

## Death Magic 131

### Chapter 131: Potions

'Interesting, very interesting,' a plethora of books laid open. Various test-tubes and other glass equipment rested on a separate table. Drop by drop, a small vase filled after countless twists and turns through a tiny glass tube. 'That should be the correct shade of red,' whilst working, Staxius had the habit of speaking to oneself. A habit common to many master craftsmen and geniuses alike.

In addition to the flask getting filled with a red liquid, Staxius concurrently experimented with scrolls. Ones of offensive nature, the more one tried, the better he would get. Trial by fire, the more mistakes the more one learned, a simple mindset followed. No major accident had occurred yet, confidence grew. A few stray rats ran by and squealed, the first usable concoction was made. Using common-tiered medicinal herbs that were bought a few doors steps down the road, it finished. Alone, coming up with that combination would have taken time and effort. However, with the help of the preordained recipes listed in the books Undrar brought over – the task was immensely simplified. Though the quality remained a mystery, a test-subject was needed.

In the corner, a black shadow moved, 'got you,' he sighed. A rat, a big one at that, the perfect test subject. Cruel as it might have seemed, using a rat was better than what he had in mind. The first thought was to go out into the crowd, pick someone at random, punch said person, and use the potion. A small knife, \*slash,\* a shallow cut. Enough to bleed and not let said animal die. "Moment of truth," Staxius stood from the chair, the hands slightly trembled not by nervousness – but with excitement. \*Drip, drip,\* it fell gracefully onto the wound. Normally, said potion would have been administered through the mouth – in case of a human being that is. But for a rodent, a drop on the body sufficed.

"No luck," Staxius nodded in disappointment, the brew melted off said subject's legs. Using one of the trial healing spells that were written during the concoction, Staxius healed the subject to full health. "It's sad to see how much you are to suffer, but I care not," the body sat back down, herbs with the addition of other items. A new process, different temperature, the addition of mana. Every possible combination was tried. It took time for a full flask to be filled, but one drop took only about five minutes; thus, testing advanced faster than predicted.

From the legs getting melted off, to instantly combust, growing and shrinking in size to exploding – the rat went through so much its eyes died.

"I've had just about enough," all the books were read. All the information assimilated; the brew didn't turn out anything remotely close to healing one's body. A huge wall stood, the pathway to knowledge blocked once more. Deep breaths in, rather than experimenting on the rat, a notebook laid empty on the table. The rat was put in a cup and kept near the corner. "I'll just let the subconscious take over." The body relaxed, the atmosphere felt nostalgic, a déjà vu-esk state of mind. The place where all the answers became clear – Clarity.

Clarity, the realm where impossible became possible. Any normal human only at the peak of their field was permitted to enter this godly realm. However, Staxius had managed to enter it almost too easily. It was as if opening a door, with one turn, all became clear. Not to mention that the entry was given without even mastering the field he sought answers from. Unknown but present, the symbol beneath the left eye lit faintly.

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It felt like diving. The further one went, the harder the pressure became, it overwhelmed the mind. Almost to the point of breaking – though, this didn't stop Staxius. The conscience traveled further down, much deeper than before. A strange distorted voice paved the way, a thin thread lit. At the same time, in the real world, the notebook filled rapidly with notes. The eyes were closed, the hand moved independently. They were possessed by an entity – someone familiar, the wielders of the death element. The various other death reapers, ones who came before; all the knowledge those powerful gods had amassed were at Staxius's fingertips.

This was why entering Clarity felt so simple, Staxius was only but accessing the dormant memories and knowledge. It was to be expected, though he knew not why but how. A few hours went by, a hard snap to the neck stopped the trancelike state. It faltered, Staxius strayed off the path; once he went off too much, a hard slap brought the consciousness to reality. This was to avoid being engulfed by the ocean of information.

\*Cough,\* he awoke to a room filled with smoke. The flask overflowed, it melted the small table, 'damn it,' with haste, the would-be crisis was averted. It didn't come without paying a price, the whole building felt like a burning mess. Smoke came out of each and every possible opening. People roaming about were quick to rush and see. "The situation is under control, thank you, everyone," Staxius stood outside and told many that all was good. Some came with buckets filled with water, while others came to watch the spectacle. Despite being the reject's area – the inhabitants had a sliver of humanity. Not because someone's life was at risk, no, but rather, a fire would mean the intervention of the royal guards. A set of armor practically no one wanted to see around these parts ever again.

"Be more careful next time," an older looking man with a tattooed face spoke in anger. The tone harsh and violent; one of the elusive leaders of God's ale trafficking. A drug that could force just about anyone into utter submission and dependence. It was a quick way to make uncomplacent slaves obedient. Nevertheless, here in Hidros – the production of said ale was kept secret. It wasn't wrong to use, but people were highly skeptical. The main continent was where this ale was forbidden from being sold or traded. Anyone who possessed it was automatically taken in for questioning.

This was where Hidros came into play. It was manufactured here and exported outwards. Many people with close ties with those organizations lived here, this island devoid of any law and regulation was a haven. Despite this freedom, many of those influencers stayed back and hid among the general populous. No reason was given to raise any commotion for even the royal family had ties with the dark guilds. One of the many reasons for their unimaginable wealth and power.

"Sure," Staxius waved, "Whatever kid," the man sighed and left. The dark guilds, an organization with its reach now invading the main continents and other nations. As to how powerful said organization was, no one really knew. Nothing was ever made public, all moved in the shadows. Thunderstain, though now hidden as well – probably had ties.

'That man looks interesting,' the crowd dissipated – Staxius stood and watched. Interest was piqued long ago, the underground, the place where monstrous things happened. If one were to take control of said organization, said person could honestly rule the world. Every king, queen, prince, princess, nobles,

anyone, and anything would be at their fingertips. 'Just a dream, I'd better head back inside – maybe I should try and check out those elusive organizations for once.' The inside grew breathable, most of the smoke had vanished.

The notebook had been filled, all the steps – recipes and other necessities were written. "Alright," after a quick read, all the missing puzzle pieces were learned. Without regret, using the same faulty potion – Staxius melted the book. "Don't want to repeat the mistake father did," he referred to the book Gallienne had. The book about how to create an artificial element.

"FINALLY," nighttime crawled in. The potion was brewed to perfection, one of common quality. The rat got freed after the hours of torture and testing. "Good job for sticking by," Staxius spoke as if the rodent would understand. Strangely, the test-subject replied with a squeal.

Beat from all the hard work, Staxius slept. Through the night, Avon drove without stopping. The mana boost given from master earlier had rendered the spirit unable to rest – energy overflowed.

At the break of dawn, the town came in view, the party arrived. At first glance, no one could say that a monster threatened their peace. The buildings were beautifully made. A work of art – and not to mention, costly. The dissimilarities about how lifestyle differed from the other provinces were shown in bold. Said town was of people without noble blood- however, their wealth spoke volume. A road went through the middle. The drive slow and steady, the garment many wore were of high quality. Practically everyone had clothes that fetched 80 silvers at minimum. In comparison, one could live in a tavern and afford a meal with 1 silver and 2 coppers per night. Which meant at least 60 days to live without worrying about food and shelter.

About a few kilometers yonder, the other gate came in view. The place where the attacks were reported. Warriors and soldier alike patrolled said perimeter. All had a look of despair and distress. "Time to go scout out the surrounding," Achilles got out first.

"Miss, I'd ask you to please stay away from this area." One of the guards rushed to stop her advancement. "Thank you for the warning, however," she pulled out her necklace, "my companions and I are here on guild business." To that, the man slowly backed away with a smile. Reinforcement was here at last. "That lady is bronze?" rumors spread. The smell of blood still lingered around; the body turned towards said direction almost subconsciously. "Over here," she called out to Undrar and Avon, whomst slowly made their way to her.

"Please," another adventurer came to stop the march; "the guild masters have asked to meet the leader personally. I'm guessing that you're said person?" he pointed at Achilles with good reason. Bronze rank was rare and not to mention a sign of power.

"Sadly, the leader isn't here at the moment," Undrar spoke, the adventurer stumbled. "Whatever do you mean, if bronze isn't the highest rank then who is said master?" he voiced in utter shock. "Worry not, I'll speak on his behalf," she took out the silver ranked badge. "I-impossible," the boy's breathing stopped. "v-very well," a few seconds was needed to get back the bearing. "Follow me this way please," he led the way.

"Undrar," Avon spoke quietly. "Yes?" she asked. "I'm going to head back to Rosespire, you have everything in control. I'll teleport back, just in case, Void will be on standby. If anything urgent comes

up, please use it to communicate with me.” In a blue mist, the spirit vanished. ‘Or I could just speak to Staxius directly,’ they didn’t know about the telepathy.

A few twists and turn later, the guild came into view. Three buildings to be precise, the same design but different crests. “This way,” the finger pointed towards the middle building. \*Click,\* the door opened, what greeted them wasn’t the living, but the dead. Bodies kept hidden with a white blanket. The smell overwhelmed everything, it smelled so bad the young guide nearly threw up. The eyes teared, a smell so dense the gag reflex kicked in instantly.

“Over here,” another guard signaled, the trio walked. “This is horrible,” Achilles added. “I agree, I don’t get why they haven’t been buried yet?” Undrar spoke in turn, she was confused.

“Greetings fellow adventurers,” a charismatic man spoke, he sat beside two others. “Guild master, some of the reinforcement has arrived,” the young guide introduced and left. “Before we begin,” Undrar spoke abruptly, “-I’d like to ask why those bodies haven’t been buried yet. The decay process has begun, said smell is only going to intensify. What’s the purpose of doing such an inhuman thing,” she finished and breathed.

“I understand what you mean,” the man spoke, “-I’d like nothing more to put them to rest. However, we haven’t the time nor manpower to dig graves. This town stands close to collapse, Gritt is more trouble than the smell. I’m sure that those who gave their lives in exchange for us to have a chance at defeating that monster would like it that way,” he sat back down, the tone revealed more than he could express and that was sadness.

#### Chapter 132: Alchemist

“I figured as much,” Undrar sat with full confidence, Achilles followed suit. The nature of the attack and how much damage had been done was further explained. It felt weird how only one of the leaders would speak, the rest seemed like the talkative type. However, their mouths felt tied by an unknown force. Not to mention, their aura was lesser than an average human. The face looked strong and stern; the eyes were monotonous.

The overwhelming speech from said guild leader grew obnoxious. Undrar had a gut feeling, things weren’t as it seemed. “May I intrude,” she voiced, the man’s gaze felt sharp and curious. “Please, be my guest,” he replied as if compelled.

“I’ve been wondering for quite some time now, what do the other guild leaders think about this situation. I can go as far as say that they are not of the same opinion. The three guilds don’t seem as united as you would have us believe.” Around the same time, an argument was heard loud and clear. The guilds weren’t as friendly – it further added to Undrar’s witty inquiry.

“Ha-ha,” he pushed back the medium length hair, “-of course our guilds aren’t united. It’s a battlefield, everyone has to feed their mouths and others. This would obviously raise animosities between members. However, when survival is on the line, even enemies can come to an agreement.,” Justin ended.

“Thanks for clarifying things, I’d still like to hear the same words from the other two.” Her hands reached deep inside and took out the silver necklace, “-my partner and I just want to make sure things are in order. For you see, our leader is unpredictable at most. If he were to find out that helping out

people – with him having to travel all the way from the capital, to be welcomed with conniving and secretive guilds. Let me assure you, the piles of corpses in the hall at the moment would not be enough to quell that fury.” She stood, the man slightly sweated but didn’t show any fear.

“I know not why you would suspect us from being conniving in nature. Baseless accusations can be detrimental to a person’s character if misheard,” he stood in turn, the tone filled with animosity. “No need to worry guild leader Justin,” she took a deep breath, “-my words weren’t meant to be disrespectful nor cause any miscommunication. I just wanted to make sure before we took things at face value. It’s better to be safe than sorry,” she casually smiled. “I see,” Justin breathed a sigh of relief. “You had us worried for a second there,” they shook hands. “I’ll leave you to scout out the areas, we may be under attack later – thanks for coming to our rescue.”

‘Mana,’ Undrar thought, “T-thank you for coming to our aid,” the two other leaders stood and spoke simultaneously. “Pleasure is all ours,” her eyes filled with suspicion, they left.

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“Any thought on the matter?” Undrar asked; the guild building stood directly behind. It read, Greenday’s Guild. “Nothing much really,” Achilles didn’t care – the mind was solely focused on how people could be saved.

“Isn’t that Aceline?” the duo walked to where the beast had first appeared. “Whatever do you mean?” a faint melodic voice sang; it came from the radio one of the adventures had brought. “I guess,” Achilles replied and rushed over to the blood-stained ground, a sight not for the faint of hearts. “A battlefield, this brings back memories,” Undrar added. “Yes, I agree,” they stared further in front. A meadow with a small hill, who would have thought that monsters could turn this idyllic place into hell. Without nothing much to see, the duo walked into town and watched. The way people behaved and acted could tell more than the words from a liar.

