

Death Magic 191

Chapter 191: Plans for the future

The initial awe remained, the adventuring party could not but admire their view. Nonchalant, the three-room on the left; still empty – were given purpose and name.

The left side with the biggest rooms was given three purposes. Room one, the first after stepping inside would become the reception area. A place where recruitment and formal meetings could be hosted. The second room would turn into a rest area with the possibility of hosting a discussion with up to twenty people. The third-room, the Leader's office already had a purpose. It might not have seemed apparent but each of those rooms were large and very spacious; worthy of its repute.

The right side, one that held four slightly smaller rooms also had a purpose in mind. Room four, also the first one when stepping off the elevator on the right side, would be used as a storage place for loot and other miscellaneous stuff. Room five, the second one, would be used for enchantments and upgrades for armor. A room where changes and any type of tinkering could be performed, weapons, armor, daily commodities, nothing mattered. The following room would be the fabled, portal-room. A concept the guys weren't familiar yet, basically a place that would link to all their property for fast access. It would be locked so only the members could walkthrough, with a bit of wit, that could be done quite easily. It was based on the same concept in Arda. Last but not least, Room seven; the Armory. Self-explanatory, used weapons, armor, arrows, bullets, and everything a warrior might need would be kept inside. Rather than buying from the merchants in the capital – Staxius had other plans in mind. To buy from Dorchester, since their craftsmen and smiths were talented who didn't take much price.

"Alright," with those plans in mind, he spoke.

Startled, the rest faced away from the scenery, "-today marks the debut of Kniq. I shan't give a speech or anything remotely close. You all know what awaits us – for now, I'd advise for a minimum of two days of rest. I'll get the headquarters ready for the journey ahead," the hand pointed backward, "-for now, it's best that we use the elevator." A clear message saying that work needed to be done and that they would only hold him back. Not harsh nor mean, just the reality of things.

"Thanks for your hard work, guild leader," Viola chuckled. One by one, all left after giving him a quick hug.

"Your wrong," he turned, all stood in the elevator, "-all of this is possible because everyone worked hard. To that I say, thank you," for the first time, Staxius bowed before his comrades. The sight pulled the strings in their heart, it pounded – an overwhelming feeling of happiness surged. The door closed, with teared up faces, the party headed back to the hotel.

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"You sure are lucky," Adete flew out the back pocket.

"Can't you just stay on my shoulder or head," the tone unimpressed.

"Awe, did you miss me?" she teased.

"Would me answering that change anything?" he fired back.

“Maybe?” she hovered with her hands on her hips.

“Fine,” he gave, “-I got used to having you on my shoulder or head at all times. It’s a bit weird for my limiter to not be there,” a slight smile portraited.

“AWE,” she flew and hugged his forehead, her arms stretched from one temple to the other, “-here I thought you were a cold-hearted killer.”

“It all depends on the mood,” he chuckled and entered Room number six; the portal room.

Erecting temporary portals was simple; similar to the one used to transfer Xula from Arda to Oxshield, it didn’t take much concentration nor energy. It worked the same way as teleportation. Now that the intent was to create permanent ones of which a few people could walkthrough, it took a few minutes and a large amount of mana. Nothing too difficult – only one portal was set-up for the time being. One that connected to the shop. After that, once inside the shop – upstairs in the attic, he opened another portal. One personal and cloaked by a concealment spell – one that led to the garage in Arda. For now, these were the only ones needed. The portal to the guild’s headquarters was placed on the ground floor, in the now smaller back room used for storage.

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Two days till Kniq can begin its journey. Manufacture of potions, scrolls, and equipment became a priority. It would also mark the opening of the Magical shop of which the name had yet to be decided. It had been only a few days, but people were drawn to the architecture. It stood out – most were curious.

“Hey vampire,” Adete called.

“What is it?” he finished finalizing the portals – only the people he allowed could see those pathways.

“Lord Balthazar gave you a quest, didn’t he?” she pointed out something that happened on the day he received the vampiric blood.

“Yeah, I remember,” he stood, “-to find other vampires that set off to the capital.”

“Glad you remembered,” she sat on the shoulder with her feet swinging back and forth.

“There’s no lead to go off,” a fair statement to which she dropped the subject.

“What’s the plan now?” she asked.

“Well, with all the loose ends being tied as well as tasks,” they walked back upstairs, “-there’s only one thing to do,” the portal to Arda came to life, “-we’re headed back home. I need to ask the dwarves for another favor. The only thing remaining is to open the central guild in Arda. With Oxshield as our ally, it should not be hard. We may need to get more repute and accomplish some more difficult quests first.”

Every time he entered the province, a faint heavy feeling of nausea could be felt. To many, it went unnoticed, but those blessed with heightened senses could feel it, the power of someone strong entering. Mainly, Xula, the Sage and the Overseer could sense it.

“Father,” a voice came from the doorway to the garage

“Yes?” he turned to see Eira with a not so inviting face.

“Can you kindly explain what has happened in the few days?” news spread fast – the history about Protectors, their duties and their kingdom was explained by a scholar. One who came per request from her majesty – he gave an extra lesson on controlling the Ice-element. One that came after the girl requested her mother for a long time – the determination to grow strong.

With no time to reply, she jumped, her long dress floated. “Never mind that,” she stood close to him, “-did you fight Raulf Serlo?” her eyes narrowed. Not wanting to reply just yet, he waited. “And what happened to your body, and that talk with mother earlier. I felt as if I missed out on things I was supposed to know. Look at you, she pointed out the changes,” Staxius could not but smile during the whole ordeal.

“Basically,” she led him outside, “-you look nothing like the one I know from memory. White and red hair, a buffed body, crimson-colored eyes and not to mention the paler skin,” with better lighting, she let go and stood before him. “-I was worried,” her gaze lowered.

“Come on,” without wasting time, a fatherly embrace later, “-I’m sorry I made you worry,” he apologized softly. “Many things are happening in the background, things that aren’t worth your attention. What you need now is to study and focus on getting stronger. After all, the inter-magical tournament will be hosted at the start of the school year,” he smiled. “How about I train you in the ways of the sword,” an unexpected offer, the embrace ended.

“Please do,” her eyes lit, “-the castle is amazing and all, but I feel like I’m slacking off. I want to become strong to one day stand as your equal,” the voice serious, “-even if you’re my dad, I consider you as a rival too,” the eyes filled with determination.

“Show me with actions and not with words,” the voice monotonous, “-how about a little sparring match?” hearing her say that he was her rival lit a fire. A fire to shatter her confidence.

“Anytime you want, father,” she smirked.

“Not so fast you two,” a sharp voice came from behind; green hair. “-no sparring till later in the day, I’ve business with your father.”

“Go get prepared,” he ordered, “-I doubt you’ll be doing any fighting in that dress,” he walked away.

“I’ll wait at the training room,” the reply filled with excitement, she left.

A portal conjured that led into the throne room. Sat around the table, nobles, and representatives – the Queen had summoned all.

“Your majesty,” they stood and bowed.

With a nod, she sat, the rest followed. “I shall skip the courtesy and go straight for the thing at hand,” her voice serious, Staxius could but stand back and wait. Silence whelmed the room, all who sat were serious and glared. The tension palpable, Shanna took her time before speaking.

“The Protector of Arda has come out on top against the Protector of Oxshield,” the moment those words were uttered, cheers and applause busted out the room. The entire place came to life, “-we did it,” they screamed.

“VICTORY,” neither cared about manners nor courtesy, the raw emotions of that win could be felt throughout their body and soul. It meant that Arda lived to see another day.

Taken by surprise, Staxius watched, all celebrated with cheers and smiles. “Settle down everyone,” the queen cut the festivities short. “Thanks to the effort and groundwork put in by the King, Arda, and Oxshield have officially allied,” that sentence made all on edge.

“Before lashing out about the oppression, consider this. Would you rather us being alienated with none to rely upon if ever this continent comes under attack? Monsters are getting stronger by the day – we need to think about future generations. Prejudice and change must be a quest that both parties should solely stand behind. The newly crowned Queen has but one thing in mind, the Unity of the provinces.”

“We were indeed oppressed,” Niroz spoke, “-though it doesn’t matter now. Our nation is free and at peace. As beastmen, most of the hate was directed towards us, many of my comrades were killed at the hands of nobles whomst saw us as slaves. Despite this, that is but a sliver of the human race’s heart. The people who we met were animals, far worst than demons,” the general garnered the attention of everyone around. “There are also people who think of us as living beings and not tools. That is the reality of things, it’s a basic survival instinct to fear what is unnatural. We mustn’t be hard on them – a good relationship is what we must strive for,” the tone changed suddenly, “-in any case, if there’s even a slight chance of dishonesty. We’ll crush them with our might,” the tone serious and cold.

“That’s a fair judgment,” Lord Baltazar rallied behind the beastman.

“No arguments from us,” the Great mother agreed to which the decision was final. One by one, the rest of the nobles accepted what Staxius had begun.

“Thank you all for understanding,” Staxius spoke, “-I know that many of you have underlying issues with my selfish decisions of being friendly towards Oxshield. Since I changed into a vampire, I’m no longer human – even so, I had a thought once. Imagine the endless possibilities if Arda’s knowledge about the Arcane arts and Oxshield’s growing expertise in technology were to work together. It’s unthinkable, the amount of advancement in daily care as well as weaponry and more – inventions to make our citizens live a comfortable life,” none had considered that possibility. “And not to worry, if ever our kingdom came under threat,” the eyes filled with killing intent, “-I’ll take their heads without blinking,” the voice cold and menacing. The intensity sent shivers down everyone’s spine.

“As he said,” Shanna stood, “-we’ll be cautious in case of foul play,” she smiled. “We’ve got Staxius Haggard in our corner.” Those few words helped to quell any misunderstanding. The few frowns changed into smiles; all were convinced.

“Thank you all for answering the summons – may the return back home go without trouble,” Ruslan took charge and ended the meeting.

“Lord Balthazar,” Staxius called, “-may I have a few words?” he asked to which the man accepted. Various portals summoned; the room emptied till those two were left.

“About the task to finding the lost vampires,” they stood near a balustrade and stared down to the throne, “-are there any specifics I need to know?”

Slowly, the old man turned, “-no, I’m afraid there’s no proof,” he replied in disappointment. “You needn’t worry so much,” a quick pat on Staxius’s back later, “-if they’re somewhere – I’m sure it will become obvious,” a smile later, he turned into a blackish-mist.

Chapter 192: Gergusser

“Shall we start with your training?” a few hours had gone by. News about Arda’s alliance with Oxshield sped slowly. A few individuals spread said news as a rumor. Coming out right away would have caused too much of an uproar. With it being just a rumor, the ones responsible could sit atop and study the reaction. For most people, many were angry at first, lashing out and swearing. Despite it being a rumor, many thought it was serious. Those who lashed out were drunken, the wise chose to remain silent and study from the sideline.

That burden fell onto branches that monitored and helped with what the populous needed. Simple atop but complex underneath, Arda’s rule could not have been any more complex. Details of which many remain secret for it was unnecessary for the public to know.

“Yes,” dressed in a leather bodysuit, with a small chest piece and leggings – Eira stood. The sword given to her went along perfectly with her hair and body. “What about you?” they stood in a small training ground – one used by Staxius so many months ago. One that the Protector had access to.

“Well,” he sighed, the tone gloomy, both stood in the middle, “-I broke the first rule of being a swordsman. One must always keep their blade and never do harm for it’s thy soul that one wields. Tis was what my father taught me anyways.” Each word he said was captured instantly by Eira’s photographic memory, she forgot nothing – a blessing and a curse. “Nevertheless,” the tone semi-serious, “-exception can be made to that rule. Tis but a way to keep swordsmen from not letting their blade getting blunt.”

“I get that,” she interjected, “-how does that relate to us now?” she asked.

“What it comes to is this, one who chooses the way of the sword must be strict and never abandoned the weapon. What I did was a sacrilege, I broke my blade without a second thought – to which I must atone by not wielding another sword ever again,” the voice serious and eyes blank.

“Surely you jest,” Eira took a step back, to not wield a sword again, what sort of joke was this, the mind wandered.

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“I’m pulling your leg,” he chuckled.

“Come on,” she sighed in disappointment.

“Never forget those words, it may be a joke right now, but out in the field – if the weapon breaks, you become worthless to both thy side and the opposition.”

“Are you going to teach me without fighting, what about our spar?” the voice sharp and unforgiving.

“You’ve sure grown a temper,” he pointed out, “-what happened to being cool and composed, aren’t you the ice-princess?” he teased.

“You got me there,” her stance relaxed, all that small talk wasn’t without purpose.

“Much better,” he smiled. “-the rigid and stressed stance is now gone.”

“Were you trying to get me to loosen up?”

