably be released soon enough, I mean, it's a Noble," she sighed -"good job nonetheless." A free ride was given, the only ones named as survivors was Shark's party.

The evening grew close, Staxius finished with cleaning out the interior. The return to the hotel took the man by surprise. The door opened to not an empty, but a room with a presence sitting. Thinking it might have been one of the others, Staxius walked in.

"Who the hell are you?" in front stood a fox-eared girl wearing Avon's clothes. Her face and body froze at the sight of another man. The snack she ate, the one's leftover from that same morning dropped. "... her eyes widely opened; both were curious.

Swiftly before the morsel of food hit the ground, Staxius caught it. "You're that fox-eared girl Avon spoke so fondly about." Nonchalantly, he patted her head and gave the food back. "-No need to be afraid, make yourself at home," the mouth said one thing while the mind thought another, 'why the hell did he bring her to my room of all places. Isn't Achilles, or Undrar's room the better choices.'" On the outside, he gave a smile but yelled on the inside.

The atmosphere grew awkward, "pardon my asking, but are you a resident of Arda or were at one point?" the girl shyly sat on the rug. Staxius watched whilst sitting, she reminded him of Fenrir. "Y-yes," by the way she knelt, it triggered memories. Memories about Ardanian manner and culture, most importantly, the fact that only a few people could sit that way. A practice now far-gone, but evident, a stance only a few close servants of the queen would use. Not any normal servants, ones with noble blood, ones sent to be brought up and trained by her majesty herself.

"That stance; are you perhaps related to Ardanian nobility?" her eyes sunk; the question threw the mind into a loop. "H-how d-do you k-know that?" the reply shy and unwilling, Staxius pressed forward. "Not to worry, I'm a resident Ardanian too," he smiled. "I-impossible," she denied it, "-y-you're h-human," a valid point. "I see," he stood, "well there's no reason for you to trust me. Just take your time and rest, Avon should arrive soon. I'll head out, there's more food inside the fridge if you want any," the door closed behind, it grew too much to handle.

Avon had brought her, therefore that responsibility laid on his shoulder. Staxius didn't want any part in it. Thus, for the next few hours, he browsed the commercial district in search of furniture, paint, and stuff to remodel the outside.

Achilles and Avon were welcomed at the adventuring guild as heroes. Said duo had brought down and saved other porcelain ranked adventurers. [Quest: Missing Adventuring Party] was completed involuntarily. Shark had put up an offer to look for their fellow comrade. The reward paid out 5 gold pieces. However, seeing how deep the quest was, the difficulty changed from tier-9 to tier-5. Along with that, an additional 250 gold was awarded.

The adventuring party known as Kniq gained a good reputation. Small but positive, though Avon remained on edge along the way home. "Achilles are you sure master didn't do anything weird?" he referred to the fox-lady being teleported in his room. "At worst, the sight of her dead body would not surprise me," she nonchalantly added as they walked back to the hotel. "Bloody idiot," he vanished, "what did I say?" she stopped.

"Are you ok?" he asked while a blue mist dissipated, the fox-eared girl sat, the mouth stuffed with food. "I feel better now," she took her time before answering. "Did I mention that a strange man came over earlier." She stared innocently at Avon. "... just the thought made the heart shudder. 'I can't wait to hear back from master,' the smile shone was one of a man scared to the core.

Chapter 129: New Shop

Night arrived, Staxius headed back for the trip to the commercial district ended in naught. Nothing caught the eye; all were mundane and boring. Despite this, a few chairs and some furniture got bought. It would be installed the next day by the craftsmen. He returned with a frown – nevertheless, scrolls were to be written as soon as possible.

As predicted, the room was empty. Thus, the night went on without nothing out of the ordinary disturbing the peace – a calm and quiet many envied. A fulfilling night of sleep – though, this could not be said about the messenger. The one who rides by horse; the trip was only half done. A lifeline, a call for help, a quest said messenger was to complete. The fate of the town rested upon those small shoulders. Gritt didn't manifest, a well-deserved break for the many grieving warriors.

Clang, clang, "Begone evildoer, I've seen through your lies and deception. Nothing is left to be said, your actions have led to thy defeat. Rest thy weapon or I shall be forced to take thine life." A speech of a hero from a play awoke Staxius. The crowd laughed; half-awake, he stumbled to the window. Below, a man dressed in a formal black suit held a rapier towards a hoodlum's neck. A teenager who clearly didn't have a place to live. Homeless and abandoned, Staxius watched without much thought.

