

Death Magic 201

Chapter 201: Four Pillars

“That’s enough,” the sergeant spoke, the voice feeble. That little argument tensed up the atmosphere around. All began to doubt the decision. In the distance, the horde left the outpost and headed straight for the party. A few breaths later, the military officers calmed one another down. They spoke and tried to make sense of what happened. Staxius stood and watched, the face neutral and eyes ready to engage. Kniq could but stay back with the rest and wait. Gearing up for the fight took authority over personal problems. Trying to conclude the mishap now would be a waste of time and energy. Reinhardt didn’t approve nor did Jannette. Even so, their arrogance was shut down by Adete who flew,

“Waste of space,” she added maliciously.

“M-mind your tongue,” Jannette fired back, her body recovered as well as a nasty attitude. Faced with death, the truest nature of humans came to light. She didn’t want to die, her sole purpose was to come here, sit around and do nothing. Happy was she to send adventurers off to their deaths – all of the care and attention was but a facade. What waited was a nice pay-check.

“May I remind you to whom saved thine life?” Adete asked with arms on her hips.

“Tsk,” she clicked her tongue and focused on the lieutenant instead.

“That’s enough,” Achilles intervened, neither knew about Jannette’s truest feelings and emotions. Her true self – just like many, hidden behind a wall, behind an illusion, she lived as if nothing happened.

“Sister, sister,” Emma called.

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“What is it, sister?” Emmy replied.

“Are we going to fight?” Emma asked.

“I don’t think so sister,” Emmy replied.

“Lymsey sisters,” Staxius called, “-can I have a word?” from staring into the distance, he approached where the rest sat and chatted.

“Y-yes,” they spoke simultaneously, “-anything you wish.”

“Looking at what is to come,” the monsters were five minutes out, “-this place is where the last stand will be made. I know not what has happened to the other outposts, nevertheless, this problem needs to be dealt with one at a time,” rather than the twins, he spoke to all. They walked and stood in line.

“Hence, all who are to fight here today may well end up dying, I shan’t guarantee a safe return. Out on the field, Kniq will fight as a separate entity to all of us, I shall be solo and if the twins wish, can fight as a duo.”

“Question,” Reinhardt asked, the voice polite and anger subsided – he saw the bigger picture.

“Speak,” Staxius gave the green light.

“Are you not the leader of Kniq?” he asked. A nod later, Staxius replied with, “-indeed I am, however, the four of them have built up an unshakable bond. Jumping in the mix will ruin the flow of things, I’d rather not interfere where there’s a risk of a falling out.” A reply that seemed uncalled for, Undrar and the others wanted more than anything to have him join them. A glance over in their general direction spoke volumes, “-ideally, I would prefer to fight alongside my comrades,” a gentle smile portrayed itself, the first one of the night, many were taken by surprise – especially the twins. “I trust them to have my back,” those words lit a fire under Kniq.

“W-what’s the plan of action then?” Jannette asked in a tired voice.

“Simple,” Staxius faced away, “-the big fellow is mine.” They came in fighting distance, “-the rest is up to you, Viola will be in charge from here on out,” the stance felt more relaxed, the pony-tail untied itself, a black color mist emanated from the body, the hair levitated gently and so did the clothes.

“...” Hearing those words sent shivers down everyone’s spine. “Here they come,” he commented, the intimidating sound of marching made the ground tremble. The evolved goblins were in front of the pack, around fifty in numbers, behind was the giant, one with a broken tooth – one sustained from the first punch.

‘Let’s see if that charade was bark or bite,’ the first step implanted itself into the ground to which it cracked, instantly, he vanished – a gust of wind shot backward. The lieutenant and sergeant were blown back, the twins impaled their weapons into the ground so as to not get pushed away.

“Alright,” Viola spoke, in the distance, the giant got punched, it’s body rocked backward, the sheer power of that impact sent shockwaves around. “Last time we didn’t have the strength nor knowledge to beat what opposed us,” the voice serious, “-today,” her hair changed from blond to black again, “-we have a chance to reclaim our pride as warriors. Let’s make this night a night worth remembering. Not for the deaths, but for the victory that awaits us,” hands-on weapons, Viola left her sword.

“Yes, mam,” the others replied, the aura turned heavy, time had come for the real fight to begin.

“Sister, sister,” Emma called,

“Yes sister, I know,” Emmy replied.

“We’re fighting as well,” they voiced.

“Let’s get this started, Achilles and I will be the front line, Avon will provide magical support and Deadeyes will stay back to protect the officers as well as covering fire. The usual formation, Lymsey sisters, I know not of your fighting style,” she paused, “-therefore,” a smile later, “-care do join us?” she resumed.

About three kilometers from the RFS, Kniq engaged. Staxius and the giant fought about four kilometers from the place where Kniq stood. Gunshots after gunshots, strays were killed instantly without time to recover. The regeneration seemed to have been weakened somehow. It was apparent on the first swing from Achilles, their wounds didn’t heal as fast as before. With Staxius leading the charge – focus heightened for everyone else. They concentrated so much that the door to Clarity was forced open. The

unwavering connection made by those four, he sensed it earlier. Wills and intent aligned, no words nothing, the four became one – together, the fabled barrier broke.

The past two fights didn't suffice to show their full potential. What was seen as weak was but a misunderstanding, none knew how to act after Staxius joined the fray – hence his reason for not staying close. Distant but there, the man was a good leader. Flashes of light spell cast, the ground turn from a lovely meadow to a decrepit land of flame and heat, Avon used an ancient spell named, *Infernal Wrath,* also known as the devil's playground. Not only was he the one improving, but Achilles' innate speed and physical strength also tripled in size. It got to a point where everything stopped, she walked and sliced off heads without breaking a sweat. For Deadeyes, the shots could not be any clearer, a red target with a line coming from the scope guided the man to where the bullet should travel. Some shots had arcs and angles that normal humans could but dream about. On one occasion, he lifted the gun so high up it was close to 90 degrees. No target since the scope stared at the starry sky. *Bang,* the trigger pulled, it hit its target.

The most impressive of all was Viola, she hovered above the battlefield and laughed maniacally. Her lips turned bright red, using her index, a simple motion caused damage on par with the highest tier of explosion magic. The goblins died one after the other with frightening speed. A sliver of their full potential, the pillars of Kniq – a party that would be forever etched into history.

"J-just who are they?" Jannette asked, her mind went black after seeing the rampage. Both held binoculars and watched. "Can't you see," Reinhardt smiled, "-they're the ones who will help in pushing back those devils. Underestimating them was a foolish idea. That man wasn't being ignorant to my plea, he trusted his party whole-heartedly. There was no doubt that this fight was won from the start."

"Sister," Emma called, "-watch out," Emmy yelled. The duo fought, not as impressive as those four but held strong. Killing two was the most manageable. A clear difference in power and skill, "-Is this the thing they call hope?" Emma asked whilst standing. "No sister," Emmy replied, "-that's no hope, but total annihilation," they stared, the ground broke, fires burnt monsters left and right. Paired with Undrar who flew and killed without mercy. What displayed before the twins were simply, hell.

Bang, the last shot fired, all were exterminated. *Huff, puff,* Undrar landed, Avon and Achilles stood back to back – the consciousness returned. "... the devil's playground dispelled, once a meadow and now a ravaged piece of land, the battle ended. "Clarity..." they spoke in tandem after which exhaustion forced Kniq on their knees. "We did it," Undrar added, the voice tired, "-indeed," sat in the middle of a man-made carnage, the trio rested.

"WATCH OUT," a scream followed by a shockwave, it blew the party away. Staxius teleported, the giant threw a tree at them.