“Who knows,” the eyes changed into one serious, the hair levitated, it untied itself from the ponytail. “Either way, you better show me what you got,” a smirk later, “-I’ll brandish a sword if you can put a scratch on me.”

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“Don’t underestimate me, father,” her eyes went from red to blue in an instant, without incantation, ice-spears manifested and hovered behind. She immediately took the lightning-strike stance, shadow variant. Not even a second went by, the sword unsheathed with the aim directed at Staxius’s neck. Even a trained fighter would have had a hard time evading, much less blocking. Alyson’s technique truly was a thing of wonder.

“Good effort,” to him, all that felt slow and sluggish. An effortless sidestep sufficed to get out of the way.

“Not yet,” she called, the ice-spears weren’t there any longer. Immediately, he got down onto the knee, the spears shattered into the wall in front. “You’ve certainly grown,” he complimented to which, her eyes never left her opponent. From a barrage of ice-based attack combined with a very good sword technique – it took him by surprise just how much the girl had grown. The eyes were filled without doubt, her control over her magical element was scarily good. Naming her a prodigy would not have been far from the mark – however, it would but disclaim all the work put in.

Huff, Puff, she panted, sweat dripped but froze, and icy-cold mist came from her body. From her chest outwards, it was frozen, the feet were veiled by a black mist. Eira wielded both Ice and Shadow – one offensive and one defensive. It was a common misconception by many, as strong as the ice was – it sure gave a good defense but tis was at attacking where it shined. The Shadow element perfectly suited disrupting a person’s vision, creating diversions and personal enhancements.

“I’m not done yet,” the fighting spirit remained, *Ice-element: Gergusser,* the temperature dropped, a dragon manifested itself above her back, it looked impressive but not fully formed. A single slash sufficed, the beast on her back followed the path laid by the sword. A beam of dense and pure ice shot out – the devastation sent tremors throughout the floor. All of the power converged into one single point, Staxius’s location.

“Weak,” a voice echoed. At full force, Eira gave it her all, a move she had been working on secretly behind the scene – a move strong but unpolished.

“Weak...” she could not believe it, “-even with all that,” her eyes opened wide, the stance faltered, fatigue took over. “Who cares,” not wanting to give up yet, the intensity of the beam grew, it froze the entire room.

“You managed to cut me,” he voiced, *Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads.* A tiny cut on his face, one that didn’t give much blood. It only but made a single line, a line that held Eira’s unplanned attack, a single thread that blocked the assault and remained unhinged.

“You’ve improved,” he vanished, “-good to see that the training wasn’t in vain,” the voice came from behind, “-sadly, this battle is over.” That same tiny thread of blood poked at her neck.

“What about holding back against your daughter,” her body let loose.

“Jeez,” he caught her, “-you sure are reckless,” he smiled.

“H-how was i-it,” she asked, fatigue slowly faded, Staxius transferred over some of his mana. “With that skill level, you’ve gone beyond my expectation,” words of encouragement to not break the spirit.

“I did get you on the receiving end for a bit, so I’m happy,” the energy revitalized.

“Just so you know,” both sat on the ground, she laid on his lap, “-that move you pulled. Gergusser, I don’t know if this may be related to anything but, that’s the name of an ancient dragon. Similar to Undrar, the bringer of death, you also have Gergusser, the Lady of ice,” the mind wandered around.

“I see, the name just came to me one night whilst I was out training in the nearby forest. I came across a cave that looked frozen and figured why not use my ice-element there and practice. Ever since that day, there’s a moment where I can’t hold-back the element. My whole body freezes, to a point where I can’t move.”

“You should have probably told me this sooner but what the heck,” the eyes closed, rather than one aura, there was two present inside her. ‘Ancient dragons were imprisoned long ago, cursed by creation itself to never be awakened. That was what I got from Lord Death’s library. If my suspicions are correct,’ his hand rested atop her forehead, ‘Eira might have accidentally found the imprisonment site. It would not impress me if that dragon felt an affinity to her power,’ he smiled.

“What’s the reason behind that creepy grin?” she faced upwards at her dad.

“Disrespectful much, calling yours truly creepy at such a young age. Can’t you see the beauty that shines before you,” he spoke out in jest, the eyes stared upwards and the hair levitated.

“Ha-ha-ha,” she laughed without concern.

‘Just in case, I’ll add a limiter to the secondary aura,’ without her knowing, the hand moved – using knowledge from a forgotten time, symbols and writings were placed on her back. She thought he was playing around trying to tickle her. ‘I’ve made it strong enough to hold any forceful takeover, she should be able to harness that secondary aura’s power even if it’s not Gergusser.’

“Alright,” he stood, “-get up, training is not over yet.” For the next few hours, each time Eira got tired Staxius helped by giving a portion of his mana. Nothing dangerous though complicated. He managed to teach her what his father did for three months in one day. Further analysis of the way of the sword. Nothing that would counteract what Josiah had been teaching her.

“Maintainers sure aren’t going to be happy,” he pointed out, the room was destroyed. Mainly with ice, and explosions from mana control, the lesson ended.

“Not my problem,” she voiced proudly.

“I’m headed to the bath,” Staxius called first – the one he used with Xula.

“I’ll join you,” the stance unbothered, she didn’t care about dignity when face with her dad. “Do as you wish, just make sure to not cause another problem,” he led the way, the next task was to contact Skokdrag again.

‘This is heaven,’ he sat with eyes covered by a towel. Consciousness slipped into the realm of dreams.

“Don’t mind if we do,” Eira and Shanna came to join.

“He’s asleep,” the queen pointed out and soaked.

“I must say, I’ve never seen that vulnerable side of him before,” Eira pointed out, “-I always thought dad was strong, but never this,” she smiled.

Another few hours went by, night time came sooner than expected. From a bath, he decided to head to the royal bed chambers and spend the rest of the afternoon sleeping. A moment of rest – it had been hard; the past few days were filled with unexpected events.

“Wake up,” teeth sunk into the neck.

“Cut it out,” he jumped, “-again with the jaw-ring wake-up call.”

“Was that supposed to be a joke?” Adete watched intently.

“I guess comedy isn’t suited for me.” The time now was six, a quick visit to the portal room revealed Skokdrag’s location. It didn’t take much convincing. The dwarves were happy to help with the newly acquired building. Tharis got fixed as well as new clothes. The increase in size had put quite a strain on the attires previously owned. Nothing a quick visit to the tailor couldn’t fix. He went back to the previous uniform, the same worn for the trip to the mainland.

“I’ll be off for today,” not staying the night, he left. Eira had a good lesson and Xula managed to spend some time with her beloved. All and all, a normal day except for the newly founded guild.

“This is where you’ll be working,” a temporary portal from Arda to the office was opened. “I’ve laid out the specifics and plans, now it’s time to impress yet again with that craftsmanship.”

“No worries majesty,” the same accent and same joie de vivre, the man wasn’t afraid to take on challenges. For the next two days, the place would be off-limits to everyone. It would give the party time to rest and recuperate.

‘It’s over,’ silence – after taking care of Skokdrag, he headed back to the shop. Laid inside the attic, the moon could be seen through the window. ‘I do wonder how far Eira will go. That girl has tremendous potential... Gergusser, he thought, ‘the lady of ice.’

The mind could not settle down, ‘-imagine the power she could wield if that secondary aura came into her complete control. I fear that it may also devour her from the inside. Let’s hope that there never comes a time where she has to unleash everything and go out of control. I shudder to think what that could bring.’ With this new development, another question was raised, ‘-what if there are other people whomst were possessed by the five great dragons,’ an idea which seemed out of reach but plausible.

Chapter 193: Pandora

The two days passed without much thought. From training Eira in the ways of the sword to preparing the shop for the grand opening. One that only a few adventurers wanted to visit – took most of Staxius's time. It went smoothly, using the money acquired from the delivery of the god's ale – the amount totaled at 10,000 gold, 500 silver, and 125 copper. All the cash was delivered via a card. One that Renaud sent with a personal note saying, "Impressive job on the new product. The effect lasts longer and the risk of mindless hosts is out of the way. Shadow, the talent showed in the ways of Alchemy and man-slaying has placed thy name farther up in the hierarchy. There's more to do before becoming essential. Expect great things to come. Rather than giving you the payment by cash-carrying that amount of gold would be an unnecessary pain. I'm sending you this card instead, one that is official and recognized by the bank. Don't worry about that side of things – each delivery and another card will be sent."

Hence, income from the underground arrived. The card worked just fine at almost any shop. The card's inventory was located in the main-continent, using teleportation, the bank was able to transfer it over to Hidros, though it took a few hours. No questions nothing, he was able to withdraw coins without hassle.

Thus, with the newfound fortune, one kept hidden from the others – Staxius went ahead and purchased various armor, weapons, and material for blending potions. He teleported back and forth from Dorchester. The craftsmen were happy to custom-build some items, one made of special ore – mainly, adamantite. Rare and expensive, one that was abundant in Arda. This would be the shop's most prized possession. Heavy armor worthy of the next hero – from silvery, the color changed to one white and gold. It would be infused by colored minerals to make it stronger and better. Two days seemed to little of time, to which the decision was made to scatter the process around. Chest piece and leggings were forged in Arda, gauntlets, and helmets made in Dorchester.

All and all, the price paid for said armor to be built was 2950 gold and 500 silver. For the item in question, that price was cheap. The usual selling price of anything related to adamantite reached into the 1000+ realm, a place only nobles and accomplished warriors could bother to think. To put in perspective, the average wage of a normal worker was 3 gold per week – now imagine how much 1000 would feel. With that in mind, the white and golden armor an unknown collaboration between the two provinces was accomplished. The process didn't end there for Staxius personally enchanted the leggings with Tier-Three haste. Chest piece with Tier-Two Reinforcement, and helmet with Tier-Four regeneration. The level of enchantment had only five tiers starting from the weakest, Tier-Five and up to Tier-One.

Locked inside a display case, the armor stood with a dignified stance on the left side. A place devoted to armor and protection. The right side, a wall filled with weapons of various kinds. The masterpiece in that category was a sword named: Dragonrend – one that came from the East. Long with a curved blade, sharp and deadly, the same to what Eira had but longer and stronger. The material was Obsidian, the second strongest material known to man. This particular sword was bought in Arda – an adventuring party got it as loot from defeating a monster. At first, it looked burnt and blunt – the sheathed was nowhere to be found. It took a few hours – but the expertise from the dwarves helped in saving said item. It cost around 100 gold to fix, then again, Tier-One Sharpness was the enchantment.

The price of the Armor was 12500 gold and the Sword 1250 gold. 'Good luck,' he thought whilst polishing each item and securing the lock. There were also unnamed items, one of common and

uncommon rarity laying around. Once ready, Isorin was called to give an appraisal of the magical items. Rarity assigned was Legendary for the armor and Epic for the sword.

Filled with questions, Isorin demanded answers to where he acquired such precious commodities. The response he got was, “-I’ve got connections and talented craftsmen,” a wink later, the wizard was locked out the shop.

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That was the first day; the shop had a bunch of stuff adventurers might need for a good price. Staxius wasn’t going to rip off anyone – money wasn’t an issue anymore. Needless to say, more meant better. For the second day, the focus changed to potions and scrolls. 300 common, 100 uncommon and 50 Rare healing potions. A process that didn’t take long with the help of the lab. Price would be set to: 500 copper for Common, 10 silver for Uncommon and 500 silver for Rare. The conversion rate translated into 1000 Copper meant 1 silver, and 1000 Silver meant 1 gold. 1000 silver might have seemed a tremendous amount but tis was what the merchant guilds decided.

When it came to scrolls, more effective than healing potions. Inventory held 10 Common, 5 Uncommon and 2 Rare. The price set by Staxius himself was 500 Silver for common. 1 Gold for Uncommon and 10 Gold for Rare. More expensive, a Common scroll worked better than an Uncommon potion, closer to Rare quality when it came to the blend. The magical shop had held a good number of items. The potions and scrolls were laid behind the main counter in the front of the shop. Right side weapons, left side armor, center and front for potions and scrolls. Proud and accomplishment filled his chest, the shop was now in working order.

The name chosen in the end was – Pandora. The empty sign outside could finally be filled by something other than emptiness. The second day came to an end, to which all the preparations were complete. Construction of the office now final and ready, the result would be revealed tomorrow.

‘Today mark’s the day of our opening,’ quickly, Staxius rushed through the portal and inside the office. Skokdrag’s party had already left. The emptiness filled with elegance and the feeling of nobility and prestige. Warm colors filled the hall, paintings, and work of arts. The first room with, Reception wrote atop had a desk. Cabinets, a lovely interior that gave a feeling of comfort and ease. In that manner, the rest of the rooms were filled with what was required. Armor stands for the armory, so on and so forth.

“Good morning, guild leader,” the elevator arrived, Kniq came.