"Boring," he yawned, a small crowd gathered. The boy looked embarrassed; the man who clearly was of noble birth stood with the head held up high. A lady held on the man's arm, the victim of a purse snatching. The boy's cheeks flushed – not only the attempt at stealing said purse failed; the people ridiculed him as well. *Spat,* "Bloody noble, you think too highly of yourself; born with a silver spoon. Life must have been easy up to now. Must be nice standing there and looking down upon a hoodlum, isn't it? Go on, let that ego inflate, nothing will ever come out of this," the boy acted smug.

"Whatever do you mean that nothing will ever come out of this, I swear upon my name that I shall make something out of it." The man took a step forward, the rapier rested a few inches from the neck. "Go on then, slay another reject. Our lives are worth nothing," he firmly grabbed the blade, "I dare you, slay me. Slay me and look like a hero to that damsel in distress, aren't I the monster in said story?" the hand-lit faintly, "interesting," Staxius's sleep broke.

"How dare you," the blade was pulled back, it left the boy bleeding. "How dare you threatened me," the crowd wasn't pleased by the man's action. "I care not if you're a teenager, stealing is plain wrong." To save face, the noble tried to pass the actions as a rough lesson. "Must hurt now," the man smugly added, the boy yelped. "Remember those scars as the time I stopped you from falling into the pits of robbery." He turned around, the ladies beside the man cheered and hugged said man tighter.

"Filth," the boy mumbled, it caught the noble's ear. "What did you say?" the latter turned and stared with murderous intent. "I SAID FILTH, YOU SCUMBAG," the boy spat, it landed directly onto the man's face. "Ha-ha," the saliva was casually removed, "you're dead kid," without wasting time, the rapier charged forward. "Don't kill the boy over something so petty," the crowd yelled, the man saw red, nothing could be done.

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'I've done it now, finally; death awaits,' the would-be robber held a grin. *Click,* it stopped a few inches away from the heart. "Could both of you keep it quiet. There are people still sleeping at this hour, talk about a bad start to my day," A man landed from out of nowhere. Veiled in sleeping clothes which was only a hoodie and some underpants, the man stopped the blade nonchalantly. "W-who are you?" the noble asked. "Just someone who wants to sleep," Staxius replied whilst pinching the thin sword. *Humph,* the man rolled his eyes and tucked. The blade snapped, Staxius broke it accidentally. "We still have unfinished business," the man calmly walked away.

"Who the hell are you?" the boy added in disgust. "Are you sure you want to use that tone with me?" Staxius replied monotonously. "I'll use whatever tone I want," he fired back with annoyance in the voice. A single stare sufficed, Staxius turned and faced the cocky boy. At the sight of those eyes, the eyes of a demon – it made him shudder. "Is someone scared now?" Staxius added in jest, though half-naked, the boy could not but chuckle.

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"I would ask how you got to become a would-be robber but what's the point. Those eyes tell everything, you've made the ultimate choice. You don't seek to earn money, what you seek is death, those eyes are of someone whomst given up." The boy's face froze. "What if it's true, said life is mine, why do you care if I die," he fired back.

"Yeah, why do I care," Staxius faced away, "-Listen kid; I'm not going to tell you how to live. Go die for all I care, heck, I'll help you with that if you so desire," he paused, the wind blew. "Go reflect and think if death is what you truly desire." Nothing further needed to be said, Staxius vanished.

"Wake u..." Undrar flung the door open, she expected to see a sound asleep Staxius. What she saw was a half-naked man staring into the horizon. "Someone's up early," she walked in, "what's the occasion?"

"Just unsightly people creating chaos underneath the window," he turned and faced Undrar, "-how are the others, did their quest end in success or failure?" The only response was but a nod. "Why don't you go check up on them," the hands pointed at the wall. "Fine," he sighed.

A quick peek into both rooms revealed the same exact thing. Avon and Achilles were pass out cold. The fox girl slept in Undrar's room to which she explained why Avon had to bring her to the hotel. Long story short, Avon thought it is best for the King of Arda to handle one of his subjects. A valuable one at that for fox-eared demis were rare and a few roamed around the kingdom.

"As soon as Avon wakes, tell him to teleport the girl back to Arda. Let Shanna take care of this. From what I learned yesterday, she's from noble birth though I have no clue how she got here," Undrar tried to reply but Staxius left without saying a word. "We'll join up with you later," the yells reached the end of the hall.

'Another day begins, the quest towards the opening that guild slowly advances. I do hope that researching how a relic class scroll works will be fairly simple. I can't wait to start working, just the thought makes me blissful. A quiet little shop, friendly customers, and awesome co-workers. That would have been a nice life,' the door to Void opened. "I better check on the adventuring guild before leaving.' The engine roared out into the distance.