"-W-what is happening?" barely conscious, Avon asked. *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

"Lymsey sisters, do take care of them," he stood near the RFS with people in tow, "-there are supplies inside," he teleported back out. 'That should take care of them,' the fight resumed, '-good job everyone,' without weapons, Staxius used magic. Void Fireballs paired with hand to hand combat, each assault left damage. However, it could but absorb and return said force. The injuries healed; the ogre had taken all the healing abilities for himself. Thus, the reason why the goblins felt weak.

“Sergeant,” Reinhardt called.

“Yes?” confused, she asked.

“Is it just me or does he not have a weapon?” the tone worrisome.

“Upon closer look,” she stared, the binoculars helped, “-there are no weapons,” she added. The moon provided a bit of lighting which helped visibility. Bit by bit, the giant pushed through – punch after punch, the defense of said monster increased.

“Guys,” Deadeyes called, the repercussion from being in Clarity didn’t leave much of a lasting effect. “-I think master is in trouble.”

“Surely you jest,” Achilles asked – sat on the hood of the RFS, the trio watched. The potions helped in restoring part of their stamina.

“I think he’s right,” Viola agreed, the main revealer was how much farther the beast walked.

‘Oh boy,’ from running up and down the arms, Staxius continued to target the head. Each blow as powerful as a gunshot, the body didn’t give. *ROAR,* it screamed to which the balance grew unstable. It forced him to retreat, this fight went on for ten minutes now, the giant stood in viewing distance. It had made it close to the RFS. Whilst in-midair, the beast charged and headbutted Staxius. *Dark-Arts: Magical Barrier,* it broke the second the spell was conjured. The force sent him flying, *poof,* blood dripped, he stood just shy of the RFS.

“A-are you a-alright?” they asked.

Staxius stood with arms crossed, he bled from all over. *Blood-arts: Crimson Thread,* all the blood stopped, they levitated towards him, it made a halo over the head. “Just die already,” the wrist and fingers moved, the halo broke, it formed into large spears, *Snap,* as if bullets, it pierced the giant. Wings sprouted from the back to which a single flap later, he hovered. Holes through which a greenish liquid flowed, the giant screamed in pain, its eyes turned red – a sign of being enraged. Without giving it time to breathe, the spears changed into wires which nonchalantly sliced the beast apart. The assault wasn’t done just yet, from sharp wires, it changed into tiny droplets that seemed as if the rain. Another snap later, the chopped-up body was bombarded by the bloody rain. From tiny crystals, even with all that damage done, the blood returned to liquid form. To make sure that it hadn’t time to rise, it swallowed the pieces. From pierced to chopped then bombarded after which devoured, the giant changed from flesh to dust in less than a few seconds.

“Toying around with prey isn’t a good thing you know,” Adete commented whilst drooling.

“Tell me that again with a straight face.” With the fight over, the blood returned to being a halo over the head.

“How’s everyone holding up?” he landed and asked. None had prior knowledge about the vampiric power and form. The sole response was silence and confusion.

“Master?” Deadeyes asked. Long sharp teeth, wings, halo, and the power to control blood, “-are you?” he didn’t want to say it.

“Yes,” Staxius replied without blinking, “-I’m a vampire.”

Chapter 202: New Dawn

"..." Struck by a sudden jolt of curiosity, the statement made many envious. More than that, the aura around the place intensified. The main culprits were the military officers who stood, fear glued them to the ground. The chilled aura emanating all round was from Staxius's appearance.

"Guess I never told anyone about the changes," as if nothing happened, the man returned to normal. The wings vanished, the blood halo traveled from the head and to his hand. A snap later, from crystals, it reverted to liquid – one darker and viler than usual. The reason was that the giant had been consumed.

"Any way you look at it," Deadeyes spoke, "-we did it," he smiled.

"Kniq got their revenge," Achilles cheered. "At last, we can move on," Undrar added. "Way to keep us on edge," Avon pouted, the last moments of the fight sent shivers. A headbutt that thrust him across, the landing could be seen by two distinct footsteps – one that cracked the ground.

"V-vampire?" The lieutenant asked, answers were needed, of which most ignored their plea. The battle was won, Reforge stood alive and well.

"We best return to the camp," no time for celebrations. Jannette could not but fear the people who just entered the vicinity. The twins hit it off with Viola – they grew acquainted quickly. Once inside the RFS, fatigue from earlier caught up again – to which many fell prey to sleep.

"Just what are you?" A few minutes later, the RFS drove. Forced to take a detour since the area was destroyed, Reinhardt asked.

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"No one particular," the reply uninterested, no intonation nor feeling behind the words, focused on the road, the battle ended without much hassle.

Meanwhile, at Ground-zero, an overwhelming attack that lasted a few hours slowed in pace. Many casualties later, it finished as well. The Captain got to his feet, sadly, the first news to reach was the defeat of Reforge. A blacked-out spot on the map made the heart shudder. Regret about the selfish request for back-up, it bugged him. Jen remained atop the wall to give orders. Similarly, with the defeat of the giant so far away, the attacks stopped simultaneously.

"Jen," Elmer rushed up the wall.

"Captain," she called, "-you should be resting."

"Don't worry about that," the voice serious, "-I need you to send men as soon as possible to Reforge," to which the map was shown.

"..." it was only he who knew the situation. It took a few seconds for the lady to gather her thoughts. "I understand," unlike the crew at Reforge, Ground-zero had officers with more experience.

"Any who can fight," from atop the wall, her yelling didn't reach far.

"Any who can fight," almost subconsciously, people with louder voices relayed the message down to the medical camp. It formed a sort of chain.

"You are to set off to Reforge at once, the outpost has been compromised – threat level is black." Her message echoed; that threat level meant trouble. No time to rest nor breathe, those able to fight – the spotting group, set out immediately. With the help of a transport truck stationed back at the outpost, the journey would take a few hours. It all depended on the driver's pacing. The distance separating each outpost was twice the journey from Claireville Academy to the Capital.

"Let's go, people," party leaders took command and led the journey back.

"Threat level black is bad..." chatter spread; many were doubtful. "-yeah, it's basically when an outpost has been invaded and defeated by monsters." Thus, with stamina's semi-decent, the spotting crew set out.

"Here we are," the RFS stopped.

"Just look at this place," Reinhardt commented, they stepped out the vehicle.

"Don't lower your guards, there may be more around," Staxius advised caution.

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"We need to reach the control room," Jannette exclaimed.

"The black threat level," the officers remembered. If another message wasn't sent through – all the outposts would set out for a search and rescue.

'They need rest,' the eyes closed – no trace of auras anywhere, "the dormitory should be safe," Staxius said reassuringly. "Go take the night off, I'll stand guard – doing battle in that pitiful state will only bring trouble."

"Yes, master," there was no arguing, most were half-asleep.

"Staxius," Viola remained, the rest led the way, "-here," a long and refined object got placed on his back.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked and turned.

"Not really," the face reddened from exhaustion, she handed over the sword that was gifted to her, "-it doesn't seem right to not see a swordsman like you not wield a sword," the tone held sincerity.

"There's no need for that," hands placed atop her shoulders, "-I'm fine," the voice reassuring and face unwavering, "-there's no need for my sister to go unarmed."

"Oh... ok," she smiled.

"Good job out there," from her shoulders he patted her head, "-demi-goddess," a little bit of teasing to relax her mood.

"Cut it out," the face more joyous, "-demi-goddess or no," she walked, "-still can't compare with Lord Death's heir," a turn followed by a wink – Undrar returned with the group.

"What's the plan now?" from out of nowhere, Adete spoke.

"We wait and watch," the looming heaviness lifted. 'That dark-aura when we first came isn't a mere coincidence,' stood atop the broken-down military building, he stared. 'I'm positive there's more to this

than meets the eye, we are yet to find the real culprit whomst killed all those adventurers. A line is drawing itself, the path, for now, remains shady and dark – but there’s no way those who dared attack my companion will live to see another day.’