“Good morning everyone,” he turned.

“Holy...” Deadeyes’ mouth opened in awe. The reaction similar to all who first laid eyes on the place. From empty to now this, “-how much did it cost?” they asked to which Staxius dodged the question.

“Since our guild is now operating, you’ll be handing over loot in room four. That includes everything, from junk to good items. Qaisars dropped and quest reward can be discussed amongst yourselves. Just know that the guild will be taking five-percent of everything you get. Normally people take twenty and even forty, but I don’t care,” they sat in his office, the tone formal and polite. “The five percent will be from monster drops only; the quest rewards are to be divided however is deemed fair amidst yourself. Viola will be in charge as usual.”

“What about you?” Achilles asked.

“Remember what I said a few days ago?” he asked to which her eyes wandered around.

“Kniq will be divided into two groups, one in charge of the magical shop and one for fighting. I’ll be at the shop most of the time, Viola will supervise the fighting aspect.”

“Does that mean you won’t be doing any fighting?” Deadeye asked.

“No, I’ll be fighting,” he replied with haste, “-but only on quests that require my intervention. I don’t want a repeat of what happened earlier this week,” the eyes serious.

“Also, Viola from today forth will be the co-leader.” The meeting ended.

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“Avon,” he called before the rest left.

“How may I be of service?” the eyes sparkly, nothing changed.

“I’ll need a favor,” Staxius stood, the tone casual, “-since I won’t stay here much,” he walked over to the spirit. “I need a secretary.”

“Do you wish for me to take that post then?” the voice joyful.

“No, you’re with Viola’s party – I need Auic to take that place.”

“Oh...” the sparkles died-down, “-does it have to be her?” he asked in a serious voice.

“Listen,” unimpressed, Staxius continued, “-I know you want to help the girl and all. But freeloading isn’t something I deem noble. The reason I brought her here in the first place was to work as a shop assistant. Therefore, either she gets sent back to Arda or tries to fight against her past and move on. It’s hard but if left as she is, the girl might grow even more dependent,” a quick pat on his head later, “-do you wish for the girl to end up defenseless. What happens if one day our adventuring party is wiped out, she’ll be left alone in the wild without anyone nor anything to her name.”

“Fine,” he gave in, “-won’t she require some training first?”

“I’ve got someone in mind, don’t worry about it,” the reply firm and confident, Avon left without worry.

A phone call later,

“Central guild, how may I be of help?” Diane answered.

“Hey, it’s Staxius,”

“Oh...” the voice felt distant, “-what do you want?”

“Show some enthusiasm,” he tried to cheer her up.

“No thank you, be fast or else I’m hanging up,” the reply cold and fast.

“Fine,” a sigh later, “-I’ve got a job proposal,” the tone serious.

“Go on, I’m listening,” curiosity piqued.

"I need you to train someone in the ways of a secretary who can do everything from the receptionist to accountant,"

"That's a tall order, those subjects are hard and not that easy to master even for someone talented," a quick pause later, "-how much are you paying."

"Five gold coins per week."

"Not interested."

"Ten gold coins per week, no more no less, you decide what time. The location will be Kniq's headquarters."

"Deal," the phone hung.

'Melisa would have been the better choice but I need Diane's feisty personality to bring some life into that fox girl.'

"Time to open shop," a single step through the portal later, he stood inside Pandora.

The sign on the door changed from closed to open, the business would be slow at the start. A blessing in disguise for it gave more time to research and brainstorm the prospect of making Relic Class scrolls.

"This place sure is nice," a girl commented, the door opened followed by bells ringing, it took a few hours but an adventuring party came.

"Yo, check this out," a boy called. "-What is it?" the girl rushed. "Adamantite armor," their eyes sparkled.

"Keep the chatter to a minimum," the leader spoke, a middle-aged man who admired weapons. The party consisted of four individuals.

"Excuse me," the leader called.

"How may I be of service?" from the counter, he teleported.

"-how d-did you," that sudden drop in pressure caused them to shudder.

"What was that?" the boy asked.

"Sorry about that," Staxius apologized, "-a force of habit, don't mind me," the voice gentle and approachable, the charisma shone.

"Could I please view this dagger?" he pointed at the wall.

"Sure," the weapon got handed over.

"Care to explain the specifics and rarity?" the man asked intrigued by the make.

"The weapon you hold is a common-ranked steel dagger. Nothing extravagant, the durability is good, I vouch for its efficiency."

"I see," the eyes doubtful, "-do you have any way of proving the durability you speak of, I don't wish to be ripped off..." a fair assessment.

“Care to join me outside?” Staxius asked.

“Okay...?” each one stared with confusion.

“Hey,” the girl whispered, “-don’t you think he’s hot?”

“Shut up you idiot,” the boy fired back quickly.

“I’m guessing you’re training those two to become adventurers?” he pointed at the boy and girl.

“You assumed right,” the leader confirmed.

“Well,” he smiled, “-keep your eyes on this,” a beautiful and gentle motion later, the weapon was thrown at immense speed. The air pressure rattled the ground around, the customer who stood were scared, the amount of wind-generated was unbelievable.

Dark-Arts, Magical Barrier, a snap later, the shop keeper appeared on the other side of the road and stopped said weapon. It didn’t even take a second.

“As you can see,” he reappeared before the leader, “-the weapon is completely fine,” steam came off the blade.

“Okay....” The man stood in shock, “w-we’ll take it,” he stuttered.

“Good choice,” the blade was handed over. “Ouch,” he yelled for it was boiling hot.

Chapter 194: Opening

“Holy shit,” said the boy in amazement.

“Leader,” the girl called, “-there’s no way that man is just a shop keeper,” her eyes lit with admiration.

“I must say he’s powerful,” replied the forth member, a warrior with a rather buff body.

“You’re right,” he mumbled, Staxius headed inside to prepare the bill.

“How much is the dagger?” after him, the leader followed, the others were too perplexed to window-shop. Their eyes were glued on the guy in charge of Pandora.

“I’d normally take 350 silver,” the dagger laid on the main counter where potions were displayed.

“Seeing I sort of went overboard with that demonstration,” the tip of the blade was chipped a little, “-I’ll take 50 silver off the price and throw in a sheath,” he replied with a smile.

“There’s no need to go so far,” the leader could not believe how courteous the man was.

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“No need to worry,” he reassured the party, “-tell me for whom it belongs?” the eyes wandered from person to person. The boy and girl could not believe their eyes, usually, from past experience with merchants – they’d try anything to get a few more coins – this man was different.

“It’s for me, sir,” the girl spoke out.

"I see," he leaned closer, "-give me a moment, I'll see what I can do," a quick trip to the backroom later. "Here," a red-colored sheath with a rose engraved on the leather strap.

"Surely you jest," said the warrior, "-the price of that sheath alone must rival the weapon," he spotted good quality leather in there.

"I'd charge extra," with a smile, "-since today's our big opening; I'd like to make it special for the first few customers."

"Thank you so much," her eyes lit with excitement.

"There you go young lady," he handed over the weapon, "-a quick visit to the blacksmith should fix that little chip atop."

"Thanks for being so nice to us," the leader bowed and happily handed over 325 as opposed to 300 silvers.

"I appreciate the thought," Staxius spoke, "-but keep the 25 silvers and give the young-ones a treat on my part. Also, if you could spread the word a little, then it would be greatly appreciated." The man could not but accept the generosity being shown.

"Thanks for everything sir, I'll make sure to come back later," the party left, unknown but having made a good impression – it would not be the last of them.

'I should really keep my powers in check,' he chuckled and kept the coins in a safe. 'Considering those two items were rejects by Arda, I doubt they'll notice the quality. Dwarven craftsmanship is far superior to anyone on Hidros – guess it was wise to start this business after all.' The initial price he bought those items were 750 copper for the dagger and 300 for the sheath. All and all, it was a profit. The amount put in the shop was around 4300 gold for everything from materials for potions to all the items in the shop.

With the adventuring guild now fully active – Kniq gained more recognition whilst on quests. People were happy to see them in action. The emblems and patches hadn't been delivered yet; the crew went on quests without much gear. They needed to stock up but were busy. Their balance totaled at 1500 gold from all the questing. A good start for a beginner group.

Slowly but surely, as promised by the first party – people began to visit Pandora out of curiosity. Many didn't buy at first, most were on edge with the recent fraud of fake potions going around. Luckily, the certification from the magical guild and the badge proving the status as an Alchemist, some were tempted to try out the common potions. It reached two in the afternoon, so far, only ten potions were sold.

Slow and steady progress, he relished every moment. Having more time to focus on things rather than staying out on the field. No more fighting and threatening people for a while – he let loose and dug deep into Clarity to find out more about the composition of a relic class scroll. Dead end after dead end, the process was meticulous.

The time now was three, many parties returned from their quests. A good opportunity to earn attention for Pandora. independent parties without a guild headed directly to the main guild to claim their reward. In case of being inside a guild, the party would head to their guild's headquarters instead. The quest would be submitted by the leader or co-leader, a strenuous process but none cared. After taking

their cut, the ones responsible for completing said mission was rewarded. Any loot would be first come first serve; none had the right to argue with the party leader for he would decide to whom the prize would go.

“Now this is a new shop,” tis was good fortune that the street on which Pandora sat was one frequented by adventurers going out from the alternate exits.

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The bell rung, two hooded men walked in. From their apparel, rogues.

“Oh look,” one tall and skinny pointed at the adamantite armor.

“Shiny,” the other, short and chubby replied.

“Shopkeeps, how much for this armor?” the tall one asked.

“Check the price-tag,” Staxius fired back without tact.

“Damn,” they stuttered.

“I appreciate the business but do make it quick,” Staxius urged.

“Fine...” the tall man sighed, “-how about you gimmie one of those lock-picks,” he pointed.

“100 copper per pick,” Staxius walked over and took them from the little carton box.

“I’ll take all of them,” he smiled, the eyes shady and intent malicious.

“That would be 2 silver,” he replied and packed the box.

“Awesome,” the short one exclaimed, “-I can’t believe shop still sell these.”

“Thanks for the business,” being rogue and all, Staxius didn’t care – all who walked through those doors were after something.

Rarely here at this time of day, Staxius didn’t realize how frequently this road was used. People walked and admired the new shop. Some walked in to check out the product and left. Rumors about the adamantite armor spread. It was a thing of wonder; many were amazed. At that time, Pandora was the only shop with full armor in the capital.

“Good afternoon,” he greeted with a smile, the aura and charisma made a good impression on every single person who came. At around six, the shop closed. For the first day of business, a few uncommon potions and two common scrolls were sold. All the activity and selling record was kept in a book, there was also a few arrows and a short sword.

All and all, it was a good first day.

“Master,” the door opened, “-how was the first day?” Avon rushed in with excitement.

“It’s been pretty good so far,” he smiled.

“With that visage, I was scared you’d have scared people away,” Adete who slept on his head during the whole day awoke.

“Cut it out,” he spoke without much thought.

“Pandora,” Achilles murmured, “-Master, did you know it hails from a story from my realm?”

“Yes,” he replied, “-the girl who opened a box to release evil and find hope inside, quite a good story,” the tone nonchalant.

“Damn,” Viola spoke, “-look at that sword,” she stared at Dragonrend.

“Look at this armor,” Deadeyes called, “-ADAMANTITE,” he yelled.

“Those are the best items I got so far,” he headed over to where they stood.

“Don’t forget the price tag,” Avon proudly displayed how much it was worth.

“I guess that was where you were for the last two days?” Viola presumed.

“Correct,” he replied with a nod. “-why not discuss the details of today’s quest at the headquarters.”

“It’s so far away though,” Avon complained.

“Just follow me,” once, inside the back room, the portal took them straight to Rosenvan.

“Guess the portal room is ready as well,” Deadeyes could not believe how much was happening. His guild leader kept on impressing the marksman over and over again.

“I won’t ask for a report or anything like that,” all sat inside room two, the leisure room,”-the reason why you’re here was so that the portal could register each of your mana. From now on, access from here and to the shop is given to all. Do with it as you wish, any loot and junk can be dumped over there.”

“Surely you haven’t called us here just to trigger that portal?” Viola knew something was up.

“You’re right,” he sighed. “-I need everyone to strip down,” the voice monotonous.

“What...?” the girls stared at one another whilst Avon covered up both his chest and private region, Deadeyes on the other hand already began to take off his top.

“Deadeyes, stop,” Staxius ordered. He halted before the pants could be unbuckled. “I phrased it wrong, I need you guys to undress and take your own measurements. This is a gift from me, custom made armor. State what kind, what material and what sort of enchantments. Pandora will take on the order, consider this a publicity stunt.”

“You can’t be serious...” Viola thought that it would only put a strain on him. The guilt of ruining the jacket he brought from Iqavea still loomed.

