

Death Magic 161

Chapter 161: Negotiation

Sat in a silent room, with only a single light bulb that buzzed, the Boss and Staxius eyed one another. The former had been fascinated by the latter's mannerisms. Outside, none of the guards knew what transpired. The mages were left oblivious.

"What business would you like to discuss?" the man took out the cigar and watched. "God's ale," the reply fast and stern. Hearing those two words, the man coughed. Due to smoke or bafflement, he was none the wiser.

"Excuse me, but did I hear you right?" the heavy accent whelmed his voice. "Listen," Staxius leaned back in the chair, "-I'm not so keen on repeating my words," the voice firm.

The response was a bit unique. None had ever dared use said tone with the boss – frankly, he didn't know how to act. Was it wise to be angry or just bow down to the man who intrigued him fully? "I'll be honest," he leaned and rested the elbows on the table. "-I didn't like the tone you used just about now. I'd like this conversation to go as smoothly as possible. I may be shooting in the dark but as powerful as someone like you can be, I've got just the same if not more influence over most of the people here. I won't say my guards can defeat you, but the people outside, a single call could potentially turn the whole kingdom against you," the threat finished with a smirk.

"Honestly, apologizing at this point would be a waste of breath. You could try and turn this kingdom against me." Tharis got placed on the table, "-the question we should be asking is; whether the gun kills you first or that phone rings and ends me," a deadlock, Staxius didn't back down.

The atmosphere changed subtly, from quiet and eerie to agitated. "Touché," the boss straightened his posture. "Glad we can agree," as a sign of peace, the tone used grew friendlier as opposed to condescending.

"You wish to speak about God's Ale," the threats ended, now negotiation began. "There's no further need for hiding the truth. Having sought this organization out from who knows where – you must know all the details. To that, I'll simply ask, what is it that you offer?" a simple question and a neutral tone.

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The hands reached inside the pockets, Staxius took out a vile containing a fluid. The same flask used to contain the healing potion, but this one had a greyish color. "I'm an alchemist recognized by the guild." Alongside the potion; the badge of alchemy came out. The boss's face reddened, the expression changed from neutral to amazed.

"Judging by that expression, I don't need to explain what this means." The flask slid across the table, "-that's a sample of God's ale I brewed." Hesitant, he took the flask and opened. A few sniffs later, it was placed on the table again.

"You needn't worry," Staxius added, it broke the man's thought process. "-I've removed the substance that turns people into mindless shells. Though trusting a stranger would not be the wisest thing."

As soon as he would reply, Staxius teleported out and back in. "I've found a good test subject," the tone casual. The mage who was abducted could not but remain still and try to figure out what happened. "I'll personally administer the drug," the boss stood and made the poor man drink the concoction.

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It took a few minutes, but the effects began to manifest. "See, that man is having the time of his life," Staxius commented whilst carefully watching. The mage was full out drunk – the mind traveled in another world; a smile could be seen. As opposed to the normal harmful God's ale, the effect of mindlessness wasn't present. It took a few moments but the mage retained his wit.

Joyously, the mage stumbled out of the room. "So?" Staxius sat back down and waited. "I must say it's impressive," he sat opposite and thought carefully. "Being an alchemist requires a level of intellect most of our suppliers don't have. It's normally done using a recipe, very inconsistent with the quality. At times we get lucky and others the consumer is left to suffer the aftershocks." Nothing complicated was being negotiated, not now anyway. Tis was but a demonstration of things to come.

"I can't vouch for the complete safety of the consumer; there are side effects that come with such a substance. Though I guarantee that none will turn into a mindless shell. People that consciously want God's ale are better than a slave who isn't but a waste of time and space," a sound argument, the alchemist held a smile.

"Let's say I was to accept; how much could you possibly export and how much of a cut would you take?" the real negotiation began now. "On average, I could probably produce around fifty high-quality flasks. Given that the process to remove such substances is expensive, that's the most I can do with the current equipment. However, if it's about the old nasty stuff, the amount per week could potentially double. In short, you'll get 50 flasks of high grade that needs to be deluded. Or 100 flask of the bad stuff that also needs to be deluded." That was the offer, the boss took a few minutes to think.

"Using our old supplier, it's around 150 flasks per week," he didn't seem to like the offer. "But, considering you've got a new recipe and new way of making – I could give it a try for a month, how much of a percentage do you want?"

"Fifty percent of the profit. I'm not backing down from this offer, either take it or leave it. Other rival gangs are willing to pay seventy-five percent." Staxius forcefully made the boss feel under pressure, a bit of Dark-arts was used – emotional control.

"Deal," he agreed. "-also, people around here refer to me as the godfather but you can just call me Renaud," another cigar lit. "Renaud, the product will be delivered in a week after I return to Hidros. "

"Not a problem, just contact Karlson – you'll find him in the capital," the voice friendly. With that, the negotiations ended. The partnership wasn't fully effective, the product was yet to be delivered. It all depended on how the customers react to that new stuff.

"Let's hope for a fruitful future," they shook hands. "Also, if there are people to be assassinated, do tell Karlson – I do enjoy a bit of bloodshed," he winked and teleported out.

'Interesting,' he sat, '-very interesting. I like this boy, having an alchemist working for the god's ale trade will only bring more profit.' The door closed, the night ended, Staxius fell asleep in the hotel. Sophie's plane landed.

"Wake up," rather than a snobbish voice speaking – a feminine and gentle voice spoke. "Aceline?" he sat; the eyes barely adjusted to the sunlight. "Yes, Scott asked me to come wake you. He had to leave earlier, apparently; we need to head to the stadium soon," her voice felt afraid. Feeling how on edge she was, he stood and rushed to the toilet. Rather than explaining the situation, the television turned on.

"Three days before the main event, a riot has incurred in the arena. The public service has its hands full trying to calm down the spectators. The nature of said uprising has yet to be discussed though it's speculated that some harmful substance was used."

'Don't tell me,' he heard the news, '-I swear if it's drugs, the situation might get out of hands substantially.' It turned out that the assumption was correct. After God's ale was delivered to the clients earlier that night – some decided it would be a good idea to share it with others. And by a cruel twist of fate, that batch was the worst quality ever made.

"Aceline," he got ready, "what is it?" she sat on the couch with the face of a frightened little girl. "Did Scott ask you to come?" a question asked out of curiosity. "No, he explicitly told me to stay home – but I c-can't just sit back and do nothing."

Click, the door locked, "don't try and be a heroine. Your life is at risk and as the one in charge of thy protection. I simply can't let you go," he stood firmly against the door. The television displayed images of people going wild, the crowd grew more aggressive.

"I should have never woken you," she added in disgust, "-why did I ever think doing such a thing would be helpful," the disappointment in her voice could have made anyone give into her will.

"Sure, guilt shame as much as you want, I'm not moving till that situation is handled. Honestly, either have a good and logical solution or sit at home and watch television."

It put her mind in a state of confusion, neither did she have a plan nor solution. The initial thought process was to head over there and decide what to do next. Nothing more nothing less, primitive at most.

The television continued displaying images from said uprising – the people present grew more and more dangerous. 'Drugs can't have such an effect on people,' it felt weird.

The meeting organized by the Order was missed by Sophie. She overslept, the reason why mages had been called was due to this riot. It was predicted far in the past, the reason the citizen acted this way – a spell. A mind-control spell that a hidden scholar worked on behind the scene. Away from the leaders and away from most prying eyes. A spell that the creator asked to be funded but got rejected.

"Please, I've discovered the next step to advancing our combat mage's capabilities," a white-haired scholar stood before a council. This happened a few weeks ago,

"Nonsense, controlling the human mind is forbidden by the Order. Direct control that is, forcefully using a spell to disrupt the brain into doing something unsightly is not allowed. Illusion spells don't fall in that category for most people can avoid its trap. A rather shallow spell and harmless. What you have

proposed is to directly inject mana through the air into the victim's head and force them into a state of perpetual suffering and pain." Surrounded by hooded men and women – the idea was rejected without an argument. Having tried to do something the Order never enjoyed, the man was ousted.

This lit the spark for revenge, to that end, after threatening the order for so many days. The plan to execute the spell in the arena came to pass. The scholar proved to be smarter than anticipated, he kept them guessing for weeks on end. Calling S-ranked mages to stay by as backup in case of an emergency was the true reason.

"THERE'S A MAN WITH A GUN," the reporter live on the scene shouted, the broadcast ended. "I apologize, we may be having interference," the news reporter in charge sat, her breathing erratic.

"Things are getting out of hand, Staxius – if we don't do something, m-my m-music will never r-reach the people I want it to," she spoke in a lowered and saddened voice. "-I'm being selfish, I know that; but please." She stood, "-please let us go to the show, I want to try and help MY FANS." The determination pulsed throughout her veins, the eyes shone with resolve.

"This is going to cost extra," he walked over and grabbed her arms. "Try not to puke," *Ancient Magic: Teleportation,*

"EVERYONE CALM DOWN," the entire vicinity screamed. Yells, cries, gunfire, it was chaos. Shoes and bottles were thrown on stage, the musicians could not perform; their lives were at risk.

"Please, get all the performers into the vehicles; the show is being closed down." In a blue mist, Staxius teleported near the stairs leading up to that fabled podium. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?" Scott, the manager who led the evacuation cried out.

"A casual visit, what's the situation?"

Chapter 162: Riot

"Of course, it's a casual visit," the tone sarcastic, the young idol decided to take a peek. What she saw would forever burn itself into her mind. The spectators went crazy, clothes were torn. Many girls were assaulted physically by the mindless horde of what had become of the fans. A sight unbecoming this so-called festival to spread the awareness of music.

Bang, bang, gunshots fired, a man dressed in a black coat with the eyes bloodshot red pulled the trigger. The cameras reporting on said incident had to be shut off. The violence grew too much to handle, people were hurt. The guards could not but try and disarm the man. In that crowd, the stray bullets hit many. Some fell instantly, no vital organs touched. The true nature of humans came out. Rather than trying to resolve the situation – the ones in control of said event fled. Scott desperately tried to regain the calm but tis was an effort that resulted in naught.

Luckily, after traversing the mob of people, the man in black was apprehended. Not without casualties however, despite saving the lives of many, the influence from the spell and drug made reason a fantasy. The fans assaulted the people trying to help, the medics had to stay away, the violence grew. The unknown gunman was caught but the weapon had been left in the crowd.

"How can this happen," she stumbled, the shock made the knees weak.

“Come on,” before hitting the ground, Staxius grabbed her arms, “-this is the reason I didn’t want you to come. Not for a security reason but because of this, the dormant violent animal instinct every human has. I haven’t the clue as to why people are acting this way,” he sighed and peeped in turn. “Dealing with so many will be a task almost impossible.” In the corner, a strange van arrived; It held the Order’s crest.

“Alright people, we might have been retired – but mages are still people capable of protecting lives,” a man dressed in uniform; one that S-ranked mages and above used to wear, spoke. A crew of around ten people stepped out, from a muscular middle-aged man to a young girl in her early twenties, they stood in the parking lot.

‘Just sense the aura coming from them,’ Staxius’s eyes closed. “I don’t think there’s a need to worry,” he pointed to the right, Aceline stared. The mages quickly dashed into the crowds; spells were cast. From imprisonment to illusion and spells designed to make one sleepy, every possible non-lethal magic was used. The riot calmed; the guards could not believe their eyes. Mages might have been replaced by more competent fighters, but the control over magic and mana remained impressive.

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‘It’s good to see those blue and white uniforms,’ the eyes opened here and there to check on the situation, ‘-brings back a feeling of nostalgia.’ Tempest also wore a similar uniform, one that grew to be bloodstained over the years.

“Scott, you best take Aceline away from here,” the feeling of dread never left. “I think things aren’t as calm as they appear to be,” with a simple motion, Staxius pushed the idol into the manager’s arms. The crowd might have seemed less agitated, the violence never really decreased. Rather, the anger turned into killing intent, the auras changed from white to slightly red.

“Whatever do you mean?” Confused, Scott tried to get an answer, the face showed a multiple of emotions.

“Just get her backstage,” the voice had a sense of urgency, the manager could not but agree.

The short-lived peace was the calm before the storm. Many of the people who fell asleep were harmless. The true terror came from the ones who resisted the spells. “Heh,” in the far-left corner, an old-looking man stood under a tree. The presence seemed as if nonexistent, to which many ignored.

“Raise,” the hand held a parchment and a bottle.

The sorcerers quickly took care of the injured. Healing spells were used, the medics had a pathway into the dissipating crowd. “The preliminary tests have been done,” a swift movement of the wrist later, the parchment turned to dust. *Wind Element: Subtle Breeze,* the dust rushed onto the crowd. It looked as if a wave crashing down onshore, it enveloped the people bound by spells.