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“Master,” Avon materialized, “-welcome back,” Staxius spoke with the body covered with burnt marks. After the ruckus of troupes marching outside subsided, the research continued. A cheap and decent enough potion began to be brewed. Production increased however the process was slow and painful. It required regular assistance, a single mistake and the concoction could turn for the worse. “Am I intruding?” he asked, to which Staxius replied with, “go buy some medicinal herbs and a few cartons of glass flasks. There are coins in the counter in front,” no time wasted, Avon began to run errands.

A few hours into the day, a dozen potions were brewed. Staxius sweated profusely, the scrolls would have been easier to write. “Finally,” the stance relaxed, the last of the drop fell. “Thanks for the help,” he stared at Avon who blushed. “Are you seriously blushing,” he added in jest. “N-no, I’m just tired,” he crouched. “Good job either way,” with a quick pat, Staxius transferred mana over. “Too much, please go slower,” Avon moaned as if a girl.

“Cut it out,” the pat turned into a chop. “Ouchy,” Avon pouted adorably, “go take a rest, I’ll wake you when the time is right.” With that being said, Staxius headed to the magical guild.

“Welcome back,” the same assistant who first greeted him, spoke. “Thank you, Mathew,” Staxius replied, the name was read on the badge. “How may I be of help,” the guild felt quiet and peaceful.

Mage's weren't that common, a few sat idly browsing books. Instead of a café, this guild had a library. "Is the wizard here?" the boy understood. "Please head to the same meeting room, I'll bring the wizard."

The moment the wizard heard Staxius had called, he ran once more. The first impression was a memorable one, the scholar met someone worthy to be praised. Not to mention, having scrolls to examine and study made a man of knowledge blissful.

\*Click,\* the door opened, "lord Staxius," the wizard entered with a big smile. "Isorin, long time no see," the tone changed to friendly. "Indeed," they shook hands. "May I inquire to the reason of thy visit?" the wizard asked. "Before we get into the reason for this impromptu visit, I'd like to ask how the scrolls have been serving you so far." Staxius wanted to know more.

"..." the face slowly lit, "the joy I felt cannot be expressed into words. I apologize, but those scrolls are like a work of art, I know not how one could have gotten their hands on it. I feel greatly indebted."

\*Cling,\* the sound of glass hitting glass stopped the speech.

"No need to be so formal," a glass flask was placed. "Interesting," the wizard took said item and began to examine. "Is this a potion?" he asked, the tone not as excited as the prospect of acquiring a scroll. Potions were fairly common, a little expensive but worth the money. "Yes, they are indeed potion." Another item got placed, a scroll of an orangish glow. It caught the man's attention, "what do you want?" The wizard asked.

"Nothing much, I'd like to get my hands on a trader's pass with a badge of authenticity issued by the magical guild itself. You see, I'm planning on starting a business that is focused on magic and anything related to that. Since all the guilds are related – acquiring a trader's badge here should not be an issue." The atmosphere fell silent.

"What you ask isn't out of reach, but I need to ask for what reason. Haven't you gotten a badge of authenticity already?" reference was made to the previous one.

"Yes, that one serves its purpose. However, scrolls are hard to come by. Potions are a more reliable product at the moment. Seeing as they were of my own making, I'll need a badge from the magical guild to prove my credibility as both a trader and an alchemist." Everything was laid for the wizard to see.

Alchemy wasn't unheard of, a few people, ones willing to devote to a life of constant failure and knowledge could become an alchemist. Nothing fancy stood out about said title. They were controlled and monitored by the magical guild. Though a field rather unpopular, those few alchemists helped with brewing medicine and potions. Knowledge about human anatomy as well as knowledge about magic was required. The prerequisite field of studies was expansive on their own, combining both meant said person would have to be someone extremely intelligent.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything at this time. Acquiring a trader's badge should be fairly simple. However, what you ask is the title of an Alchemist, isn't it?" Isorin spoke true. "Yes, I'd like to sell the potions of my own making, getting the title of Alchemist would help immensely," a sigh was heard.

"How many titles does one need, I've received information about you, Staxius Haggard. Or should I say, King Staxius Haggard of Arda, Silver-ranked adventurer as well as the winner to the Claireville Academy's two-versus-two." Information was shared, only a few knew of Staxius's true identity.

"I guess the cat's out of the bag." The stance straightened, the voice stern, the eyes menacing. "All the titles you've named are indeed true. I'm in fact married to the queen of Arda, the sole human allowed in their territory. There's also another title you've forgotten – that is the Guardian of Arda." The wizard felt a little intimidated. "Isorin, as a fellow scholar and man of knowledge, you must know how magic is used in Arda. Their studies in said subject are far than humanity can ever dream of. A simple theory; Teleportation – a spell that is dreamt of by every single mage in this world. The very same spell is used nonchalantly by the Ardanian. This isn't to brag, but to give an idea of how vast my knowledge in the subject of magic is." Isorin's eyes lit, the pinnacle of magic and its research was given access to a human.

"A chance to do what," the tone trembled with excitement, "–a chance to prove my intellect. The existence of an alchemist was foreign to me until yesterday. On one of my trips to the shop, I met a small girl. To be honest, her presence was out of place. However, the people around knew her well – someone popular, a renowned and talented Alchemist. Her name still fleets me, but it left an impression. A good one, that girl holds a lot of knowledge, the future is destined for greatness." He paused, "I'm rambling now, my point is that the request is for a chance to partake in the test of eligibility to being an Alchemist."

It took a few minutes to sink in, not everyone was allowed to take that test. The wizard was lost for words, this request seemed too much, even for a scholar like Isorin.

"Isorin," he called out, "–if you're at a loss, the answer lays before you."

With a nod, the flask got examined further. [Skill: Appraisal] "I see," he sighed. "–alright," he stood. "Come back in an hour or so, I'll take this with the other scholars. A meeting with the master Alchemist will be needed. You're lucky for the test is done only every six months. It just so happens that today is that day," without another word being said, the man left. 'I've done what I could, better head back.'

Another hour went by, Staxius nearly forgot about the test. Moral wasn't high, by the way Isorin acted – it felt hopeless.

"Isorin," half an hour before Staxius arrived, a meet was organized. Many of the Alchemists were present with other mages, doctors, and scholars. "I'd like to apologize, but this is something I have to stand behind." The voice firm and unfaltering, Isorin decided to trust Staxius. He argued constantly, the others were doubtful, the exam was the hardest to ever be created. Without years of studies, not even a mage could finish it.

"I know that Staxius Haggard isn't well known. There's not even a report of him studying at a magical school or university. However, I would not rule him out just yet. The boy you guys are painfully looking down upon is the only human to ever study in Arda. I cannot give any more information; the guilds have made it clear to keep it a secret until further notice." The potion was placed in front of all to see, "I was doubtful at first," a few drops fell on a wounded animal. "The potion is just as good as our most talented alchemist."

"What do you mean just as good," a small girl voiced loudly. "I've used my appraisal skill, it's Uncommon and close to Rare," Isorin added.

"So, are we just going to allow anyone to partake in this test, without no background check, nothing – just on the whim of a failed scholar, pathetic." One of the other academics lashed out. "I care not if

insults are directed at me,” the eyes lowered. “I’ve placed all my trust in that boy.” He stared right at the small girl. “I wager a challenge, let’s have both Clarise and Staxius take the same test. A certified alchemist should not worry about an exam like this. Aren’t you the genius who was born to change the world?”

### Chapter 133: Exams

The last line got onto Clarise’s nerves. Isorin purposefully spoke in a cocky tone; a very sly man. Just like that, the council ended, Staxius was given special permission to partake in the exams. A bet was made to which it’s nature would not be revealed until later. The wizard had more riding on this little stunt that Staxius could ever imagine.

“Isorin, I held you in high standards until now. Wagering everything for the sake of a kid who isn’t even a proper scholar – shame on you my friend, shame on you.” Another middle-aged man, dressed casually, placed his hands upon the desperate wizard’s shoulder.

“Don’t worry so much, investments aren’t made without risk. Long have I been a slave to the norms and rules set by higher scholars. The talent I saw today made me realize that there are people out there who can do things for the betterment of humanity,” he fired back with a tone of confidence and determination.

“We’ll see old friend, we’ll see,” after a few steps he turned, “Clarise isn’t someone to be taken easily, be on your guard and warn that prodigy of yours. This exam will be particularly tough – I feel bad for the other applicants. Because of that little stunt, today’s batch of promising alchemist may give under pressure,” the door opened and the figure vanished into the shadows.

Time went on without fail, the council did some last-minute revision to the papers. Clarise would have normally assisted with the questions, however, today that honor was given to the master alchemist. The guild was informed, to which upon hearing the name Staxius Haggard, no further question got asked.

“Isorin,” a door swung open, the wizard sat at the desk with a tired face. “What is it?” a sharp voice pierced through the moment of self-pity. “Just so you know, I’m going to completely destroy that student of yours. I dare not fathom the gut you had to compare me, a genius in both medicine and magic to someone unknown,” it was Clarise, her pride was wounded. “Keep all the talking to a minimum, what the hell is your problem,” a monotonous voice spoke from behind the closet. Long hair tied in a ponytail, shabby clothes, a symbol under the right eye and a face that could freeze over the world. “W-who are you?” seeing that man, Clarise’s stance faltered, the voice trembled.

“T-that’s your opponent,” Isorin voiced slowly. “Aren’t you supposed to be happy?” Clarise asked seeing the depressed state of the old wizard. “I was confident until he came, the boy refuses to even look at the book. Too simple and too easy is what he says,” Isorin held out a book titled; *The Art of Alchemy*. A standard, beginner book that only a few are given access too for its rather complex to understand.

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“And I still stand by those words, the first pages are filled with magical symbols. They are there just for show – the author doesn’t even know how they work. A waste of time for both the writer and the reader.” Staxius voiced. From sleeping on Isorin’s bed, he stood and sat next to the depressed scholar.



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“How dare you,” Clarise’s pitch increased, Staxius glared. “That book is a work of art, I won’t stand idly by as you calmly disrespect the author and the hours he put in,” she stepped inside.

“No need to get angry, I’m not disrespecting the hard work. It’s admirable, however, I can say what I want about the finished product. It’s out for all to see and honestly, there are mistakes littered all over.” Without fail, Clarice approached and stared, Staxius pointed out the mistakes. “Here and here, it’s the wrong order. The herbs are to be put in first then add the boiling water, not vice-versa. It may seem that the order isn’t going to matter, however, the slight difference in temperature can affect the natural flow of mana, plants are living beings just like us. We should handle them with care,” out of spite, Staxius closed the book – Clarise’s face remained stoic.

“I see,” she stepped back, “-I’m relieved to see the opponent isn’t someone useless. Though I disagree with that method you just described, we’ll meet again in the exams. Unless you score perfectly, Isorin may lose everything,” she chuckled, a little girl at heart, a harsh and egotistical one.

“That’s why you’ve been all depressed,” Staxius gave two hard slaps on the back, “-no need to worry. All the books you’ve shown me, their contents have already been assimilated with their mistakes and faults. Thus the main reason why the first healing potion came out defective, the authors were mistaken about the subtle processes happening in the background – away from the naked eye.” The wizard’s eyes lit back again, “-promise that you’ll defeat that girl. Her demeanor has always been like that; being from noble birth doesn’t help either,” he requested.

“I think you’re mistaken,” the cold voice returned, “-this isn’t to help you get revenge on some egotistical teenager. The reason for my visit is to get the title of Alchemist, a trader’s badge and a badge of authenticity. I hope you haven’t forgotten the terms I laid out,” a scroll fell onto the table, “-a gift for all the effort.” Footsteps were heard, “it’s about to start,” the door opened, “-you better get to work,” Staxius left.

A few twists and turns here, a giant room came into view. It was situated inside the magical guild; the building was bigger than at first sight. “Ones who are to partake in the alchemist exams, please stand in line.” A loud voice spoke, it echoed down the corridors.

To everyone’s surprise, the dozens of students present all left. No one remained, rumors spread that Clarise was going to take the exams as well. It spelled out trouble in bold, her reputation preceded her.

“Staxius Haggard I presume,” the man spoke loud and clear, the reply was a nod. “Go in, your exams await,” the man spoke in a smug way. An assistant wizard by first look. As calm as a painting, Staxius walked and took a seat. The few alchemists present quickly rushed to aid and explain how the test was going to take place. Sadly, nothing seemed as simple. The theory required: three papers on medicine, three on magic, two in astronomy and one in botany. It was then followed by practical exams in both medicine and magic. Then lastly, a practical test about brewing a potion.

All those exams made Staxius tired before even starting. Clarise sat right beside, “I hope you’re not overwhelmed. This is the hardest exam to date, normally only brewing a potion and a few theory works is needed. However, since I’m to be partaking the same test and poor Isorin has put all his research

about scrolls on the line, it's a fair test. Don't want it to be easier than it already is," she smugly added, the thought was to intimidate her foe.