Directly below, Reinhardt furiously worked to get the connection up and running. It took a few tries and a lot of time. In the end, a message was sent across, “Reforge has been retaken from monsters. All who sent reinforcements are to withdraw.” The good news reached Ground-zero a bit too late since the fighters were already on way. It would have been pointless to call them back. Assigned to Reforge initially, a sense of security from seeing familiar faces might boost their morals. This was what Elmer thought.

The night turned to day – the camps lived to see another sunrise. Reports about the group that saved Reforge were spread across the network. A mere five individuals who held their own against evolved creatures. None could probably give an accurate description of how strong those foes were. The information that mattered was, “a guild retook Reforge without external assistance.” All the adventurers heard the news, many curious to who was that strong to led such an operation. Guesses fell quickly to the high-tier guilds, some said it was Blades-end whilst others said Pegasus.

“Look at the state of this place,” at the break of dawn, the trucks arrived. Quietness lifted; the place came to life. Giant footmarks laid across the ground. On the third floor, one of the buildings was torn, impact and carnage reigned supreme. Not to forget the massive hole left on the second floor, “What happened?” around twenty people came as back-up. Most separated from their parties, last night was indeed chaotic.

“Rise and shine,” a deep voice spoke. A dark figure leaned on the door frame.

“Five more minutes,” head deep into their pillows, none wanted to wake.

“Care to handle this for me?” courteously, Staxius asked Adete to do the honors. To which she bowed and gracefully hovered – it seemed as if she accepted a dance.

“WAKE UP MAGGOTS!” the scream rendered the room unbearable. “Did the sandman put his member into thine EYES?” a vulgar sentence that made Staxius crack up.

“Fine...” two bunk beds, left one for the ladies and right for the men. The tavern should be up and running in a few hours – we’ll be able to get breakfast then. For now, better get ready – we’re going for a run.” Time was barely six in the morning; the truck arrived the same as Staxius got the party ready for a run.

“Staxius, Staxius,” the twins called from out the dormitory – they were both awakened by Adete’s scream.

“Overly familiar, aren’t we?” the reply cold, he glared.

“Sister, sister,” they hugged one another, “-what is it Emma?”

“I think we angered the master,” Emmy pointed out, their legs shook.

“Get in line,” he ordered, to which they obeyed.

“What’s the occasion?” Avon asked for it was rare to do these things.

“Nothing particular,” the voice monotonous, “-some fresh air should help with recovery,” he faced away, “-this isn’t a competition. Use this occasion to take in the scenery, and most of all, fill up those lungs,” the run began.

“Who are they?” the adventurers walked the same time they left. “Don’t know and don’t care, we better meet the lieutenant,” all pretty much thought the same thing.

“They’re here,” Jannette pointed out.

“I know,” the duo made way to the courtyard. From there, a summary of what had transpired the night before was given. Minutes turned to hours, Staxius unknowingly ran farther out, in the vague direction of the third outpost.

“Master,” Avon kept up with the pace, they ran across the road that went around the edge of Oxshield. “Is there a specific reason why we’re running?” doing something bold like this was out of character.

“Not really,” he spoke, “-call it an impulse,” behind, the rest kept up easily.

‘Of course,’ the mouth said one thing and mind thought another, ‘-there’s a reason why we’re running,’ he stared in front. ‘the briefing will take some time, and waiting around while doing nothing for the taverns and inn to get ready is but a waste of time. Us running like this will set their mind off what happened yesterday. I also wanted to check out how the walls would be built,’ not much could be seen but tis was enough. With eyes closed, the enormous barrier around Totrya was seen for the first time. That run was a way to see if there were any inconsistencies.

Minutes turned to hours, the sun rose, the run came to an end. “I’m beat,” Deadeyes sighed but held strong. The twins miraculously kept up the pace. As predicted, the briefing ended, the ghost town felt more alive. People moved around – the inn served food.

“Look,” many heard the news, “-it’s the guild that retook Reforge,” whispers and idle chatter. Drenched in sweat, they stopped.

“Go wash up,” Staxius ordered, “-as far as we’re concerned, feel free to take the day off. Till orders are given, do as pleased.” Two claps later, they dispersed.

“Damn,” a man examined, “-just look at how intense those guys are,” the last to leave was Staxius, he stood and waited for all to leave.

“Man,” Deadeyes sighed, “-my body feels much lighter than ever before,” he spoke with amazement.

“Now that I think about it,” Avon commented, “-I feel the same way,” he smiled. The heavy feeling lifted, even the girls including the twins felt it. The reason for such a feeling was the fight yesterday. Tis was when he conjured forth the wings and flew out – many thought it was just a gust of wind – however, it was a concentrated escape of mana. One potentially lethal to those who decided to stand and not move about. The purpose of that run was so that he could secretly filter out the mana. Partly responsible, tis was his job. Exercise meant more energy which resulted in the mana getting excited and easier to control.

‘Now that’s out of the way,’ a quick shower later, Staxius headed to the military area.

“Yo genius,” a man called, one with a scar atop his head, “-that area is restricted to adventurers and others alike,” the tone unsightly, backed by three others, they approached.

“Quite peculiar,” Staxius courteously faced the men approaching

“Yea, you better not anger Reinhardt, that man’s cray, cray.”

“With all due respect, I think I’ll be fine.” Unbothered, he turned around and headed straight for the door.

“Stop or we’ll kill ya,” they threatened and pulled out a knife.

“Rogues,” he stopped, “-I wonder how ruffians like you got here,” the tone monotonous.

“Good, just turn around nice and easy,” they chuckled.

Chapter 203: Rogue’s lie

“This is easier than I thought,” the man with a scar voiced proudly. The three behind held knives, no killing intent behind the eyes. They wielded the knives as if it were toys, not even a proper grip, they held it as if it were a kitchen utensil and not a tool for slaughter.

‘What’s the proper way to deal with these idiots.’ Staxius thought; the mind wandered with countless possibilities and outcomes. ‘A bit of intimidation should work fine,’ the eyes emotionless, he watched, ‘-these guys aren’t killers. Just people trying to play tough,’ from emotionless, it turned into a glare, ‘weaklings trying to act tough, how annoying.’

“Ay, don’t glare at us,” the leader of said band spoke, the voice higher but wasn’t clear. It felt as if something was caught in the throat, a sluggish tone of an old man paired with the vigor of a teenager.

“Before we do anything,” Staxius asked, “-have you ever killed someone?” the voice and emotions changed to a man afraid and not wanting to die.

“O-of course not,” one of the three behind added without much thought.

“Shut up you idiot,” the one in the middle elbowed the first who spoke.

“What does that have to do with anything,” the leader asked in turn, “-killed or not have killed, who cares, there’s a first to everything,” he licked the knife, “you can be my first. The first to deflower my consciousness and turn me into a murderer,” the eyes firm and grip tightened, the leader meant business.

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“Pathetic,” tired of the game, Staxius’s aura changed, “-I don’t know how idiots like you managed to join the outposts,” he gave a side-glance to the military office, *Death Element: Unleash Aura,* the pressure that oozed forced the little gang on their feet.

“W-what is h-happening,” asked the leader whomst could barely stand much less kneel, their whole body laid on the floor face first.

“The answer is simple,” he walked and turned the leader’s head with his feet, the intent was to stare into that man’s eye, “-you see, killing someone doesn’t have much merit. After all, once a person is dead, there’s no coming back and no having fun.” Discreetly, he bit part of his inner cheek, a small cut that allowed blood to flow, *Blood-Arts: Crimson Thread,* the blood dripped from the side of the lips. Unnoticeable unless getting close, “-if one wants to kill,” the blood raced down his arm and off the index finger, it attached itself with the knives, “-then one must be ready to be killed,” an upward motion later, the weapons levitated and placed themselves headfirst on their necks. Unable to speak from the pressure, tears formed, it dripped on the dusty ground which turned moist.