‘I knew it,’ the eyes remained closed, he monitored the changes in the aura. The spell broke, not due to being stronger than the caster, but due to the lack of consciousness. Imprisonment spells turned the victims’ brains against themselves. They weren’t physically shackled but made to think that they were, without a brain to process what happened – the spell stopped. Gnarls and hisses paired with the growing aggression, the violence began yet again.

This time, not only were clothes torn off, skins were scratched. Many bled, many cried, the sorcerers desperately tried to stop the crowd. They managed to rescue and take ninety percent; the remainder were the ones who turned psychotic.

“Heh, this weapon could have been ours, WHY DID YOU HAVE TO REJECT MY PROPOSAL,” the old man cried, everyone ignored.

“We need to restrict them at all costs,” the leader yelled.

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“What do you think we’ve been trying to do,” the others fired back, mana got used extensively.

“Damn, never did I think we would have to try and stop a mob of mindless people without using our best skills,” the leader complained. This wasn’t their lack of strength, but being forced to not cause harm – it grew tougher than expected.

Each mage stood in a circle; they combined their spells to form a barrier. It locked the ones who grew bloodthirsty inside. The only way to limit casualties. A few innocents were trapped inside with the monsters but nothing could be done. Either save a few or let the whole yard get overwhelmed and turn into a bloodbath. The spell hadn’t reached its peak.

Wind and Lightning Element: Ethereal Paralysis, a woman bearing red hair jumped into the fray. “Silvester, I’ll take care of those guys – take care of the innocent,” with a nod the leader jumped inside. Around two hundred bloodthirsty men and women stopped moving. The berserker spell from the old scholar slowly reached its maximum potential. It grew harder to contain people.

“This won’t do,” a sluggish voice spoke from behind, “-I need at least someone to die in this battle,” the hands held a gun. All the mages maintained the barrier; the guards evacuated the others, none noticed his presence for they were busy.

“SOPHIE WATCH OUT,” Silvester screamed, she turned. *BANG,*

Death Element: Absolute Barrier, a man appeared in a blue mist, “That’s not fair, old man,” he sighed, “-I’ve been watching your actions since the start. I must say that the spell you used is quite impressive,” the voice monotonous, the bullet stopped and hovered.

He walked closer to the scholar, “but still, that doesn’t give you the right to kill someone under my watch.” *Snap,* the bullet flew past the bald-head.

“W-who are you?” struggling to stand, the man knelt.

“No one particular,” *Dark-Arts: Mana Cancellation,* a giant black circle engulfed the entire stage and spectator area. Every single spell stopped; the flow of mana blocked. The berserkers fell, the mages stumbled.

“What is happening?” one of the mages yelled, no longer could magic be used. Complete darkness, the circle felt as if the void had risen onto the world. *Snap,* it dispelled, the symbol underneath the left eye glowed.

“Now then,” Staxius crouched with Tharis kissing the scholar’s forehead. “Trying to ruin an event most were happy to participate in. That little stunt you pulled could now effectively stop the whole festival. Do you have an idea of how much time and effort the artists here have spent trying to entertain?” the voice subtly oozed out anger and hate.

“Don’t do anything rash,” Silvester rushed and grabbed the man’s arm.

“Unhand me,” Staxius mumbled.

“Let go of the weapon and I’ll consider,” he fired back, the voice not fatigued from the cancellation of mana.

“Do you think you have a choice in the matter?” the voice felt unthreatened, he pulled the trigger.

BANG, the head flew back, the victim fell over.

“WHY WOULD YOU DO SUCH A THING,” the leader yelled and pulled on the arms. This forced Staxius to turn around and stand.

The eyes looked emotionless whilst Silvester’s eyes burnt with anger, the teeth gritted. A tear could be seen rolling down his cheeks. The hands immediately grabbed onto the collar. It looked dire, Sophie after having recovered a little bit rushed over.

“Please stop this madness,” someone requested, the grip lessened.

“Why did you intervene,” he sighed and faced Aceline who stood beside Scott.

“Did you forget that we’re a team ?” Scott asked in a smug tone.

“A team of complete idiots,” he replied in jest.

One after the other, the mages regained their strength. The public service rushed in to help the injured. “Staxius?” fatigued, Sophie leaned on Silvester.

“Instructor Sophie, what are you doing in these parts?” the tone formal, he acted as if he didn’t know her. The eyes looked nothing from what they were in the past. It had a small glimmer of hope, a glimmer of love and compassion. “You’ve changed,” she added in a smile.

“I’m sorry, but who has changed? I’m afraid I barely know you,” the reply formal and unfaltering, the other two stood behind. “Who’s this?” Scott asked. “An instructor who teaches my daughter,” the tone unimpressed.

“STAXIUS,” she screamed, “DON’T YOU DARE IGNORE ME,” she stumbled and grabbed on his collar.

“Sophie calm down,” the husband tried to stop, “don’t you interfere,” a glance backward, he nodded.

“Hey, that’s no way to treat someone,” Aceline jumped in but Staxius shook his head.

“I don’t know who you think you are, Instructor Sophie; but if you don’t unhand me now,” a metallic rod poked her stomach.

“Go ahead, SHOOT ME, I DON’T CARE,” the voice filled with sadness and compassion. “I can’t believe you’ve forgotten about me,” slowly, her grip lessened, the eyes teared up.

“Big sis?” out of curiosity, he mumbled two words.

“YOU DO REMEMBER,” her eyes lit, the same one as the crimson princess.

Gently, he stepped back and straighten the now wrinkled shirt. “I don’t know what happened, but this isn’t a place to converse,” Scott jumped in, “-if you wish to discuss, please head to this restaurant later in the evening, we’ll be having dinner. Nothing beats a pleasant conversation around good food.” Without another word said, the trio left.

“WAIT,” Silvester yelled. “No, let him go,” Sophie pointed at the ground, the scholar lived.

“My dearest wife, care to explain why you lashed out at that man earlier. And also, what has come over you, this fierceness, this vigor; are you well?” he asked. The mages gathered in a circle.

“I’ve been asleep for far too long, dearest husband. Just know that the crimson princess has had a reawakening,” she winked.

“Who were they?” the car approached.

“People from my past,” he sighed, “-people that are better left alone and not to be trifled with.” Her change in personality didn’t add up. Staxius had already given up on trying to get Sophie back in his life, the final farewell was said weeks ago. This change wasn’t appreciated, digging up things from the past only brought about regret and misery. ‘If her memories have come back, I’ll need to make sure that she doesn’t get in the way.’

“A change in plan, we are headed to Star Tower. Staxius, you have been called in by Akhtar – apparently, there’s something he wishes to discuss. It concerns Aceline and the concert.”

The riot ended with a lot of casualties and no deaths. There needed to be an explanation, the public didn’t want to stand by and watch. Phones rang across the kingdom; the prince was needed urgently. The incident could potentially turn Iqavea upside down. A rumor about God’s ale spread; with that, the Dark guild’s secrecy could be jeopardized.

“Emperor Paradus, I’m sure you know what will happen if ever our organization is brought to light,” Renaud spoke, the voice menacing, the television displayed images from the riot. “-I’ve got no qualms with getting a bit of exposure. But you see, I’m afraid that the godfather controlling masked murderers isn’t going to stand by and watch. If you know what is best, do turn this whole charade into something believable. Our contacts are already on the move, you better thread carefully – the Overlord is watching. A single misstep and you can kiss the title of Emperor good-bye,” the phone hung.

Chapter 163: Puppets

“The riots earlier today calmed down. The public service and mages from the Order were pivotal in that accomplishment. No deaths have been reported; a statement from the organizers have yet to be given. The fate of the festival seems dire, it might be shut down,” the lady took a pause and changed posture and tone. “As to the cause,” the voice felt sneaky but kept its overall formality. “Rumors have been going around about a secretive substance that possesses the ability to change people. The ones who provided these fluids have been dubbed Noire,” the news broadcasted itself onto various television in the commercial district.

Staxius stood before a shop that dealt in electronics. A giant windowpane separated the outside from the inside. Behind, the citizens carried on with their daily activities. Some were out shopping for food whilst others for clothes. Considering how packed this place usually was, it came as a surprise when the headcount appeared lower. This part of the district wasn't focused on the rich and privileged but the average and poor. The commoners which made up of a good seventy-five percent of the population.

"Remind me why we stopped again?" a voice came from the entrance.

"I don't know?" Staxius replied; the shop read, *Taka's Electronics.*

"I found it," the driver stepped out, "-sorry, but I'll get the car working in a second," the tone relieved, the man walked away.

"The car broke down," the voice felt smug.

"I apologize for asking a dumb question," as a joke, Scott turned around and pouted.

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Unimpressed, he ignored the little joke and focused on the news being broadcasted.

"Guys, get in," Aceline yelled, the car turned back on. The driver gave a thumbs up whilst covered in oil and dust. To that, the journey to Star Tower resumed.

Click, the phone hung. Sat in the high-rise office, the Emperor stood and watched over the foggy capital. 'Damn it,' the hands rested on the glass pane. The chill gave off provided a moment of peace for the hands were sweaty and hot. The phone call from Renaud distraught the man, 'who would have known that a stupid festival could result in such a conundrum,' the body calmed, the erratic mind thought rationally again. 'I need a scapegoat; else the media is going to aggravate this situation.' Faintly, in the background, a screen played the news on loop. 'Heh,' he chuckled, "-I'm not emperor to one of the great nations for nothing," he walked over and sat. A screen materialized; the hands typed – contacts from all over the capital were called in. Questions, demands, everything that happened on that day was reported to his majesty. It didn't take long till the Order and their secret came into light.

'The perfect scapegoat,' a picture a scholar displayed before him. The hands moved independently; phone calls were made. First, the prince; the responsibility of not having the event shut down was given. Then, another few calls to powerful individuals to pressure the media as well as the Order. For the next few hours, the attention changed to cover up the incident's true reason and cause. Only the part that involved the dark-guilds.

Renaud's agents who were dispatched helped greatly. Rogue reporters and people in search of a scoop were taken out. The agents didn't work for the God's ale division but the assassination sect. One ruled by a man known as Stanley, someone with a short temper and the strength of an army at his command. Any piece of information about God's ale and the dark-guilds vanished from existence. It didn't matter who knew or where they stayed. Once a target had been placed – none could escape death.

"Here we are," the car drove underground into the parking lot.

"Time to see what's going on," Scott led the way to the reception desk. There, a kind lady asked them to wait – Akhtar currently met with a few people.

“Can you give me details about how those men were dressed?” out of curiosity, Staxius spoke out.

“They wore top hats,” she replied with a smile.

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Ancient Magic: Teleportation, he vanished. If the people in top-hats were involved; it certainly meant death or worse.

“Akhtar, your time has come. Either pay up or we shall silence you. Not as an enemy but as one who’s closely linked to us. A purge is in progress, all who knows about the organization shall perish,” the briefcase opened and revealed a gun.

“C-can’t I h-have m-more time?” for an hour; he wasted time. Phoning people to get money, acting innocent, he did all that could prolong his life.

“I’m afraid that time allocated is over,” the gun aimed.

“Not so fast gentlemen,” in a blue mist, Staxius materialized and wrapped his arms around both men who stood. Hearing that voice, Akhtar dropped to the floor.

“Who are you?” they asked, the voice nonchalant.

“Someone not worth mentioning,” the body took a step back, the hands grabbed onto both the assassins’ head and smashed them against one another. The same motion as clapping. Rattled, both fell to the ground unconscious. ‘Vampiric strength,’ he thought, without the noble blood – that sort of move would not have happened, not without using magic anyways.

“Aaaakhtarr,” he called out in a melodic voice that resembled singing.

Cowered underneath the desk, the rather large man could not fit entirely. “Would you kindly stop playing hide and seek,” Staxius leaned whilst standing.

“I-I’m sorry,” in a haste to stand, the head hit the desk. Simultaneously, the phone rang. It displayed Prince Ernis’s name. “I’ll get that for you,” ignoring the struggling owner, Staxius picked up the phone.

“Hello, Akhtar are you there?” the voice had a frightened tone.

“I’m afraid not,” he replied. In the background, the man in question stood. He crawled from underneath the desk, it was as if a monster getting summoned from hell – one that was clumsy and slow.

“Is that you Staxius?” the voice now seemed perplexed.

“Yes, what’s the matter?”

“I’m trying to get a hold of all the organizers, is Akhtar there?” he felt desperate. Not wanting to get in the way, the phone returned its owner.

“Akhtar speaking,” he replied. Bored, Staxius tied up the assassins and began to rummage through their clothes and briefcase. The only thing found: a handkerchief and a weapon.