"Thanks for the heads up," the gaze met hers, "however, I'm more worried about when I'll be able to leave. Time isn't a luxury," with haste, a question got asked. "Are all the theory papers here?" the voice firm and direct. "Y-yes," one of the assistants replied. "Awesome, can I ask a favor?" the tone now innocent and shy. "What is it?" the alchemist who presided over, spoke. "Can I have all the papers at once?" a quick pause to check the reactions, "-should not be an issue seeing as only Clarise and I are here," Staxius ended.

"Should not be a problem," the alchemist smugly replied, "however, practical's are over in the other room." A faint sigh was heard.

The clock showed noon, and it began. Each paper was filled with complex questions, it took everything out of the student's mind. Innovation was a big part, most of the questions required critical analysis and deduction. One after the other, the papers were filled out rapidly. The answers were so long, additional papers were given; Staxius worked hard. The conscience slipped into the realm of knowledge yet again.

'What is wrong with that guy,' Clarise looked over and saw a dead face.

Minutes turned to hours, the clock read four, "finished," the trance broke. "Excuse you?" the alchemist coughed, "I'm done, can I please do the practical now?" Staxius asked, to which an assistant guided him to the other room.

"I can't believe it," whilst gathering the answers, "master Clarise, this boy is very talented. The thought of the master alchemist personally examining these answers are exhilarating," the overseer smiled.

"I'M BEAT," the door opened, Staxius fell, the time displayed six. "Welcome back," a familiar voice spoke, Isorin stood beside Avon. After waking, the spirit tracked his master to the guild. Then met up with Isorin who remained depressed and worried, they spoke before realizing each knew Staxius.

"W-what are you doing here?" the tired man asked, "-came to pay my master a little visit," Avon replied with sparkles in the eyes. "How did it pan out, was it difficult?" Isorin asked. "Not really, it was cleverly crafted, especially the medical one. Apart from that, all the rest were fairly simple, I'm confident." He stood, a few minutes later, Clarise stepped out. Her eyes looked dead; the face frowned.

"Is everything alright?" the wizard asked, "-do I look alright to you?" she fired back and left. The examination ended, Staxius soon headed to the hotel. Isorin kept watch, the suspense stole the calm night of sleep. On the same day, all the answers were reviewed, results would be given the next day.

"Watch out," rock covered with rocks, an old friend had made its appearance. "Call for backup, Gritt is here," one of the guards yelled. With haste, Undrar and Achilles joined with the rest of the adventurers. The highest-ranked among them was Emerald; tier-six while the others were Steel; tier-eight.

Not to arise suspicion, Undrar remained in her human form. It limited her full capabilities, however, despite this, the strength she wielded as a demi-goddess wasn't to be played around with. "We didn't make it in time," a pack of wolves, goblins and a few hobgoblins all appeared from out of nowhere. Gritt, the earth elemental led the charge, swing after swing from the hobs, people were crushed. Gritt took care of the long-range, the wolves and goblins acted as a backup, they circled around and attacked

weak spots. Up to now, monsters were thought of as unable to communicate. Though now, all moved as if a single unit.

“Don’t falter guys,” Achilles yelled, the adventurers got massacred. \*Earth Element: Ground Breaker,\* from the back, Undrar used magic to support and slow down the advancement. A spell that momentarily created ravines in the ground, high-tier magic. \*Light Element: Divine Light,\* a protection spell that gave a small shield and partly healed the injured. The spell was cast on everyone standing.

“We need healers, take the wounded, I’ll hold back this elemental,” Achilles yelled, her footsteps echoed around. \*Blade whomst served me in countless battles, I, thy master asked for thy assistance in battle,\* the blade manifested, she leaped, the elemental conjured a weapon in turn. “DIE,” a downward swing, her eyes fired up, \*CLANG,\* the impact noise screamed all-round the battlefield. The strike was so powerful the ground beneath the monster cracked and formed a meter-tall hole. “I guess you are impervious to damage.” She fell back, nothing was lost, \*Shadow Element: Eternal Slumber,\* Undrar cast yet another spell. It blinded the monster, all it saw was darkness. An imprisonment spell that blocked out the vision and perception of everything real in this world. Paired with that, \*Ice Element: Frozen Lake,\* the hole Achilles made was filled by ice as hard as iron if not harder.

“It’s now your chance, everyone CHARGE,” Achilles yelled, the adventurers obeyed. With the main threat restricted by a demi-goddess, there was no way that beast would ever get out. One by one, led by the ancient hero herself, Achilles beheaded hobgoblins after hobgoblins. Everyone followed the example, the fight only just begun.

#### Chapter 134: Repute

“Watch out,” a voice yelled, an arrow flew millimeters away from Achilles’ ear. Behind her, a goblin fell, the green devil had managed to sneak past. “Thanks for the help,” she smiled and continued the onslaught. “It’s Dead eyes,” the fighters cheered, a respected marksman had stepped onto the field. “Dead eyes?” Undrar asked; the man gave a quick nod to which magic continued being used, \*Ice element: Icy Spikes.\* A projectile spell that works similarly to a fireball but does not explode on impact.

Shot after shot, the sneaky pest was killed without a miss. The adventurers’ confidence grew more and more, powerful back-up had arrived. “I see why they named you Dead eyes,” Undrar calmly added in jest. The man’s eye bled, each shot he took was unbelievable. It meant great strain on the eyes – the talent had outgrown the body. “Too bad that your human body is holding you back,” she finished

As time went on, the numbers of monsters diminished slowly. It came down to the last few wolves, nothing major occurred. The team worked together, the defense successfully pushed back the attacker, however, many were injured. “Now it’s time to face Gritt,” Achilles walked closer, a snap from the dragon sufficed. The various spell on the elemental broke, the beast ran out. It yelled, all the rocks around began to levitate and fire in random directions. “Enraged I see,” a single sign from the warrior spoke volumes. All knew her intent, they slowly backed away, none wanted to get in the way.

“Let’s dance,” the ground cracked, she leaped and aimed for the head. Her speed grew, the intensity and brutal impact amplified. One after the other, strikes were made throughout the rocky shaped body. “Impossible,” the people yelled, a beast known as invincible and mighty was stopped. Undrar had a small helping hand, whilst imprison, water magic was used to seep into its inner body. From there on,

the water gradually solidified and created weak spots all over. This changed the whole battle, from deflecting all the physical attacks, Achilles now had weak spots to work with.

Though small and invisible to the naked eyes, a combination of instinct, feeling, and hearing marked the spots clearly. The relentless assault continued, from striking at normal spots to now aiming for the cracks, Gritt took damage. Nothing could be done, the adventurers watched and waited as a master went to work. Beautiful, fluent and agile, she fought as if being water herself.

“The fight is nearly over,” Undrar proclaimed, “-go inform the guild master that Gritt is defeated.” Just as she said defeated, a loud noise echoed around, Achilles stood atop a massive pile of rocks. “Pathetic,” she sighed, the monster wasn’t as tough as expected. “S-sure...” the few Steel ranked looming around rushed inside to fetch said leader.

The fight ended, anticlimactic at best, the threat over the town died. Another problem arose, many were hurt and some even mortally injured. \*Clap, clap,\* “Listen up everyone, take the injured to the guildhall – we’ve got some healers and medics standing by,” the charismatic leader yelled.

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“Good job,” many smiled and thanked Kniq. “Congratulations on defeating Gritt,” the leader approached the duo who picked up Qaisar. “Mention not,” Undrar replied. “Yes, you should rather take care of the injured. What’s the point of defeating this beast if many are to perish due to lack of medical supplies.” Achilles voiced in turn. She spoke true, it didn’t look apparent at first, but the damage done was more than expected. “Do notify the central guild,” Undrar spoke yet again. “No worries, there’s a signed note about the ones who helped in defeating Gritt back at the guild. Do check-in before the journey takes you back to the capital.” Justin left; the air cleared.

“Staxius, Staxius,” Undrar used telepathy, the note was delivered, the duo waited inside Void. “What is it?” time now was night, the fight happened at dusk. An hour had gone by, “the beast has been slain. As predicted, many were injured; I was wondering if the potions are ready? There’s money to be made here. Medical supplies are running low,” the car was parked in front of the guild of which was utter chaos.

“I wish I could help, sadly I’ve only got like ten potions up for consumption.” He replied whilst in bed, she broke the peaceful slumber. “Can’t you do anything?” she urged on. “I can send Avon with the supplies, but ten potions aren’t going to suffice,” he fired back. “It’s just sad to see that people are to die for no reason,” Undrar continued to fight the case. “Fine, I’ll send Avon, no need to make money, I’ll even drop some scroll in there. Make sure only people who need the help the most are treated – can’t be wasting precious medicine.” Unwillingly, Staxius got out of bed.

\*Knock, knock,\* “Wake up Avon, you’ve got jobs to do,” half-awake, the spirit obeyed. A slight touch from the master woke the boy fully, mana got recharged. “Teleport us to the shop.” Blue dust was left behind, the duo disappeared.

Using the same bag, the ten working potions and three common-tier scrolls were given. Avon took the task at hand and set off for town. In turn, Staxius took on another journey, a journey to the world of dreams – a voyage unpredictable at best.

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“Hello people,” he arrived faster than predicted. With a long yawn, Undrar took the bag and headed inside. “What a drag,” Avon vanished into the car – Achilles slept. The day ended; the mortally wounded people were healed thanks to the items provided. Kniq’s name grew more reputable; a band of adventurers who stopped at nothing to help.

Though still unknown to most, the duo from Kniq – most importantly, Achilles; her reputation grew. Reputation as a strong and honest warrior, some few kids even called her a hero. A title which in the past was indeed given to her. Alongside, Viola’s name got praised as a knowledgeable sorceress. \*All hail the saviors of Riverwood,\* cheered echoed inside. Nonchalantly, Undrar smiled and accepted the praises, many complimented her might. After a few minutes of idle chitchat with many up and coming adventurers, an opening to leave presented itself. The bag was left empty, ‘people sure are grateful,’ she walked outside.

“Viola,” a voice softly spoke, a man leaned against the wall beside the door. “What is it?” she turned and replied courteously. “Is your adventuring party that strong?” the posture straightened. “I’d like to keep it humble, but as far as I’m concerned, with Achilles and I present at this instant, our party is only a fourth of its normal strength. I should hope this gives you an idea,” the legs moved yet again. “Give me an opportunity to train under your tutelage,” he dashed and bowed. “I can’t confirm you being accepted,” his plea was ignored.

‘Rejected once again,’ Dead eyes thought, the teeth gritted in pain. “If you’re serious about joining us,” the voice now distant, spoke. “-Come to the capital, head to the central guild and ask for Staxius Haggard – that’s our leader. Though in fairness, our guild hasn’t truly been established yet, just a group of individuals.” A thunderous roar woke people in the vicinity, “time to go home,” another quest done.

Another night and another day, Staxius woke fully rested. The shop became comfier to sleep rather than the hotel. Plainly because this building was fully owned by him – nothing can beat the feeling of being at home. ‘Should take the others another ten hours before arriving.’

As usual, the town slowly came to life. Staxius headed for the magical guild. “Good morning master Isorin,” he walked inside to see the wizard sat comfortably with a book in hand. “Morning Staxius,” the book closed, greetings were returned.

“Any news about the results?” Staxius asked; a chair got pulled. “In a few minutes or so, I’ve was notified that the papers were examined rather quickly,” Isorin replied. “Thanks for the heads-up,” he sat and browsed the few books resting on the table.

“Master Isorin,” after a few minutes, the young assistant called from the counter. “Must be the results,” he stood, Staxius followed suit. ‘My heart is beating; this feels like the entrance exam at Claireville Academy. What a feeling of nostalgia,’ anxiety gently tickled, the anticipation was bearable.

“This hall goes on forever now doesn’t it?” Staxius spoke, they had been walking for quite a while now. “We’re headed to the alchemist’s division of the building. Those guys like to keep it quiet, noise and other disturbances can be enough to create a wave of verbal assault,” the wizard explained why and how this section of the guild was used.

Along the way, Clarise joined up from another room. “Morning,” she greeted whilst half-asleep. “Morning,” the others replied. Time had finally come, two massive white doors stood at the end.

Torches and tapestries depicting demons and angels were displayed a few meters before said room came into view. Intimidating was an understatement.

\*Bong,\* the entrance opened with a loud noise. The interior slowly made itself visible. Red carpet all around, a giant floating globe stood in front, bookshelves on the bottom and first floors. Spiral staircases around the edge of the middle. The ground was completely even for in the center, it was carved into the ground. About three steps lower than the normal floor onto which the strange device levitated. Paired with that, countless robed people rushed around, they held books and other utensils.

“Over here,” Clarise took command and guided them upstairs, a floor above the main area. A place circular and filled with bookshelves, the climb didn’t stop there. It went a floor above, now on the second. Relatively smaller than the lower floors, it hosted offices, \*Master Alchemist,\* was written on one of the four doors. Each was in the four-cardinal position. The main room was located on the northern side.