“Now tell me,” with killing intent, he spoke, “-are you ready to die?” the knives began to slowly pierce the skin. The idleness changed to moans, they hummed frantically and tried to get away, the feeling of dread as if face to face with death himself, the men gulped and struggled.

“That’s the difference between people who kill and people who pretend,” unleash aura dispelled. Three of the four knives now hovered behind Staxius, one remained on the leader’s neck.

“W-we’re s-sorry,” they begged, “w-we won’t do a-anything of that s-sort no l-longer,” they cried, “f-forgive o-our f-foolishness.” Not feeling generous, *Slash,* the fourth knife sliced, blood poured – even after all that begging, no mercy. As if disgusted, Staxius turned and walked.

“M-monster, d-don’t you h-have a heart,” they cried and rushed over to the man who laid in his blood. *SNAP,* the three knives thrust as if bullets, it narrowly missed the three follower’s head and landed behind. Only the tip of the grip was seen, the force at which it was sent made the weapon bury itself.

“You have five minutes before he dies, either go get a healer or buy a potion from one of my companions,” the metal door opened.

“Unbelievable,” Adete commented.

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“What’s wrong with that?” he fired back.

“Five minutes to find a healer or he dies, how cruel can you be?” she voiced with a joyful tone.

“At least I gave them a time-limit, those who are destined to live shall live, and those who’s time have come to an end, shall die.”

Knock, Knock, a few turns here and there, at the back of the facility, protected behind barriers and cameras, the control room stood. Jannette and Reinhardt were inside trying to relay messages across the network.

“Who’s that?” the sergeant asked for it was rare to have someone visit this part of the building.

“Check the camera, I’ve got people to contact,” Reinhardt sat in the middle with a C-shape desk which faced a giant screen upfront. The sergeant was seated on the lieutenant’s immediate right-side.

“On it,” she replied and sent the footage on the giant screen.

“Holy...” what they saw was Adete staring deep into the camera, she purposefully shook it to garner their attention. “Get back here,” a voice in the background was heard followed by knocking.

“Break down the door,” she gave up and returned to Staxius’s head.

“My pleasure,” the stance taken was one of a man about ready to kick down the door.

“Open the door quick,” urged Reinhardt to which Jannette ran.

Bam, “-I apologize for the intrusion,” nonchalant, Staxius walked in, the sergeant stopped midway. Confused, the lieutenant sighed. The door, supposed to be military-grade protection that could stop gunshots and explosion was kicked in as if nothing.

“How do you have so much power?” Jannette asked and returned to her desk.

“I got lucky,” the tone smug.

“I’d like to thank you for saving the outpost,” Reinhardt was reluctant to start a conversation, “-but I’ve got people to contact. Last night was more than we could handle,” the tone sincere, he went back to work.

“I see,” uninterested, he changed targets to Jannette. “If I can’t get information out of the lieutenant, then,” he stood and stared, the lady could but feel intimidated. Feeling her demeanor, Staxius changed tactics, “-there’s no need to be threatened. I’m here just to ask a few questions,” the voice friendly and approachable, her guard lowered.

“As you wish,” from the desk, she leaned back and stood, “Sergeant Jannette at your service, how may I be of help?”

“I’d like to know more about the wall and how adventurers are being recruited. The whole process from start to finish,” from standing, he took a seat facing Jannette and sat.

“As you wish,” she breathed, “-I’ll try to make it as short as possible. To which we’ll start with the wall. Tis a project started around a year ago, during the time monsters became a threat. Seeing their strength increase daily, the kingdom contacted the main-land for support. Thus the idea came into play, to seclude off a rather unusable province from the general populous. I know not the details of how this came to pass but its how we ended here. At first, it was the military who was in charge. Sadly, after the first checkpoint of the first sector of the wall was built, we realized that monsters could not be beaten using ordinary means. Hence, the idea for adventurers to help. It was already obvious that people wanted to fight on the front lines to get loot and grow powerful. It was there that warriors of any rank could partake in the battles. Since the wall was being built far away from prying eyes – it went unnoticed. Many clueless adventurers remained at Reforge where they fought without knowledge of what was happening. With each passing day, the intensity grew, the project had to be made known to those who were willing to fight on our behalf. To that end, the roads leading up to the south were blocked off. The reason used was that the monster had infected the area,” she paused and breathed.

“That’s how it all began,” it resumed, “-reckless fools in search of glory were sent to their death without any guidance nor help. The death count was unthinkable – Raulf decided that enough was enough. Restrictions had to be put in place, to which six high-ranking officers talented in strategy would be sent to Hidros. Tis was when we arrived, each outpost had their platoon of which contained three to four squads of five members each. As time went on, the braves died and the cowards survived. We could but rely on adventurers; those who sought out to come aid in our battle were welcomed. Only tier-9 and

above are admitted. Too high a limit and there'd be no one willing to fight. Of course, they would not fight for free. Fighting here proved to be a boon – ranking up and getting stronger was easier than anywhere else. The money was good as well – for each beast slain, the party responsible would be rewarded by the guild. Funding for said system came from monster drops,” she ended, “-that’s about all I know.”

“I see,” he paused, “-but,” the eyes narrowed, “-you still haven’t told me about the wall itself.”

“That’s self-explanatory, there’s nothing special about it. Just a robust wall that stands between us and the devils. The bricks used are imbued with high-tier protection magic. One that has the property of pushing back small monsters – though it’s hit and miss at the moment, the research has yet to be done.”

“Thanks for the help then,” he stood, “-any news about what happened to Updust?”

“I’m afraid not,” Reinhardt spoke, “-there’s a scouting party who should be reaching Stonegrove later today. From there on, they’ll head to Updust. Not only us, but Fusefall has sent a party of their own. Rumor has it that a burning wall of flames had laid siege to that territory. But as said, tis but rumors.”

“Guess there’s nothing to be done,” he headed for the door, “-I’ll stick around till Reforge is ready to stand on its own. Afterward, I’m headed to Stonegrove, keep me informed about the situation. If anything arises, a call for back-up by the other outposts, then call me immediately,” to which the details were given. The door closed and all returned to their duties.

“Staxius...” stood outside, Achilles waited with arms on her hips.

“What’s the matter?” unbothered, he asked as if tired of speaking.

“Did you really injure a man so that he would have to pay us to buy a potion?” her stare filled with doubt and disappointment.

“Listen,” he walked, “-they wanted to kill me,” the voice changed to one dramatical and as if shocked, “-I was but a scared little fledgling who tried to seek help from the Lieutenant,” the face matched his tone.

“Very funny,” she laughed sarcastically.

“Well, they asked for it,” the melodrama ended, “-trying to steal at the break of dawn is uncalled for.”

“I-its h-him,” they approached the courtyard where a crowd had gathered. The man stood with another scar on his head, Avon and Viola tended to his injuries. The looks received were those of disdain.

“He assaulted me and my men when we were just trying to mind our own business,” he continued to lie. The face had a smug look but none cared for they were malicious towards Staxius based on prejudice.

“Oh,” Staxius proclaimed as if surprised. He walked forward, the man sat with Viola and Avon on either side.

“Is what the man says true?” Viola asked for she could not have cared any less.

“Poor fellow,” he approached and knelt, the voice filled with pity and woe, “-how could anyone do this,” he asked, “at the break of dawn in a state of drowsiness from waking up, how could someone attack those who had fought tirelessly the night before. It’s shameful, after a hard night of deprived sleep and

not to mention the dim lighting, how could someone know who attacked who. I'm sorry," Staxius apologized, "-I'm sorry that the world isn't as peaceful as we might have thought," he patted his shoulder, "you need rest, my friend." Time was around 7 in the morning. "-I'll make sure to find who did thee wrong," dignified and polite, the crowd had second thoughts.