Downstairs, the duo could not but stand and act confused. The receptionist’s shock displayed over her face. To see a man disappear into thin air, tis was the object of fantasy. “We’ll wait over there, do tell if

the man is ready to speak," calmly Scott took the lady into the waiting area. On occasions, the girl behind the desk would glance to check on the duo.

"Why did he have to use teleportation here?" Scott questioned in a disappointed tone.

"Who knows," she said with her eyes wandering around. People's attention latched onto her – Aceline was a star after all.

Upstairs, the call ended. The situation got explained in greater detail. Akhtar took charge and transferred over the information gained from Ernis. What the prince wanted, "the festival must go on without fail. If it were to stop – things might blow out of proportion."

Staxius sat on a couch with a firm stare. The captives laid in the middle of the room. "I don't see a reason why the event can't continue. If the media is handled correctly, the show will carry on without fail. From what I've seen, they greatly affect the general populous. A single word that said everything is alright, would solve all our problems." A fair and good judgment, the time spent in Vlaiwia told a great deal about how most behaved.

"I agree, but those people aren't as easy to manipulate. Their ideals are, to be honest with the population. The people who governed the media are a bunch of idealist idiots who sit around choosing whether something is worth being publicized. Even they don't know that the headlines are made in such a way to create suspense and intrigue many."

"Well," Staxius stood, "-what about these guys in black," he walked to where the businessman sat. "There's more involved than money in this unfortunate incident," he whispered. "Is there something else that you hide?" the mannerism might not have been obvious to many, but the way Staxius acted and spoke differed from people to people. The way of threatening through whispers rather than shouts. Those were the skill past down from Tempest and his teachings. The art of manipulation, one skill that didn't involve magic though dark-arts was sometimes utilized to make the process faster.

"I'll t-tell you," the memories from a night back returned. "I c-called you here knowing that assassins might come after my life. I had a gut instinct so I contacted Scott rather than you." The manager worked for Aceline and Staxius worked for Aceline whilst Aceline worked for Akhtar on this project alone. Indirectly, that call forced the bodyguard to accompany the rest. With a smile, the adventurer sat back and listened. Tis was a witty move, one that raised Ahktar's worth a little.

"Before you arrived," the businessmen's confidence returned mildly, "- I was told that a purge got ordered. Anyone who knew about the dark-guilds would be killed without a say. Since I have close ties concerning God's ale side of the business – I might have been spared if only I paid the protection money on time. Things came up that force me into hiding. The bank seized my private account – I can't retrieve coins. Thus, I had to use other means," a briefcase was put on the table. "-I've got the money but time has forgone this man."

"And why are you telling me this?" he interrupted.

"Well, I contacted Karlson earlier, he told me that you worked for them. Hence, I thought you could maybe deliver this to the leader?" the voice felt apologetic.

“Well, you thought wrong, but I can help,” the upper-body leaned forward, “-on one condition. I want the event to continue and turn into something far better than what the public had planned. I want the artists to be paid handsomely. No more short-cuts; this festival must turn into the thing that makes the citizens want to forget and relax. To forget the problems that occurred in the past few days. Do that, and that plump face of yours will be left alone. ”

“I can’t guarantee that the other organizers will be on board after such a fiasco, they want to profit,” the condition was one tough and cruel.

“I don’t care,” he spoke monotonously, the head shook slightly, “-pay for it using your own money, but get the job done.”

Gulp, “I-I’ll do what i-is possible,” the confidence vanished.

“Good,” he replied, “-I’ll make sure that this is delivered, just don’t mess up Aceline’s hard work,” the fingers wrapped around the handle tightly, “-thanks for doing business,” he disappeared.

‘Speaking with that guy is like dealing with the devil,’ the head lowered onto the table, ‘-I thought I was going to die,’ just as the mind relaxed, the tied-up assassins awoke. ‘Come on,’ he sighed.

From the emperor to the prince and even the dark-guilds. Phones were used extensively, from threats to promises, the media and Order could not but fold. A scapegoat was given, the Order released a statement about the nature of the attack. Paradus was the mastermind behind said action.

The festival went on as ordered, the prince and Akhtar worked hand in hand. The backers who wanted to cut-ties were forced to comply. Many of the idols could not believe what had happened. More money and better equipment for the advertisement.

Indirectly, the media had to report on these new events. In a way, it dispelled any notion of some secret underground organization existing. The news given was that an exiled mage from the Order became hungry for power. This would not have sufficed if not for the one responsible himself coming out. Face with a camera, the confession could not be denied. Behind the scenes, the scholar had to willingly give up for a chance to live.

Soon after, the public’s fear subsided. The excitement for the event regained its momentum. Actors and actresses were called in to make guest appearances. Even the prince was rumored to attend. With influential people assisting, it alleviated the fear that something bad could happen. A single man had to fall for this peace, a scholar wronged for trying to innovate.

Backstage was where most of the magic happened. It held true even in the real world. People influenced one another for their gain. The dark and shady secret every nation dealt with. Lies and deception, the citizens oblivious to anything that happened. Puppets manipulated by someone of higher influence. At the center of it all, a single man; Staxius Haggard. Directly or indirectly, thanks to the subtle actions here and there; the situation turned out in his favor.

Chapter 164: Dinner

“I can’t believe how much has happened in the last few days,”

“Ha-ha, tell me about it,” two lovely ladies of high-class spoke. They gossiped around a good dinner and a vintage glass of wine. A butler stood by as they conversed, he catered to their every move. Smooth and gentle music played in the background, a live performance by talented musicians.

Time went by faster than usual, the sun retired after a day of work. Though its radiance was cut short by clouds. As subtle as a warm evening breeze, the tense atmosphere blew away. People were given a chance to sit back and breathe. The heaviness lifted; the visible agitation swapped for a smile and light-hearted jokes. From fancy restaurants to taverns, bars, and the common folk’s home. People gathered around a nice meal.

“Over here please,” a waiter welcomed three individuals. Dressed in formal attire, Staxius and his party entered. Tonight’s reservation came as a gift from Akhtar and the organizers. Many of the performing stars who were badly treated were given as a compromise and apology. Sugar and his team could be seen in the corner. The ladies’ attention wasn’t only focused on the food alone. Many purposefully took a seat from where that lovely face of his could be seen.

Tonight didn’t only compromise of singers, but stars and other influential people. The same restaurant the team from Hidros had dined for the few days. “Here you are,” the young waiter showed the table, one suitable for six people.

“I guess that this is in conjuncture with the guests you invited earlier?” the tone felt soothing, Staxius asked in a relaxed manner.

“Yes, I got a call confirming their arrival,” the manager soon turned to Aceline and conversed.

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‘Sophie, why after so long,’ he sighed and leaned. ‘Using teleportation so frequently does make one sleepy,’ the mana reserve wasn’t low but had reached half-way. Mana cancellation on that scale used up a tremendous amount of power. Though it was recovered throughout the day. It felt nice to take a break; away from all the scheming and plotting. The goal of meeting the boss was a success. The riot came as a surprise; the situation had been handled. A good sleep was what he waited forward too. Tomorrow was a day off, a day to recuperate and prepare for the concert.

Aceline’s excitement could not be contained for her face glimmered with anticipation.

“You’ve been having fun,” a familiar voice spoke.

“Where have you been the whole day, it’s weird to not have you pestering,” he asked in jest.

“I’ll just translate that too; hey Adete, I missed you,” she flew and sat on the table. “And to answer the question, I’ve been sleeping,” there loomed a sense of pride in that sentence.

“You basically did nothing for the whole day, how quaint,” the index-finger patted her head. “Either way, it’s nice to have you back,” he smiled and stared outside.

“Over here,” far out, the faint sound of the waiters uttering Sophie’s name was heard.

Scott and Aceline had a clear view of the entrance. Staxius sat opposite the singer. “They’re here,” Scott whispered and signaled with his eyes.

“Good evening everyone,” Silvester walked in, the man was dressed in a lovely dark-blue suit. Sophie followed behind and nodded; she wore a red dress. Behind her, a young girl who seemed around fourteen.

“Good evening Marquess,” Scott stood and shook hands. Staxius did the same, the atmosphere seemed more formal than anything. People on other tables stared, the Clyfford family was renowned. Especially since Piers was wedded to royalty. After the greetings later, Silvester sat opposite Sophie and the girl sat next to Staxius on the left side.

The manager and Marquess hit it off immediately. Both men had a similar interest, Aceline spoke with Sophie who seemed hesitant. The bodyguard was left alone and watched as everyone had a partner to converse with. It didn’t matter; the mind was at ease resting.

The girl seemed uncomfortable; in that instant – an image of Eira popped into mind. No longer could he ignore the quiet lady.

“You sure resemble your mother,” he broke the ice with a lovely smile.

“T-thank you,” the voice cracked a little.

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“No need to worry young lady,” Adete stood with her arms crossed. “-If that man tries anything, I’ll punch him for you,” she said in a friendly voice.

“You can try,” Staxius added smugly to which she flew and played around with his hair.

“Give up now or I shall cut your hair,” she proclaimed as if victorious.

“I yield,” he played along. The little charade helped in lightening her mind.

“A lovely smile,” Adete took charge, she spoke with the girl.

“Thank you, I’m Meriel,” she introduced with a smile. Hearing her name, Staxius choked.

“Is there something wrong?” Aceline asked, her attention changed.

“Not really,” he looked at Sophie, “-Meriel Mirabelle Clyfford, I’m guessing? he paused, “-isn’t that a mouthful.”

“Oh, shut up,” the face lit with embarrassment, the awkwardness around the table lifted. Food was ordered, the Clyfford family were nice people. Time went by, they grew to know each other. Adete played with the prodigious young mage, whilst Staxius dozed off without anyone noticing.

“Staxius,” Sophie called, the meal ended. Aceline joined in a conversation with Scott and Silvester.

“Yes?” the would-be nap broke.

“How have you been?” the intent was to start small talk.

“Listen, if there’s something you want to say then go ahead. Small talk isn’t going to take us anywhere,” he said in a way that only she heard.

“Fine,” she replied, her eyes lit with determination. “-I’ll tell you what’s going on. I’ve regained my memories from way back then. Apparently, for more than a decade, Josiah trapped and altered my memories. I lived in a fake but cozy world. I made a family, became a good instructor but always lacked something. I never knew why I felt sad – not until now anyway. It was my regret from the day you left, from the day everything changed. I never got the chance to apologize, so here,” her head bowed, “-I apologize for acting like an idiot so many years ago.” All at the table heard it.

Silvester was aware of the situation, she told him everything. The remainder decided to face away and focus on the husband instead.

“Apologize for acting like an idiot,” he mumbled. Her eyes closed, ‘he’s going to get mad and leave, I just know it.’ Her assumption was right, the old Staxius would have done something along those lines.

“Honestly,” he sighed, “- I still don’t get why you act the way you do,” he patted her head, “-but it’s fine. I’m at fault for leaving without saying anything; so, we’re equal,” her head rose to see a smiling young man.

“People grow over the years you know,” he took a sip, “-but I’m glad you’re the one teaching Eira.” Her heart now at ease, but more and more questions arose.

“Yes, on the subject of Eira – you have a daughter?” the face shone with curiosity. “-also, how is it that you look the same as you did so many years ago. By all means, you should be in your late thirties.”

Cough, “-your mistaken ma’am, Staxius is aged around twenty, isn’t he?” the singer asked, the manager remained at a loss for words.

“The secret is out of the bag,” he sighed, “-unofficially I’m close to forty, but official I’m about twenty.” He smiled, “-there isn’t a need for further explanation. It will grow confusing,” the duo gave in and spoke to Silvester.

“Can’t you be any tactful?” the eyes opened wide, he gritted.

“Sorry,” she winked.

“Anyways, on the subject of Eira – she’s my daughter. We may not be related, but she’s one of the people who awaken the feeling I thought I never had. Her protection became my priority. Sadly, I failed her many times but she still calls me dad. The feeling of pride hasn’t left yet. To that, I’m grateful,” he replied in a reminiscent way.

“What about your love life, are you single?” her prying nature returned.

Not wanting to reply, he faced away and ordered another drink. “Come on, don’t avoid the question,” she pouted.

“My lady, the man who sits there is married,” the idol whispered and quickly turned away.

“Really?” she faced the now tired-looking Staxius. “Who is it?” her face looked like a child wanting a toy.

‘Revealing my title as King here might not be such a good thing. Arda is its own nation and I’m probably not even welcomed here.’

“Her name is Shanna, another person for whomst I’d turned the whole world against me,” the reply stern, Sophie stopped and sat back. Conversation partners rotated from here onwards, it took about two hours but the dinner ended splendidly. Sugar and the other members stopped by their table to give their regards.