Without knocking, Clarise entered as if owning the place. All followed behind, by all, only Isorin and Staxius were allowed. The assistant sadly had to remain on the lower floors.

“How many times do I have to ask for the simple courtesy of knocking before entering,” a relatively old looking man sat behind a desk. The room was of a shade of dark red and brown, archaic but elegant. “Sorry not sorry,” the girl took a seat calmly.

Isorin shook to the core, Staxius felt how nervous the wizard was. “Calm down,” he whispered and stood in front, shielding the view from the master alchemist. “I’m sorry,” Isorin gently muttered.

“Let’s get to business,” the room reverberated. “-Staxius Haggard and Clarise, I’ve personally reviewed and analyzed each of the answer sheets provided. Not to mention the physically brewed potions,” the tone felt saddened and disappointed. “The results are laid here,” two pieces of paper were kept hidden from view. “I must apologize for having to host such a brutally tough exam,” the tone remained the same. “I know not the reasons why and how, but it’s apparent that Isorin trusted in you, young man,” he pointed at Staxius.

“I was sure that this exam could not possibly turn well for anyone,” he stood; “-however, I was proven wrong. Never in my years have I seen such a thing.” The results were revealed.

Name of Participant: Clarise Reinhardt

[Paper One Medicine: A]

[Paper Two Medicine: A]

[Paper Three Medicine: A]

[Paper One Magic: A]

[Paper Two Magic: A]

[Paper Three Magic: A]

[Paper One Astronomy: A]

[Paper Two Astronomy: A]

[Paper One Botany: A]

[Paper One Practical's: B]

"I expected as much from a current Alchemist," the master alchemist's tone remained sad, it seemed more obvious that the other might have failed. "Don't worry so much Isorin," Staxius whispered, the wizard took a look at said results. The heart shuddered; the alchemist didn't look pleased either. A lost cause, "we've lost, there's no way you can top that score – I'm sorry to have caused you so much trouble," the prospect of all the research being taken away only made the condition worse.

"How about that," Clarise acted smug. No response from Staxius, the face remained blank; nothing could be seen nor said.

Chapter 135: New Badges

The other piece of paper came out, the tension turned palpable. In no way was beating Clarise a possibility now.

Name of Participant: Staxius Haggard

[Paper One Medicine: A+]

[Paper Two Medicine: A+]

[Paper Three Medicine: A+]

[Paper One Magic: A+]

[Paper Two Magic: A+]

.....

[Paper Three Magic: A+]

[Paper One Astronomy: A+]

[Paper Two Astronomy: A+]

[Paper One Botany: A+]

[Paper One Practical's: A+]

"WHAT IS THIS?" Clarise voiced, the master alchemist held no answer. Staxius watched with no care. "See, I did say there wasn't a thing to be worried about," he turned and face the now clueless wizard. "How can you... I mean did you study at a prestigious institution back in Arda or something?" Isorin's state remained in perpetual doubt. "Not really, I've just amassed all that knowledge from my father, the laboratory he had and other means. All the questions were mildly difficult. There's a pattern if one pays attention," he turned and looked at the master alchemist.

"The boy is right," the head lowered, Clarise could not believe it. "Little girl, you may be a genius or prodigy, however, to underestimate and judge people by your standards, that's worse than anything

else,” Staxius added with salt in the tone. He hated people like her, people who looked down upon others. “But how could you...” her face sunk down into the abyss. “It’s simple, I was going to purposefully let you score the best score possible. However, the way your eyes felt during said exams could not be ignored – the arrogance in them, I was disgusted.”

\*Cough,\* the small argument ended with the master coughing. “What is done is done, congratulations on getting a perfect score across all the papers. I must say I’m more than impressed. With knowledge and skill like that – nothing is out of reach. From an astronomer to a doctor and alchemist, the potential is infinite,” the man sat and took out badges and other miscellaneous things from the drawer.

“Is it final then, I passed all the requirements to be known as an alchemist?” Staxius asked with no particular interest. “Yes, you’re more than qualified,” the table slowly filled with papers and other things. “Please take a seat,” the man offered, Clarise still stood breathless and perplexed.

“This is the Alchemist badge and a few papers to get one started in said art, there’s also a badge certifying your eligibility in the medical and astronomy field,” the badge in question was of black and golden color. A pentagram with a few scribbles here and there, said was the crest; It looked simple though impressive. “I, Flein Reinhart, now welcome you, Staxius Haggard, into our ranks,” they shook hands.

“Ahh, the prodigy is related to the master, hence her familiarity,” Staxius stood, “-I better head out, there are more pressing matters to which my attention is needed. If my help is ever required, please drop by the shop,” he explained where it was located.

“Thank you very much,” the old man now used a humble voice. “No worries, I shall see you some other times,” the paper the man gave was left behind. Only the badge counted, the faulty knowledge people had didn’t interest the man in the least.

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The walk lasted a few minutes till the ground floor came in view. “Isorin, the research is saved. Cheer up, there are things needed still, get that head back into reality,” he poked the shrunken cheeks. “I’m at a loss for words, I didn’t expect such a heavy upset. A perfect score in every single paper, that isn’t possibly human now is it?” Isorin asked in a joyful tone. “Yeah...” the reply felt monotonous, Clarity came into mind – part of the reason all the questions were answered.

A few hours went by, Staxius’s profile updated massively. The Magical guild worked hand in hand with the Fighter’s Guild.

[Name: Staxius Haggard]

[Title: King of Arda, Alchemist, Trader]

[Ranking: Silver Adventurer with Platinum Potential]

[Important Deeds: Help in discovering the sadistic Noble]

[Credibility: Certified Potion maker, Authentic dealer in Magical Scrolls]

[Reputation: Honorable and Transparent]



“Not that impressive?” Staxius asked sarcastically. “Not impressive at all,” the wizard added in jest. “Here are your badges, even if they are lost – no need to worry. We’ve already notified all the guilds and other necessary outlets of who you are. The title has been blurred as per request from some powerful people. Instead, it’s Baron of Dorchester that is displayed. In researching who the name Staxius Haggard – it popped up many times in Dorchester. You hold a seat at the noble council, so many titles – definitely a freak of nature,” Isorin finished.

“Thanks for all the help and sorry for all the trouble. To make up for the latter, do drop by later, I shall have some scrolls for the pleasures of knowledge,” with a wink, the trip to the guild ended.

Seeing the other guild was just a few buildings away, Staxius walked over. Diane’s unwelcoming face shone through the glass window. ‘Great,’ he stepped in, she noticed and snarled. “No need to look so happy,” he spoke in jest.

“Good morning Staxius, are you here for the daily quest updates?” Melisa spoke. “Just the one I wanted to see, I’m here to put up a request,” he walked over.

“Is that the case, then please fill out this form and state how much the reward is,” a piece of paper was handed. Rapidly, it filled, [Quest: Hunt for Medicinal Herbs] more of an errand, the rank given was Porcelain. “And the reward?” she asked. “How about 2 coppers per plant,” he replied, “-the more one brings, the more cash they get, no definite price range,” he added nonchalantly.

The board came down, first, all the completed quests were shown.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Missing Person – Tier 10(Completed)]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

[Kill Quest: Goblins – Tier 10(Completed)]

[Kill Quest: Hob Goblins – Tier 9(Completed)]

[Kill Quest: Gritt – Tier 4(Completed)]

“I guess my party did kill Gritt,” he mumbled whilst leaned on the counter. “Whatever do you mean? The adventurers set out yesterday, no one should have arrived...” she replied baffled. “I apologize for that; I was informed that Achilles dealt the final blow. With Viola by her side, nothing is impossible. However, don’t let that cloud judgment, Achilles can handle just about anything on her own,” deep down, having them as partners sufficed. A dragon, an ancient hero and a more than joyful spirit – a trio that helped to overshadow the shady and dark persona of his.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

[Hunt for Medicinal Herbs – Tier 10]

[Kill Quest: Hobgoblins – Tier 8]

[Kill Quest: Wolves – Tier 9]

“Don’t you think that the dragon spotting quest should be removed?” Staxius asked before the crowds rushed. “In two days or so, if no one takes up on the offer then, sure, it’s going to expire,” she answered, the crowd ran – Staxius slipped through and headed to the shop.

‘Teleportation sure would be convenient,’ he wondered whilst strolling through town. From the business district, to now the commercial, Staxius walked. On the various television sets – Aceline’s first concert at Claireville Academy was displayed. \*The pride of Hidros,\* it read below, she sure was popular. [Notice: Aceline is to go on tour in the main continent in the upcoming days]

That announcement was completely ignored for the countless bars and taverns Staxius frequented came in view. “Aye der Staxius, why don’t ya come by some time?” the bartender of the shadier looking bars spoke or rather, yelled. He aired out some of the carpets onto which bloodstain was seen. “Maybe later, Timothy,” Staxius waved back, the usual stoic face became familiar all across. A new owner, a nice partner and fearless whilst dealing with hoodlums. Though they ended up drinking most of the time, no care was given to appearances.

Even the leader of one of God’s ale trafficking joined in once. As usual, he stepped inside and began brewing potions, writing scrolls and studying one of the relic class symbology.

Far, far away from the capital – in Plaustan. Near the southeast, on the beach, Aceline took in the view and sunbathed. “Lady Aceline,” Scott spoke loudly. “Over here,” she waved back – the beach was empty. “We should really get inside, there are plans for the next show to be made,” without a care, he took her by hand and gently pulled. Her fair skin had grains of sand all over, the hair was tied in a lower-ponytail. “As you wish,” she grudgingly headed inside.

“Now on the subject of protection,” Scott voiced, the conversation had lasted a few hours – it reached the end. From planning songs to the stage and other things, everything was discussed. “Isn’t the emperor going to send over guards?” she asked to which he replied with, “sadly not. Caution is advised, there’s no telling to the unpredictability of rivals or enemies. First and foremost, you’re the pride of Hidros – the only outlet we have to the outside world. Protection is more important than having a few exposing outfits to please the fans,” the concern voiced, Scott asked for a suggestion.

“Why not hire an adventuring party, if we are going by the whole pride of Hidros things, then why not let the protectors of said continent serve as my bodyguards,” she voiced. “That’s a great idea,” the excitement died down. “-I don’t think the kingdom has many powerful adventurers. Even if there were a few chosen, all look large and have battle scars all over. It will be off-putting, we need a person that is inconspicuous and strong,” the prerequisites fit a small demographic. “I’ve got a person in mind, the winner of the two-versus-two tournament,” she suggested. “You mean the snow angel, Eira?” he asked. “No, her father, Staxius Haggard. I’m sure that I needn’t speak about the strength the demon wields.”

“I’ll be frank, that guy freaks me out. The aura around him is definitely of a killer, I’d wager my life that the amount of blood on his hands could fill up a tank,” Scott’s tone changed to worrisome. “I’ve made up my mind, he shall be mine bodyguard, it’s going to last only four days – nothing major is to happen anyways,” the matter was settled. “We’ll head for the capital in the coming week, I’ll contact the guild beforehand.” Scott ended the conversation.

Back on the roads leading into Rosespire, the victorious trio arrived. Before heading to the shop, a visit to the guild was in order. “Here’s the note from guild leader, Justin.” Undrar stared directly into the eyes of Melisa. “Good job,” Diane interrupted, “-another quest added to Kniq’s accomplishments.

[Adventuring Party: Kniq]

[Achievements: Uncovering the plot about dying Adventurers, Saviors of Riverwood, Slayer of Gritt.]

“A pretty good profile for a beginner, there’s still a long way before them turning into a guild,” Diane paused, “-I wish you well in the upcoming journeys,” the party left.

“WE’RE BACK HOME MASTER,” the door swung open, Staxius nearly fell off the chair. “Calm down,” he tried warning the spirit who dashed and speared the master onto the ground. “Idiot,” a chop to the head sufficed. “Welcome back Undrar and Achilles,” he stood and brushed the dust away from the clothes. “We’re back home,” they both spoke with a smile.

“Glad to have you back,” not knowing what to do as a reward, Staxius patted their head. “A job well done, you best head to the hotel and rest,” to which they calmly left.

“Have you organized a party for them later tonight?” \*Boing, boing,\* “Could you not jump on the bed,” Staxius requested before answering Avon’s question. “Yes, a full-on drinking party – we’re to get wasted tonight. There is cause for celebrations, you three defeated Gritt and I became an Alchemist. The main goal of making a guild isn’t far off. We lack three things if I’m right, money, an actual headquarters, and reputation. The first two are my responsibilities,” a white fume came from the brewing apparatus. “Oh shiii,” he dashed.

## Chapter 136: The Twin Jellyfish Bar

Dusk settled in, a few dozen potions accompanied by a few uncommon and rare healing scrolls. Staxius sat with the head resting on the arms crossed which laid on the table. Avon slept peacefully behind. ‘The party...’ he had drooled a bit before the nap broke. The sound of people swearing streets across helped in said awakening. “Avon,” he stretched, the time had come for celebrations. “What is it?” the spirit unwillingly spoke, the sleep felt too good to be broken. “Wake up,” Staxius, half-asleep he pulled the boy out of bed, the body light and frail. “Fine,” Avon reluctantly stood.