“I won’t take no for an answer,” papers slid across the table. “Put your sizes, what kind of armor is needed and any specifics. I’ll do the enchantments personally,” he stood,”-you better get to it.”

“We do have an amazing guild leader,” Achilles mumbled.

“Yeah we do,” Deadeyes could not believe it. Custom made items, magic ones. Trying to buy one of those could have cost a fortune. But as would luck have it, Staxius was generous when it came to

spending money on people deemed worthy. No matter the cost, anything that would make said person grow stronger was well worth the price.

“Care to explain where you’ve been all day?” Staxius asked, the landscape outside felt as if heaven. The stars, so close to the sky – it was unimaginable, a dream come to reality.

“Snoozing on your head,” the answer direct and unladylike.

“Master,” a few minutes went by, “-here,” one by one, each came into the hallway and handed over the paper.

“Let me see,” he read for Deadeyes first, the man wanted light armor. One comfortable for a long period laying on the ground, more emphasis was put on the helmet. He requested goggles and items that would be essential for a sniper.

Second, came Avon, the spirit wanted but only one thing, a uniform similar to what Staxius wore.

Third came Achilles, since her body was invincible the only request was some light armor and emphasis on her footwear. Her sole weakness laid in the ankle. Weapon wise, an improvement on the sword Staxius brought back.

Fourth came Viola, she didn’t demand anything specific. The only thing written on the paper was; another jacket.

“You guys are hopeless,” the head shook in disappointment. “-I’ve got an idea.” A quick pause later, “-rather than armor, how about uniforms?”

“...” silence followed.

“That’s a great idea,” Deadeyes advocated, “-light and easy to move. Not to mention that there will be possibilities to add on equipment rather than wear heavy armor.”

“Yes,” Viola liked the idea, “-we can have the leather jacket you brought over.”

“Nothing beats the aura given off when a group of people walks in wearing the same outfit,” with a smile, “-I’ll shall get the preparations ready; you guys are dismissed for today.” Inspiration hit – alone in the office he drew. Long boots with pants that will go inside the latter. A simple white shirt, a leather jacket. A belt, specially made to hold guns, swords and whatever is necessary. Simple and effective, gantlets for the swordsman,” the color scheme would match the same uniform he wore. With that, the plans for the outfits were readied. The day ended, to which he headed back to Arda to stay the night.

The tailors were happy to make the shirt. The pants, boots, and jacket would be made by dwarves for it would be infused with Ikaomite. A special ore that had the property of normal thread which could negate up to 90% of magical damage. Those were just the building blocks, layers and layers of other unheard minerals and ore would be used for the other parts. The service didn’t come cheap since it was a material rare to acquire, the price for each set was 1750 gold. Since it was an order from the king, the price reduced to 750. The wings emblem would be woven into the very core of the jacket, the red felt like blood and white like ashes. That out of the way, the rest of the night was spent in the company of his family.

Chapter 195: The Military

“Guild master,” Melisa spoke on the phone. A few days had gone by, a report from independent guilds stationed in Plaustan came in one after the other. Many expedition groups from that part of the continent went missing. Mainly the temporary base near the borders of Totrya. To the south, from afar, people raised concern about a circle that stretched onto kilometers around. A barrier had been erected; poor souls who tried to step in were burnt to a crisp. The situation grew out of hand, monster activity near the forth southern base, increased. At that time, Blade’s end’s weekly patrol returned home, a party with two promising adventurers – Gurdan and Edward; their party witnessed the destruction of that camp. Eyes filled with misery, nothing could have been done but to return to the capital and report as soon as possible.

A vague memory for all was entranced by a fragrance that spread from the source of which was a meteor crash site. Defending the border and sending over scouting groups to search for survivors grew to be difficult.

“Alright adventurers,” stood in the middle of a military outpost, one that safeguarded the southern border named Reforge, a man dressed in uniform. The eyes serious and unforgiving, dark circles from restless nights and cuts over the face – he spoke with a loud voice.

“It has been a few days since the impact in Plaustan. As of today, there hasn’t been contact with the Updust Camp. We can only presume that they’ve been wiped out. As for the adventurers stationed there – the sign doesn’t look promising,” each word resounded in the people standing.

As per order from Raulf with the help of the general – in an attempt to not lead young warriors to their death. Each party who wanted to be stationed near the border in quest of fighting and getting stronger had to be assigned to different platoons. Those were done to their own discretion, he who commanded Reforge’s outpost was a Lieutenant in the army. One famed for his long experience serving in the mainland, a man born in Hidros. At first, this limit of freedom proved to be less than desirable. Adventurers tried hard to protest but orders came from the Guild-Master himself. Various outposts were located around at key-point near the border. Saving Oxshield, the heart and brain of Hidros was a priority.

Since the continent was massive – none cared. There were quests to be done everywhere, from small traders town to cities and more, there was never a lack of work. However, getting the green light to fight and defend the borders had to be earned. The warriors had to prove themselves, too many rookies had died worthless death. Thus, the outposts settled. Led by the military under her majesty’s control – the people could work with a chance of survival.

Ever since contact was lost with one Outpost, the whole chain of command grew sloppy and ineffective. Without someone in charge of Plaustan’s border – nothing could be done. The reason for what happened remained unclear, that part of the map turned into a giant black-spot. This was the solution to the continent as a whole came to conclude. Six outposts that surrounded Totrya in which a wall, one giant and robust, was to be built. It took a lot of time and still wasn’t complete. Only a quarter had been built, the rest were barricaded off by temporary magical barriers of which The Order provided.

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That one quarter linked the first and second outpost. The first one being on the south-west, also known as Ground-zero. The second one, the place where all came first to fight off the invasion, Reforge. The sheer length of what distance those walls would have to be made was inconceivable. Nevertheless, it

was either that or let the beasts enter the realm. Mostly kept hidden from the general populous, that task was assigned to many building companies with direct supervision from the Order.

It would take around five years to fully complete the wall – a long time. Many lives would be lost to see that goal accomplished. The first time of completion was ten-years, which reduced as more companies got involved. The more manpower, the quicker the building process. For the time being, a high-tier barrier kept the unprotected border safe.

“As known by all,” the lieutenant spoke, “-our duty as adventurers and military officers is to safeguard the builders whomst work day and night to complete Azure’s wall,” a quick pause later, “-since we’re tight on manpower, 90% of the fighters here will head to Ground Zero. There’s been a call for help, monster activity is running rampant.”

“What about the remainder?” a party leader asked.

“Good question but I’d advice for all to remain silent till permission is given to speak,” he glared at the man who interjected. Scared, the man could not but back down, the officer was scary.

“The remainder will consist of three parties of which containing four members maximum. You will head to Stonegrove, from there on, new orders will be given there. There are too many inconsistencies; a war is lost if no information is given. Remember people, this is a full out war against those foul beasts. Many of our honorable soldiers and adventurers have died trying to establish a starting point for future generations.”

“Alright,” another officer from the military came forth, “-I’ll call out the party name of who is to head to Stonegrove.” Split into two, there were the Royal guards and guards in general – their responsibility was to keep the people safe inside town, cities, and capital. Then there was the military, people trained far harsher than the guards who wielded the sword. The difference between the two factions were weapons, the entire military personal was trained in the ways of fighting with guns as opposed to swords. The influence came from Iqavea, a concept that was implemented a few years ago.

With things as it was now, military and adventurer’s guild had to work together. There were already a few soldiers – Oxshield never focused on military up to now. The place had been fairly peaceful, mages were the only protection needed, well was – times had changed. Without a good enough facility to train the fighters, most were sent to the main-land. Some returned and some earned prestige thus never coming back.

When it came to Oxshield, that piece of information never mattered. Their sole job was to guard the borders and not engage in anything else. Tis was the order given – the protection of the province. Thus, was how the invasion of beasts from Totrya was controlled. Not perfect by any means, the intelligent life-forces easily escaped from their prison and raged chaos in the nearby villagers. The nature of which remained unknown.

“Lieutenant Reinhardt,” called an officer dressed in uniform.

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“What is it?” sat before a screen, he worked tirelessly to try and figure out what had happened over at Updust Camp.

“All the adventurers have left for Ground-zero and Stonegrove,” the reply quick but filled with doubt.

“What’s the matter?” he picked up on the slight change in tone.

“I was just wondering how unusual it is for us to be called all the way from the main-land. I know you were born in Hidros, but most of the other officers are foreign to this land. No law system, nothing as elaborate as the Vlaiwia. The people here are without fear, adventurers and the guards are the only sorts of protection available. Not to mention the separation and distant feeling of each province, this place isn’t united at all, sir,” he spoke what many had in their heart.

“Well,” the screen switched off, “-Hidros has always been weird and filled with confusion. They live in an era different from the rest of the world. There’s no word to describe it apart from chaotic. I won’t say it’s a bad thing – our job is to guard the walls that are being built. Orders are to stay out of danger and let the warriors do their job. We only but provide guidance,” he replied with a smile. “I love my continent, their culture and everything that makes it Hidros, let’s just focus on what we can do to help the populous.”

In the distance, the sun rose – the meeting was held early in the morning. A call for back-up came from one of the three outposts inside Plaustan, the one after Updust. The adventurers in charge of that area sent over a party of three people to inform the guild.

“Good job on surviving the trip back home,” Diane replied with a smile.

Immediately, Melisa took charge and informed Raulf who returned to the castle.

“I see, thanks for reporting,” the phone hung, he who sat inside the office with assistants all in front, lowered his gaze.

“Guild master?” one of the assistants called, “-Is there something the matter?” she asked.

“Matter of fact,” the voice saddened, “yes,” all who worked turned to hear what happened. “One of the military outposts has gone silent. We just got news from a party who ran all the way here. It took around five to six days for the news to arrive. Communication is cut off from that area, nothing, a grey-spot. There’s also a call for back-up,” the message delivered, he thought tirelessly.

“Reaching out to a top-tier guild would be the better choice though that process will take a lot of time,” the same assistant voiced.

“We’ll need a small party that is strong and doesn’t have much influence yet,” another suggested.

“We could just contact Kniq,” the first assistant muttered nonchalantly.

“That’s not a bad idea,” he smiled, “-get of hold of them, and ask specifically for Staxius Haggard. We’ll need someone strong to provide back-up,” to which the main-guild was notified.

It hadn’t been eight in the morning and an immediate summons from the guild was issued. Sound asleep inside Pandora, the door shook violently.

‘Every morning,’ he yawned and teleported downstairs.

“Staxius Haggard?” a man dressed elegantly asked.

“Yes?” he replied with a confused tone.

“The guild master has asked for your presence, do head over to the guild as quick as possible,” the message delivered, the door closed.

‘What is it that’s so urgent,’ he thought and got ready. In the same fashion, the rest of the party were personally contacted.

“Care to explain all the commotion?” Viola asked, it took around an hour for everyone to arrive. Sat in a meeting room, Diane and Melisa.

“There’s an urgent request that requires your intervention,” Melisa spoke to which a click later, a video played. Raulf gave a summary of the duty at hand. Once over, “-basically we lost contact with an outpost and you need us to go provide backup?” Staxius concluded.

“I hate how you just condense all that information into a simple sentence,” Diane clicked her tongue. “But that’s basically it,” she sighed.

“Are you going to take on the quest?” Melisa asked with a subtle voice.

Staxius thought and stared at the rest’s faces. “Please Staxius, this is urgent. We know not what has happened. There may be more at play than what it seems,” a private message played.

“Let’s do it,” Viola spoke.

“I’m down,” Deadeyes added.

“If people are in need, then I shall give my best,” Achilles proclaimed, a sentence worthy of a hero.

“Plaustan here we come,” Avon jumped.

“Let’s go fight some people,” Adete whispered, “-I’m dying to see blood flow,” she chuckled.

“On one condition,” Staxius voiced.

“Which is?” Diane asked with a skeptical tone.

“Give me a day to prepare and I want for Diane to start with what we agreed earlier on the phone. Meet me at our headquarters after you’re done with work – a phone call shall suffice.” None knew what he referred to.

“Understood,” the eyes rolled, “-I’ll come by later in the day,” the head shook slowly.

“Then it’s final, Kniq formally accepts the quest of providing back-up to Fusefall Rock,” a seal of approval later, the party left.

“Alright people,” stood outside the guild, Staxius spoke. “It’s time to stock-up, go where is necessary but do prepare. I’ll be at the shop, if there’s anything you require, do come by. I may even give a discount.”

“As you wish,” Viola took charge.

“We’ll meet tomorrow at Pandora,” he finished and headed out.

'Six outposts under the control of the military with one unresponsive,' the eyes blank, '-this should be interesting.'