"At least you weren't hurt," cheered one.

"Be grateful for his party," another yelled.

"Get some sleep," to which many returned to their prior activity.

"Now then," Staxius whispered, the crowd dissipated, "-try that again and I swear I'll kill you without a second thought," he stood. *Death Element: Unleash Aura,* it forced the man onto the ground, *CRACK,* mercilessly, Staxius stomped onto both of the rogue's arms.

Chapter 204: Rogue's will

Bones shattered; the excruciating pain spread from the arms upwards. The man tried to scream and move to no avail. Staxius's aura with the strength to overpower a vampire was used on a mere rogue. The crowd which gathered were gone, the way he spoke cleared all doubts. They assumed that the one who accused was confused and dazed. Achilles, Avon and Viola watched; their faces horrified by what he did.

"What have you done," Achilles grabbed his shirt and gritted.

"Isn't it obvious," he returned her gaze with one twice as imposing. "-I'm clearing out trash," a quick tug, he cleared her grip.

"Listen to me," he knelt, the eyes devoid of emotions, "-I spared your pitiful life earlier, and this is how you repay me?" disgusted, one thought came to mind and that was to end it all. "Don't get me wrong, I've got a bit of compassion inside but reserved for the people I trust and admire. In thy case, nothing, a pebble on the road, a drop of water in an overflowing river – worthless. Therefore, I'm taking both arms as compensation for all the trouble. Pull something like that, and I'll take the legs. Next, I'm going to break you limb by limb till the head is the only thing left functional. At that stage, I'll gouge out the eyes, then pierce the ears, and lastly, I'll burn your tongue. Double cross me again – and I swear that I'll end all who you deem precious as well," the face serious, the posture stern and aura intense, he stood.

Scared beyond belief, even the party members could but step away. What Staxius said was honest and true. Unfortunately, the twins overheard everything and gulped.

"Now then," with eyes as cold as ice, he continued to slowly crush the man's arms. All the way from the hand to the elbow then shoulders, nothing spared nor left for luck. Slow, meticulous and excruciating, the man suffered relentlessly. This was done out in the courtyard, publicly where all could see. Despite that, none could care less since their attention was someplace else. Each crack sent nauseating sounds, Avon, Achilles, Undrar, and the Lymsey sister watched unable to do anything. In that instant, many realized just how cruel the man they called master was. All the small glimpses of happiness and comfort from him was genuine. It grew to the point where many took it for granted.

Following each crack, bone fragments pierced through the muscles and skin. A bloodied mess of which Adete took care. She hovered with her arms out, all the blood that bled levitated and formed a crimson orb.

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Crack, he finished. "May this serve a lesson, don't take favors granted by others free." Anger, hate, and despair emanated from the man. "Listen very carefully," the moment it ended, he voiced seriously, "remember what I said, try as much as to cry or scream then I'll show you what true pain feels like." Unleash aura dispelled, free to move again, the man stared up at Staxius, adrenaline took over, the arm numb and devoid of motion.

"You fucking monster," he gritted, the face filled with tears and snot, "-FUC," *SLASH.*

The twins hurled, Achilles stared away in pain, Viola lowered her gaze and Avon shook his head. Rather than keeping his mouth shut, the man tried to scream and lash out. Enough was enough, using the orbs Adete gathered, in a blink of an eye, it changed into a blade and cut the rogue's tongue clean off. He coughed and gasped for air, the blood rushed and drowned the inside. Not wanting to let him die yet, Staxius made it so the blood had a place to escape rather than getting killed. To stop the bleeding, the orb solidified and froze the injury in place. A pink muscle laid on the floor, to which he stomped without care. The persistence vanished, face down and seeing his tongue get crushed – the man's survival instinct took over. Resistance would be futile; the eyes lost its vigor – he gave up.

"Getting my hand dirty this early in the morning isn't good," *Ancient Magic: Teleportation,* he vanished with the man in tow.

Nothing, the courtyard remained as innocent as before. No one realized what happened, the sisters were left frightened to their core.

"V-viola," Emma approached.

"W-was that t-the guild l-leader?" Emma asked, tears flowed. Unable to look them in the eye, Viola stared at the floor. Achilles could not believe her eyes; she fell to the floor. "How cruel can one be?" she gulped with her hands over her mouth.

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"It's best to forget what we saw here today," Viola sniffed and gathered her thoughts. "That goes for you two as well," she turned and embraced the twins. They cried wholeheartedly; it got the attention of the others.

"Poor girls," some pitied, "-they probably lost their party," the adventurers sympathized without knowing the real reason.

"It's been a long time," Viola spoke again after a few minutes. "Let's go somewhere quieter," she offered and led the rest to the dormitory. As silent as a morgue, the party sat and wondered.

"I still don't believe it," Avon spoke, the rest sat opposite one another.

"Let's not dwell on the matter," Viola's mind returned to normal. The only ones who were deeply touched by said incident were the twins and Achilles. Avon wasn't sad, the boy was amazed.

“Viola,” Emma called, “-how can you be so calm around a leader like him?” Emmy completed the question. “Aren’t you afraid?” they wept.

“Honestly,” she sighed, “-I’m scared as well,” the gaze faced upwards. “Behind all that, there lives a man who cares. Staxius cares about people he swore to protect and help. Only those who are worthy will be given mercy, the rest can go to hell. The world is a battlefield, the strongest survive and the weakest die. Adapt as much as you want, but if the strongest decides to hunt you down, then it’s game over. Outwit thy way to a better future. Needless to say, this doesn’t apply to the man we obey, he’s as smart as he’s strong.”

“Don’t worry so much,” Avon intervened, “-it’s all good,” the voice casual. “Why worry about things that are beyond our control. What happened earlier was a shame but it’s to be expected. Master gave the man a chance to surrender but you saw what I did, he was going to scream,”

“Fair point,” Viola agreed to which the conversation closed.

“I wish it could be as black and white,” Achilles voiced, “-I’m a hero from another time – my belief has always been to protect the weak. There’s no way one who had vowed to the citizen will stand by and watch.” Conflict about what ideals to follow made her on edge.

“Go against the master if you want,” Avon said without the inclination to get involved.

“Is that so,” she thought, “-I’m not angry, but confused as to why that had to be done,” her eyes focused, “-I need answers,” to which the lady stormed out the room.

“Come on you two,” Viola sat with the twins, since they were still teenagers – it would not be right to leave that tragedy to hold their still growing mind back.

Far from the camp, about a thirty-minute run, Staxius teleported. “Isn’t the morning breeze lovely?” he asked – the rogue laid on the floor unable to move.

“AHHHH,” he screamed, the eyes red and cheeks swelled to which he used his legs to move over and bite Staxius.

BAM, annoyed, he kicked the man’s face as if it were a ball. A broken nose, lost teeth and cut cheeks, the man’s vigor rekindled.

“How annoying can you be?” Staxius knelt, and pinched his ears, “-I thought you gave up earlier, what happened, where did all this will come from?” Not able to reply, the man continued to scream, “monster, monster, monster,” is what he thought whilst screaming. Bored, he tugged and removed the ear, “-oh damn,” he held it in front of the eyes. The fight to try and hurt Staxius continued, no matter how much pain was inflicted, the man didn’t concede.

“I’m bored,” nonchalantly, he sat next to the rogue who laid face first on the ground – the adrenaline wore out, all the pain rushed. “I must say you impressed me,” he stared out into the distance. “There’s a reason why you haven’t given up yet,” a glance, the eyes emotionless and face tilted. Even with all that pain throbbing, the rogue didn’t give – he continued to fight.

“It’s hopeless now, no arms, no means of speaking, the hearing is probably beyond recovery and face shattered. There’s no way survival will do any good,” he stood. “That fighting spirit and will to survive is

good, I like it. To which I make this promise, thou unknown by name and spirit, I shall grant thee mercy in the form of a painless death.”