Without much hassle, the party joined up – the spirit had to use teleportation a fair bit. Staxius grew to abuse how easy it became to travel from places to place in a heartbeat. Nothing exciting happened, not till they reached Timothy’s tavern. The other bars felt too formal and calm to be enjoyable. “Aye Staxius,” time was close to eleven. “Lovely night now isn’t it Tim,” the party took a seat at one of the only circular tables at the back. “I guess it’s da usual?” he asked to which Staxius replied enthusiastically with, “double it for tonight,” a smirk told all. The other people who frequented said place was also of the same mindset. Drinks after drinks, they got drunk without a drop being lost.

Drinks arrived at Staxius's table, a barrel of ale, a few bottles of wine, and others. "Pretty hardcore for tonight, well enjoy, – we are open till the day comes and all are blackout drunk," with a casual laugh, Timothy left.

"Before we begin, I know that you three are already tipsy. Therefore, I'd like to say what I can whilst I'm my own self," Staxius spoke, the tone felt somewhat serious. "-the day isn't long till our guild is officially recognized. I've already begun working on financial trouble. Word can't express how much gratitude I feel to have such lovely partners besides me. Long ago, I had the same sort of feeling with another bunch of friends. Sadly, time stops for no one, only Viola remains from that crew. Despite this, I'd like to say, with Avon and Achilles here, the same feeling of nostalgia overwhelms the mundane nature of life in general. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all for sticking by my side. Let us all drink to a fruitful future – our journey has only begun," the ale filled mug raised.

\*Cling,\* all cheered with mugs in hand. In a fail swoop, the drinks were refilled again. "I'd like to add something to what Master said," Avon coughed and spoke. "I know not when I was created or how I came into existence. All that is apparent is that I'm a spirit who's a bit overpowered. From being trapped in a car to being released and given a new life, I'm also grateful to be able to enjoy this time in a good company. I'm confident that our time together isn't ending yet, Staxius is immortal, Viola is a demi-goddess and Achilles an ancient hero. I dare anyone to find a party any stronger than this," to that, many laughed and the mugs were filled again.

"My turn," Achilles spoke, a few hiccups later, "honestly, I'm the same as Avon. Imprisoned and calmly resting in the afterlife until someone decided to revive my soul. I was shocked to see that my memories remained fresh and intact – so was the skill and power bestowed. To that, I'm happy to be of use; though this realm fills lackluster. The only opponent I can dream of fighting is Master Staxius – though my weakness is already known. Despite this, it's much more fun," she sighed then continued, "-I'm fully aware that the self-righteous nature of mine isn't perfect for the heir to the god of death. Still, thank you for accepting me in this closed group of friends," she ended. This sort of behavior was normal, alcohol brought out people's deepest thoughts and emotions. More often than not, if one went out drinking with someone special – both would usually speak about how much they cared for one another.

Another mug, another refill, \*cough,\* Undrar spoke, "I'd just like to say, screw you Staxius," her mug emptied and slammed onto the table. "Screw you for leaving me alone for all these years. Don't you think it's a bit uncalled for to forget the person YOU rudely took from the hall of rebirth to go on an adventure? What is done is done, the sixteen years felt like months if I'm being honest. Seeing Eira grow into the person she is now made it worth it. Nevertheless, something came to my attention – I spoke to Eira a few nights ago," the eyes turned fearless, "-tell me why," the eyebrows raised, "-tell me why the news about Staxius Haggard being married to the QUEEN of Arda HASN'T BEEN BROUGHT TO MY ATTENTION?" a slam on the table rattled the overall loud and noisy chatter.

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"Oh, I forgot about that," Staxius chuckled and continued to drink. "You casually forgot?" her cheeks flushed, she stood -"y-yes," Staxius gulped. "Whatever," her stance went back to relaxed, "-you'll never

change. Just inform everybody back in Dorchester sometime soon,” yawns were seen across the flushed and tired faces of the party members.

‘Dorchester,’ he wondered, ‘should pay them a visit soon. I did somewhat vanish without saying anything,’ at this point only Staxius drank. The others were passed out and laid to rest on the seats. “Timothy,” Staxius called, the stance reverted to sober, “how can I help?” he rushed over. “Is that thing opened at this hour?” both whispered to one another. “Meeting with those guys right now is possible, however, it’s a death sentence – do you really wish to meet the traffickers?” the voice now nearly silent.

“Nothing excites me more than a bunch of ruffians and some low-key work,” the index finger brushed against the nose, Staxius remain confident. “Alright, follow me then,” the path led into the toilet. There, behind one of the urinals, a button got pressed; revealing a secret door behind the mirror. “Good luck, I can’t follow anyone inside – your funeral.” The barkeeper stopped. “Don’t worry about the cash, ask the blond-headed girl – she’ll pay once awake,” the door closed behind.

A neon sign provided the only source of light, \*The Twin Jellyfish Bar.\* Unimpressed, the walk continued inside. From the painful silence to slight murmurs and whispers, the carved-out pathway slowly reached a secret hidden by many. The place was home to the Dark-guilds members who met to discuss business and have a bit of fun.

Amidst the darkness, a faint red light marked where the bar was. He stepped in; the place was dimly lit on purpose. It helped in safeguarding the identity of many who knew of this place. Though it wasn’t necessary – the atmosphere of secrecy it provided added to its charm. To the right, a bar with a counter reaching half-way into the room. Behind said counter, glass displays with bottles from expensive and exquisite brands from renowned brewing companies. Further down the right side, an area reserved for business talk and other activities meant for the eyes of the participants only. In the top left corner, poles and a stage. Women, what was to be expected, dressed in nothing more than underwear. Some were fully naked, the man who sat underneath all the action drank and remained relatively quiet. Moans and screams were heard from opposite the counter, a corridor led to another room. \*Playthings for sale,\* was written in bold atop.

‘Looks like fun,’ sarcasm overwhelmed the mind. To the eyes of someone normal and average, this place could be seen as heaven or hell – it depended. \*BANG,\* a man walked out with blood all over the face, “the whore didn’t obey, so I shot her,” he proclaimed to the group of friends sitting near the podium. They all laughed, “there’s a rule to not kill the merchandise.” The barkeeper yelled from across, “cheer up, she was only a demi. There are no rules against those slaves are there?” the man fired back with the tone pretty arrogant. “Fair enough,” the barkeeper went back to mixing drinks.

‘Thank god the others aren’t here to see this,’ Staxius approached the barkeeper. “Good evening,” the barkeeper spoke, Jason was written on a name tag. “Good evening,” Staxius replied, the people sat next to him all turned, the gazes could be felt. “Jason, this guy isn’t a regular,” the closest person spoke out. A shot of whiskey got placed in front of Staxius. It took a few seconds before Jason yelled, “INTRUDER,” the lights turned on – new faces weren’t welcomed in this place.

“Hey ponytailed bitch, who the fuck are you?” they wore top hats, guns were pulled and aimed. “A guy looking for business,” without a care in the world, Staxius delicately drank and admired the whiskey. “You better say who you are,” the man who called him out spoke with a menacing tone.

“Can’t we all be civil,” Staxius asked, the glass got emptied. “He’s trying to act civil here,” they mocked and laughed. “Well we don’t care about courtesy here, princess,” the same man spat at his feet. “And neither do I,” the voice calm and unfaltering, the man who spat fell, a fork embedded itself into the neck. “Shit, my hands must have slipped,” casually, the hands clapped and rubbed against one another. The latter was dirtied by blood, Staxius’s face changed.

“WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?” all who sat now stood, someone got killed right before their eyes. Most of the noncombatants screamed and ran inside the changing rooms. “Who the hell is making all that noise?” coming out of the private room, a heavily tattooed man. \*Bang, bang,\* without another warning, guns were shot. ‘Time to test out this new spell combination,’ \*Death Element: Absolute Barrier,\* all bullets stopped. “WHAT IS HAPPENING?” they yelled, another barrage of bullets got fired. An invisible wall was conjured, using the dense mana he naturally had. A moment of inspiration whilst in Clarity triggered this new spell. A wall made of mana that compressed air into something unbreakable.

“Are we done playing?” Staxius asked with the tone now cold and merciless. \*Snap,\* the levitating bullets turned and shot back at one man only. “The whore didn’t obey, so I shot him,” a bit of retribution – Staxius killed the guy who bragged about slaying a demi-human. A single bullet sufficed, though it kept on impaling the man even after death. The body broke bit by bit until it was reduced to only holes and bones.

“ALRIGHT, CALM DOWN STAXIUS,” the old man yelled. “Hey, it’s you from earlier,” Staxius waved with a cavalier behavior. Most were shocked and traumatized by how brutal someone could be. “A fucking demon,” everyone looked at one another.

“AUSTIN,” Jason yelled, he didn’t look bothered either. “-We’ve got another body, please send the cleaning crew.” Another drink got placed on the bloodied counter, the body with a fork inside leaned over. Blood dripped; the glass turned red. “Thanks for the drink,” another sip was taken. “You demon,” Jason added in jest, “-go speak to the old man. He’s the one you want to see if there is business to be discussed. Don’t worry about these idiots, they’re run-of-the-mill thugs.”

“Over here,” the old man yelled in urgency -“coming,” Staxius replied. “Thanks for the drinks, you’ve got talent,” a smile later, they now sat in the private room.

“I didn’t expect this visit so early,” the room rather small but comfy, a picture of a naked girl rested behind the tattooed man. “I’m Karlson,” he spoke, “-let’s get right to business,” the atmosphere felt relaxed. “Nicely met,” Staxius fired back. “I want information and a lot of them. Also, there’s a deal I’m willing to consider.”

“Alright,” Karlson straightened the posture and placed a revolver onto the table. “Before we get started,” Staxius quickly grabbed the gun and fired. “Trigger happy much?” he asked; the bullet went straight past the head. “Well, I figured that this conversation would be better if only we knew about it.”

“We’re alone, aren’t we?” Karlson added in a smug tone. “Yes, now we are,” a gentle smile later, the conversation began.

“I want information about the band of people who launched an attack on a tailor shop earlier this week. I’ve already got their location, and it will not take less than a few hours to exterminate them. Therefore, I’d like to know who is in charge, having more bodies to clean up is a drag,” Staxius leaned forward.

"I understand, though that gang is out of my range. They operate underneath the other leaders of which I can't give out any more details. I'm but a pawn in this organization, the dark guilds have more influence than you can ever think," the answer firm and direct.

"Well then," the badge of Alchemist was placed onto the table, "-I'd like to speak about the God's ale," he smirked.

Chapter 137: Klaern Aebalar

"You'd like to speak about what?" Karlson choked, bringing up such a sensitive subject out of the blue was reckless, to say the least. "You heard me the first time, I said I'd like to discuss God's ale," Staxius sipped in turn.

"You must be crazy," he continued to deny – giving away information would be the last thing the trafficker did. "I'm not that insensitive to ask for information, I'm sure the overseers are keeping you on a tight leash," the glass emptied. "Why not cut a deal, I'd like to buy some, price isn't an issue though I'd appreciate some kind of discount," the voice serious and unfaltering, Karlson could not but give.

"That I can do, the package will be delivered at the shop to our discretion. I hope this solves all your quandaries," the tone defiant, Staxius's presence now annoyed the man. "No, we're not done just yet," he sighed, "I'd like to take a look at the demi-humans you have. I'm sure that Arda becoming its own kingdom and the dark guild keeping the demi's here might come across as a problem. That is if the stay in nonconsensual – otherwise it's fine. Though this boring talk won't bring anything good, do show me the way," he stood.

"I've got more business to attend too, there's someone already waiting to give the tour. Do keep the bloodshed to a minimum – replacements are hard to come by, especially when everyone is neck-deep into this whole adventuring thing," the tone now casual, Staxius left without further bothering Karlson. 'Stupid brat,' he thought, 'it's impressive how that boy could stop all the bullets at once.' A cigar got lit, 'might come in useful later. Need to see what the guy is like first, the lords aren't going to be happy about this little incident.'

"So, this is where all the girls are displayed," Staxius spoke, the guide stopped and nodded. A glass pane with girls from every possible region in Hidros, it ranged from elder to youngsters. "There's just about everything a person could want," he continued to think out loud, the guard stood by and listened. 'They all act so weirdly, the body motions are almost too fluid, the eyes look dead inside.'

"I'll take the one in the far right," he pointed at a relatively small girl – someone aged seventeen if guessed properly. The reason was that she had elven ears and looked more alive than the others. "As you wish," the guard took things in hand and organized a room in which Staxius now sat and waited patiently. 'How mad would Xula be if she knew I was in a place like this,' he relished the thought.