“It’s been great seeing you again,” they now stood outside. “Likewise, Sophie, likewise,” he smiled – their relation returned to a place comfortable. She had a family and so did he, trying to intrude into the once brother’s life, wasn’t the smartest idea.

‘If I could not train the father, then I shall train the daughter instead,’ both parted ways. She returned to normal and smiled. Silvester walked beside her, he smiled, the girl also showed happiness.

‘It’s good to see that the crimson princess has settled down.’ An image of Silvester holding her hand and her holding Melisa’s hand was engraved. An idyllic moment, one that finally turned over a new leaf.

“Staxius Haggard, are you going to stand and gawk at that couple or are you joining us for a late-night stroll,” Scott stopped and spoke.

“Get over here already,” she ordered as well.

Since the next day was a day off, the trio strolled around town. The city didn’t seem the least concerned about whether it was day or not. People still walked the streets shopping or having fun in arcades. The malls were packed – teenagers ran around shooting videos and fooling around. Couples could be seen hidden from view, they flirted.

‘It seems that killing Akhtar isn’t a concern any longer,’ Renaud finished the conversation with Stanley. The money rested on the table, every coin with interest. ‘That man has proved to be more useful than I thought,’ with the risk of them getting exposed out of the picture. The organization went back to where it belonged – into the shadows.

“Look over there,” Scott pointed at a giant screen. It played Aceline’s song as well as many others. People could be seen swaying their heads back and forth along with the beat.

“I think this concert shall be one that Iqavea is never going to forget,” he placed his hands onto the singers’ shoulder.

“I’ll do my best, Staxius,” she replied firmly.

For the next few hours, the trio continued to experience the nightlife. Staxius had only one thing in mind, and that was sleep. The last place came in view, a park with a lake in the middle. Trees and plants overlooked said area, the meadow was well maintained. A path led further inside; a crowd of people could be seen running.

“LADY ACELINE,” from said crowd, a man yelled. “PLEASE BE MINE, I LOVE YOU,” he leaped.

Staxius dozed off, “WAKE UP,” Adete pinched his cheeks in time. *BANG,* the gun fired; the fanatic fell to the ground with a light injury.

“Good job Staxius,” Scott yelled as he went to check up on the victim.

“Be more aware, what the hell was that, come on – you’re a vampire; night should make you stronger,” Adete yelled. That situation could have ended way worse without her aid.

“Sorry,” he apologized. ‘I must be more careful, that situation could have ended badly. Relaxing now isn’t a wise idea, I need to refocus.’ The body demanded sleep; fatigue had reached its peak.

“Scott, Aceline,” a crowd gathered around the past out fan.

“What is it?”

“Let’s go home,” teleportation was used. “-Shout later, I want to rest,” they reappeared at the hotel. “Good night,” he dozed off.

“I guess our guardian can get tired as well; I’m off to sleep, goodnight Scott,” she walked out, the fifth day came to a close.

Chapter 165: Syhton

The sixth day, also known as a Friday – Iqavea awoke to a pleasant morning. The shady weather whomst had ailed many for the past few days gave in. The sky felt clear though it was six in the morning.

Early birds everywhere; many rushed to work and many got their kids ready for school. Teenagers were semi-responsible and did those things alone and without their parent’s help. Compared to Hidros, life here was way above the norm. Even some of the upper average class here could be compared to wealthy people in that ignored continent.

It came as a surprise that despite being in the Emperor’s rule, Hidros didn’t have any say in how things were for the empire. King Blaine in the final days made a contract with Paradus – one that remained hidden to everyone else. One that states, “the empire shan’t interfere in the matters of Hidros.” At the bottom, both the imperial seal and signature could be found.

As a result, both grew apart – allies but distant. Since Gallienne became Queen, no longer were emissaries sent to Vlaiwia. Paradus didn’t care; the only condition asked from the ex-king, “if the empire is to not interfere with Hidros, it stands to reason that Vlaiwia is not obliged to send over coins and commodities for its growth,” a condition and small price to pay for a chance at freedom. Henceforth, the Empire and Hidros grew apart. A non-concerned Emperor and a novice queen who slowly settled into her responsibilities.

For the past few months, Kreston remained calm. An unusual silence since the burning of Frostrest. It was decided that the apparition of monsters was the reason. On the King’s day of birth – the pope and the duke left suspiciously. Some nobles, Gallienne included, figured that they were up to something. Envoys from Rosespire were sent to that province but the borders remained close. The order came straight from the pope. A person who held as much authority as a duke.

The day prior, whilst chaos ran rampant in Vlaiwia; Gallienne and her people turned faces around the capital. The castle was opened to the public for visits, it didn’t matter for commoners and nobles were welcomed. An attempt to make the people feel as if their new ruler was transparent. It went to reason that only the yard and the mini-town could be accessed. The inner castle itself – the reception hall and throne room was made public as well.

An opportunity that many didn't want to slip by. The news broadcasted the whole event locally. Unfortunate souls who could not participate were given a chance to see inside.

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Then and there, the truth came to light. The Queen didn't sit alone, a lady stood beside her.

"Welcome, dear people of Hidros," Gallienne spoke with confidence and pride. "-today, in honor of my late father, the king. Long has this secret been kept from the family," she pointed at the girl dressed in a white robe.

"This lady, the one who's served as our medic and healer for the past decade is an apostle of Syhton; the Goddess of Stars," the name reverberated around the hall. Many breaths cut short; out of respect most knelt and prayed. The God of Stars was what the people of Oxshield believed in, the prominent deity that had lit the way for many generations. The ways of the stars, astrology, and astronomy, one scientific and one religious; both had a connection. From the many scholars to the many priests, a single thread connected them both, tis was the stars.

Revealing the apostle proved to be quite a shock. The people hailed Gallienne as the chosen Queen. On the surface, it might have looked like wanting to come clean about most of the stuff kept hidden. Sadly, nothing was as black and white; this was a plot to antagonize Kreston. No longer could she sit back and let those fanatics do as pleased. A reaction from either the Pope or Duke would be sufficient. She needed a way to converse and resolve any problems that may arise later. On that day, the church of Stars could not hold any more people. The masses had rushed to see the apostle in actions.

"Another fake apostle," stood in front of heliographs and paintings, the pope received news from the capital. "-we pray only one god, and he's almighty," the eyes lit with determination; the same one when they fought against Dorchester. "Another sin added to thy head, princess Gallienne, judgment shall befall thee soon," the tone sinister, a pile of corpses laid before him. The hands worked separate from the mind, "-with the power from the true apostle, I shall revive these people and grant eternal bliss."

"Yes pope, that is the way one is to be to spread the word of our God," stood in a corner with wings and a halo, a man waited ever so patiently.

"Angel Hamael, if it wasn't for thy enlightenment then these people would have never survived the wrath of the fallen ones."

"No need to fret, the fallen ones shan't bring harm any longer. The land of Kreston has been blessed by our Lord, I'm but a messenger in charge of overlooking and protecting the followers," the body shone with radiance, with a flap – the angel flew. He flew off in the direction of Totrya.

'No fallen one will ever try and hurt our citizens. Those vile creatures, the reapers of sin and evil, with Angel Hamael by our side; our protection is guaranteed,' a smirk could be seen as the people came to life.

Heavy Snores, 'again,' the eyes opened. A cold breeze rushed in from the opened window, the sun had yet to rise. Despite this, the darkness from the night lifted slowly. 'Still can't believe that a place like this is the capital,' he looked through the window, the curtained were pushed aside. The buildings and light were like stars, so far yet so close.

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"Morning," from next to the pillow, Adete awoke.

"Morning," the reply subtle, a new day began. One where nothing had to be done, a day of relaxation and fun. The breeze continued its invasion, this sent shivers down the body, a sensation that could be described as ecstasy.

"Could you kindly shut that window, I want to sleep some more," the head buried into the white pillows, Scott mumbled out of spite. The cold had broken the then deep slumber. No reply, the windows shut and the door closed.

"Staxius," Adete spoke, she laid on her stomach with both hands hanging off each side of his shoulder. "What is it?" he entered the bathroom.

"Today's our day off, what's the plan?" her face changed; the lady always loved to have fun.

"Nothing much," the reply nonchalant, he brushed both his and Adete's teeth, "-these canines sure are annoying," each day, they grew longer and sharper.

"Deal with it, vampire," she fired back, her mood changed from joyful to angry, the reason was that nothing had been planned, nothing that involved FUN.

"Can you stop being a brat for once," they now stood under a showerhead, the water ran – warm and uplifting.

"Brat or not, you owe me a favor since yesterday night," they now stood in the kitchen with only a towel separating their flesh to the outside.

"Seriously?" the duo now sat and ate.

"Yes, seriously, I'm going to pester till the ears grow deaf from my voice," arms on her hips, the emphasis on trying to remain serious whilst getting fed made Staxius laugh.

"Fine, I'll take you around town," he agreed. 'Not to mention I need to buy presents,' he thought, 'cash is a problem.' The sun rose, the room came to life. "I guess we'll need to pay Renaud a visit." *Knock, knock,*

"Coming," the door opened, Aceline stood with her face flushed.

"Anything I can help you with?" he asked with a casual tone.

"Not really, I- I wanted to get some food," her eyes constantly looked to the side, her right foot fidgeted around nervously.

"Come on," a decent enough breakfast was served. Adete ate less than usual.

"Thank you so much," she dug right in. "Have a good meal, I'll be off for today; see you guys at noon," *Snap,* the guard vanished. Her attention was solely on the food, Staxius disappeared without her realizing.

The mansion looked more sinister than usual, screams and cries could be heard outback. Staxius walked in as if owning the place, the mages and protectors were notified of his identity. Rather than pointing their gun, each gave a quick nod acknowledging his presence.

“More, make them cry more before taking the shot. Those reporters need to know that they dug their own grave,” sat outside overlooking the forests, Renaud had tea. The scene that played out in front wasn’t of a lovely sunrise, but the torture of the poor souls who knew too much.

“So, this is the purge,” Staxius stepped out and stood near the boss.

“Good to have you, what’s the nature of this visit,” he asked in a friendly manner. The victims stared at the brown-headed man, their eyes cried for help, the body semi-exposed with lashes and injuries everywhere. One lady and five men, the crew responsible for unraveling the truth about the Dark guilds. They were all tied up on chairs.

“Please help us,” she screamed, the torturers took a break. Renaud and Staxius spoke, they needed a moment of silence. “HELP US, WE DID NOTHING WRONG,” the men begged.

“Renaud,” Staxius ignored the victims.

“ARE YOU JUST GOING TO LEAVE AN INNOCENT GIRL OUT FOR HERSELF. DON’T YOU HAVE ANY SHAME, HOW CRUEL CAN YOU BE, YOU WORTHLESS PIECE OF SHI-,” a gust of wind rattled the trees.

“Choose your tone carefully when addressing someone who might hold the key to one’s survival,” ahead rolled down to Renaud’s feet. Blood flew all over the lovely green garden.

“I’m sorry I got the lawn dirty,” the tone apologetic, Staxius approached the boss.

“It’s no matter, they were going to die anyway,” he replied with a dignified tone. The girl was beheaded in a single motion. “Let’s head inside,” they walked in. “Guards, kill them,” four gunshots later, the screams turned peaceful.

“I didn’t expect an alchemist to be so rough but considering the fate of my previous bodyguard, you sure are merciless,” they walked till the underground office.

“I regret it,” he sighed, “- I regret getting my sword dirtied this early in the morning,” blood dripped slowly.

“Ha-ha,” tears of joy could be seen, “-you regret getting a weapon dirty and not about ending one’s life, are you even human?” he sat.

“Define human,” Staxius fired back. “Touché, what brings you here?” he said in an intrigued manner.

“I came to ask for a favor,” the voice serious.

“If it’s under my control, I’ll gladly see what is possible.” Both men stared at one another, Renaud tried to read the intent but was unsuccessful.

“I’ll be frank, I need some gold and that’s about it. Of course, I’ll happily do a job to compensate for the effort,”

“Depends on how much you’re looking for?”

“Around 100 gold pieces,” that amount was expensive. People would kill for that amount of cash. Since Staxius usually dealt with a lot of gold and didn’t care about spending, people might not realize how valuable that one piece of gold was.

“Is that all?” he asked in an unimpressed tone, “-only a mere 100 gold, I thought you were a man of status and pride,” the shoulders relaxed.

“I care not what you say, Renaud, tis the amount I need,” the voice firm.

“Dear Staxius,” he reached out underneath the desk, “-here,” he threw a card, one that resembled a guild card. “A bank account containing 1000 gold, 50 silvers, and 3 copper,” the face held a smile.

“Consider it a gift for our coming partnership – I went back to check on our test subject, the man had only praised to give.” He smiled, “take it, there’s no need to wait any longer; all I ask is for quality god’s ale.”