Immortal yet mortal, I, Staxius Haggard, God of death, order thee to leave thy mortal vessel, Soul Extraction.

Eyes which once lit with passion subsided. The rogue died painlessly after having suffered at the hand of Staxius. The will to not give up left an impression, to which he extracted the man’s soul. Like the cursed-sword of old, the emotion left behind was now bound to him. ‘That amount of resentment will serve in the near future – worry not, foolish rogue, I shall find a new vessel for thee to reside in soon.’ The Void flame conjured and burnt the body.

“A roundabout way to kill someone don’t you think?” Adete came forth.

“Not really,” the eyes gazed far out, “-he made an impression.” A grey mist with a skull manifested on his palm. “See, that’s the rogue. Trapped but at peace – his consciousness is gone. We can say that he passed on. I extracted the soul and separated all the dying resentment, hate and all the willingness to survive from the soul. That fighting spirit alone might prove to be the foundation for a new cursed-blade. I could always use Daemonum Gladio, however, it has yet to call on me – that blade is as elusive as a cat.”

The corpse burnt, without much thought, Staxius waited. The trees swayed, the flowers and grass came to life, the sun shone, the wind peaceful and gentle. It could not get any more idyllic than this. As if a dandelion, the ashes followed the wind and scattered around. In the distance, a figure could be seen running.

“Master,” it called.

“Achilles?” he asked and walked, “-slow down.” Out of breath, she panted.

“I have questions,” she spoke whilst breathing heavily.

“Give it a moment,” the voice monotonous, “-gather your breath then speak.”

“I want to know the reason why one would go to such lengths,” she didn’t listen and asked.

“I see,” the voice deep, “-it’s simple,” he walked. “The rogue was a fighter and a fool. I shan’t justify my actions for tis was best.”

“It was best to torture an innocent?” she fired back not knowing the full story. It was expected that one would assume so.

“Innocent,” a side-glance later, “-think again. Why would I go through all that trouble to hurt someone on purpose? Do you really think I enjoy hurting others?” a statement that made Adete laugh. Achilles’ doubt remained strong. “The plan was to stop after crushing the man’s arm. Sadly, he tried to scream and fight back to which I took his tongue. Afterward, once we teleported again, he continued to fight despite the pain. I took his ear and continued the assault without stopping – the spirit wavered but didn’t break. In the end, I slit his neck. The man rests in peace in the afterlife – he shall be reincarnated soon as the son of a nobleman. That became known after I extracted the soul, separated the resentment and regrets. He shall be fine,” the voice reassuring, Achilles gave.

“May I ask where’s the body?”

“Cremated and one with the flowers and trees,” they walked towards the outpost, “-he died peacefully, tis a given for the fight for survival made an impression.”

At peace with what Staxius said, Achilles let out a smile. Staxius’s way of evaluating people seemed unequal at best but there was a purpose behind each action. It was nice to see that he didn’t kill for pleasure, an enigma to whomst the hero held at high esteem.

Chapter 205: Fog

The return to the outpost went on without any trouble. Staxius joined up with his party, Deadeyes wasn’t present when the whole ordeal happened. The Lymsey sisters were traumatized heavily. No inspiration, nothing, Viola was out of ideas to what she should do. In hopes of calming her troubles, he who was responsible got involved. A bit of dark-arts, emotional control, and wit later, the twins’ vivid memory was replaced with ones that were tamer. Nothing extraordinary, the man only but helped the girls have a good time.

Meanwhile, inside the office, Reinhardt and Jannette worked tirelessly. Their minds focused on the situation at hand. Reports from Fusefall were sent across – the scouting party from that outpost managed to survey the land. The rumors of people burning when getting close to the anomaly were true. None knew what it was, a heavy-fog blocked everything out. An impermeable wall of unknown. The monster attacks were focused on Ground-Zero and Reforge only, the others were left alone.

It took Elmer and Jen a few hours to evaluate the damage sustained. Many lost their lives sadly, with forces as tight they were – there remained only one option. A special request to the builders to fix the communication was placed. One of higher priority, connection to the main-guild had to be made.

Time passed without notice, it reached noon. Ground-zero was where most happened. The antenna got fixed, the builders chose to obey the Captain’s orders.

“It’s fixed,” said a man dressed in yellow, “-if you would excuse us, there’s preparation to be made,” followed by a team of six; they returned to the second checkpoint.

“Captain,” Jen called – each outpost had the same layout. Identical to the last detail, since it was last minute; not much thought could be placed in esthetics. The activity here was sorely lacking, no merchants nor traders. The taverns and inns only served on tight schedules. The people who worked here were scared beyond belief. Every night was a hell – they lived in perpetual fear of the wall being breached. Little did they know that said wall would be the beacon of hope for Hidros someday.

“Yes?” sat inside the office with four assistants as opposed to them alone, Elmer studied and evaluated the situation.

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“Communication is up and running,” to which, the Captain didn’t waste time. Messages were exchanged with Raulf himself, the matter at hand was people to fight for Azure. Last night had been a fluke, if it hadn’t been for Reinhardt’s gamble, Ground-zero would not have survived.

“Captain Elmer, we apologize sincerely for said inconvenience. However, the guild can’t stand to send any more adventurers to the border at this time. We can only do so much, the people under our supervision are but lowly fighters without guilds – the ones who survive off odd jobs and such. A guild named Kniq has already been sent to the vicinity – they’re the best we can do. If more men are needed, there’s always the option of contacting the mid to high-tier independent guilds.” To which afterward, details of said people were given.

“Thanks for everything, Guild Master, we shall do what is necessary to survive,” the exchange ended after a good thirty minutes. Both on either side sat with visible frustration; it was all for naught. Raulf wanted to send more help. Will alone could only take one so far, losing more people right after that defeat would cause unrest.

One option remained for the Outposts, the independent guilds. Phone call after phone call, Elmer phoned everyone in the contact list – from low to mid and high, none wanted to join forces and fight for Hidros. As expected, many were only interested in money and glory, not for the safety of people. Those were the mind-set of their guild leaders which didn’t reflect the whole organization.

“Pathetic,” he sighed, the two names remaining was Blades End and Pegasus.

“Seeing that response, I assume that we’re hopeless when it comes to fighters?” Jen presumed right.

“From what I’ve heard so far, they all but want one thing, easy money. Not to shame the reason for why they might think that way. Hidros is already a hard-enough place to survive, it’s to be expected,” the phone dialed Pegasus first.

“I understand the situation,” after a few minutes, the lady speaking on behalf of the leader replied, “- care to hold for a bit?”

“Greetings Captain Elmer,” a deep voice took over the conversation.

“Greetings, may I have the honor of knowing thy name?” the tone courteous, Elmer felt the power resound across his flesh and body.

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“I’m Arthur Ragenald, guild leader of Pegasus,” it sent shivers, the name was as powerful as the man’s voice.

“Mr. Ragenald, it’s a pleasure, may I assume that you know the details of why I called?” impressed but unshaken, Elmer continued.

“Yes,” he paused, “-the details have been given, it shall be a good learning experience for my recruits. Pegasus is willing to help without care for money nor fame. Two parties of five members of which the lowest rank is Tier-eight Steel and highest Tier-five Ruby shall join thy efforts.”

“Thank you very much,” the voice filled with relief, the phone hung. “The high tier guilds aren’t as bad as I thought, Pegasus is sending over two-party of five people,” Elmer relayed.

“That’s the second strongest guild which focused on combat only,” Jen explained the assistants who stared cluelessly at the Captain. “With them on our side, it’s going to work out.”

“Now for the ranked one guild,” pressure and anxiety, the conversation went similarly. As opposed to the leader replying, tis was the vice-leader, a woman by the name of Luna Nova. Her voice was sharp and stern – it took a bit of convincing.