"Undrar," Avon awoke, "what did the master say?" he asked with the tone sleepy. "Nothing much, he told you to take her to Arda, he wants Shanna to deal with her." The face relaxed, "Is that so," a sigh of relief was heard. "Better do as he asks," promptly, after breakfast, the lady was taken back to Arda. Amidst the goodbyes, Undrar also vanished.

Achilles was left alone to wonder Rosespire – the gut guided the path towards Jimmy's Stuff. Back at the guild, talk about Kniq grew popular. Everyone spoke in wonder to who those guys were, Diane looked the least impressed.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Missing Person – Tier 10]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

[Kill Quest: Goblins – Tier 10]

[Kill Quest: Hob Goblins – Tier 9]

Nothing new came onto the board, a waste of time and effort. After a quick chat with Melisa, Staxius headed out to the shop. News about the royal family remained scares. No one knew what had happened to the king. An eerie silence, it made many anxious. More and more visitors came from the main continent. Rumors that Hidros had become infested by monsters – people who sought adventure and thrill made way. This boosted trade and commerce; more visitors meant more money for the kingdom. Despite this, the rate at which Qaisars were exchanged also phenomenally increased how life was lived. No longer was a gold piece as valuable as before, it was now the same as having two gold pieces, its value dropped by half. Fluctuation like these became frequent, many who were smart knew how to predict said fall. As time went on, the value settled – a slight decrease was noted.

After winning the tournament, Eira became more popular than ever before. Mainly, people were curious about the man who fought beside her. This didn't affect her in the least, the qualifiers were still underway in other provinces. The main tournament was to be organized in five to six-month time, preparation was the main reason for such a long time.

Castle Garsley's construction went at a faster pace than usual. It now looked more imposing than before, sloped roof, stone brick walls, a gigantic wall, and the ever-casual atmosphere. A new name for the new town was to be decided. However, most chose to wait until Staxius returned. Autumn and some of her friends built a school. The kids who once roamed the streets in search of a fight with the other now had a purpose. Many enjoyed the prospect of studying. Swordsmanship got taught on and off by Adelana. Physical conditioning was made mandatory. Boys and girls alike had to train hard, a good body

meant a good mind. The villagers were happy to have trusted Millicent. Her condition worsened without anyone's knowledge.

"Achilles?" the car pulled over; she walked the road that led towards Jimmy's Stuff. "Master?" she jumped. "Get in," Staxius smiled.

Ready and waiting, the furniture was delivered an hour after Staxius arrived. "Achilles, please get that for me?" he currently stood on the roof, hammer in one hand and wood in another, the broken sign was taken off. "On it," she rushed out detached in sweat. Her head wrapped around in a shirt; the cleaning process went faster thanks to her.

A table, four chairs, a small bed, a cupboard, a glass display, and a counter. Those were the items delivered, *Crash,* the sign fell. "WATCH OUT," she yelled, "Sorry about that," he fired back. The once dusty interior was cleaned to perfection. The fruit of both their hard work. Like two arms on the same body, Staxius and Achilles worked in tandem. Nothing needed to be said, each read the other's action. One by one, the furniture was taken inside. The front housed the glass display placed atop the counter while the back housed the rest.

"Master, is it just me or does the back look more like a bedroom than a workshop?" she voiced a solid point. "It's not a wrong assumption, maybe it is to be a bedroom," the eyes winked. "Achilles, go take a break, I'll finish up the outside," to which she obeyed. It wasn't ready yet, a few remodeling needed to be done. The stone wall had cracks here and there, it added to the esthetics.

"Can't believe I'm back here just to get a book." Undrar sighed, she stood in a bright room. "Here, these are the books you sought after," a friendly voice called out. "Thank you," with a smile, Undrar gladly accepted the help. "Tell Staxius to be more careful out there," the same voice requested. "Don't worry, I'll pass the message," a portal manifested. 'Lord Death wasn't present to greet me. A bit weird but that's normal. I do doubt as to why he had to give Staxius the symbol of power so early into the journey.'

Chapter 130: Alchemy

"Master," a voice called from below, he crouched on the roof and finished the last of maintenance. "What is it?" he yelled; she swept the floor for dust had been brought in by the wind. "Undrar is here," Achilles yelled once more. "Tell her to start cleaning, it would be good if this shop could be rendered useable in the next few days." As requested, Undrar quickly changed clothes and began cleaning. The books she brought along laid in a backpack, the same one they used years ago. The one with its presence erased. Minutes turned to hours, cleaning, painting, refurbishing – all came to an end.