Chapter 196: Auic's demeanor

'A request from Raulf. It hasn't even been a week since Kniq became an official guild,' rather than teleporting, Staxius chose to walk. The destination was the hotel where Auic spent most of her time. 'It does strike me as odd that an outpost would just vanish. I did have that nostalgic feeling, the same from when everything changed. I wonder if it's all related,' time was barely nine, people rushed over to work.

"You've opened the shop to only leave for another quest..." Adete spoke, she sat annoyingly near his forehead. The legs dangled and purposefully hit his nose and cheeks.

"It does seem stupid to open up for business then take-off," it was weirdly amusing. "Guess that's the way of my life, always chaotic," the hotel came in view.

"What brings you here?" a girlish voice asked.

"Can't I come by and pay a visit?" he replied casually.

"Sure you can, but I need to head off now, I'll see you later," without time wasted, Lizzie scurried off.

"Wait up," another voice came from behind, this time it was Auic. Staxius stood in the reception-hall, those two were always up to something. People around glared, a demi-human and a brat; not apparent but present, prejudice.

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"It's those two again," in the waiting area, people whispered, "-I know right, always creating a ruckus this early in the morning."

"I'm already late as is. Auic, let me go," Lizzie urged, both now stood outside. Curious, Staxius followed.

"But you forgot lunch," Auic held a box, the cheek flushed and breathing heavy, Lizzie always awoke with a lot of energy.

"Sorry," the girl winked then ran off.

"That girl... I swear," a faint mumbled which turned into fear. Her posture slouched, piercing gazes made the body shrivel, it was as if trying to erase her presence.

"So this is how morning starts," a deep voice came from behind, one soothing.

"S-sorry," without looking up, Auic tried to slip inside.

"Isn't it a bit rude to ignore people?" Staxius asked and grabbed her arms, the voice unimpressed. No response came, the eyes shut and body squeezed, her feet moved nervously, sweat could be seen dripping.

'Just how badly is this girl affected,' witnessing all those emotions flow through her – it hit just how much Avon cared. Someone who was rejected all her life, tortured and sold, it was to be expected.

However, sob-stories didn't work with him, "Auic, it's me," he shook her arm, "-better snap out of it," the voice serious, her eyes opened.

"M-majesty," a sigh of relief, her posture relaxed, "-what b-brings you here?" she asked, the nervousness didn't go, people continued to glare.

"I just came to pay a little visit," he replied, the voice unchanging, "-on second thought," he glared back at the people. The sheer intensity discouraged the rivaling stares, "why not take a walk with me?"

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"O-okay..." reluctantly, she followed. Silence slowly took command, the walk continued till Pandora came in sight, it lasted around half an hour.

"Listen," he broke the ice, "-there's something I need to tell you," they walked side by side though her gaze remained at the floor. "I know the hardships that you've gone through. I won't say I understand but..." he looked over, she still kept her gaze downward, "-we'll be going on an urgent quest soon."

"Will Avon be participating?" she stared up, the eyes filled with concern.

"Yes, Kniq as a whole will be going on said expedition," the door unlocked, "-this is why I've made a decision," he entered, the door closed behind. "Either stay here and work for your stay or return to Arda. A noble girl must know the implications and repercussions of living off someone else. Now I don't want to say you're a burden – not at all," the tone filled with sincerity, "-but it's not right. I don't want a noble to turn into such a pitiful creature. There's a difference between leaning on someone for support and freeloading," she followed him into the lab area where papers were subconsciously set for another day of work, "-thus I ask this not as a king but a friend, what do you want to do?" the voice friendly and comforting.

"..." she wanted to speak but held back, her hands trembled.

'So much trouble,' it was hard to watch how much she hated herself.

"Listen up," a fierce voice spoke, "-either say what is in thy mind or get the hell out of here," harsh but direct, Adete felt the anguish.

"I-" she stopped.

"SPEAK UP," Adete screamed to which Auic slapped herself.

"I want to stay here!" she tried to scream but the soft nature of her voice refused, It sounded adorable as opposed to serious.

"Good," Staxius smiled, "-starting tomorrow, I've appointed someone to come tutor in the ways of being a secretary. I need an assistant to help," the gaze stern, "-remember why you were brought here in the first place?" her eyes lit, "-that's right, it's to work."

"I u-understand b-but the way people stare, it's so cold and unforgiving. I can't do anything, the memories tie me down, hard as I may try, my mind refuses to let me go. Always bound by the past, swallowed by darkness, I thought Avon could be the one to save me..." tears formed, "-but even with all the help given, I can't do anything," heavy sobs followed.

“No need to be harsh,” the voice understanding, “-I was wrong to put you in a discomforting situation. Dealing with all those fiends regularly,” he thought, “-I guess that was selfish on my part. I thought you’d be alright,” a glance later, “-I was solely mistaken,” he apologized.

Once again, Auic went silent, tears flowed, the body knelt and posture as if begging – no dignity nor pride, confidence was a lost cause.

“How about this,” after a few minutes of consideration later, “-what if we bought a house. One all the members of Kniq could share?” a blunt proposal. “Alright,” he stood, “-I’ve made up my mind. We’re going to buy a house,” the eyes blank, the first step to making Auic feel welcomed and wanted was to have a home. Away from all the hate and prejudice.

‘5700 gold the current balance.’ A pause later, “-Auic, could you please open the shop downstairs. There’s no need to answer to customers, just open it and sit behind the counter, I’ll come in a few minutes.”

“A-alright...” she stood and headed downstairs.

“What are you thinking?” Adete asked.

“I forgot I have to pay for the uniforms later, it’s going to cost 3000 gold. I haven’t clearly thought this through.”

“Buying a house is a stupid idea and for the sake of a girl, are you stupid?” Adete voiced strongly.

“No, it’s a good investment. Not short but long term. A place we know is safe and without spy and others trying to pry,” soon after a phone call was made. The process of finding the perfect home would be long. Nevertheless, Cake was assigned to the case. Using her connections, it would take at least one week before any good offers came up. Whilst on the phone, Diane was also contacted.

“Alright, I’ll take it from here,” he voiced.

“Do you mind if I stick around and watch?” Auic asked.

“Sure,” the day began. Time went on, none came by, a slow day. Though it gave time to think, ‘-six outposts in which a lieutenant or higher rank is assigned. It’s unlikely that this call for help could be an ambush. The ogre attack and recent incident don’t feel as if mere coincidence.’

The time now reached noon, “Auic,” he called, “-we’re shutting down for today.”

Curtains pulled, open sign turned to closed, she worked fairly quickly. “Since we’re going on an expedition later,” he signaled her to follow, “-over here,” they entered the office. “I’ll make you a deal,” they stood before the window. “There’s a bedroom inside Pandora, one secluded and fairly safe. I saw the stares people gave earlier today.”

“Don’t worry,” she interjected, “-I’ll manage. Even if people despise me, I’m in charge of taking care of Lizzie. She’s an airhead who will rush headfirst into anything,” she smiled, “-it’s alright, I may be weak, shy, and miserable,” the eyes changed from woeful to confident, “-but I can also be reliable. I was trained by her majesty the queen. Today’s talk helped, without a conscious effort to change, my past will continue looping without end.”

“Impressive,” the tone casual, “-either way, your training to becoming a worthy assistant will be hosted here. The teacher should be here any minute. *Ding,* the timing could not have been any better.

“Welcome to Kniq’s headquarters,” the door opened, Diane stood completely perplexed by how elegant and pristine the interior was.

“Surely you jest, in no way can one such as thou afford this level of luxury?” she walked in almost scared to step on the carpet.

“Must I state my title out loud?” the voice formal and courteous.

“It’s hard to believe you’re a King at times,” she sighed and sat in the meeting room.

“Well that’s the truth and none’s going to change that fact,” the idle chatter ended.

“This is who I want to be trained,” he pointed at Auic who sat far away, “before stating the obvious, she’s a demi-human to which I presume should not be a problem?”

“No, not really,” Diane stood and headed over to the lady. Instantly, both spoke, it seemed as if they were old friends. ‘Guess girls are better suited to one another.’

“I’ll notify the receptionist about the daily visits,” Staxius stood, “-do take care, I’m entrusting her to you, Diane, be sure to not disappoint,” the door closed. As said, the people downstairs were notified. That out of the way, preparations for the journey could now commence.

First came transport, Void would have been fine if only it was for one person. Luckily, Rosespire was perfect – a few minutes of teleporting from shop to shop. Hidden in an alley, a business that rented vehicles. One purposefully hidden for it was part of the underground. Jason kindly referred the address – to which Staxius took full advantage. In the end, for the price of 150 gold, an armored beast was rented. One larger than a car but smaller to a truck. Perfect for off-road and carrying a lot of people with supplies. Said vehicle would be delivered tomorrow at Pandora.

The connections made came in handy, both in the open and underground. ‘Better check up on the uniforms,’ after returning to the shop, it was time to head to Arda. Tharis got fixed and improved, 3000 gold pieces paid for four uniforms. A heavy-price tag that was well worth it. Not needing anything fancy, after meeting Xula and Eira, they spend the next two hours bonding.

“I might be gone for a day or two, even a week depending on how grave the situation is,” last words said before leaving.

“See you later,” they waved and wished for good fortune.

‘Done,’ he breathed, loose ends tied, people informed, he was ready to leave for Plaustan. Not wanting to take items away from the shop which would result in a loss, he made another batch of potions and scrolls. Thus, the day continued till night came. The party never paid a visit. Adete continued to pester, all and all, the day was productive.

‘Tomorrows the big day,’ tucked in bed, Staxius rested. “The first quest as a guild. Can’t wait to see what awaits us.” Without much help, sleep overpowered consciousness.

Things near Azure's walls didn't look great. The first outpost; Ground-zero suffered great damage. People were eaten, some clawed to death and others burnt by witches. Many stood back and watch as comrades and good fighters died. It grew overwhelming, a distress signal was sent to the other outposts. However, none could return a favorable response. For the sake of the citizens, many fought until death came. A noble and dignified way to go out.

Chapter 197: Twins

"Morning people," a new day rose, Staxius stood before Pandora. As ordered the day prior, Kniq waited with bags filled with equipment and supplies. The facial expression spoke but one thing, they were ready for anything.

"Morning guild leader," they replied at the same time, it felt like a wave.

"Before we leave," the door to the shop opened, "-I've got supplies that need to be distributed," he walked, they followed.

"What about transport?" Avon asked intently.

"I presume we're going on horseback?" Deadeyes guessed.

"Here," he stopped, on the shop counter laid four boxes, silver with each one's name engraved atop, "-please take one and change. The boys will stay here, while the girls are to head upstairs," for the past few days, his voice and tone fluctuated heavily. Adjusting to the new host took a bit of time and effort. Now, it felt second nature, the voice returned to how it was before the changes. Monotonous, without feeling and unreadable. Staxius's facial expression also subsided, nothing good nor bad, he returned to normal.

"On it," they replied, picked-up the individual cases and dispersed.

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"-Sure is heavy," Avon commented to which they laughed. Staxius didn't pay attention. A conversation on the phone took the focus away.

"Yes," he spoke without paying heed, the room grew empty, "-I'm ready to pay, can you bring the vehicle?"

"As you wish, sir," the reply quick, the phone hung.

"I wonder how much he paid?" Achilles asked; the cases opened – it was as if staring into a treasure chest. Each came with instructions and neatly placed inside a red-colored interior.

"Holy..." Viola stared in amazement, "-are you serious?" her smile could not be contained.

A few minutes went by, Staxius waited patiently outside the shop. A rambling in the distance distinguished itself. 'What a beast.'

"Is that even a car?" Adete asked.

"No," he replied, "-that's a military-grade transport vehicle. Don't ask how I managed to procure such a machine, I've no clue from where or when it came."

“Lord Staxius?” the driver stepped off, a tiny fellow with a mask covering the face.

“Over here,” he called and waved gently.

“Awesome,” the tiny-man came closer, “-here’s the key, any damage will be added as an extra cost. Better take care of this baby,” he smirked, “-tis armored with plenty of space for a squad of eight or more.”

“I’ll be careful,” the cash handed over, “-no need to worry,” the voice monotonous, no read could be made on the intent.

“Thanks for the business, Shadow,” with a smile the man took off. The speed at which he ran was impressive, dust from the dirty street lifted with each step taken.

“How can someone always manage to find such weirdoes?”

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“Talk about irony,” the hand grabbed Adete’s head, “-you’re the biggest one of all,” her eyes stared menacingly.

“Let me go,” waling and swearing later, Adete was freed from the grasp.

“How many times do I have to say to not treat me like a doll,” angry, she hovered and stood atop his head to which she stomped. No response, rather, the focus changed to examine the rented beast.

‘The man spoke true when he said the beast was rare. Just look at the size of this thing,’ he did circles around, ‘-large, fairly low to the ground, massive wheels, windows that seem to be sturdy enough to handle a barrage of attacks,’ impressed, he took a step back and admired. The head-light upfront seemed as if two eyes staring off into the distance, their gaze said, come close and we’ll destroy you.