“I see,” she thought, “-after hearing the story, I’m willing to send over a single party of four members. Tis all we can spare at the moment, it compromises of two Steel ranks, one Tier-six Emerald and Tier-four Bronze which should cover for the lack of numbers,” the phone hung.

“Yes,” he proclaimed, “-another party is being sent our way,” a smile, one big and comforting, “-Ground-zero can finally take a break. Once the second checkpoint is completed, the responsibility of protecting the wall will be sent over to Reforge. Our duty will then change to survey and providing support as is needed. Not to mention that life will be less hectic as now.”

“Yes, I agree,” Jen breathed a sigh of relief. The news about who was to join the efforts was sent across the network.

Time reached three in the afternoon, Kniq remained on standby. Staxius, on the other hand, went monster hunting. Tired of staying still, he teleported from place to place around the vicinity of the border. All that he found were but weaklings. None match the aura that was felt before – the search was for the ones responsible for said incident. Needless to say, rather than waiting for Reforge to give any news nor information – he teleported farther and farther away.

‘Better to see what is going on myself than count on others,’ Once reaching Stonegrove, wings sprouted to which he flew overhead and went to Updust.

“Wait up,” about thirty kilometers from the area, Adete urged for him to stop.

“What’s the matter?” he asked confused to her sudden outburst.

“That fog is trouble,” in form of a giant dome, the entire area was closed off. No one could see inside, the scouting party Reinhardt sent were seen approaching.

“I agree,” they hovered, “-even so,” the eyes locked onto the target -“I’m not that keen on giving up because of a fog.”

“Why am I not surprised,” she rolled her eyes.

“If the rumors are true, then we better buckle up,” no hesitation, five strong flaps later, the body turned into a human bullet. Instantly, they pushed and pierced the outer barrier which had burnt many prior.

‘Oh,’ once inside, all was dark. The skin began to melt. It didn’t bother for they landed. The fog intensified with each step he took, from the skin, it reached the muscles and made way to the bones. It might have seemed reckless, but after a few seconds, *Undrar’s Blessing: Protection against dark-magic,* a boon that blocked out magic from a single element completely. Even with this, the damage continued, *Dark-Arts: Mana cancellation,* the spell cast over the body. A shield that prevented foreign mana from affecting the body. The side effect was the restriction of using mana that meant no magic. The blessing and cancellation worked perfectly with one another.

“We’re in,” he walked, on top of dust, a strong gust of wind carrying metal and debris crashed from all over. Thunder and lightning reigned supreme, the gust also carried water, one if hit any who managed to survive this far – would take their head straight off.

“It’s not worth it,” Adete ordered again, since the spell was cast onto himself – regeneration from the Death Element was limited. The process turned slower than usual and only covered vital organs. The extremities of the fingers and limbs were torn and injured without time to heal, the damage was beyond expectation. Moving around in that state would only spell disaster.

“I guess,” he sighed, wings sprouted, and they retreated. They only made it to two kilometers. “Mother Nature is still as almighty as ever,” he sighed and hovered. An arm sliced off, the legs only bones, with half of the face melted – retreat was the better option than continuing.

“It’s for the better,” Adete added, “-who knows what’s in the middle. A dragon, a god, a demon, or creation itself – that amount of power isn’t normal. There’s no way someone from this realm has that much strength. Either it’s one that can traverse space and time or a descendent from the higher beings.”

“Guess you’re right,” on a small hill that overlooked the area, a break to recover was taken. Good thing that the fog was visible to the naked eye else people might have walked to their deaths. Regeneration kicked back in, he stood as if nothing happened. The same could not be said about the clothes, the right sleeve was gone as well as the pants that changed into shorts.

“Another perfectly good suit ruined,” the head shook in disappointment. “Let’s see if the all-seeing eye can travel inside,” the eyes closed.

“Should have tried that in the first place,” Adete sat with a little burn on her arm.

Concentration heightened, the dormant crimson eye came to life, it burnt vividly then opened. Palm on the ground, a shock later, he jumped out the body then flew over to the barrier. It entered without much trouble – no presence nothing, the weather didn’t affect the vampiric power. Through and through, all that remained was darkness till Updust came in view. Or what was left of said thing, a meteor had crashed, the impact could be seen. One that slowly built with the help of the storm. Nothing else could be seen, there laid something in the middle that powered the whole process – an Orb, one purple and vile. Next to it, a lady to which a single glance later, the all-seeing eye stopped. *Snap,* the right eye bled.

“Guess there’s someone responsible,” he mumbled, the eyeball shattered from one look. “Someone with the power to kill with a single glance, this is going to be a pain,” the voice monotonous.

“Are you alright?” Adete asked over and over again for he fell into a trance. “When in doubt,” her teeth pierced into his neck.

“Again?” the dream broke.

“Yes, again,” her voice stern and worried.

“We better head back. Whoever is responsible for that dome will be at it for a while. That faint glimpse, a familiar face – I know that lady from somewhere.” *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

“Probably mistaken,” Adete justified, “-better not dwell on fragmented memories.”

"I agree, let's focus on the thing at hand," they entered from the front entrance – the clothes torn and a bag filled with Qaisar. Hunting monsters earlier proved to be simple and easy, one after the other, they died without a fight.

"Just look at him," the others who walked about stared in awe, "-I'd like to know more about said individual," many were curious. A meeting had been called a few seconds ago which explained why people moved about more regularly.

"Sergeant," Staxius called. The officer came out of the military building, she walked behind Reinhardt.

"Yes?" she stopped and asked, the lieutenant continued without looking back.

"I'm sorry to ask this, but is there any way I can cash in these Qaisar?" the heavy loot bag fell to the floor.

"O-oh..." taken by surprise, "-that's a r-rather big haul," her eyes wandered from side to side. "May I ask how many monsters you killed?"

"Oh, about two hundred or so," the tone as cavalier as normal.

"TWO HUNDRED," a sudden outburst that went unnoticed. "For now, just keep the coins; with no guild anywhere close – we'll have to wait for a truck to come to collect whatever was earned. The next one should be here in two days."

"I appreciate the help," a gentle smile later, "-you're not that bad a person, even if the real intent is hidden," a remark that touched her deeply.

Chapter 206: Turmoil

"Good afternoon everyone," stood in the middle of the courtyard, the briefing commenced. All who arrived earlier this morning stood in line. No sound, no noise, no unnecessary motion, they were as calm as images. At the back of the line rested Kniq with the Lymsey sisters.

"As most of you know, yesterday Reforge was attacked by beings that have never been seen before. We counted around fifty of humanoid goblins with high-regeneration, information is lacking concerning their weakness. Amongst them, there was also a giant, one bigger than the building to your right. The third floor was damaged courtesy of the said giant. By the first look, it stood bigger and taller than the rumored ogre. Needless to say, the latter is by far the worst threat we can imagine," he paused to let the information be digested. Nervousness paired with the fear of the unknown rose. "Despite this, hope isn't lost. Many of the people sent to Ground-zero should make their way back tomorrow or so. The top-guilds namely: Blades End and Pegasus, have decided to join our fight," the mere mention of those names sent a wave of relief across.

"Question," asked one of the party leaders.

"Go ahead," rather than being stern, Reinhardt felt generous.

"If the humanoid goblins and giant were that big a threat, how come only the military base was destroyed and nothing else?"

“That’s a simple question, as you all know – yesterday’s win was brought about by Kniq, a guild sent over by the guild master himself. It’s safe to say that without their intervention; this briefing would have never taken place. Concerning that question, Staxius, the leader of Kniq, lured the beast farther into the continent. There, after a rather short battle, all who had threatened us, perished.” A nod of acknowledgment later, the leader stepped away.

“Now if there’s any more question, please speak up.”