Back in Arda, security increased. The monster problem perturbed peace on a daily basis. Nothing could be done about it. The kingdom was in full alert mode, guards were trained more rigorously. The mage's academy had to work twice as hard, wands and staffs were handed out to people who didn't have the ability to use magic. The newest addition to the weapon's arsenal, wands that didn't require the user to have mana. Autonomous – functioned just like a gun. The Ardanian's take on a firearm, the best thing for their whole culture revolved around magic and myths.

The sight of Avon raised alert to some degree. Though that was quickly remedied, the spirit became quite popular. Prophecy and Avon, the two spirits from the queen and king. Songs, poems, and legends

were told about their origin. Though baseless and made up fiction to entice many crowds, they were well crafted and entertaining.

“From afar rides the saviors on a chariot of gold given by the god. Their descent into our realm for the demon-king has wreaked havoc for too long. Wielder of sword and Wielder of magic, both rush to our king and queen’s side. Together united as one, by the power of love and compassion, the people are freed from the terror reigned; a testament to their loyalty.” A simplified example of the many tales being recounted.

Thanks to this, the usual uptight security was lifted. Shanna welcomed the spirit with open arms. She sought answers concerning her beloved husband. It came to a quick close when the fox-eared girl walked in. Her garments changed, the filth and dirt washed, to audience the queen in that previous state would have been an insult. Her face remained perplexed; the queen spoke no words. Her eyes teared, the fox knelt – both ladies cried. A long-awaited reunion that Avon didn’t witness. He headed back to Rosespire with haste.

“Master,” Achilles yelled once more, nothing changed. Despite the hours, Staxius remained crouched on the roof. “What is it?” he yelled; time was at a loop. “Avon’s here.” She fired back. It came as a surprise to see what the haunted house turned into. The eyes gleamed with happiness as he stumbled inside. Exhaustion had caught up, teleporting back and forth without rest – especially over a distance as vast as Arda and Rosespire, he gave way. At the sight of the bed, in a blink of an eye, the overzealous Avon slept.

“What a sight,” Staxius mumbled, the hyper Avon was out cold. “Here,” out of the blue, Undrar threw the books over the table. “and they are?” he didn’t look impressed. “Books about potions, scrolls and anything related to magical items. There is information about enchantments to one’s weapon, the stuff of that nature. I mean you wanted to open a shop about magical items, didn’t you?” she smiled. *Poof,* a hug, tight and comforting, long had it been. Staxius deeply cherished that dragon, the first ally to be made. “No need to be that excited,” she replied while patting his head. “Thank you Undrar, I deeply appreciate it,” a peaceful grin portraited itself. “No need to thank me, that’s what friends are here for. Forget that, not friend, but family,” she pulled out her tongue in jest.

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The tight embrace ended; Achilles felt left out. “Want a hug?” Staxius asked, “...” no reply. “If you want one, better earn it,” a flick to the forehead made her slightly angry. However, that weird humor slowly became familiar. “Seeing as we all are adults, I propose that we take a break and celebrate. Also, I just really want to have some alcohol.” The last night out had made the envy for booze even greater. “I don’t see why not,” Undrar didn’t object, “I do want to try some of this world’s alcohol.” Achilles was fired up. “What about Avon?” before the question was asked, Staxius recharged the spirit’s mana to capacity. “DID ANYONE SAY BOOZE,” Avon jumped, “Calm down,” a gentle chop to the head sufficed.

As planned, the party closed the shop and headed out. Only a few steps were needed, the bars and taverns rested behind said building, in the other street. From classy looking too plain old shacks, the streets crawled with drunkards. Hoodlums were more common sight than usual. A place was the royal

guards refused to check; an area governed by the dark- guilds. Many who tried to disturb this little haven were returned in a coffin. The worse place to set-up a business, however, it didn't bother Staxius.

A whole army could attack for all he cared; a single second was needed to slay them all. Bars, after bars, they hopped around. Drinks after drinks, everyone grew tipsy, and finally, when night broke in, they were fully drunk. Nothing much was said, the focus was solely on walking back to the hotel. Staxius decided to stay back and rest inside the shop. After a few steps, Avon grew tired and teleported the rest back to the hotel.

"P-please h-help u-us," time now was midnight, the guild stood close before the messenger. He got a ride back thanks to some other returning adventurers. Sadly, none were present to welcome the tired man. Parched, and starved, the man fell steps away from the closed doors and slept.

Morning arrived faster than expected, Diane's day began with said man. She provided food and drinks, he provided information, the quest given was accomplished.