“Will do,” they shook hands and Staxius disappeared.

Chapter 166: Concert

“Can we go have fun now?” having gotten the money needed, the duo now stood at the foot of hotel Villareal.

“Sure,” with a smile, Staxius strolled through town. Time was eight, the shop barely opened. This didn’t discourage, walking alone could be seen as fun. Watching people work, to see how excited some were about the concert. Many children dressed in uniforms traveled by foot and public transport. It differed a lot from Hidros, kids were allowed to go back home after school was over.

‘Must be nice to return to a lovely home after a day of work,’ a few minutes of walking, Staxius stood on an overpass. The hands rested on the railing; cars drove underneath. Above, planes and airships flew, the massive buildings in front hid the sun.

“I can’t wait for the show tomorrow,”

“Yes, I can’t either, he-he,” dressed in mini-skirts, three girls walked by. They spoke with enthusiasm about tomorrow’s show.

‘Me neither,’ he turned around and faced the commercial district. “Time to go get some presents.”

“Finally, let’s GO,” she cheered.

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Minutes turned into hours, they walked – Staxius went crazy on the spending. From clothes to weapons and little gadgets, he bought things that many could only dream of affording. As promised, he got a noose for Diane – even here, the want to annoy that lady could not be quelled. The presents were mainly clothing and accessories. For weapons, he bought a peculiar looking sword, one of the lengths of a longsword but refined and sharp. It had a small curve that eased in slicing off what might stand in the way.

“Sir, that sword hails from the east. It was made by a well-renowned craftsman,” the reseller tried hard to pitch the deal.

“Sure, I’ll take two and show me your most prized item.” 800 gold was left and a few coppers. There were already more than enough presents, it all got sent back to the hotel. On the way to the weapon shop, their driver drove by; to which he offered to help.

“Here we are,” placed on the table, a piece of armor.

“Is that supposed to be the item?” what laid before was a crest, one the size of a coin. A black crest with a skull and nothing else, the eyes looked alive.

“That’s our most prized commodity, a piece from the helm worn by Admis during the fight against the invaders.”

“Admis as in the goddess of destruction?” it seemed too good to be true, how could something that valuable remain in a shop. Surely if it was authentic, collectors might have jumped on the occasion. With that in mind, Staxius watched – the eyes stared deep into the seller’s soul.

“I-I a-assure you, it’s real...” he gulped, the breathing grew erratic.

“Even if it’s real, what’s the point of owning such a thing. First and foremost, it’s rather unappealing for something worn by a goddess. Second, I feel nothing coming out of said item, and thirdly; a god-level item would not lounge around in a well-established shop.

“I-I c-can’t argue y-your logic,” he panted, people around started to take notice of the scene. “How about this, buy three of those long swords and I’ll throw in this trinket as a gift.”

“For the supposedly most prized item, you sure are willing to get rid of it,” a dark-aura emanated from the man’s back. Sheathed in a beautiful black and grey scabbard, he bought three. Each held different colors and designs. 200 gold for each one, a price that seemed cheap at first but was a whole lot. Money left was 200 gold, Adete had grown frustrated by all this shopping.

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“Let’s have fun as you asked,” what he came out to do was accomplished. Both headed into the entertainment district and remained there till three in the afternoon. The rendezvous with Aceline and Scott slipped his mind, they were three hours late. The smile on the batgirl’s face was well worth the effort.

In the end, both parties returned to the hotel at four.

Click, the door opened, “thanks for ditching us,” Scott walked in with the lady behind.

“Don’t mention it,” he laid on the couch and watched television. The entire kitchen was filled with presents wrapped nicely. Expensive brands and companies could be seen all around, some receipts were scattered here and there.

“WHAT IS THIS?” the manager exclaimed in shock; a 200-gold coin bill remained on the counter.

“Why are you so angry, it’s not like I’ve spent your cash?” he sat upright and turned.

“Why am I angry? We’re paying you 100 gold coins for this job and you tell me you’ve spent twice that amount on a sword.” Scott threw a tantrum, Aceline stood back and laughed, Staxius’s antics always brought a smile.

“Sorry mother,” the tone smug, Staxius stood, “-catch,”

“What is it?” he caught the present.

“New pair of glasses, don’t worry about the prescription I did some snooping around, they should fit perfectly,” the body face the singer. “No need to worry,” she looked perplexed, “-I’ve got you something as well,” rather than throw; he handed her a box. A box in which laid a microphone, one filled with precious stones and gold. “I know it looks a bit fancy, but tis a present.”

Both were left in shock, for a 100-gold coin job, Staxius spend ten-times that amount. For the next hour, Scott continually pestered the man about the information of how rich he was.

“Could you just shut-up, dinner time has come,” the day came to a close. One not that eventful. Preparation was in order for tomorrow, the jet was said to leave on the same night. Waiting another day wasn’t feasible, the company back home wanted Aceline to come as soon as possible. As a change, instead of going to the fancy restaurant, Sugar invited everyone to a party. One hosted in a tavern, a place more familiar which felt home.

Drinks were served, people sang, the crew relaxed. Staxius chose to sit in a corner and watch, Aceline had fun with Sugar. Scott took quite a liking to the silent bass player. Trying to remain inconspicuous, he stayed back. A smile could be seen, he rejoiced in seeing others have fun, Adete sat on his shoulder.

“Tomorrow’s the last and final day,” he mumbled. Fondly enough, the mind yearned to see the shop. Xula’s face came to mind several times. In the right pocket, a glove was pulled out, the same one she threw. Tis was something he would never let go nor forget.

Driing, Driing, a new day began. The precious night ended early; the performers had to keep in shape. The first few hours after waking was utter chaos. Clothes went missing, Scott lost his mind, the idol yelled.

“CALM DOWN AND GET IN THE CAR,” Scott cried.

“We are calm,” Aceline replied with a soft voice, the car stopped.

“Today’s the day we’ve all been waiting for,” news about the event was broadcasted on a special channel. “-It shall be the first music festival organized on such a scale. Many stars are scheduled to come with prince Ernis in the guest list.” The camera panned in and out of the arena, the podium got a massive upgrade. The screens almost doubled in size, the spectator area tripled, it went back further than before. Akhtar had to invest more money, a condition mandatory.

An investment that proved to be worth the effort. People queued, around 100,000 from what it seemed. It wasn’t filled to capacity yet, one quarter remained. The hype came from the incident prior, the riot made many curious.

“Over here,” a guard guided the car through a narrow road.

“Welcome to paradise,” Akhtar stood and personally welcomed the performers.

“Thanks,” Aceline bowed, her face turned red – excitement could not be contained. Music was played by local bands and artists. Warm-up for the main events.

“Follow me this way,” Tom waited, he was assigned to her crew. “Good to see you,” the manager spoke, the aura changed from friendly to serious and down to business.

“Good job,” a voice whispered; Akhtar’s eyes opened in shock, “- you made the festival a success,” it faded into the background. Intrigued, he turned around to see no one. The moment the body faced forward again, Staxius smiled with a wink.

“Here we are,” they stood near a caravan, “-please take as much time as you want. The main event starts at four. The bands will perform for one hour each, you’ll be the closing act. Then after all the artists are done, the stage will be open for bands to perform all together and have fun. The whole event will run till midnight – there, local bands will take over again leaving the main performers free to head home or assist the show,” the briefing ended.

“Well, better get ready, I’ll be off to survey the area and make sure nothing happens.” *Click* the door opened, “-make sure to have fun and sing to your heart’s content. I’ll be in the crowd cheering.” In a blue mist, he disappeared again.

“Damn this place is impressive,” he teleported onto a support beam. Below, the camera crew filmed the event, he sat atop and watched. The eyes closed; no strange aura nor maleficent intent could be sensed. The head swayed back and forth to the beat; the crowd cheered. This was unlike anything he saw, the show at Claireville Academy could have been child’s play.

“People sure love music,” Adete hovered. “They sure do,” the screens displayed the artists singing their hearts out. The hours felt like minutes, the show was well organized. No breaks nor stops were seen, people changed seamlessly on stage, the music never stopped. Before one realized it, four in the evening came by. Sugar was the opening show.

As rumored, many movie stars and including the prince were seen in the VIP area. Surrounded by bodyguards, ones with weapons. Seeing him walk on stage, the girls went nuts, the cheers echoed throughout the vicinity. He played, many other big-name musicians dropped in, the music continued.

“Aceline, it’s your turn to jump on stage,” the moment of truth came; she stood with a pearly white dress. Her hair combed as if a princess, her hands held the expensive microphone.

“Go give them hell,” exhausted, Sugar stepped off. From the high energy and fast-paced songs, Aceline walked in. The crowd cheered just as loud, the pride of Hidros was ready. Her outfit mesmerized many, the musicians behind were well dressed.

‘Show them what you’re made of,’ far back still on the beam – he stood and waited.

The music began off slow, it made the crowd fall into a trance. She sang, her voice touched the hearts of many. Mid-way through her performance, the beat changed, with a pull of a string, the dress fell; her outfit changed. The rhythm altered, Sugar jumped on stage and so did the other stars.

Earlier, she requested that for the others to join her on stage. Rather than standing out, the emphasis was put on having fun. The more people meant more entertainment. Also, her songs were very popular to the point that many musicians learned it by heart.

The crowd went wild, she sang, they played. Amidst those people who shone, she lit brighter and shone even clearer. The Pride of Hidros had only begun her journey into stardom.

“She sure is something else,” Adete commented on the performance. “Yeah, being able to link all those people’s hearts as one. Making the rather self-centered Sugar give up on the spotlight; she’s a force to be reckoned with.” Hours on end, they played till exhaustion. No sign of disturbances was seen, the crowd seemed tired but continued to show the energy.

It reached nine, the music stopped. “Thanks for coming,” she bowed; the others followed suit. “Encore, encore, encore,” they demanded more. They could not just leave, the crowd wanted more and tis was their job to deliver. At that moment, Sugar took her mic;

“STAXIUS HAGGARD, IF YOU’RE OUT THERE – COME HERE THIS INSTANT,” the speakers roared, it nearly deafened the spectators.

‘In your dreams buddy,’ he sat back and smirked.

“STAXIUS,” the musicians called out simultaneously, they all witnessed him playing the guitar a few days prior.

“Yeah, not going to happen.” Adamant – they called without stopping. It grew annoying, the crowd’s emotion changed to violent and erratic.

“You best jump on stage, vampire.”

Chapter 167: Axis

The promise to never pick up an instrument; the resolve to never disrespect people who worked hard. It was on the verge of breaking from the action of a single selfish man. Sugar didn’t know about said promise so it was expected. Since the stage was open for anyone from the artist’s camp to perform as the main event ended. He thought that it would be nice to have the man who lit a fire under him play.

“Staxius,” the crowd cheered, “Staxius, Staxius, Staxius,” they knew not who it was. Seeing their favorite singer and musicians beg for the man to step on stage; logic states that said person must be incredible.

“Staxius,” another voice came from the speaker, this one was of the manager. “-Don’t worry,” he stepped on stage and replaced the keyboard player.

‘People are idiots,’ he sighed. “Best get going,” Adete pinched his cheeks. *Ancient Magic: Teleportation,* a quick trip to the changing room, he got a mask and picked up Daisy.

“Staxius, finally, go on stage,” Tom ran around the backstage until the man in question was found. “I don’t know why but they want you to perform. Go play and have fun, it’s the least you can do before the event ends. Make it a night that everyone will remember,” the face held a smile, he patted Staxius’s back. “GO GET EM.”

‘Selfish people everywhere,’ he chuckled, the mask fit perfectly.

As if time stopped, the sound of footsteps climbing up the stairs took the performers by shock. “He’s here,” the drummer yelled; the beat began. “Let’s give them hell,” the bassist played, the silent girl had

a change in personality. Scott did nothing but smirk, the piano beautifully accompanied the other instruments. "LET'S GO," Sugar screamed, Aceline joined in, both sang.

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The song revitalized the crowd, the fatigue vanished. "Where's this Staxius fellow?" a single note turned everyone's head around. "Is that him?" the audience grew impatient, a masked-man stepped on stage. The music stopped; each stared intently.

With eyes closed, he stood in front of approximately, 100,000 people. "Take the lead," Scott yelled. The guitar screamed into action, it cried; the instrument lit of a thousand lights, the bloodstains made an impact.

"This is why I told you to play," Sugar added smugly, everyone joined in. The audience cheered beyond belief, music played, all had fun. The aura changed from stressed to peaceful and relaxed. From nine, it reached eleven, the singers were exhausted. Scott could barely touch a key, the drummer had cramps. Keeping up with Staxius's high pace was a challenge in itself, rather than the drummer setting the tempo; he forced everyone to follow.