\*Click,\* the door opened. Without a word uttered, the girl crawled into bed and began to undress. "Wait for a second," Staxius stopped her hands from going any further, "isn't that job supposed to be the guy's privilege?" he sat and stared with the eyes blank. "S-sorry," unknowingly she got dressed again. "Stop a minute," he interrupted her again, "... her face looked scared and confused. "I didn't tell you to get dressed either," he sounded so bored it made the girl even more nervous. "No need to be anxious, I care not about you nor your body. I'm after one thing only, and that's information," he

straightened the posture and whispered, they both sat on the bed. “W-what?” she asked, her face now baffled and body covered by the blanket.

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Silently, Staxius placed the index finger on his mouth and told her to shush. ‘I expected as much,’ the eyes closed. The outline of people was seen through the wall; spies. ‘In total, I can see and feel about three, their aura is not familiar nor impressive. Probably some people sent by Karlson, I did come across as someone suspicious back there.’

\*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from when you were born and till you die, I, the god of death, hold in my hands the strings which binds you to this world, by my authority, I order thy chains to be severed, spell, Tactus Interitus.\* Three-snap sufficed. The outline vanished; the unwelcome guest died. “Right,” he stood, “-let’s get to business. What I want is information, anything is essential. You were given a sip of God’s ale; the symptoms haven’t taken effect just yet. I’m to guess you’re new around here?” the tone friendly and welcoming, the frightened girl gathered courage.

“I-I was a-abducted by s-some people I thought were my friends. One day, whilst a visit to the capital, I came across a building that said they were an embassy for Arda. A place where all demi’s who were sadly outside the border when the independence was made public could meet. At that moment, I shuddered, not seeing my family again, just the thought made me want to run away. At first, they were friendly but when the time came for me to depart, they lured me into some strange building. Memories from back then and now is fuzzy at best, I don’t remember anything – my body aches all the time. I think I may be pregnant too, but there’s no way to know,” tear ran down her cheeks, “- I-I just want to go back h-home,” her cries intensified.

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“First of all, you better shut up,” he said so in fear of being discovered. “Making promises isn’t something I do. Fake hope is the worst thing a person can have. However, I can’t just take you and only you out. It will be unjust to leave others to suffer. Honestly, I’m powerless in the sense that there are more people in similar situations out there. Evil is never going to stop as long as there’s good. It’s a perfect balance,” he paused, the look on her face spoke volumes.

“Are you just going to abandon me and leave?” the eyes looked like a puppy. “Probably yes,” he fired back frank and without remorse. “My name is Staxius Haggard, what’s yours?”

“Klaern Aebalar,” the word painfully rolled out her mouth. “Aebalar...” memories got triggered, “Is Aebalar your family name?” the voice changed to serious. “Y-yes,” in fear, her eyes shut. “This may be a personal question, but is Faraine Aebalar your mother by any chance?” deep down, Staxius wanted this to not be true.

“H-how d-do you k-know my mother,” her eyes opened, the persona changed immediately. “H-how is s-she doing?” a plethora of questions were asked. Most of which, fell on deaf ears. “This may come as a shock, but Faraine Aebalar has left the realm of the living long ago. I personally dealt the last strike,” to which he recounted when and how the mother died.

“I-I’ve lost e-everything,” she broke down, the dream of going back home to a loving family shattered. “I apologize,” the tone didn’t seem genuine. His eyes told a different story, it glimmered. Upon a glance at



it, she didn't hold a grudge. "There isn't a need to worry. I care not anymore, there's no point in rescue," the voice gave up, the fate as a slave settled-in. "Damn it, this is why I hate this," with a sigh, Staxius stood.

"Listen up, this isn't pity nor is it compassion. I made a promise to personally meet and apologize to Yaegar Aebalar. It didn't come to pass for many things that came up along the way. I took that boy's mother's life. The least I can do is return him someone close, a big sister who can raise him into a respectable man." The look in her eye changed, the thought of having a little brother was foreign – the memory didn't kick in until he said the name.

A way to reduce the feeling of not being raised by a mother. Staxius found a way to lessen said pain, pain all too familiar to little Staxius. This task overshadowed everything; the decision was made. At any cost, that girl was to be sent back to Arda and to her brother, a task he was to accomplish alone. Luckily, Void was parked next to the shop.

"Miss Aebalar, better get dressed," the long sleeve rolled, the eyes turned from blank to deadly in seconds. Nothing else needed to be said, her will crumbled – Staxius's overpowered determination and personality sufficed.

With only a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, she followed. The door broke open, the guards remained still, it wasn't of their business. "Jason," he yelled, the bar came in view. "I'm taking this one with me, I'm not going to buy her, fight me or let me go – up to you. But I'll pay for the drinks," a gold coin flew across the room, Staxius headed for the door. "No worries, I don't want more bodies to pile up, just make sure to bring more business later," Jason yelled, the voice courteous.

"Should we kill him?" one of the guards approached, "be my guest, this bar is a free place. People are allowed to do what they want," a casual smirk later, five of the guards opened fire. \*Death Element: Absolute Barrier,\* he turned, the eyes seem to burn, Jason shrugged. \*Snap,\* the bullets were sent back. "More bodies again," the bartender sighed.

The door to the bathroom opened, Timothy waited on the other side. "Aye Staxius, how was it?" he asked. "Fun," he replied in jest. The others were still passed out drunk, "this way," he led her outside and into the car. "Where are we going?" the state of confusion broke, "we're headed home. Back to Arda, better sleep, there's about two to three days' worth of driving to do. It roared, the mode set for overdrive and gone.

The day came by earlier than expected, the trio awoke to a vomit infested tavern. It reeked of alcohol and sweat, "what a night," Achilles mumbled. "I agree," Undrar stretched. "Where's Master?" Avon asked to which the dragon held the answer. Through telepathy, the reason for the sudden absence was explained.

"Undrar, you're in charge," she was proclaimed as the secondary leader. To that, her first task was to get everyone in working order – bathing, a good breakfast. The hangover went by quickly since Kniq took half the day off – then headed back to adventuring.

"Good afternoon, Viola," Diane spoke, the guild remained empty at that time. "Good afternoon," she replied. "Are you here for the quest?" she asked, the reply was a nod.

[Masked Murderer – Tier 2]

[Potential Dragon spotting – Tier X]

[Escort for Trading Routes – Tier 8]

[Dark Guilds – Tier 4]

[Hunt for Medicinal Herbs – Tier 10]

[Kill Quest: Hobgoblins – Tier 8]

[Kill Quest: Wolves – Tier 9]

“I’m afraid there’s nothing new this time around,” she spoke in disappointment. “No worries, we’ll just do the kill quests,” Undrar replied and left. Avon remained at the shop to wait for potential customers – potions were ready to be sold.

“Tell Avon to sell the potions for fifteen coppers per flask,” is what Undrar told the spirit earlier in the day. “-and to not touch the scrolls even if the world came to an end,” that part was also included.

The journey had now taken Staxius half way till Savaview bridge came in view. At this pace, the drive to the Dorchester’s ex- noble district would be a day at most. That was if no stops were made along the way. He had been driving since the previous night, the girl grew to be hungry.

Time went on, the party back in the capital continued to do quests. Avon got a few customers but none bought the potions. A kid who watched over the counter was seen as a joke. A package came by earlier, to which he gently stored away. The sun began to set, the car only just passed the bridge. “I still can’t fathom the distance between each province.” Another hour later, the lively town of Castle Garsley came in view.

“Let’s stop here for tonight, I’ve heard the people here are pretty friendly,” He spoke in jest. It looked nothing from when the last visit was made. Keeping track of the date wasn’t something much fond of, each passing day meant one became older. The gigantic wall rendered the member of the council speechless. “Can’t believe they did all that in just a few months. Given it’s probably been more than half a year, this is a work of unimaginable skill,” the word came out without realizing, “this way of building and craftsmanship – definitely the work of dwarves.”

Chapter 138: Abdicate

“Where are we?” the girl asked to which he ignored. The mind was lost in thought, from scaffolding to now a full-on working town, the car slowly drove towards the entrance. Guarded by some clocked men, he pulled over and got out. For all he knew, the town might have been altered beyond anyone remembering his face nor name.

“Who stands there,” the guard spoke, the voice firm and direct. “A traveler, I’ve come to stay the night, is there any way I can gain access?” Staxius asked, the voice normal and casual. “Definitely, all are welcome in this town – from demi’s to elders, we greet with open arms,” quite a change from the tone they used. Deep down the guys who stood to watch were friendly; the atmosphere of the town did its job.

“Thank you very much,” the car started back up and drove inside. It now became more apparent, most of the buildings were build at the foot of the hill. Though the slope wasn’t left out in the open either.

Filled with construction with the castle as the main jewel. It stood rightfully atop and watched. A few turns were needed, Staxius got lost, this place was denser than imagined.

"Isn't that road headed to the castle?" the girl pointed to the left. "Well spotted," sleep caught up – it grew harder to focus.

At the castle itself, time was around eight. Many came back from work. The tavern was filled completely, though this didn't matter. Walls were broken down to allow more people to enjoy the unique trait of this place. "Julius, it's time to call it a day," Millicent spoke, he napped with a pile of paper on the table. "I-its t-time already," a yawn later, the Silver guardians, Fenrir, Autumn and Millicent headed out for dinner. Another unwritten rule was made, a circular table that could hold the noble council was always left free. The latter was located at the bottom just as one entered, it rested on the left.

"The usual for that table," the lady in charge yelled, to which many maids rushed out and served food and drinks. From traveling adventurers to craftsmen, traders and many more, the place was packed. Kids ran around whilst playing tag, smiles on the faces could not be faked. Genuine happiness – life grew to slowly turn comfier as time went by.

"Millicent, you should really cut it out with the drinking," Adelana added in jest. "Leave me alone," she pouted. "Come on guys, time isn't for petty arguments – food is on the way," Julius added to which the rest nodded. "Gosh I'm hungry," Fenrir's ears moved, her tail wiggled – just the anticipation made her mouth water.

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"Sorry for the wait," one of the many maids delivered meats and veggies. "Here is the rest," the others arrived – the table filled completely. This wasn't the only table; for many others were just as and if not fuller with morsels of food, stew and bread loaves.

"Why aren't you digging in?" Alyson asked; Fenrir's face changed. "Are you alright?" Ayleth asked – the wolf's eyes changed. \*Clomp, clomp,\* "this scent," she mumbled. "What do you mean scent?" Autumn asked.

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"Has this place always been this cold," a familiar voice spoke, a figure walked in, time felt as if it stopped. Strangely, everyone stopped, this figure stole the breath away. A silence whelmed the room, "what is happening?" Klaern followed close behind. "No clue," said silence broke – murmur filled and the loudness returned.

"... Julius?" Adelana called. "It's impossible," he replied. "MASTER," Fenrir dashed. "NO WAY," Ayleth stood. "Calm down," Staxius hugged and patted her head – though they both laid on the floor. Fenrir unwillingly ran and speared him into the ground.

"Hello everyone," a gentle smile portraited itself. "Welcome back," Julius rushed over and help the old friend onto his feet. "It's good to see you, Julius," both embraced. "Hello master," the silver guardians all stood in line, an old habit. "No need to be so formal," one by one, Staxius greeted all with handshakes and kisses.

A few minutes went by, he was seated on the same table with the elf right beside. Drinks after drinks were ordered, food was devoured. They all conversed, it was mainly about how the town came to be this joyous place. It went on and on, the questions were relentless – information about the business side assimilated itself. Julius happily explained the inner working. The others focused on eating and drinking until Adelana spoke out.

“Care to explain where you’ve been?” it had been so long, none knew when nor where the man had been. “In Arda – didn’t I leave to solve the misunderstanding between our provinces?” a bite of meat later, Adelana spoke again, “Yes, that problem has been solved for quite a while now. Though, it does raise the question to why so long,” she finished.

“Well things changed,” Staxius spoke, “-I grew to be weaker with each passing day. It all began on the day that meteor flew over Hidros – details would be too much. To make it simple, I was defeated thoroughly, no hope, nothing – I stood there powerless and waiting for death to take mine soul away,” he took a sip.

“What do you mean defeated?” Julius asked; the voice perplexed for the image of Staxius being beaten could not be accepted. “That is true, dear friend. I was bested by someone I know not the name nor face.” It took a turn for the worse – hearing about the loss made some anxious. Mostly, the thought of the man who he admired falling so easily could not be justified.

“You’re here sitting with us and having a pleasurable meal – it mustn’t have been that hard,” Julius spoke. “Well that is all thanks to someone special I met along the way,” the tone felt reminiscent, almost blissful and beautiful. “I was sent to meet the queen to rectify our misunderstandings. Despite this, on that fateful day all crumbled, I awoke in a room – a room given to me by her majesty the queen. Her influence was pivotal in how I stand now before you all, to that I’m grateful. Thus, my absence for so long – I’ve been training and helping Arda in any way I can. The rise of monsters did also add another thing to be worried about,” he paused and looked around. The way he spoke felt romantic, each had unconsciously gotten closer. After a sigh, “I’ve got another news.”