"Gritt, basically a monster invincible to weapons?" she asked. "Yes," he replied firmly, the eyes lit of a thousand flames. "You can rest easy, I'll assign it to Tier five, is that alright?" she asked, the paperwork for filling out the request was nearly complete. "Whatever tier you assign, I don't care, just make sure people are sent," he placed a small piece of paper, "these are the reports from the other guilds there, a death count." It reached in the dozen, "-I'm sure this is sufficient for actions to be taken seriously. I beg you, if people aren't sent as soon as possible, my friends and family might die in the coming days," the plea continued. "I've got it, calm down, the quest will be put up as a priority. Just take a breather." She sighed, Melisa walked in, "you take over," Diane rushed into the backroom.

[Kill Quest: Gritt] the task got written in bold red. It meant urgency, a code used in special cases when jobs that were of the utmost importance needed to be complete.

"Who do you think is going to take up the quest?" Melisa asked to which Diane replied with, "probably one of the top-tiers. There are good money and fame involved, not to mention this monster is possibly a boss-level one. Would not surprise me if Shark, heck, even Blade End's main adventuring party were to set out," the response fell on deaf ears, Melisa was lost in clouds. "Are you thinking about Kniq," her daydream broke, "n-no."

"Sign us up for the new quest," many adventurers came forward, no restriction was given this time. From Porcelain up, everyone could participate. In the next few hours, parties from individual guilds, freelancers and others set off. The appearance of Gritt caused harm to the existence of Oxshield. Loud footsteps, vehicles, horses, one by one, they left.

"What's all this commotion about," half-asleep, Staxius walked over to check. The path taken by the warriors was right in front of the shop he bought. A weird coincidence but necessary. Using the main gate wasn't optimal when sending any kind of troops of people out to fight. A detour that led outside. A change in luck, it meant that when people were to head out for quests, the ones who used the same path would notice Staxius's shop. Potions and other stuff to buy, resupplying, perfect for what he planned.

The reason why people headed out at this hour was a bit out of the ordinary. From young teenagers to battle-hardened warriors, everyone came out. Familiar faces and not, everyone walked. No sign of the

top guilds anywhere, just freelancers and new parties. It wasn't until Avon came back to explain the situation. Achilles had a craving for the pastries the guild sold. Thus, this was the reason to how Knig grew aware of the situation at the border. Avon asked about their game plan, Staxius only but replied with denial.

"If you want to go out and fight, be my guest. In a time like this, one must be smart," Staxius explained to the rest of the party about his denial. They were teleported thanks to Avon.

"I'll tell you a small story I heard once. Long ago, a river was reported to have a large deposit of gold. It became so common that people went from rags to riches overnight. Obviously, rumors spread like wildfire, a gold-rush ensued. However, a single man, devoid of the greed of getting gold had another idea. An idea that made him just as rich if not richer than the others. Rather than getting gold, he invested in iron and turned it into shovels and tools. What followed next was a work of genius, people rushed to buy his wares. Rather than following the flow, he thought it best to think another way – cunning at its finest." Staxius ended, "-thus, rather than following these people to battle, I'd rather stay back and prepare supplies. Many of them will come back hurt and possibly mortally injured. You know full well that Claireville academy's hospital won't be able to handle that much pressure. Instead of scrolls, small affordable potions for the poor, just to not be unfair." It convinced all.

"Still, if any of you want to go out and help others. I'd be happy to let you go." Staxius wondered, "you know what, I've got a better idea." A moment of inspiration. "Avon take both Achilles and Undrar to the border. Your teleportation skill will come in handy; I'll stay back and prepare supplies. Using that, we could sell more stuff there rather than waiting for customers here."

The plan was made, everyone set off to accomplish what needed to be done. Research began, Avon left. Hours after hours, Staxius studied, new sets of equipment were bought from a nearby shop. Making potions meant using alchemy. A field relatively new and foreign. This didn't stop the quest for knowledge, experiment after experiment, he tried one after the other without fail.

"Do you think this plan is going to work?" In charge of driving, Avon spoke from within the car. "I think so, it was a good idea to think logically. People are rushing in for fame and glory, our objective is making money, we cannot let the others influence our actions." Undrar replied. "I think that was the moral of the story he told us a few hours ago." Achilles added. "Still, I want to face that monster, the one people call Gritt. Let's see if the Gritt is bark or bite," she ended, the car rushed forth into the unknown.

'Alchemy, what an interesting subject,' covered by liquid and burnt marks that regenerated. The apparatus told what was needed to be said. A firm grasp on the fundamentals was achieved in less than six hours, something that took more than two years for many students to accomplish. Never underestimate the level of intellect the man known as Staxius wielded. Anything occult was where he thrived, the mysteries of the unknown.