“That sorts out the details about transport,” Achilles voiced as if to anger Avon.

“Yeah, yeah...” the spirit’s voice grew distant.

“Master,” Viola called, “-we’re ready,” she smiled, the rest stood in line. Boots that reach just shy below the knee for the ladies and ones that went above the ankle for the men. The pants, one dark-grey with black stripes along each side. On the waist, a leather belt strapped around the legs and back. It was fixed so that it could not be moved, there was space for a gun, sword, potions, and anything required. The top, a black shirt made of special fibers, the emblem embroidered on the collar. An optional amber-colored scarf was given to which only Avon and Viola wore. On top of the shirt, a jacket, one grey with the wings on upfront and at the back.

“Looking good,” Staxius commented. The party stood, the outfits reflected their resolves

“I can’t believe that each one of these items is custom built and serve different purposes,” Deadeyes added.

“It’s not that great, there are slight differences for each one – should not be much of a problem,” the leader ended the conversation.

“Guess it’s off to Plaustan,” Avon voiced with sparkles, “-I’m sitting up front with master,” without a second lost, the seating arrangement got decided.

“Alright people,” Staxius interrupted the would-be argument about who sat up front, the look on their faces revealed more than they thought. “Load up the equipment and weapons,” he ordered – the back opened, a place where additional people could sit. The capacity upfront was three on the first and four on the back then came the storage space. The three up front would be, Staxius, Avon, and Viola. Deadeyes and Achilles reluctantly accepted the back seats.

‘I was able to make 25 Common potions, 5 Uncommon and 4 Rare. For scrolls, I only managed, 8 Common, 4 Uncommon and 2 Rare. Weapon wise, I’ve got Tharis and that’s about it. No swords, Dragonrend seems the viable option but... can’t mix business with my life. Either I have to pay myself to not lose in the long run,’ a conundrum, ‘-whatever, I’ll just make due.’ Mana injected, the vehicle came to life, the shop closed and blocked off by a barrier spell from Undrar.

“Let’s go,” Avon pointed forward, Adete remained on the shoulder, the two at the back had more place than imagined whilst Undrar stared out the window.

Driing, before they advanced, a phone call.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Good,” Melisa’s voice, “-you haven’t left,” she seemed relieved. “Could you come by the guild before leaving?” she asked for a small detour that would take a couple of minutes.

“Going by how much the breathing is uneven, I guess it’s urgent,” the beast came to life, the phone hung and they were off to the guild. Cake was given the freedom to plan out their next move. If anything came up, anything urgent and life-threatening, a blank message would suffice. A distress signal both agreed over the phone – one that Staxius had to abide without a second thought.

“Look at that...” the beast came through town, the name given was RFS, no particular meaning nor explanation, just RFS.

“I wonder who’s inside,” adventurers who headed to the guild were stupefied. Something as impressive as that vehicle made all envious.

“I think they’re here,” Melisa said as whispers ran rampant from the street and into the building.

“That obnoxious idiot,” Diane rolled her eyes. The RFS stopped, the party stepped off.

“What’s the matter?” they walked in tandem, from the outfits to the mannerism. Led by Staxius, Knig walked, rather than join with others to speak and socialize, each member’s face remained stern and focused. That emotion came from following the leader, Staxius Haggard, his presence made all want to give their best – the man had done many things to help whether with ulterior motives or not. All had the utmost respect, both as a strong individual and a friend.

“Sorry for calling all of a sudden,” Melisa took charge, “-but we received new orders, you’re to take these two,” she pointed at a pair of twins. Black hair, brown eyes, tan complexion, the face well sculpted with freckles. They seemed young, around the age of sixteen, “-since they were the ones who informed us about the incident. You’re to take them both in thy journey.” A glance from the leader, the eyes

pierced through their soul. The sisters slowly backed away. “Sadly, there was supposed to be more of them,” the assistant’s voice grew distant, “-an incident happened to which they’re in medical care.”

“Honestly,” the voice neutral, “-I’ve but one question,”

“Go ahead,” Diane joined the fray.

“Am I going to have to babysit these two or can they handle themselves?” a fair question, he continued to glare at the girls.

“They’re both Tier Seven – Sapphire,” Diane voiced proudly.

“Good,” the voice unimpressed, “-listen,” he leaned, “-I’m doing this because the guild asked us too. In no way am I responsible for your life, tier-seven should be able to fight on their own. Hold me back,” killing intent oozed slightly, “-and I won’t blink twice before ending your life myself.”

“Did you just hear him...” the people around grew suspicious, their guards raised – all heard what Staxius said. “Who does he think he is?” subtle but present, they were all on edge.

“That’s enough intimidation,” Viola held his shoulder.

“Do as you wish,” without care, he walked out as if all who stood were nothing but pebbles on the road.

“Sister,” one of the twins called.

“What is it sister?” the other asked.

“That man is interesting,”

“Yes, he’s scary,” it grew confusing.

“Hey girls, don’t worry about what my brother said. That’s just the kind of man he is,” Viola spoke as if a big sister, her voice gentle and caring. “-I’m Viola,” to which she introduced the rest of Kniq.

“Now that’s how a leader should act,” the rest cheered.

“I’m Emma Lymsey,” the first girl spoke.

“And I’m Emmy Lymsey,” the second girl added.

“We’re the Lymsey sister’s,” they spoke as if one. Since twins, it would be hard to know who was who – however, Emma had a beauty mark on the right side of her upper lip whilst Emmy had one on the left side of her lip. Not to mention their hair was the same but inverted. Emma had her hair parted on the right as opposed to Emmy who’s was on the left. Each wore light armor – but with different colored chest plates. Emma’s was blue while Emmy was pink. Rather than pants, the girl had shorts of which their legging reached the thigh.

“Thanks for answering the last-minute demand,” Melisa bowed, Diane gave a thumbs up. From whence they came, Kniq returned.

“We’re ready to go,” Undrar spoked, the two new passengers sat behind with Deadeyes and Achilles.

“You two at the back,” Staxius spoke, it took the twins by surprise, “-did the guild give any specifics to where we should go?”

“Yes,” Emma spoke, the tone a little shaken up.

“They told us to head to Reforge,” Emmy completed the sentence. The RFS came to life, the engine made the machine vibrate, the amount of power under those wheels could make anyone feel inferior.

“Here they go,” from inside the guild, Melisa spoke with a ray of hope in her eyes.

“Let’s hope that Staxius doesn’t kill the lieutenants,” Diane added in jest, “-they’re pretty annoying.” Thus, the quest began.

Meanwhile, at the castle, Raulf and the Queen spoke. They discussed about the threat that Kreston might pose in the near future. With the announcement of Syphon’s apostle, it was bound to create a problem. None knew what was happening in that province, a mystery to all. At the rate things advanced, the logical conclusion came to was that if Kreston had a plan in mind, it would take at least a few months before getting ready. Plenty of time to prepare. Not to mention the alliance with Arda, Gallienne could rest a little easy. Staxius gave his word as the Protector of that kingdom, one worth its weight in gold.

Xula had the same feeling – scouting parties were sent to search for a suitable place to establish a common town. A neutral zone where Gallienne could establish an embassy. A town with the sole purpose of slowly making the populous acceptant of humans – to show that behind those cruel hearts, there laid more people whomst had affection towards others.

Chapter 198: Onwards

“Get in cover,” a voice yelled, chaos raged throughout the field. Spells, gunfire, and skills materialized and used all over. The air reeked of gunpowder, blood, and death. The awful stench from when a monster died lingered around. A tiny whiff sufficed to turn the strongest of stomachs upside down.

“FIGHT ON MEN,” atop the wall, a man screamed. Armed with a cannon, all could not but turn to him for inspiration. “-FIRE,” he ordered, a blast followed by which three evolved wolves exploded into flesh and blood.

“Let’s go!” with the few people left on the battlefield, fatigue had overwhelmed many. Despite this, the words from that man gave a spark of energy, a ray of hope. “With Captain Elmer as backup – we needn’t fear,” soaked in sweat and other bodily fluids – the adventurers kept on fighting.

“HISS,” the sun rose – the monsters retreated without a second thought. All faced away from their enemies and ran, the sun’s heat proved to be a weakness of the beasts which fed on the darkness. Their prowess and aggressivity lessened during the day though there was the exception to that rule.

“KILL THEM ALL,” on the field, a reckless boy ran with a sword in hand. Three goblins faced away and exposed their backs.

“Someone STOP HIM,” from atop, Elmer shouted but none could do anything. It took a second for the boy to die. Death by a wolf who turned enraged and went on a killing spree.

“Retreat,” the order was given, if only it had been earlier, that boy would have lived to see another day. This was what the survivors thought.

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“We survived another night,” the captain’s emotions lowered, he became tamer.

“At the cost of 20% of our forces,” a soldier who held a tablet and wore glasses spoke.

“You’re right,” he sighed, the posture stern but facial expression disappointed, “-I don’t know how we’ll manage to hold out for five years,” lifts were dropped for those who couldn’t climb up the wall with magic or special abilities. Day time meant construction, “-all who’ve sustained major injuries are to be sent to the medical camp,” behind each word resided authority backed by experience and knowledge. “The rest is to head over to the construction site – transportation is already stationed. Take that time to rest and recover, breakfast will be served on transit.”

“Understood, sir,” tired and broken, the adventurers could but obey orders. This was the price paid to have the opportunity to join the military camps.

“The boy who died earlier lost his family to goblins from what I heard,” rumors spread, many grieved silently. Crying out loud would only make the dense atmosphere unbearable. All knew the implications, grit and endure – for a better future.

“Just look at that mess,” the people who fought left, the captain and his assistant remained atop the wall, “-bodies of young people who tried to amount to something in life. It brings shame for me to send all those fighters to their deaths at night. It’s not like they don’t know the implications – signing your own death certificate, heroes amongst heroes,” another night survived, the time had come to return to the main camp. One far from the wall, protected behind smaller barriers in case of a breach.

“Status about the request for backup?” both walked inside Ground-Zero’s main base, military officers stood and held rifles. Faces filled with regret, most hid behind a stoic demeanor. “The other camps have formally denied the call for help. The reason is lack of man-power,” the reply didn’t come as a surprise.

“All we can hope for is that construction of our wall is accomplished as soon as possible,” they now sat inside his office.

“The builders estimate that the final touches should last another three to four days. The structure is finished, magic and last-minute adjustments are what stands before us.”

“I know Sergeant Jen,” he answered, “-I know, we just need to hold for four days then Ground-zero will be protected,”

“With the number of fighters as low as is, we can hope to last for two days max. Well at the current rate. It’s frightening to see how the attack suddenly changed from spread out to us.”

From the border between Arda and Oxshield to Ground-zero then Reforge, the main skeleton had been built. The first part was completed months ago, the focus was changed to a check-point between the first two outposts. Tis was where many foes focused their assault. To keep the fighters from focusing on said checkpoint, the newly built wall at Ground-zero was targeted.

“Let’s hope for the best, once the second checkpoint is built, our defenses will be increased. Then the builders can focus on the other part of the project. It’s a critical stage, we need as much help as humanly possible,” the conversation ended to which the captain went back to deciding who would spearhead the defense later at night.

Messages and reports were relayed through the military network. Organized and efficient, the seamlessly flawless system was broken by that unknown grey spot. As predicted, Ground-zero suffered most of the damage. Nevertheless, hope reigned yet again, the message took a bit of time to arrive, but Reforge sent over 90% of its forces to help. The good news rekindled the captain’s spirit.

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This looked great for Ground-zero but Reforge would take a hit. A gamble from Lieutenant Reinhardt about monsters focusing on the second checkpoint. It left the second outpost completely defenseless.

“Any idea to when we’ll reach our destination?” Viola asked, the RFS had been on the road since eight in the morning. The time now was two in the afternoon.

“Can’t we take a break?” Avon asked.

“There’s a village close by,” Emma suggested.

“Yes, over there,” Emmy pointed.

The journey would take another two days before reaching the destination. Lucky was it that roads were built for that very purpose. As opposed to the northern area, ever since the walls were built, people decided to pack up and move farther up the province to other villages and towns. The closest city was to the west. A place relatively quiet and out of the way, the name; Vaka.

“There should be an inn somewhere around here,” Emmy spoke, the RFS stopped.

“Yes sister, there’s one over there,” Emma pointed further into the village. The vehicle was stopped a few meters away from the place – it would bring unnecessary attention and cause problems for the citizens.

“Will you be accompanying us, master?” Avon asked to which Staxius shook his head.

“Go ahead and do what is needed, we’re leaving in fifteen minutes sharp,” orders given, Kniq walked into town to rest and relax. Not to mention, get food.