“Is it your return to Dorchester?” Julius tried to guess. “Not that, I’m afraid that I can’t do anything for this town anymore. Julius and every single one of you have built a haven from the ground up. The right to come and change the order of things is nullified. More than that, I rather enjoy the pleasures of a place my friends made. I want no part in how it’s ruled – everything is in thy capable hands.”

“Are you going to abandon us again?” Adelana yelled out, “-just like sixteen years ago?” her tone felt furious. “It’s always like this, you make a colossal effort to start something, then when said thing starts to become somewhat manageable – you vanish. Leaving the rewards for the others to reap; what the hell is wrong with you?” her truest feeling came out. It took them by surprise, this sudden outburst – very out of character. The sisters remained silent and watched, none wanted to add a word.

“Heh,” he chuckled, “-spot on, Adelana, spot-on,” he took a deep breath. “yes, I do have a habit of leaving the things I worked for behind – that’s part of the fun,” the mouth said something and the brain thought another. ‘I can’t tell anyone about this curse I have. The curse that everything I cherish is to crumble and burn. This is part of the reason why I leave without saying anything – to lessen the shock and pain of saying goodbye.’

“Staxius,” Julius held his shoulder firmly, “-if you’re serious about leaving Dorchester to our rule. Then I must ask of you to formally abdicate from the position of Baron of Dorchester.” the tone cold and direct. “Which means I have to give you my crest?” Staxius asked. “No, the crest is rightfully yours. What I want is for you to stand and formally say that you want no part in how Dorchester is to become.” Autumn pinched, Adelana tried to stop Julius but it was set in stone.

Without remorse nor regret, Staxius stood. “I, Staxius Haggard,” the others tried to interrupt, “-formally relinquish my title as a baron for the province of Dorchester. From this day forth, neither of my actions will have any effect on decision making. Duke Julius and Duchess Millicent, I seek your permission to abdicate myself from the esteemed position of Baron.” The other two accepted the terms, “I, Duke Julius Garnet, accept thy refusal to follow thine responsibilities.” Millicent said the same.

“Well, that should fix many things now. From today forth, Dorchester is officially out of my reach. Julius, I thank you for being a supportive friend. Though it saddens me to relinquish that title,” the voice remained normal.

“Seriously...” Adelana mumbled, “SERIOUSLY?” she yelled again. “It’s official then, Staxius has left the noble council, what a joke,” the anger now palpable – he smiled and sat.

“Adelana,” Julius called out, “-I think you misunderstand,” he smiled. “What don’t I understand? Does this mean that he leaves and never comes back,” the face filled with hate.

“No,” Staxius said, “the reason goes deeper than one may think,” the overly angry Adelana sat and listened. “Without saying a word, Julius trusted my actions and words. Don’t you think it’s hard on him as well, after all, I just gave the man more responsibilities to handle now. A town much less a province, can’t be ruled without allies,” a gentle smile later, “-I’m not abandoning the place I was born in just yet.” \*Cough,\* he cleared the throat.

“That’s all well in good, but how is that of any help when one doesn’t have a word to say in the decision making of said province?” Ancret asked to which Staxius stood again.

“I’ll formally introduce myself, dearest friends.” The posture changed into one more dignified. “My name is Staxius Haggard, King of Arda as well as second-in-line to the throne,” with a wink later, they all stopped.

“K-king?” Ancret asked, “K-king,” Julius choked, all muttered the word king. “How in the world did that happen?” Adelana asked. The shock went on for hours, not knowing how to behave in front of royalty took the reins. “No need to worry about courtesy, I’m still the one known as Staxius,” he sat.

The conversation continued, from the marriage to where he stood now, most got explained. The elven lady whomst journeyed alongside joined the fray, all spoke. With the title of Baron gone, Staxius’s freedom expanded. Helping Dorchester grew to be easier as an ally. Julius spoke on and on about what the alliance could do, Staxius suggested things. Their path diverged once again, but it was to be expected. Each friend helped the other in ways none could guess.

“Thanks for supporting my decision,” they both stood atop the castle wall. Basking in the cold night breeze as the sublime sight of millions of stars twinkled overhead. “No worries, I did expect such a thing from earlier on,” the tone friendly and calm. “Still, I’m sorry for having you do all the work in my stead. Taking care of this town is more than difficult. Just hang in there for a while – this town will be the focal

point in the prosperities to come. The day isn't far when Castle Garsley grows to be autonomous – the people here are all friendly and compassionate.”

“What about Arda?” Julius asked; the eyes looked towards Brisnet Heights. “Thing is shaky – we haven't the luxury of adventurers hunting monsters. This is why I'm planning on starting a guild, I've already got a necklace to prove it. “Silver ranked, impressive – but doesn't it require more than three members?”

“That isn't an issue, the party is already established. Soon, my friend, soon – we'll become fully functional,” Staxius turned around, “there's something you need to know,” the hands grab the shoulders tightly, “the being who defeated me isn't to be trifled with. The apparition of monsters isn't just coincidence – I'm confident that thing has something to do with it. Be on guard, the world is to change sooner or later – gather up forces, become strong and adapt.”

### Chapter 139: A Will

The word of warning from Staxius had gently brushed against Julius's mind. It didn't seem all that important at first. As time went on, the same words now grew to be heavy and piercing. Become strong and adapt, this slowly imbedded itself, the night continued without stop.

A day had gone by since the journey back to Arda began. The trio back at Rosespire completed quests at a high pace, reputation increased slowly and so did their overall financial situation. The potion shop got a few customers who weren't put off by the kid and the price of fifteen silvers. Meanwhile, Aceline and her assistant got ready to head for the capital too. A journey that would take about four to five days, considering transportation and a place to live.

Dawn approached, the orangish sky lit dimly. The breeze felt quieter than usual, the tavern empty. The noble council of Dorchester stood outside, Staxius and the elf said the last goodbyes. “Thanks for everything, and do invite me for the wedding,” he added in jest, the eyes stared at the Silver Guardians who shyly looked away.

“Yeah, yeah,” Adelana shrugged. ‘What's this feeling,’ on the way inside the car, Staxius blinked and an aura put the subconscious on guard. The door closed, a glance behind revealed Millicent, she looked normal. But the aura around her was not human, it rather felt demonic in nature. Curious to why, the eyes closed, and all sharpened. It remained there, a black shadow of a hand that grabbed Millicent. For the most part, it didn't seem dangerous, probably just an attachment. “Give me a second,” the door reopened. “Did you forget something?” Julius asked seeing Staxius return.

Nothing, not a word, not a sign, he ghosted straight past the others and headed for Millicent. “W-what is it?” she mumbled; her mind shuddered. \*Tap,\* the cursed steel blade manifested, \*click,\* it unsheathed; a feeling of nausea filled the courtyard. “W-what is happening?” despair, hate, resentment and fear, everything rushed out, the temperature dropped. The eyes remained closed, the strange aura around her seemed to react, \*slash,\* a quick diagonal swing near her head sufficed. The demonic hand released its grip and lashed onto the sword, it was too good to let go. A feast of dark emotions, the thing it wanted. It sheathed again, all the vile emotions vanished.

“Sorry about that,” he turned around and left. “This feeling,” she spoke, the eyes teared up. “THANK YOU, MASTER,” she yelled, at last, the suffering ended. No longer did the voice spoke, peace came back.

“Next time do speak to someone about the troubles. You’ve got good friends and companion by thy side, use them – it’s what friends are for,” the door closed and the car shot out.

“Millicent, what was that about?” Adelana asked; the girls gather around. “I-I’ve j-just been saved. I-I’m sorry for everything,” she bowed and explained the situation. “No need to cry,” a group hug followed, Julius remained by the side-line and thought. ‘This is the reason why I admire you, my dearest friend. Unexplainable actions and unpredictability but with a goal to always bring a smile on the faces of the people you care about. Resent it as much as you want, by heart, you’ve got the qualities to become a hero. Not one of justice and righteousness, but a hero that the people actually need – not some guy who forgives and forgets, but someone who doesn’t even blink when taking a life. One who makes rash decisions whilst considering every other possibility.’

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“Brother,” Autumn called, “snap out of it, we’ve got a job to do.” To that, the town went back to the daily grind.

“Are we far off?” Klaern asked, “we’ll be at the noble district in a few minutes or so,” he replied. The sun rose right behind Void, it shone its light onto them till the ex-noble district came into view. It remained abandoned, many of the houses were demolished. Apparently, Julius had plans to turn this small district into a place where factories could be built. Seeing as Staxius was out of the noble council now, it didn’t matter what they did. The church stood, the plan was to climb up and gain access to the portal.

“We’ve arrived,” the car parked; one jump sufficed, Staxius decided to showoff. A single leap sent him on the roof, “go inside, there’s a stairway,” he yelled from above.

“Arda, here we come,” the portal remained, ‘-I’m coming back Xula,’ he thought with a smile. Trees and vegetation, the duo came out underneath the capital. A few steps forward and the entrance was spotted, guards stood watch, their armor shone in the waking sun.

“Who stands there,” they detected the girl’s presence. “-No one particular,” the leaves got brushed aside, Staxius stepped into the open. “Who is that?” they asked, to which one had his head slapped. “That’s King Staxius,” thus bowing respectfully. “No need for formalities,” he approached, they raise their heads. “How’s the monster situation?” Staxius asked. “A few guards set off on patrol earlier today, a horde of goblins roaming around the outskirts were reported by the elves.” With that answer, Staxius turned and closed his eyes, no strange auras were detected. “Could I request a portal to the castle?” he asked, the guards escorted the king to the closest doorway. Located in the barracks, “the people were already informed of your arrival, just step on through,” one of the guards added, Staxius smiled and walked inside.

“Welcome back King of Arda,” a familiar voice spoke, “thanks,” he replied gently. The sage stood on the other side of said portal, he waited with arms open and ready to welcome his dear disciple. “Excuse me, but what is this King business? Aren’t you human,” the elf raised a good question. “Sorry, I should have introduced myself earlier, but I’m Staxius Haggard, husband to her majesty the queen,” the tone friendly and soothing.

“May I ask who this lady is?” the sage asked. “This is an elf whomst I found and decided to bring back. Remember the lady I killed when the goblins first attacked? She’s one of her siblings. Has there been any news to where the boy is located now?”

“The Aebalar, yes, the boy lives in one of the orphanages on the lower floors,” he added. “Thanks for all the work, master. Could you please get her some food, clothes and a nice bath.”

“Staxius, you know full well I’m not your personal butler. But whatever,” he smiled, “-I’ll do the necessary arrangement.” With haste, the sage vanished alongside the lady. The throne wasn’t in sight yet, time, since Xula was seen, had been more than he could keep track of. Nervousness made him joyful, ‘damn it,’ he sighed.

\*Clap, clap,\* footsteps echoed, the atmosphere felt tense. “All welcome King Staxius,” a butler yelled, trumpets were blown, instruments played. ‘What is this?’ a glance at the balcony atop revealed many influential nobles applauding his welcome. It came as a surprise when the elusive Zachaeus Balthazar was spotted.

Xula came in sight, the walk down the red carpet leading to her throne felt long and slow. Her face looked shy, the cheeks flushed to which he smiled, but she bashfully looked away. Before a word was said, she stood and conjured a portal.

After following her, they arrived at the same spot. Under the same tree, the same idyllic landscape, the table filled with pastries. “Morning Xula,” he took a seat next to her. “M-morning S-Staxius,” her voice trembled. “I care not for formalities,” he mumbled and without warning, rested onto her lap. The seats were closer than before. “Welcome back,” her hands ran down the long hair.

“Sorry for taking so long,” he apologized. “No need to worry; things have been more than eventful,” she took a bite and crumbs fell onto him. It was as if it snowed, but rather than snow it was sugar. “Very ladylike,” he added in jest. “Give me a break,” she sighed – the queen wasn’t queen when Staxius was around. Formalities went out of the window; each grew to become comfier around the other.

“Did Avon bring back the girl he found?” Staxius asked; a gentle breeze made her greenish hair dance. Rather than facing forward, the head tilted upwards, a place where all her beauty could be admired. The perfect jaw, cherry lips, the eyes that changed colors. An angel could not even describe her beauty. “Yes, imagine my surprise when she came before my sight. The joy was overwhelming, but I had to keep it hidden. That fox-eared girl belonged to a noble faction that has now disbanded. An attendant I personally trained for her marriage closed in. Sadly, things happened and her presence vanished into thin air,” her eyes softly gazed into the trees.

“Was it a bad thing to have brought her back?” Staxius asked. “Not really, it was sudden and unpredictable. You see, her family has died – that girl is alone and has nowhere to go. I’ve given her temporary refuge in one of the many rooms, though I can’t decide of her fate now,” unknowingly, she pinched Staxius’s ear. “There’s some explaining to do, my dear husband. I’ve heard from Avon that you’re quite popular with the ladies. A quick read in his mind revealed many things, are you sure you don’t want to go into details?” her eyes red and angry. “OUCH, calm down, dearest wife,” the head lifted off the seat. “I’d never do anything remotely vulgar and unethical. You must know that I’ve only got eyes for one lady in particular – that someone is you Xula,” their face stood inches apart, the tone



sincere and unfaltering, her heart raced. “S-sure,” before a reply could be given, Staxius went in for a kiss.