On the last strum, on the last note, he broke two strings. "That's it for us, thanks for being awesome," Sugar took the lead and ended the show. All who performed stood in line and bowed. Aceline nearly passed out, Staxius caught her; it was over. The seven-day trip into the main continent came to an end.

Fatigued took the reins; adrenaline had been the only thing keeping them active in the last few minutes. "And with this, we are done," Staxius sighed, all their stuff was placed into the car by the staff. "We can't afford to take rest; the plane is waiting," the manager spoke with urgency as they waited inside the changing room.

"I know but look at her," he pointed at the girl who slept on a couch.

"We'll have to carry her," Scott stepped in and helped her onto Staxius's back.

"You carry her, I'll take the guitar and other stuff." Just as they were about to leave the room, Sugar and his crew walked in.

"That was epic," he proclaimed.

"Sorry but we have a plane to catch, see you guys later," Scott ended the conversation before it began.

"Catch," Staxius yelled; the mask was thrown, "-become a better guitarist than me, I leave you my legacy," the trio ran out.

'Your legacy,' he thought not realizing Staxius said that in jest. "COUNT ON IT," he screamed but the voice was silenced by the stage.

At one AM, they reached the plane – Aceline slept peacefully. No goodbyes, no farewells, they left as quietly as they came. The prince threw a tantrum when the news about them leaving reached his ear. On that day, the imperial capital forever changed. Music became an integral part of life.

A new day rose in Hidros. Today was the day their idol would return home.

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Knock, knock, “who is making all that noise?” half-asleep, Avon stumbled into the main room. He stayed over at the shop for last night had been one filled with alcohol and food. *Click,* the door opened, “-sorry but the shop is closed,” he said with a yawn.

“I’m sorry b-but i-is this were I c-can find my uncle?” a small child stood with a picture. The boy looked on the verge of crying, Avon could not but wonder.

“I’m sorry,” he leaned, “-here we only sell potions and magic items. I’m afraid that your uncle might not be here,” the spirit patted his head reassuringly.

“N-no,” the kid refused, “-look,” a note with a picture was handed over.

“Axius, if mother or father ever get into trouble; please go to this place and ask for a man named Staxius Haggard, he’ll take care of you,” the note was signed by Claudia, H.

‘Don’t tell me this is master’s nephew,’ he watched intently. An uncanny resemblance, a boy that looked girlish, long hair with a pretty face – eyes in the color of honey.

“Avon,” a voice yelled, two figures walked. The boy cried, “what are you doing with that child?” Undrar rushed over. “Calm down and tell me what happened,” she spoke softly; almost motherlike – the boy sobbed. “Let’s go inside,” she offered her hand and the small boy walked in.

“Avon, care to explain?” Achilles asked in a polite tone, they stood in the dim backroom.

“I’ve no idea, the boy walked in claiming to be master’s nephew,” soon, the letter was handed over.

“I see,” Viola took a seat. Auic took the boy into the main room for she had stayed over. “-Well, there’s nothing else we can do except wait for Staxius. He should be here soon.”

“The letter feels oddly suspicious,” Achilles spoke, “-didn’t master say he was an orphan with no family?” the question raised eyebrows.

“No,” Viola firmly added, “-he has a mother and a sister. Both abandoned him and his father long ago – that’s about the extent of what I know,” she concluded.

Outside, a raging thunderous sound stopped. “Don’t tell me he’s back,” they mumbled, Deadeyes jumped from one of the clocktowers and glided across the street till landing atop the shop.

“That’s a nice little suit you have there,” the tone casual.

“Welcome back home,” he dropped down.

“Thanks,” rather than a handshake, Staxius went for a quick hug. A show of affection never performed before, “-I’m glad to see you’re alive and well.” Both men stepped into the shop.

“UNCLE,” the boy screamed and latched onto his legs.

“STAXIUS,” simultaneously, the trio stepped out the backroom.

The face remained expressionless; it had not been a minute. No time to rest nor time to say hi – another thing came up. “There, there, why are you crying?” he picked up the unknown child.

“M-mother s-said to f-find you i-if ever t-they were in trouble,” he sobbed. Not wanting to impose on the little boy, he patted his back and stared at the rest.

“Care to explain this situation?” he asked menacingly. Avon reluctantly showed the letter.

‘Impossible,’ the shoulders relaxed, “-Claudia?” the memories were vague. It had been more than a decade since he heard that name. Claudia H, as in Claudia Haggard, the long-lost sister whomst he never got to know.

“Dearest Pope, I found an intruder,” far away from the capital, a lady dressed in black was thrown onto the floor.

“Angel Hamael,” the morning prayers stopped, “-it’s a pleasure to see you again,” he turned around.

“The pleasure is all mine, though I apologize for interrupting your prayers to our god,”

“There isn’t a need for such politeness, what brings you here?” he asked intrigued about the angel’s visit.

“I found this lady spying around in an ethereal form,” tied with a silvery string, the lady in black laid on the ground with her mouth covered.

“Interesting,” he walked closer, “that crest on your chest, blank and without a symbol – you belong to Whisper don’t you?” he laughed. Her eyes opened, *Spiritual Element: Transmigration,* her body turned transparent; the strings were unbound.

“I’m surprised that you know of Whisper,” she stepped back, ‘the mission has been compromised. I’m sorry but mother has to leave for a while,’ a small button on her glove was pressed. It triggered an alarm at home. One that the boy was taught to always obey, it had orders to go and meet Staxius.

“I’m sure you’re powerful,” Hamael spoke, the wings stretched, “-but you see, I’m an angel. We don’t take kindly to people who trespass into the holy land,” with both arms, he made a gesture as if grabbing her neck. Strings came from the fingers and immobilized the lady.

“Please, don’t kill her,” the pope intervened. “-If we do anything rash, then the Order might come after us. At the moment, we lack the strength to go against them, thus I plead for thy forgiveness.”

The grip lessened, “as you wish,” the wings flapped. Ignoring the lady, he went back to praying.

“So, let me get this straight,” Staxius sat with the boy in front, “-your mother told you to always obey that alarm and message if it ever came on?”

“Y-yes, but this time it said to come here,” he replied in a more relaxed tone. Auic went and got some snacks, one that made the so-called nephew feel at ease.

‘It’s not even been five minutes,’ he sighed, the party stared with no clue, ‘-I’ve good got to move back all my equipment for making God’s ale. I need to make that delivery soon or later. I’ve given the scholars and craftsmen in Arda plenty of time to improve said apparatuses. It should technically lower the brewing time from five days to 24 hours. Having someone from my lost family just pop out from nowhere does put me in a dire situation.’

“Where’s Lizzie?”

“She’s at school,” Avon replied.

“Auic, are you good with kids?”

“I can manage somehow, master,” her shyness diminished a little.

“Viola, could you kindly cast a sleeping spell on my nephew here,” to which she agreed.

“Now that most of you guys are here,” he stood, “-I wish I could have had more time conversing with each one,” he stepped out and brought in the presents.

“Each box has one of your names on it,” swiftly, everyone took turned searching for presents. It revealed clothes and daily commodities that could come in handy. The clothes were high-end and expensive, the crew had no idea about how to react.

Deadeyes was given a new leather jacket, a new pair of glasses and a whole new outfit. The others were given the same. Clothes imbued with magic and a protection spell. Ones that provided more mobility; brown leather jackets that acted as body armor – the combatants were all given the same thing. Undrar’s insignia was marked on the back

“We sure look menacing,” Avon voiced, he stood in line with Viola, Achilles, and Deadeyes. Auic was given a lovely dress rather than combat-ready outfits.

“Now for weapons,” Viola and Achilles were given the long swords – the spare one was reserved for Eira. Deadeyes got given a new sniper rifle, one that Staxius managed to acquire with connections from Renaud. Not to feel left out, Auic and Lizzie were given smartphones, the same as the teenagers used in Vlaiwia. The chatter grew louder by the minute – none could believe their eyes.

“Listen up people,” the voice serious, Staxius spoke, silence befell the room.

“Viola, I’ll need you to give me a report about how the adventuring has been going so far. Avon, I want a report on the sale of potions – Deadeyes, I see that the rank has increased. Achilles, I’ve heard that you made quite a name for yourself. Everything seemed fine in Viola’s tutelage. Therefore, you guys will continue to take orders from her.”

“Yes sir,” they all agreed.

“I’ll take care of this nephew business,” he looked around, the party representing Kniq was menacing with those leather jackets. “-It’s probably time for the new quests to be announced in the guild, I’ve business to attend,” with a nod, they all returned to their duties.

Undrar could not believe her eyes, the man had grown over the seven days. A good growth, he relegated most of the daily stuff into her hands. Nothing new, there were much bigger things that needed his attention.

Chapter 168: Razer

A few hours went by since the idol’s arrival. The airfield was crowded with reporters from the local news. Everyone wanted to see the Pride of Hidros return. To catch a glimpse of the lady who made the

continent proud. A mysterious black car remained hidden from view; a surprise guest – Queen Gallienne.

Whilst getting ready to leave, Theodore approached Scott. “Thanks for everything, I’ll never forget these days,” Aceline spoke as the bodyguard walked through the crowd.

“Anytime,” the crowd gathered around, Staxius vanished. The butler took charge and escorted the duo to meet her majesty. Tension around the capital was low, it gave the queen time to come fetch her friends. The return wasn’t glamorous; for the journey back home was mundane at best.

After an unexpected meeting with Axius, another few hours passed. Kreston’s long slumber came to an end. They were on the move,

“Pope, are you sure it’s wise to start trouble?” sat around a circular table, the duke asked.

“Do you wish to say that the fake apostle the queen brought is worthy of disrespecting our faith?” outside, devotees protested – they wanted the truth. The truth about Syhton’s champion.

“Surely you jest pope, have you forgotten that we led a holy war against Dorchester around a year ago, don’t you think it’s predictable. The apparition of the fallen-ones is a prospect that we should be more worried around,” the duke remained adamant. Over time – fighting and war were seen as unnecessary.

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“No dear duke,” the pope stood with a holy book in hand. “Oh, Angel who protects, angel who saves, and angel who avenge – please come forth and enlighten this whomst been devoured by the darkness of ignorance,”

A ball of light radiated in the middle of the table, like a flower coming to bloom – it opened. Hamael stood with the wings covering his body, “you’ve summoned me?” the voice soothing and refined, the duke could not but stare with the mouth open.

Following a bow of respect, “-could you please enlighten this man about the nature of the fallen-ones,” the pope asked courteously.

“With pleasure,” from standing on the table to now sitting, the angel began, “-Duke Hawkin, there isn’t a thing to be worried about. The land of Kreston has been blessed by our god; I’m proof that the protection is active. No fallen-ones shall ever harm the citizens and believers.”

Amazed, Hawkin took a few moments to compose, “-despite this your holiness; isn’t going to war the worst thing we could do? We began the last war because of a fake apostle, as the ruler of Kreston; I cannot condone said actions,” without a break, the body changed from relaxed to formal. “Even if we were to lead a war against the queen, the repercussion would be unavoidable – it will lead to us being labeled as traitors thus ousting the province from her rule,” a quick pause later, the pope didn’t speak nor did the angel. “Let’s consider if we were to go all out; there will be a need for people to take over the border. The one between Kreston and Oxshield has remained broken for more than a decade now. The only plausible way to enter her territory is through Dorchester. A province that has seen a growth in popularity and prosperity, Arda has backed them fully. They have one of the most secretive and powerful provinces as their ally. With Gallienne at the throne, they may even have her protection. All that adds up to us being the losers,” the fact laid before all to see.

“Dear Pope, I must agree with the duke, there is in no way a change that the holy land could win that fight.” The angel backed Hawkin – a holy man could not oppose the will of one of the people whomst he prayed to.

“Who said Kreston had to fight,” he spoke in a menacing tone, “-who said the holy land is to take on the damage,” the shadiness grew. “We only need to shake the kingdom and bring out that fake apostle; my prodigies will do the rest.”

“What do you mean?” Hawkin asked as the pope spoke in riddles.

“My friend, you’ve lost your edge,” the head shook in disappointment. “It’s not the province of Kreston who’s going to fight, but mercenaries and fighters under the name of Razer. An organization that will be independent on the outside but controlled by us from the inside. The Dark-Guilds will be willing to get involved for a few coins, they care about money and nothing more.”

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“A syndicate that will seem independent but actively tries to provoke the Queen,” Hawkin wondered long and hard.

“It’s going to be a challenge,” the angel added.