“Hey vampire,” Adete spoke, the inside felt empty and hot.

“What is it?” he asked, the eyes closed.

“You’re not thinking of teleporting the whole unit into Reforge... are you?” the voice skeptical, she hovered and stared with doubt.

“Not to Reforge,” he denied, “-I could probably do it, however, that’ll end up using half of my mana-reserve. I don’t want to go into this unprepared,” the all-seeing eye activated, “-therefore, we’ll only teleport to a place where the journey will take us a few hours as opposed to another day. I don’t want to

sit around and drive," since turning, the power of the eyes was tamed. He could accurately tell who, what and where a person or anything else was.

"Found it," a few minutes later, "-the perfect location, the town of Frehtin." A quaint little place north of the second checkpoint.

"Are you positive?" Adete checked.

"It's no problem," he replied, the voice filled with confidence.

The short break ended quickly. They returned with filled stomachs and higher moral.

"Before you enter," Staxius stepped off, the voice serious. The way he behaved seemed unnatural, something was wrong. Before a question could be asked, he spoke, "-this might be hard, stomachs might turn upside down but tis necessary. I know not how to lessened the load of this spell on the body," nonchalant, he stepped away.

"You guys better get in," Adete hovered, Staxius stood a few meters away.

"Is there anything wrong?" Viola asked.

"Bat-lady, did something happen?" Emma asked.

"Did something happen, bat-lady?" Emmy added.

"Nothing to be worried over, get seated already," she replied with a tired tone. Nothing else needed to be said. Each sat with a bit of anxiousness raising from underneath. None knew what the leader thought. The twins were scared out of their minds, the impression made earlier today was powerful. Thankfully, Undrar stepped in to act like a good person in the group. With one playing harsh and the other of the compassionate lady – they were kept in check.

'Here we go,' the eyes closed, a sudden burst in aura enveloped the body, the shirt levitated, from black to blue – a portal materialized. One exactly the size of the RFS.

"Alright," from outside, Staxius spoke, a gust of wind spread from the driver's seat. Rather than teleporting back, he sprinted. "Hold on tight," the vehicle came to life, after which they drove straight into the portal.

A few seconds later, it reappeared above a road that led inside the town.

"Please stop," Emmy begged,

"I'm about to puke," Emma stated, their eyes teared. Barely holding on, they hurled. Not inside the RFS but outside, Staxius teleported the two. The lovely lunch returned to the wilderness. Sadness came forth more than embarrassment, the lovely meal went to waste.

"That's a tough one," everyone stepped out, Deadeyes tried hard to keep the stomach in check. Avon and Undrar were unaffected, Achilles could but watch as the food came back up. It seemed as if she pitied the food and not the ones puking.

"T-thanks f-for helping," Emmy finished, the mouth covered by the disgusting liquid.

"We're i-in y-your debt," Emma added, both bowed.

"You're supposed to be Tier-seven," Staxius approached, the voice unchanging and presence as intimidating as usual. "Here," two handkerchiefs were handed over, the twins could not believe. A quick look at the face revealed a man who stared into the distance.

"Viola, get some water and make them rinse their mouths," nonchalant, he returned to the vehicle.

"What did I say?" she approached with a smile, "-I told you my brother is not that bad a person," a wink later, the girls freshen up and returned inside.

"I do hope the pieces of clothing were thrown?" the drive continued.

"Yes, we threw them," Emma confirmed.

"Sister took care of them," Emmy added. Those two had a habit of repeating what the other said. A connection shared by twins only, one that went far beyond the realm of comprehension.

"Are we headed straight for Reforge then?" Deadeyes asked.

"That's the plan," without much thought – they drove past the town.

"Lieutenant Reinhardt," the same officer who stood close to him earlier yesterday called.

"What is it Sergeant Jannette?" the screen shut-off, the time had come to prepare for night as it was now five.

"Since the fighters were sent away to help defend ground-zero and the scouting mission," she pointed forward, "-our site will be opened for monsters to infiltrate."

"Sadly yes," he voiced, "-that is in case their focus turn to us, but I doubt it."

"Nonetheless, the connection with Rosespire is established," good news to which the Lieutenant seemed hopeful, "-we've got back-up coming. Their mission is to provide support to Fusefall. Their first stop is Reforge, the guild master gave new orders. We're to do with them as we please, their mission is to provide support to not only Fusefall but all the outposts."

"And how strong is this unit?"

"About five people strong, sir," she replied but felt ashamed.

"Are you serious?" he lashed out, "-only five people, do they take us for fools..." the fist clenched, "five people to help defend the outposts, how degrading," the face seemed disappointed.

"It might not be in vain," Jannette spoke out, "-the man in charge of the party was strongly recommended by the holder of the Divine-blade title. Not much is known but rumor has it that the man is a demon."

"Demon or not, I'm doubtful that five individuals can provide any significant change."

Chapter 199: Camp Reforge

Day turned to night, the amber-colored sunset in the distance. The growing chill, the impending sense of danger – the various outposts were on high alert. The building crew was done for the day, all retreated to the safety of a makeshift headquarters. The officers in charge stood and watched as adventurers geared up. Another night had come, a fight till daybreak – Ground-Zero’s force grew in numbers. Filled with determination, the fighters stood in a row.

The same could not be said for Reforge. Alone with a few military personnel, mainly five riflemen and Jannette, Reinhardt waited. About five to six kilometers away, laid the camp. The wall hadn’t been built yet, there were openings from where monsters could enter.

“Everyone,” Reinhardt spoke, the few members with drowsiness on the faces could but pay attention, “-tonight we shall be alone, expect no help. Tis a risk with the highest probability of ensuring that Azure is built. As we stand now, fighting even against a mere goblin might endanger our base. Therefore, earlier today, I ordered Sergeant Jannette to scatter mines and explosives around key points. They will be utilized only if hordes of ten or more are seen approaching,” the way the words were spoken, the way it reluctantly rolled off the tongue – it was obvious that people were going to die. “With that out of the way, I’ll let the Sergeant take over,” he backed-off, the lady came forth.

“As most have realized by now, the explosives aren’t remote control. Someone will have to remain on stand-by to trigger in case of an attack. Five explosives for five people,” a feeling of dread spread from her outwards. Drowsiness vanished, the riflemen stood, sweat dripped, their fist clenched. Many of them had families and wives waiting back at the mainland. Unable to speak out, all they could was to follow orders, even if it meant to give up their lives. “I shall assign what area to whom,” she walked and handed over notes. “The mission will begin in thirty-minutes, go get prepared – you’re our lasting hope, Good luck soldiers and may the god of war watch over thee,”

“Yes, Mam,” they saluted and left in order.

“A suicide mission,” she mumbled and joined back with the lieutenant.

“Indeed, our comrades are off to their deaths – let’s hope the gamble I wagered on pays off.”

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In a similar fashion, the other outposts were ready to fight. Azure’s wall stood fifteen meters high and eight meters wide. Large and robust, there was no way any monster could get past that shell. A sliver of hope, a bold idea to help future generations. Without a secure path to preserve the citizens; measures had to be taken.

“Night is here,” Emma pointed out.

“Yes sister, the hour is at hand,” Emmy added.

“Everyone listen up,” it had been a few hours since dust set-in. “-We’re a few minutes away from Reforge,” Staxius spoke, “-before all this begins,” the tone deep, “-are you ready for a fight?” he referred to the incident, one that caused their defeat.

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“...” silence which meant hesitation, obvious was it that the memory from that battle lingered. Behind the tough act laid the uneasiness of not being able to help nor protect people around. Mostly, Achilles was affected, as a hero from another realm – her duty was to always protect the weak. Sadly, that ambush was more than many could have planned for. It wasn’t just monsters that were involved – but another entity, one powerful if not stronger than many.

“I knew it,” the voice unchanging, “-scars, hesitation, and regrets.” those experiences were familiar to him as well. Not being able to help Sprinkles in their time of need, and various others in the past. The regret of not being strong enough to help where it counted. “Nevertheless,” a light in the distance shone, many lights in fact – a place inhabited by people, “-those feelings are precious. Use it to get better, remember the bitter pain of not being strong enough. Mistakes are meant to be learned from and not fret over, I’m saying this as a friend and not the Leader. For better or worse, we’ve got a quest to accomplish and this is the time to do it.”

“Activate number one through three,” inside the command office, Sergeant Jannette whomst was glued to a computer screen gave orders. Reports came from the soldiers on the field, concurrently, Ground-Zero’s area of combat seemed silent.

“We’ve been had,” Reinhardt spoke with regret, “-our foe isn’t as dumb as we thought,” three explosions echoed.

“-There’s more of them coming,” the remaining two spoke, the voice shook and fear present. Staring down a barrel, they hid, “-I’m sorry, but dying without putting up a fight goes against my principle,” from a bush, the man stood. Rifle lined up and aimed, he fired, the shots seemed random but each hit without exception.

“Don’t compromise the situation farther, DO AS YOU’RE TOLD,” Jannette breathed down their neck, the riflemen weren’t going to listen. “Sir,” she turned around, cheeks red from a mixture of emotions. Reinhardt could but shake his head, a message to let the men alone. “Bound by orders, that’s who we are,” he spoke, “-nevertheless, if a man chooses to die, let him die how he wants.”

Far away at the same time, “captain Elmer,” Jen rushed over the wall, “-we’ve been had,” she panted. “The attacks up till today was a diversion to change our focus,” reports came in from Reforge, Reinhardt gave a summary of what he thought.

“That fool,” Elmer shook his head, “-a gamble that didn’t pay out,” he turned around, the battlefield after the wall was as told – empty without a soul. “EVERYONE RET-” *BAM,*

“CAPTAIN,” Jen screamed and held out her hand, everything moved in slow motion. A bolder hit the top without anyone noticing. Around two-parties of four died immediately, “-watch out,” adventurers swooped in, not even a second had passed. “Get the captain and sergeant out of the way,” orders were given by party leaders, some moved as fast as the large fragments, “-we’ll take care of the battle,” hues of light rushed up and down the wall. A surprise attack that cost eight people’s life, one that took the veterans by surprise. Mainly the captain for he was to order a full-scale retreat back to Reforge.

Bam, bam, bolder after bolder, the wall was targeted by an unknown entity. The rocks came from beyond the border, inside Totrya – about twenty kilometers. It seemed impossible to be able to launch a barrage of attack from that distance though it just happened.

“Captain...” Jen called, “-captain,” she crawled over, he bled from the head.

“Worry not Sergeant,” a lady dressed in white came, “-I’ll use my talents in healing,” to which a prayer later, a green light emanated from the captain’s wound.

“Any idea of what has happened?” with only a slight concussion, Jen stood. From an emotional wreck to now a lady with authority, the change in mentality was a gift from intense training.

“At 09:35 PM, an unexpected barrage of boulders targeting our location began,” an officer arrived on horseback. People ran around, a makeshift medical bay was erected a few meters from the wall. The impacts went through its body, though it stood without a scratch. The fragments came from the boulders. From peaceful to chaos in a second, both camps were under attack.

“Send orders that the short to mid-range fighters are to not engage,” nobody was on the field yet, “-devote their attention to the spot where the attacks are coming from. Anywho can conjure Earth magic, put them on defense – break up the parties if needed, I want three teams, one spotter, one defense and one back-up. The ones on defense must be magic-users, and no one else, the spotters can be anyone whilst the back-up are people who have skills specialized in quick movements. They will be in charge of saving the magic users in case the defense fails. The rest is self-explanatory.”

“Roger,” the officer saluted and quickly scaled up the wall with the help of a ladder. The adventurers desperately tried to save all who were hit from the initial impact. Once the orders were given, the chaos resorted, the defense team was in charge of stopping the projectiles from touching the walls. The spotters had two tasks, one to spot the origin and the place of impact. The support stood by in case one skipped their watch; a defensive battle.

Back at Reforge, “Damn it,” Jannette slammed her desk, “-Ground-zero is under heavy attack.”

“I see,” Reinhardt spoke, “-this is the turning point. If we manage to survive this night – we can be sure that the next few days will go by smoothly,” he stared outside, “-wishful thinking is what this is.”

“We’re out of ammo,” the riflemen yelled, “-for the future,” two explosions followed, the speakers transmitted the last message. “Put up the signal that Reforge has been taken,” the lieutenant ordered, from blue, the outpost turned to black. A color that displayed across all the maps throughout the network.

“They’ve breached,” the sergeant spoke with a woeful tone.

“Arm up, their next target is us, we’ve got a few minutes to prepare,” he stood, the gaze ready to fight. Mentally, it was a given that tonight would be their death. The blacked-out spot on the map was to only be used if hope was lost. From Blue which meant standby to red, meaning under attack then black that meant defeat, those were the three-color code. In the distance, a few kilometers away, an army approached. Eyes of a reddened color, one of impending doom – the remaining officers at headquarters were those two. The rest of the noncombatants were ordered to evacuate at the break of dusk. Varying in height, length and overall physiology, the monsters approached.