For the next few hours, access to this part of the garden was cut off from the rest of the world. It became secluded, the king and queen bonded. The long months of having been far apart made each envious. Not to mention, since the marriage, the couple stayed together for one day till he departed.

“My back itches,” he sighed, both rested on the grass. Xula tightly wrapped herself onto his right side. She slept peacefully, ‘-I’ve got the best wife haven’t I,’ an obnoxious smile remained fixed. He could not shake this feeling of bliss, the first union of body and soul. In those hours, the king and queen became one. Though resting on the grass half-naked could not but make him laugh. “Every death reaper bares the curse of misfortune; we can never be truly happy.” The words from Lord Death came into mind. A curse that was ever-present.

“I’ll defy creation itself if needed. This curse isn’t going to stop me from loving the people I cherish. God, demon, angel, anyone, I dare you. I swear on this never-ending life of mine, if the day comes where Xula or Eira have to part ways because of this curse, the world shall crash and burn, this isn’t selfishness – it’s my will.” The left hand raised up and clenched into a fist.

“Don’t be so rough,” Xula mumbled, it sounded adorable. Slowly, the calmness caught up and Staxius fell asleep in turn. Another few hours went by; he awoke to a still sleeping angel. “Hey, it’s time to wake up,” the face constantly held a smile. “A few more minutes.”

In the end, both stood and headed out, the couple spent the rest of the day together. From a casual stroll into town to visiting local shops and having fun. An inconspicuous date, Xula had to change her outfit quite a bit. It reached the point where none could recognize her. Staxius remained adamant on the hair staying green, he loved the color and never wanted to see it gone. Thus, the day went by quickly.

She had fun, and so did he – never mind the fact the trouble of monsters looming overhead. A guillotine that hung on a tight string. Night came, a portal got conjured – and the date ended without further troubles. “Thanks for choosing me as your betrothed,” Staxius said quietly whilst staring at the starry night. She hugged him from behind, they were in the royal bedroom. “There’s no need for such things. I’m thy wife, and thou art mine groom – nothing is to ever change,” her voice pure and caring.

“Even so, I promise to always be by your side,” he turned around and embraced with all his might. “Don’t worry about the curse of the death reaper – I’ll always remain close; you’re my conduit after all.” She overheard what was said earlier that day. “You heard all that,” the face flushed in embarrassment. “This is new,” she said, this was the first time the always cold and pale face lit. It looked alive for once, “oh I didn’t realize,” the cheeks burnt.

#### Chapter 140: A Gift

“Wake up,” a gentle and fragile touch slowly caressed the cheeks. It felt as if a feather onto skin, ticklish and adorable. “As you wish, your majesty,” he spoke in jest. The eyes awoke to a semi-nude angel atop him, her head rested on the chest. “You told me to wake, then, in turn, fell asleep, a bit harsh isn’t it?” without much effort, they both stood.

The balcony door opened; a rush of cold wind blew inside. "Freezing," she yelled. "It's fresh and pure air, SMELL IT," he remained adamant. Today was the last day in Arda – the task self-assigned grew to be nearly completed. Each got dressed, had a bath together then exited the royal chambers. Though now a King, to see so many maids and butlers waiting to serve felt nerve-racking. The dirtied white shirt and pants were swapped for ones more formal and better looking. The day began in the dining hall – a hefty breakfast with no attention to table manners. No one stood to watch Staxius stuff his face with meat. The sight of how eagerly the husband ate, Xula joined in – it got messy really quick, both laughed. In no way meant he didn't know table manners, the thought of being formal and uptight around Shanna didn't seem right.

"Dearest disciple," the sage teleported into the throne room – breakfast ended a few minutes ago. "Good morning master," he greeted with a courteous tone. "Good morning to you as well," the former smiled. "I've got news about the Aebalar – the boy whomst sister you've brought back is ecstatic. He requests to audience with you – apparently, bringing the girl back gave him hope."

"I'll head there as soon as possible, thank you for answering my childish demands," guilt surged. Staxius made the sage who he admired so much do some lowly work – degrading. "No need to worry, a teacher can help out a student whenever needed – tis my privilege," with a quick hug, the sage vanished.

"He has taken quite a liking to you," Xula spoke whilst seated on the throne. "I guess, the sage is very special to me – thanks to him, the knowledge about magic and what I knew since birth were altered for the better. It makes more sense now, how mana and the elements react and intertwine – though it's extensive and tiresome."

"Anyhow I've got duties to attend too – they're some people dying to speak with you again," her eyes looked upwards to the nobles. "Before you go," she interrupted, "-I'm guessing you are to leave later in the day?" her voice felt saddened. "Sadly, yes, the task given hasn't been fulfilled yet," their gaze met.

"Promise to come back soon," she stood and walked down the podium. "Considering I'm living in the capital as opposed to the noble district where the portal is located. The journey will take a few days – precious time which I can't afford to lose," the concern voiced, her answer came as a surprise. "Since we're married, and not to mention the Guardian of Arda – I'll bestow upon you, dearest husband – a spell and gift past down to only members deemed worthy," her face came closer, the lips locked. Her green hair turned white, the eyes lit, the face boiling and an outline of wings on her back. "There," a gentle smile later, Staxius felt something burn from inside.

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A blueish aura emanated from the hands and feet. "Don't tell me," teleportation came to mind. "That's correct," she smiled, "-you now are one of the few individuals with the ability to create portals and teleport from places to places at will. I can't stress how much power that single spell has, combat, transportation and much more – this is the epitome of Ardanian spellcraft. Use it wisely and try not to let too many people know about its existence," her eyes winked. "... he stood; the mouth speechless. "Now, there's no excuse," she whispered in the ear, "no excuse to not visit me later at night," with the demeanor of a playful child, she stepped away. "Don't worry about coming daily – come back whenever possible; though I miss you already." Without another word said, the queen headed into another room.

'Let's try this,' \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\* Instantly, he appeared before her majesty who nearly choked. "Wha...?" the sentence cut short for Staxius kissed her again. "Pretty handy," he stepped away and vanished. "Idiot," she mumbled and both parted ways.

'This teleportation spell is going to be very useful. Infiltration, spying, and not to mention combat prowess. From what I've sensed so far, there's no limitation apart from the mana it uses – which should not be a problem.' Standing near the empty throne, Staxius began to experiment, from teleporting ten times in one second to opening portals and sending shoes inside – all that could be done were learned. Better to know one's strengths and weaknesses before a fight.

"Greetings your majesty," Staxius climbed up the stairs, only two people remained seated. The always mysterious Nox clan leader and the Great Mother. "Greetings Lord Balthazar and Great Mother," he took a seat.

"I solely apologize, but I've got business to attend too," she left both men to their own devices. The footsteps went further till it muted completely.

"Ahh, King Staxius," the vampire stood and walk closer, "-it has been a pleasure to witness the things you've been doing in the capital." Curious, Staxius stared up at the pale looking gentleman. "No need to be so harsh, I've but got a few spies here and there dotted around the kingdom. It's effective to say that nothing can escape my eyes," the tone felt boastful. "I see," he answered nonchalantly.

"This goes to say that tis not out of malice or ill-intent, I've been captivated by you for a very long time now. Secretly, I've watched how the fates of many people were changed due to thy intervention. Though it pains me to say – it did bring change, and partly for the better. The tone always remained secretive and deep.

"Therefore?" Staxius had enough,"-don't get me wrong, I enjoy a few mind games. However, ones that are painstakingly long and have no clear goal in mind don't interest me in the least. Either be frank or I shall be on my way," the words seemed harsh but the tone was polite. "I do apologize, a force of habit," he chuckled. "No need to worry, I just wanted to say that I've got eyes around the whole kingdom. An ability you could stand to gain if only you'd hear this old decrepit man."

"Sarcasm does suit you, Lord Balthazar," the tone smug, "-and how is that going to help?" he asked.

"Being able to see everything and paired with the teleportation her majesty just bestowed onto you. Doesn't that combination mildly pique your interest?" the voice now genuinely curious. "I do relish the thought," Staxius paused and breathed, "-there's a catch isn't it?"

"Well said, there's absolutely a catch," the tone raised in pitch due to excitement. "-many of my kinfolds, the vampires set off for the capital a few months ago. Many never came back – their aura vanished; something quite impossible for the immortals. Despite this, with the ability to see all – I could never really gain any closer to that mystery. Plaustan is the primary concern, I could only go so far as seeing a blurred image of the supposed God-slayer." Hearing that title, Staxius's face changed to which the vampire quickly rectified, "-the information network our clans have built over millenniums isn't that weak, heir to the god of death," he sighed. "Thus, it's my will to finally bestow this curse of mine onto another. It's been far too long; this never-ending life has been boring until you arrived. Staxius Haggard, I want to help thee in thy quest in becoming the strongest entity in the whole universe," a quick pause was taken.

“That’s good and all, but why now, why me?” Staxius remained apprehensive. “It’s simple, vampires are powerful but at night – we have limitations. And this power doesn’t work on anyone besides the ones with our blood running inside. You’re different, that immortal body, the strength of an army, the wit that defies normal limits and first and foremost, the ability to endure just about anything. Don’t look surprised, I’ve sensed the number of curses that dwells inside that soul of yours. It’s so dark and vile I know not how one can even wake in the morning.”

“No need to say anymore, Lord Balthazar – I’ll graciously accept thy offer. Does this mean I’ll have to become a vampire?” a sensible question. “No, an exception can be made, only the power of the all-seeing eyes is going to be given. But before we progress, this is not a boon but a curse, one of torment and pain. One that shall take away the restful night of sleep – are you willing to take that risk? It’s nonreversible.” the voice serious and demanding an answer.

“Another curse, another day. What’s a single drop of water in a cup? Nothing,” he added. “A single drop can overflow said cup if not careful?” the vampire fired back. “That isn’t an issue if said cup is big enough,” Staxius smiled. “You win,” the old man laughed, “-I see that you are just the man I thought you’d be.” Without warning, fangs sunk on the right side of the neck, the reaction remained monotonous. He didn’t even flinch, “are we done?” he asked whilst touching the bite mark. “Yes, there’s a small amount of ancient and noblest blood running in thy vein. It isn’t nothing to be worried about, your teeth might get a little sharper but that’s all,” he smiled, “-and now for the curse,” he took off the white glove. It revealed a shrunken hand with the bones and veins exposed.

It got placed atop Staxius’s. A black aura manifested, the nails grew pointy, \*slash,\* it pierced his hand, blood overflowed, the table grew wet. Jolts of electricity ran up and down the arm, it made its way into the right eye. The latter twitched uncontrollably, everything turned dark, “The curse has now been activated, welcome to hell, the inheritor of the curse of Nox – One who is to become the strongest entity.”

“IT BURNS,” the pain built up, screams, the eye could see beyond the room, it went from flying overhead to animals on the ground. It jumped from living beings to another, even monster wasn’t excluded, “WHAT IS THIS?” he screamed, the sight jumped from all over. The agony grew with each jump, tears flowed, blood, the pupil burned from dark brown to scarlet red. The excruciating pain lasted for about a few hours, it reached noon. \*Huff, Puff,\* the breathing now erratic, the mind regained consciousness.

“How was the initiation,” the vampire sat with a book in hand. “Is this really a curse?” Staxius asked. “Depends on what you define as a curse. The pain you endured was the worst of all, now it should constantly hurt whether it’s used or not. The perpetual headache of being connected to every single living creature. As long as blood runs through its vein, you can see through its eye. “Are you serious?” Staxius asked in a childish tone. “Yes, I did say the pain would be excruciating,” a page got turned.

“This is the supposed pain, honestly, I feel nothing. Is it actually working?” the book closed. “What do you mean you don’t feel pain,” the vampire rushed over. “The curse is in full effect, the right side of thy brain must be screeching with agony right about now,” the face came closer. “Show me the right eye,” he asked. “-Impossible,” a step back was taken. The eye was of a scarlet color with a pentagram inside – small but easy to spot if one came close. It burnt with a black and white flame, it merged with the dark aura from the death element. Though the color changed slowly, the fiery red turned purple and then

white. It cycled through those three colors slowly. "The All-seeing-eye merged with the power of a would-be god, how amusing," a smirked portrait itself.

'Getting a hang of this is going to be a pain,' he thought whilst using the newfound power. 'this place is familiar,' \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\* Unknowingly, Staxius teleported inside the royal chambers, "STOP WITH THE JUMP SCARES," Xula yelled. The left eye closed, "Wow, this is like looking into a mirror," he mumbled and waved the hands randomly. What he saw was through Xula's eye. "Don't tell me," she walked closer, "-you were given the curse of Nox haven't you?" she sighed. Both eyes opened, the power stopped.

A few minutes of experimenting sufficed, the power didn't work with both eyes opened. It worked when only the right eye could see. When both eyes closed, the ability to see and sense aura worked. This opened a whole new world of possibilities when it came to combat.