“You needn’t worry, I’ve got elite soldiers ready to fight. The blessing bestowed by our god has proven to be more than the weaklings could handle. For those who survived, they wait in the shadows: the eyes beg for blood, the teeth hunger for flesh – the church is ready to fight,” hidden from view, the pope experimented with body alteration. Hamael provided a method that proved to be a boon – normal humans were turned into Saints. People who had the abilities and skill of an angel; a band of individuals that would make up the organization named Razer.

“What about the lady?” Hamael asked.

“The one from Whisper?” the pope replied seeking confirmation.

“Yes,”

“She’s currently imprisoned. We’ve tried various methods to get information but it all ended in naught. We’ll have to send the Inquisitors for questioning,” more ruthless than tortures and a level below Bishop rank – those were the Inquisitors.

“I guess the council is over,” Hawkin stood, “-though I hate to say this, count the noble faction out,” he stared at the pope, “-the church has the same power and influence as us. You needn’t my support nor authorization; please do as you wish – I’ve already lost more than I can bear,” disappointed by said meeting, he left.

“The path of righteousness has been rendered foreign to my old friend. May the gods bless his soul,” saddened by the decision. His holiness took things in hand and preparations began.

Back in Rosespire, Staxius sat beside the boy who slept ever so peacefully. The others left out on quests. Letters and requests from the Alchemist faction were scattered on the ground. ‘Neither of these jobs brings out the hunger for knowledge,’ lost, the eyes wandered around the dim room.

'God's ale, this kid, alchemy, the task of opening the adventuring guild in Arda. Time is running out; I hope Arda is hanging tight.'

"Man I'm lost," he sighed.

"That's weird," Adete flew out the pocket. "-here I thought the King of Arda had things under control," she teased.

"I had a plan but this new development has thrown a snapper in the works."

"Heh," she laughed, "-how long would it take to track down that boy's mother using the All-seeing eyes?" a small hint that pulled him out of the dazed state.

"I see," a smirk later, "-I need information before searching," to which he awakened Axius.

"There isn't time to sleep," the voice soft yet felt urgent.

"What is it?" he awoke, the face sleepy and the mouth yawning.

"We're going to find Claudia," he smiled.

"Have you found mother?"

"Not yet, we need to get you home for that to happen. Care to help uncle in finding mother?" he said in a calm and relaxed way.

"Sure," without much persuasion, he agreed.

The priority was arranged. Finding a lost person would be faster than trying to make god's ale for that process was slow and required concentration. The quicker Axius was out of the picture, the quicker he could get back to work. Claudia being the lost long sister loomed around. A reunion with family, something that made the heart shudder. The boy who called him uncle was also the same one who called him a hero. The same child he met at the tournament, everything fit – a bit too perfectly.

"STOP," the boy screamed, the car screeched.

"What is it?" Staxius asked; the boy pointed at a mansion. "We're here," he exclaimed and stepped out.

'The noble district,' it came as a shock to see the castle so close. It stood directly in front of said mansion. One built with the utmost care and precision. The craftsmanship on the wooden frames that made the entrance was commendable. Slated roof, brick walls, and a lovely garden with a fountain. It resembled houses the Order built back in the days for Scholars.

"Over here," nonchalant, the boy rushed inside.

No strange auras or presence were sensed. Hand in hand, both entered the house. Lovely interior, not too fancy nor too cheap – it had a perfect balance. A feeling of nostalgia emanated deep within, an uncanny resemblance to the childhood home in Krigi of old.

A few steps later, after reaching the first floor – the place where the alarm had been triggered was shown. 'Alright, we've got a computer, the room feels like a study. How the hell can parents be so

irresponsible to leave out their child,' he chuckled, 'as if I did any better,' the eyes looked at every detail possible. Any evidence that could give a hint to where she was.

"No luck," the search went on for ages, from carpets to behind paintings, Staxius looked. Even the bookshelves weren't left alone. "Uncle, over here," the boy called out – a small box rested underneath a bed. "I forgot this earlier but mom also said that if you ever came to visit, then," he handed over the box, "-I should give you this."

Both sat in the study, the box rested on the table filled with papers and notes. 'There's a strange aura coming from it,' he took a good look. An imprisonment spell combined with an illusion spell. 'Should be easy to disarm,' *Dark-Art: Mana Cancellation,*

Click, it opened, inside a few pictures and a letter.

"Hello Staxius," the letter was opened, "-if you're reading this then something bad must have happened. It may come as a shock, but my name is Claudia Haggard, the daughter of Tempest Haggard. The day the war began: you, mother and I were going to live together. Well, that would have happened if only you kept quiet and didn't run away to dad. Mother's job forced us to move. Ever since that day, I've always wondered about what happened to my older brother. Then one day, a letter came from mother; she managed to track you down after god knows how many years. It was then and there that I decided to come to meet you with Axius, however, things happened and duty called. Sworn to secrecy, there isn't much I can say. Nevertheless, the reason for your visit is probably to seek out my location. In the computer, there's a folder hidden by a password known by us only." It ended.

'A password known by us, I'm not convinced.'

"UNCLE LOOK, ITS YOU AND MOM," Axius smiled and yelled, they were pictures of the Haggard family long ago; the short days of peace. Memories from a forgotten past came to light, he stared at the boy and pictures. In no way was this lady the sister, it had been far too long – the mind refused to agree.

"Yeah, we look alike," he patted the boy, Axius resembled Staxius at the age of nine.

'Now the computer,' leaving the nephew, he sat and searched through the machine for answers. Password... Rather than words, it wanted an audible password.

"Way to make it harder than it is," he leaned back and relaxed after trying out names and places for thirty minutes. 'Something that only we know,' images of Eira and her time as a babe came to mind, more importantly – a melody.

"It can't be," he hummed the childhood tune. *Access Granted* 'I guess you really are my kid sister,' the head rested on the keyboard, a sense of relief soothed the erratic mind.

"Nice song," Adete popped out of nowhere, "-I like it," she hovered.

Chapter 169: Elite Guards

The screen displayed in detail an array of information. Most were inconsequential apart from the last entry. It felt vague and unfinished. Nevertheless, her location was discovered for it said that the mission would be in Kreston.

"Uncle," Axius called out.

“What is it?” he turned around.

“Did you find mother yet?” the boy rushed over to the desk.

“I think so, it will take some time before I can fully track her down,” with a smile – they left the house and headed back to the shop. The time now was around two, the sun continued to shine without care.

A few minutes later, “what are you guys doing?” Staxius asked seeing as the adventuring party returned.

“Diane has asked for you,” Undrar replied. They came back to deliver a message and gather up on supplies. The few unsold potions were taken out.

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“Did it seem urgent?” he didn’t want to head to the guild – not now anyways.

“I don’t think so, it’s probably linked to the masked murderer who became active a few days ago,” leaving him and the nephew alone – the rest walked out the front door.

‘How impressive can people be,’ he watched with pride as the members left to conquer a quest. “Avon,” he called out.

“How may I be of service,” the eyes sparkled, the voice mischievous, nothing changed.

“I’ll need you and Auic to take care of Axius for a few hours.” There wasn’t a need to explain his actions, the duo agreed and he vanished in a blue mist.

Stood on a balcony with Arda’s capital laid out in front, he breathed in the always fresh air. ‘Good to be back,’ a smile was seen. ‘Guess it’s time to go to work,’ sat with no one around, the left eye closed. “Adete, I’ll need help,” to which the girl flew into action. She rested on the right shoulder; the face looked peaceful – both went into a trance. It became familiar and less difficult to control, the days of practicing and forcefully looking outside the reach of the eyes – it made mastery a little faster. The goal now was to scout out Kreston and look for Claudia; with a picture of her as a kid, tis was the only evidence.

“Your majesty,” stood near the throne, the sage called.

“Yes, I feel it,” her face changed, “-it’s him,” her eyes grew less tense. They were in the middle of a congress amidst the other leaders. Each race had rushed over, the monster problem had grown out of hand. The royal guards alone could not handle said situation. Goblins made nests outside, their population grew rapidly. Elves and dark-elves went through a fight. Their disparities and blatant disrespect towards one another had brought about this talk. Tis was a pointless quarrel about the correct way to deal with the pests. Dark-elves were pro-magic, they were adamant that spells were the most efficient way to fight. Elves, on the contrary, didn’t oppose the idea but suggested that bows and other weapons might be as effective.

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“Do watch your tone,” a deep voice rattled the ambiance. The spat between the elves had grown out of hands. “Have you forgotten that each one of you sits in the presence of her majesty the queen – can you

be a little more tactful and leave the pointless arguments for another time,” the eyes raged, the tone serious and intent murderous, general Niroz was truly frightening.

“I’ve heard enough,” Shanna spoke, “-seeing we don’t have an efficient means of fighting off the invaders. I propose that rather than the royal guards fighting alone; we create a band of fighters. Ones that will exclusively deal with monsters for the time being. Five of the best fighters from each race, I care not about disparities; tis my will that all are to work together. I know full well that Arda is a very vast kingdom with each race having a territory to rule. This time, it’s a do or dies situation, I only request five fighters from each race. I’ll personally send my elite guards in hopes of helping.”

The Night Wings, it sent shivers down the leaders’ spine. Her elite guards were not normal beings, but fighters and mages who had reached the realm of impossible. Individuals who remained in the shadows – their power was rumored on par with champions of old. A fairy who ascended into an angel had the authority to control people with far more power than the average.

From being initially made of vampires alone, Xula decided it best to release some members and stick with five. The fewer people, the faster information could travel and the less hassle to maintain. Their identities were unknown: there were stories about a man that could split a mountain in half. A girl who held absolute authority over fire and lightning, not only the elements but the spirits as well. A man so quiet and silent that he turned invisible. An elf who could shoot in any given position, angle, distance, and always hit her target. Lastly, a vampire, a direct descendant from Zachaeus Balthazar.

Those were the rumors that spread throughout the castle.

“Your majesty,” Ruslan spoke, “-are you sure it’s wise to bring them out at such an early stage?” he knew about the guard unit.

“They have trained and stayed in the shadows for too long – it’s time to prove their worth. Niroz, you’re in charge of guiding and forming platoons as deemed necessary. If by chance a race isn’t able to send out the required amount, do contact Ruslan and arrange for only one. Strength in union,” she smiled, her authority was fearsome. None could ever dream of betraying much less trying to lead a revolt.

The congress ended; a temporary solution was found. One by one, portals were summoned and each leader headed back to their territory. “It’s finally over,” she breathed a sigh of relief, the talk had gone on for three hours.

“You best get going,” the sage disappeared. The queen was left alone to rest, more importantly, she wanted to see Staxius. *Snap,*

Laid on the balcony, he bled, the right eye worked tirelessly. The strain put on the mind was slightly lessened by Adete. Despite this, the pain grew numb, he felt nothing. Dark-arts kicked in to help soothe said agony. The search went on and on, Xula sat and laid beside him. The attention was solely fixated on finding Claudia. The surrounding grew to be oblivious, a small bubble of emptiness and silence.

Dusk claimed it’s rightful place, the sun headed to sleep. Nighttime strolled in, it had been five hours, stars came out to play. The town lit of a thousand lights, people moved about, it felt more alive than daytime. *Cough,* blood sprayed out, the trance broke. “Huff, puff,* the breathing erratic, he awoke.

“Did you find it?” Adete came to life. “I think so,” he replied, the mind slowly returned to reality. An unusual warmth came from the right, the smell of rose and vegetations. He turned to see green hair; a sound asleep Xula. Her hands wrapped around as if a prison, one warm and gentle. A smile later, he scurried inside, grabbed a blanket, came out, and covered the sleeping queen.

‘It sure is nice to have someone precious,’ the body leaned on the balustrade and faced Shanna. The starry night stood behind; the eyes could not but watch intently, her beauty could not be described. The trip to the imperial capital, coming in contact with people of fame and beauty, neither one could compare. ‘I do wonder about the whole angel conduit thing. It’s still rough, there haven’t been any changes to my body, unlike the vampire blood. I was sure that it would have at least made me grow a pair of wings or a halo,’ he chuckled, the mind felt relaxed.

Snap, not wanting to wake the lady, he teleported inside the garage. The body fatigued from the stress of using the All-seeing eyes, he stumbled a little before returning to normal. As expected, the stuff was untouched, the supplies of potions, scrolls, and samples for God’s Ale.

‘Interesting,’ hidden by a white blanket with the engineering crest embroidered – Staxius unveiled a masterpiece. ‘I can’t believe it,’ the apparatuses brought in were altered. It had been made ten-times better; at first glance, one could use mana to directly influence the brewing process. A white table with every possible equipment built-in, it looked as clean and tidy as the stuff made in Iqavea. ‘You can always count on them to get the job done, from Tharis to now this.’ - Staxius’s respect for the scholars sky-rocketed. It looked good and all, but there remained a slight problem; the table was as big as Void if not longer. In no way was it going to fit inside the shop’s room.