“Can you feel it?” Staxius asked, the RFS came in viewing distance, “-the monsters are here,” the vehicle stopped. It stood in the middle of the courtyard after driving through an empty security gate. A town was what they saw, many buildings around with no inhabitants in sight.

“Silence,” Emma commented,

“Yes sister, a bad omen,” Emmy added.

“Shut up,” Staxius ordered, all obeyed. ‘This area is taken for all we know,’ the mind worked, the party slowly got off.

“Divide into three groups, Achilles and Avon, you take the north. Viola and Deadeyes, you take the west, the Lymsey sisters are to guard the rear, do not engage unless necessary – that applies to the twins only.”

“What about you, master?” Avon asked.

“Isn’t it obvious, I’m going to the east,” orders given, they dispersed. Reforge was a mini-town build for the sole purpose of acting as a resting place for both the military and adventurers. The northern part of the town was where merchants, inns, and taverns rested. Any remote sign of entertainment was there. This was also the place where all ate and spoke. The western area was where people would rest. A residential area for all, it reached out to the south where a training ground stood. The middle, also known as the courtyard was where briefing and messages were given. The eastern area was reserved for the military, headquarters where information traveled across the network. A place where weapons and anything related to that were kept.

The camp was surrounded by a wall, one made of bricks of where only two-point of access were seen. One in the south, in the middle, while the other was on the northern wall a bit to the right – directly in front of the military area. That entrance faced Azure, from whence the monsters came.

‘Let’s hope the others can hold their own. I’ve purposefully sent them to areas where there’s less risk of an ambush. The strongest aura I saw whilst scanning the area is here,’ Staxius stood before a metal door. A three-story building rested, completely oblivious to what had happened. *Click,* it opened, a faint beeping was heard, red-light flashed on and off – a battle had taken place here prior, the windows at the end of the hall were broken.

Chapter 200: Evolution

“It’s safe to assume that monsters are already here,” from the shoulder, Adete flew and stood on the head. A secondary pair of eyes that stared backward.

“I agree,” Staxius walked, the all-seeing eyes linked with Adete directly. He saw what she did as well as what laid before him. Closing the eyes would allow for a better view of all the enemies around. Even so, he decided to not use that power yet, examining the scene came first.

BANG, “Upstairs,” Adete called, gunshot echoed. Instantly, without trying, he rushed up the stairs with eyes closed. The plan changed immediately, the thought process was to examine and salvage anything worth of value. Seeing the place was deserted and quiet, it wasn’t far off to assume all were evacuated.

“Lieutenant Reinhardt,” weeping followed by small giggles and what sounded like flesh getting torn and eaten.

"I'm alright," he coughed, the officers were held up inside a storage room. The scene that played was a nightmare, the sergeant was held down by a tall beast while its minion tore off part of her clothes as well as flesh. "G-get away," she cried, hope was lost. The gunfire came from her trying to divert the monster's attention from Reinhardt who was unconscious at the time.

"..." at that moment, the true cruelty and merciless nature of those devils came to light. Anger, hate, sorrow, helplessness, all rushed the man – powerless and without a plan nor anything else, he could but watch as blood flowed. The officer still breathed, she gasped for air, the eyes turn dim – "h-help me," the lips mumbled silently.

Click, the door opened, a gust of wind blasted through the room, without a second wasted, the tall beast went flying through the walls. A single punch to which the minion jumped to follow their leader. Four walls with holes laid in front, the night sky could be seen.

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Uncommon Scroll: Healing Magic, the wound healed, on top of that, potions were poured on the girl as if it rained. Tis was Rare quality healing potions, each dripped twinkled. The fleeting hope rekindled, "-t-thank you," she smiled and rolled over.

"You," the eyes cold, as cold and merciless as the devils, Staxius turned, "-how many of them are there?" he asked, the voice intimidating.

"W-who are you?" Reinhardt inquired, the face confused, the mind unable to process what happened.

"Never mind," a sigh later, he ran through the openings made.

"Aren't you going to save them?" Adete asked whilst in mid-air.

"They can walk, people who've given up don't have the right to live." The eyes scanned, 'where did that beast go,' he thought, for the first time rather than using a weapon – Staxius went straight for a punch, one that proved to be efficient. "A vile means of combat," he commented after landing, the bone in the right hand broke on impact. It didn't take long for the regeneration to kick in.

BANG, gunfire as loud as explosions came from the area Deadeyes and Undrar went. Not only them, but Achilles and Avon fought as well. The killing intent and menacing aura oozing from those four sent chills. This could but put a smile on Staxius face – 'good to see their confidence isn't lost yet.' The eyes closed, he crouched and placed the right hand on the floor. Focus heightened, a push later, the consciousness jumped out his body, the real form of the All-seeing eye, a bird-eyes view of everything and everyone. Walls and obstructions didn't matter, the skill acquired of seeing auras through matter had merged.

"Avon, watch the back," confined in an alley, Achilles took charge. Back to back, they both got to work – the monsters approached. Namely, goblins and hobgoblins, they didn't look green, their size-matched those of humans. The body strong and buff as opposed to scrawny and weak – rumors were true; they were evolving with each fight.

"On it," the sparkles faded, above each finger laid a different hue and element. He wielded total control over magic – a spirit with an unknown past. Not only did he look impressive, but the girl behind leaned closer to the ground, her hand on the grip – the eyes fixed on her target.

“End them,” she ordered, a barrage of spell blasted out from Avon. On the other side, Achilles jumped and stood behind her foe, the blade returned to its sheath. *Quick Draw Technique: Guillotine,* heads fell. On Avon’s side, the foe burnt to a crisp, some frozen and some turned to ash.

“We did it,” Avon rejoined, “-don’t be so sure,” Achilles spoke seriously, the face stern. The heads which fell moments prior all levitated and returned to their hosts. Those who were destroyed by magic returned to normal as well. The situation didn’t look good.

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“Viola, I’m out of ammo,” Deadeyes urged, he had been firing since the beginning.

“I know,” she stood with her hair slightly black from the root. “It’s them,” the voice tense, “-the beasts that nearly wiped us out,” the same sentence was spoken at the same time by Achilles and Undrar.

“How can you be sure?” Scarily in sync, Avon and Deadeyes asked the same.

“None saw this part of the fight. After defeating the ogres, we thought the fight would have been over, sadly,” memories from the time rushed, “-they regenerated. The first goblins shed their previous bodies and took on a more humanoid appearance. Not only them but all who came afterward,” the explanation ended.

“I tried to examine what kind of magic this was,” Viola continued to explain, “-sadly, it’s a dead end. Never have I seen this kind of spellcraft anywhere,” the voice deeply concerned. “No matter how we fight, they’ll keep on regenerating, a battle of attrition is what this is,” wings sprouted from her back, “-we need to regroup with the others,” she urged.

“I’ll create an opening,” Avon suggested, “-if what you say is true, then we need to regroup,” they came to the same conclusion, teamwork and how much time spend together linked all on a deeper level.

“Grab onto me,” a smile later, the different hue over the fingers changed to one blue – a continual stream of ice came forth. Using that, they scaled up the three-story building and ran for the middle, Undrar could be seen flying with Deadeyes in tow.

“Sister, sister,” Emma called.

“Yes, sister?” Emmy replied.

“Can you feel it?” Emma asked.

“Impending doom,” Emmy replied. From sitting atop the RFS, the duo stood and watched.

“Guess we came to the same conclusion?” A rough landing later, Undrar asked with her face pale and hair fully black.

“Yeah,” Achilles replied, “-it’s them,” she panted.

“H-hello,” a voice came from the military area, a man walked with a girl in his arms. “P-please help,” the desperation could be seen, the place was in no way clear nor safe. Three wandering monsters spotted them and rushed.

“That idiot,” Avon gritted, a fire barrier paired with a wind wall separated the would-be attacking beast from the survivors.

Bang, Bang, two gunshots from Deadeyes who restocked on ammo. The goblins who would have pounced had their head blown off. “Let me help,” Undrar joined to maintain the barrier, even with the head destroyed they crawled and paid no heed to pain.

“Quick,” Achilles rushed and helped carry the lady.

“This is going to get hard,” Deadeyes commented, he now laid atop the RFS with a gun as long as him.

“Yeah,” rather than feeling helpless, the others were ready to fight.

“Lieutenant Reinhardt,” the sisters called.

“Emma and Emmy?” barely conscious the man sat with his back against the hood.

“Yes,” they smiled, each held one of his hand, “-we’ve come with back-up.”

The horde from all over was drawn to the middle. Surrounded, the only safe place was the RFS, inside which rested both officers. Avon took a stand, he used magic to erect multiple barriers around the vehicle. Ones with different properties, one that acted as the first line of defense as well as attack. Any who tried to enter was either burnt, frozen, or solidified – it depended on the element of said protection. This only worked on monsters, an original high-tier spell he named as, *The five pillars.* Once conjured it turned invisible so to not limit vision.

Bang, any who got past the spell was shot, Viola and Achilles did their best to damage and send the beasts away. “They’re not immortal,” Undrar figured out a solution. “Stack up damage till it overflows the power of regeneration, killing them over and over again without a chance to get back up, that’s the way forward.”

“Can sister and I help?” Emma jumped; a giant hammer conjured forth.

“We can be of help,” Emmy added, she wielded a battleaxe, twice her size but similar to her sister.

“Sure,” Viola agreed, “-together we can do this,” she smiled.

“Is this the wisest move?” Adete asked, Staxius remained crouched and watch from afar. “I was just waiting for the opportune moment,” from looking down, the sight returned. “Don’t underestimate Kniq,” he stood, “-those guys aren’t weak,” the eyes opened, it shone brightly red. “I trust them.” The fighting grew more intense at the courtyard, the horde kept on increasing, *ROAR,* a deafening gnarl came from the military area.

“Focus on defense, RIGHT NOW, FULL BARRIER,” Undrar ordered, the five-pillar merged into a single entity. Rubbles flew, a beast the size of building screamed, it made the ground tremble. The face could be seen clearly over the roof, the same face – an ogre, one evolved beyond the realm of reality. The movement seemed slow but was in fact incredibly fast, it kept on roaring whilst tearing apart the building as if a piece of clay. No real effort, Childs play, it broke off a quarter of the top floor and launched it at the courtyard.

“It’s him,” Undrar muttered, “-he’s the one who nearly killed us,” the anger whelmed her mind.

"N-not again," Achilles sighed.

"This isn't going to hold," Avon admitted, projectile came rushing down.

Decay Touch Aspect, a beam as large as the room came out of nowhere. A nauseating feeling followed, darker than night itself – it completely erased part of the building.

"What-" Avon's jaw dropped.

From large to now but mere specks of dust, even the beast took a pause. "I guess they improved Tharis," nonchalant, Staxius approached.

"M-master?" they called. "Don't just stand still," he urged, the beast grew active again. The cavalier walk changed into a full-on sprint, "-get inside," he urged. Quickly, they all jumped in, Deadeyes remained atop the vehicle, the Lymsey sisters held on each side. It powered on and rushed out of the outpost.

"Can't you fire one of those shots again?" Viola asked, the voice unhappy from running away. Persistent, the giant followed. 'He took the bait,' the mind focused on driving.

"Are we just going to run away?" Achilles asked, the aura inside felt tense. "Come on, master, answer us," the pestering continued.

"SHUT UP," Adete screamed, she lashed out in his place, silence followed.

"Take a look at this," he handed over Tharis, steam came off the weapon. "Even after improving the gun, it could barely handle a quarter of what I wanted to fire," the voice neutral. "And for you Achilles, we're not running. Fighting there would only cause more trouble in the future. That outpost is important, we can't just destroy that place – this is but a trailer of what's to come." The RFS stopped shy of an open field, a good ten-kilometers from everything.

As expected, the monsters followed deeper inland. "Are you insane?" Reinhardt asked, "-what happens if that thing is let loose to wander around," the possibility rushed into mind.

Unwilling to answer, Staxius ignored the query. The attention focused on surveying the area with Adete's help using the all-seeing eye. Using the final form required concentration and time to set-up, it wasn't worth the effort at this stage.

"Lieutenant," Jannette awoke, they all stood outside thinking about what happened.

"Are you going to keep on ignoring me?" adrenaline rushed, the eyes serious, the lieutenant was right to be worried.

"Shut it," from the roof, Staxius stepped off without much effort. The body didn't move, much less flinch, "-the responsibility of safeguarding the walls is yours," he stood menacingly before the officer. "I'm here to clean up the mess," the voice cold, "-either back off or die," he stared straight through the man's soul – the crimson eyes felt alive.