At that moment, an idea came to mind. The wall in Dorchester proved to be the inspiration. Excited, he ran out of the garage and searched all over the castle for the sage. He went from the throne room to the kitchen and even the portal room.

“King Staxius,” the portal room felt tense, “-the sage is currently in a tavern enjoying the weekly special meals,” her tone felt scared.

“Is there any way to contact dwarves or master builders?” the tone formal. It might not have looked apparent, but the lady behind the desk had information about almost everything.

“Your majesty, if tis the dwarves you seek then may I advise looking for Skokdrag. He should be down in the mines for the nightly check,” a portal materialized.

“Thanks for the help,” he stepped through.

Magma ran down below; a circular platform went around the vicinity. In the middle of said circle, a smelter that used the power of the liquid below for the crafting of weapons and armor. Sweat instantly dripped, the heat felt suffocating. Around the edges of the platform, various tunnels headed deeper into the ground.

“What ya doing ‘ere?” a rather short but buffed out man spoke. A white-beard, a pick-ax on the back with a helmet.

“I apologize for the inconvenience, but I’d like to speak to Skokdrag, is there any way I can find him?”

“Ya looking right at him,” the accent felt harsh but fascinating.

"I require someone to help me in renovating and constructing a building," the voice formal and polite.

"Don't think I can 'elp ya lad, orders are orders," lighting wasn't great, he walked away.

"Would it help if I said I was Staxius Haggard?" the dwarf stopped.

"Ha-ha, nice joke lad, but you ain't no king of Arda," he replied with a fake laugh.

"Care to see?" *Snap,* the void flame conjured and helped visibility.

He turned, *cough,* the accent changed, "I'm sorry for being rough on ya," it grew more audible and refined.

"There isn't a need to be frightened friend, tis but a favor I require. Of course, there's gold involved."

"Gold ya say, but majesty, us dwarves don't care about such thing," the face stern, money wasn't going to change the situation.

"What about a favor for a favor?" the proposition piqued the dwarf's interest.

"Hmmm," he took a few seconds; faintly in the background, a growl could be heard. Overshadowed by the clanging of blacksmiths working, the noise could have gone unnoticed. "How about this," the voice felt a little hesitant, "-defeat whatever is making dat noise and consider that building built."

'Here I thought it would be some troublesome favor. Turns out it's probably a monster, what better way to save time.'

The dwarf looked scared, the noise rattled others, the blacksmiths stopped working. "Consider the job done, Skokdrag," without another word said; *Death Element: shadow-step,* he dashed into the tunnel from whence the noise hailed.

'This is why they stopped working,' a clearing in the path leading down reeked of blood and iron. A beast feasted on the corpse of the previous workers. The body of a lion paired with a snake on it's back. Each bite it took, the creature grew in size. Both eyes closed to check on the aura; a raging fireball. The extent of its power, blood red and growing with each passing second. 'This is going to be fun,' long had it been since a fight with a monster; an unknown foe – the thrill of combat filled his mind, the eyes opened; blank.

Chapter 170: Chimera

Grrr, from feasting, Staxius's arrival disturbed the atmosphere. It triggered the beast's attention, the mouth breathed fire, the snake on it's back felt on edge. The eyes pierced straight through anyone who might have opposed said monstrosity. Slowly, as if toying, the lion turned around. The paws were as big as a normal-sized human, the height was twice Staxius's. The canines and fur bloodstained; the paws were freshly wet. *Hiss,* the snake didn't stand down either, it constantly tried to pull away and latched onto anyone who stood.

'Will this be a fight worth remembering or will it just be something inconsequential,' the heartbeat dropped, the breathing turned slow and composed. The eyes and face turned emotionless; any unnecessary thing such as background noise, the presence of unimportant beings was erased. The less the brain had to process, the faster the reaction time; muscle memory came in when the fight began.

Tap, the sword materialized, *cling,* it unsheathed. The aura around him doubled in intensity, it made the beast step back a little, a sign of weakness. Confused as to why it retreated; the monster roared, it echoed throughout the tunnel and into the smelter room. None knew by, but monsters of this level always had an edge – they felt smarter than the average. It looked as if they understood things that others could not.

Wanting to keep his cards by heart, Staxius took a standard stance. The sword erected in front, he waited and so did the foe. *Woosh,* they rushed, *clang,* the first contact made, pushed back Staxius. The paws had more than enough power to break a bolder without effort. If it wasn't for the vampiric blood, that strike would have broken bones. From the get-go, he was placed into a defensive situation. Assessing the surroundings, calculating the strength and ability, the usual combat style.

Not this time, it was different. The snake remained at bay, the lion took charge and fought. It didn't do any excessive movements, just a strong and fast strike from left and right. The fire it breathed earlier was out of the picture – it held back. Not wanting to be the first to make a move, the pattern of strikes grew mundane. Block, parry and strike, both foes did the same or at least tried too. The beast had overwhelming physical strength, Staxius lost out on that front. Superhuman strength could only get one so far, monsters were born twice as strong as a human. When it came to vampires, they were an exception – for a pureblood vampire that was, Staxius only recently begun to change.

It didn't show, but the strain put on by the All-seeing eye also took a toll. From the get-go, he stepped into a losing fight. *Clang,* bored, the beast threw a swing that forced the swordsman to leap and retreat. It had been five minutes, Staxius's breathing remained calm and compose; the beast's eyes felt cold and daunting.

"Heh," Tharis unholstered and *bang,* the snake jumped into life and caught the projectile. Roars and hisses echoed around; the monster's attention fully focused on one foe.

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'Well then, if it wants to keep underestimating me, then,' both eyes closed, the stance changed, '-it's fine by me.' All in the sight was the monster and the edges of the small room with obstacles here and there. The cursed-sword sobbed, the countless apparitions wandered the room, the temperature dropped. Heads flew around and latched onto any moving thing, it did damage. They hungered for the soul of the living and took bits out of a living thing's mana.

This new development forced the lion to use magic; it breathed fire. The souls tried to latch but were turned to dust – not permanently. The apparitions hit by said attack returned to the sword as it was their perpetual hell and imprisonment. *HISS,* the snake's aura changed; no longer could it hold back. The threshold of pain and damage sustained had been far exceeded – it was now out for blood.

Feeling the change, he dashed forward. The movement turned invisible; the fighter simply vanished. Despite this, the snake kept tracked, a hawk eyeing down its prey – it possessed the skill: Thermal Vision.

Clang, the fight resumed, a tough opponent. Physically powerful and now used magic. Mana cancellation was channeled through the weapon, many fireballs and fire-breaths were rendered useless.

A few minutes into the exchange, an opening presented itself, a clear strike at the underbelly. He took the gamble and dashed under, *-hiss.*

Staxius came out the other side, the right side of the body began to melt. That opening had been a trap, a lure to a false sense of security; Acid breath. With the back exposed, he faced the wall, skin melted off – bones were exposed. The lovely uniform's magic barrier was breached. *Grr,* behind, without losing a second, it pounced; another opening.

From teeth to claws, the monster jumped, their heads reached out to devour the opponent. "Check-mate," he turned around, *Void-Flame Aspect,* Tharis stared down the lion – the latter could not move for it was in midair. *Click,* the trigger pulled – rather than a bullet, a beam the size of a tree trunk fired – an explosion rattled the whole mine.

The main body vaporized, *-hiss,* the snake wasn't dead for it separated half-way through the jump. "Not today," an inch close to biting the head off, *-Slash,* a clean strike that cut said monster in half down the middle. Blood from the momentum hit its target. Staxius might have stopped the snake but the blood continued its path. Drenched in the guts of his foe, "damn it," he sighed.

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"Aye, are ya okay?" countless footsteps scurried into the mine, Skokdrag came to aid. One after the other, they formed a line and watched, Staxius's melted right-side regenerated. The eyes opened, the crimson-colored pupil burnt vividly.

"I'm alright," he turned around, the exposed injuries nearly made some dwarves puke.

"Ya ain't alright," he tried to reach out and help.

"I said I'm fine," the king held out his right hand, one that had been reduced to bones. It regenerated, a black-aura manifested and covered the injuries. With a sharp wave, the injuries were a thing of the past.

"What the hell is he?" the courageous miners who rushed were in awe.

"Skokdrag," the tone serious, the leader could not but stand straight.

"Yes, your majesty," the body uptight and stance formal.

"Thy favor has been fulfilled." Nothing more needed to be said, the intent was heard loud and clear.

"I'll gather up my men and wait for your orders," with a bow, the dwarves scurried outside. *Tsst,* the sound of burning came from the pockets, Staxius Haggard: Slayer of Chimera, a title was added onto the guild-card. 'Interesting, maybe there's a prize for defeating this monster,' he chuckled and walked back up the stairs.

"Skokdrag," he called out, the man in question spoke urgently with the workers, "-meet me in two hours at the castle gates, we'll depart then," the order given, the man walked through the gateway and headed back into the portal room.

"I'm sorry for this, but you may want to clean up the bloodstains," nonchalant, he stepped through and headed back to the castle. "Guards," she called out, maids and butlers rushed. For security reasons, the

one in charge of the portals was ordered to never tell her real name out loud. For that simple reason, Overseer title was bestowed upon the one behind the desk.

'Damn I reek of iron,' he teleported inside the royal chambers.

"STAXIUS," a feminine voice yelled from the balcony.

"Over here," he replied, the room dimly lit for the night had taken reins. Footsteps ran from outside, "-I missed you," she jumped; an unusual change of persona.

"Me too," he stepped out of the way and caught her hands, *Click,* the light turned on. "Sorry about this, my current attire is a bit unsightly; in no way are you to lay thy hands on these dirtied vestments," the king stood; with blood freshly dripping off the forehead.

"Tis no matter," without care, she escaped his grasp and jumped in for an embrace. "-we shall need to take a bath instead," the voice coy, her face hot, the breathing out of control. The queen stood with her head pressed against the king's chest.

"I know not what brought about this change," the face leaned close, "-but I like it," a quick peck on her cheeks.

"Me neither," she replied, her face looked adorable. "Either way, getting blood off oneself is a pain, let's head for the bath." A quick shower to rinse off the blood later, the couple soaked comfortably. The water warm from fire-magic, the surrounding; a combination of forestry and the starry night sky, nothing could compare.

"I never knew about this place," Staxius spoke, both naked and sat back to back.

"You never asked," the reply gentle, "-the castle has more thing than one can imagine. For a King who remains out of the country more often than not, they're so much I can do," her tone felt sad, she dearly missed him.

"I do apologize," he said sincerely, "-but I've taken on a task that must be completed. For the sake of Arda and its citizen, most importantly; a task to lessen the load of ruling a kingdom."

"I said that there wasn't a need to worry," the conversation continued peacefully.

"Still, thou art mine own wife and tis a right every husband should have. The right to worry and care for the one whomst he loves," a phrase which felt poetic and expressed how the man felt.

"You'll never change, will you?" she smiled and leaned closer.

"Thanks for opening my eyes and changing my life for the better, Xula," more than love, he felt grateful – she gave a purpose to live, and a purpose to strive for greatness.

"And thank you for being the one I can turn to if ever things get wary."

So far yet so close, both continued to soak in the moon's glimmer. The conversation ranged from romantic to political – a rundown of what had happened to one another was given. Staxius came to know about the existence of the elite guard; it piqued his interest but quickly went off into the void of unnecessary information.

Dressed in spare uniform; one identical to the one previously used – Staxius got ready to depart. Xula remained close, she watched as he got dressed and prepared. From taking care of the gun to cleaning the sword, she watched as the preparation ended. *Tap,* the sword vanished, the hair tied in a ponytail and the gun holstered inside the vest.

“You sure take care of the weapons and clothes more than your own body,” she added in jest.

“They are the things that make me whole,” the necklaces were worn. The glove was kept in the top pocket.

“Oh my, that’s embarrassing – the glove has been in your care?” her cheeks blushed. Part of her mind thought that he might have lost it and part thought that he kept it. Seeing it being taken care of so dearly made her heart skip a beat. Behind that cold merciless persona laid a gentle and caring man, one that only she and Eira knew about.

Not wanting to touch on the subject, Staxius reached for the table. A small purple box with a golden leaf crest.

“Xula,” he called, she stood near the entrance, “-could you come here?” he asked to which she stepped in.

“Here,” the box opened, it held a ring – one with an emerald, rare and flawless green with an exquisite tone; it matched her eyes perfectly. Held in place by golden rims, the jewelry looked expensive.

She held out her left hand, “-looks absolutely stunning on you,” he complimented – it rested on the fourth finger.

“I’ve seen emeralds in my time, but this one sure is unique... I love it,” their lips locked.