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“What can we expect later tonight, will those abnormal join the fight?” another leader asked.

“No idea; we’ll have to wait and see,” a pause later, none had questions to which he stepped off.

“Concerning today’s formation,” the sergeant took over, “-seeing there are about twenty people ready to fight. We’ll split into four teams of five. I know many have their parties fighting off at the first outpost. It’s unfair to break up the group for our selfishness but it’s what many signed for. The teams will be reorganized to our discretion, we’ll consider everything. Bound by the same ordeal – strength by unity is what is needed at this moment. Set aside differences and look forward.” Unbalanced with teams scattered around the outpost, this was the only way to come up with a line of defense. Each team would have support, tis was necessary for a long period of time-fighting. The space from Totrya’s border and the would-be wall was about thirty-five to fifty kilometers. Long to allow movement and time to retreat if needed.

“Here,” she went around and handed notes on which was written who would join what team. Two at the front would act as the close-range fighters. One in the middle, those specialized in mid-to-long range combat. The back, those with special talents and skills. This was the formation – primitive and basic at best, they would be separated a kilometer across. Those on the front lines were basically bait if it went wrong. The people at the back were those deemed special and given priority over the others. Many caught onto what Jannette was trying to get at but decided to ignore it.

“Guess we’re the lucky one who shall be the head of the attack,” the first two teams met and got along. The remainder returned to their respective teams. The special unit only but nodded and glared at one another.

“Question,” amidst the chatter, a deep voice called from behind.

“Yes?” Jannette turned to answer the one who spoke.

“What will Kniq be doing?” the eyes cold and voice unimpressed, Staxius approached the officers with torn clothes.

“Oh...” her gaze wandered around again.

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“You’ll be staying back at Reforge to defend the outpost,” Reinhardt jumped in.

“Is that so,” Staxius’s tone felt colder than usual, “-this may be overstepping my boundaries, but I can’t help to see the point in sending two parties to be bait. In that case, it would be better to only send one party and leave the rest behind. After all,” he stared at the special unit, “-those respectful individuals are

being saved for some other purpose. It's quite intriguing." Something was definitely off – foul play of the highest degree.

"Guild Leader," Reinhardt called, "-I know that this situation isn't pleasing for anyone. But I implore you to remain a little tactful."

"Mind your place," a girl from the special unit spat, her eyes filled with disgust.

"I don't know who the hell you are," the others from the same team were riled up, "-but what you say is true. We are being treated differently, those who stand before us must kneel and give their lives, we're superior to weaklings like them," from silent, they approached menacingly. Two ladies and three men, eyes filled with confidence and pride, the kind of people Staxius liked to torment.

"Hey man, I appreciate you sticking up for us," the leader of the vanguard came forth, "-but it's alright. Adventurers have their pride and some are more worthwhile than others. To be honest, we're fine with fighting to our death if it gives Hidros a surviving chance," the face innocent and tone sincere.

"It's all good," the other leader said politely as well, "-you better not get involved with that special team, there's a reason why the officers want them alive. They have the potential to become Platinum ranked, a talent that comes rarely. Compared to us whose potential is but Ruby or Emerald, there's no helping it."

"Hear that?" the first lady said with a voice of disgust, "-don't jump in thinking you're a hotshot," their eyes lit with hate, each one got ready to fight. Hand on swords, fingers on trigger.

"I see," he turned around and ignored them, "-I'd take adventurers with a good heart rather than egotistical idiots anyway. What's the point of being strong if it turns one into a pest, a nuisance."

"Guild leader or no, we don't care," the special unit jumped.

Death Element: Unleash Aura, their faces hit the ground instantly, the so-called platinum potential adventurers could but do nothing.

"Platinum potential," he added, all stood perplexed, the officers remained silent, "-I don't care about potential, what is important is how a person behaves. I loath people who act high and mighty. Some may say the same about me, but I care not," he knelt, "-listen up special unit. I don't know who or what you are, my purpose in coming here was to provide aid to the outposts. All I asked for was some clarification about the formation to make my job easier. Since the intent I felt was malicious whilst I only asked a mere question, doesn't that make it unfair?" he stood.

"Sergeant," he called, the voice imposing and powerful, "-I want to know what makes these five so special."

"Guild Leader, Staxius," Reinhardt intervene, "-this is enough, it's a clear violation. The orders given by us is final, your job is to obey our command, nothing more nothing less. Don't do anything foolish," though intimidated, the man stood strong.

"Dear Reinhardt," Staxius walked over, "-as it stands now, I could end everyone and everything here without batting an eye. My ways of doing things have always followed the path of bloodshed, therefore – I'd highly consider the option of not interrupting me when I do my job."

“There he goes again,” Viola sighed and watched.

“That’s him for you, always itching for a fight and conflict,” Avon added with a chuckle.

“The man who we call master is truly the worse of the worse,” Achilles shook her head with a smile.

“Should we step in?” Deadeyes asked.

“No, it’s all good, don’t worry,” Undrar reassured the party who watched in awe.

“Surely you jest,” Reinhardt coughed, “-killing everyone here, how preposterous.”

“Stare into my eyes and tell me if I’m joking,” filled with killing intent, to which the man stepped away.

“Hey man,” called the leader of team one, “-are you sure about this?”

“Yeah,” the other leader added in turn, “what’s the point of causing all this turmoil on our account,” they had doubts but felt at ease. A hierarchy amongst adventurers, bound by each individual’s potential.

“You get me wrong,” he turned and faced the crowd, “-my intention isn’t to create turmoil nor anything of sorts. All I want is for people to go into battle without a death wish. It makes thy weak and useless. As the one who retook Reforge, I vow to lead the battle later on. Follow me to victory as opposed to die for others. One must always have the intent to win, but you,” he stared at all, “-the gazes are filled with regret. I met a man earlier, one who had his arm, legs, and tongue tore who kept on fighting against the odds. Even as he breathed the last breath, the fighting spirit never broke.”

Jannette and Reinhardt listened carefully, that act being put on wasn’t to create an uproar. It was a drama, one to rekindle the will to live of the fighters. All the death and despair had to have taken a toll on their psyche. Conscious or not, many had given up. A single glance sufficed – if they were to go off to battle in such a mindset, it wouldn’t last a mere ten minutes.

“A picture speaks a thousand words, and this display before you is proof enough. Those with the power to become platinum lay on the floor without a say in the matter,” he faced the officers. “I deeply regret my actions for trying to overturn thy authority. To which I humbly apologize.”

“Guild Leader,” Reinhardt came forth, “-it wasn’t wrong to interfere. Heroes are people who move without thinking. When things are out of order, they speak out. A trait that Jannette and I respect. Therefore, I ask this, do you have a better plan, one that doesn’t require men to be sent off to a pointless death?”

“Yes,” the voice confident, “-I shall lead the assault alone. Kniq will stand as support for the rest. Watch and learn, my fellow comrades – I’ll show rather than speak. Learn from how I fight, monsters are clever but with a few mind games, everything is possible.”

“Is what you say true or is it an act?” the vanguard asked.

“We’ll see later, won’t we?” a cold gaze that sent shivers down their spine. *Dispel,* Unleash aura lifted. “Kniq will swap places with the Special team, make them guard the outpost instead,” the small revolt ended. In that confusing moment, Staxius managed to establish a new hierarchy with him at the top. One subtle and subconscious. Second, the special team had a taste of what power felt like. Third, the

officers found that it was best to not try and order him around. Freedom and power, he acquired what most wanted.

“You’ve heard the man,” Jannette said in a loud voice, he shall lead the assault at 18:00 hours. Special team, you’re with us, may the god of war be by thy side,” the crowd dispersed baffled by what transpired.

“Is it necessary to always be so crude?” Undrar asked, the party stood next to the RFS after a few minutes.

“Not really,” he shook his head, “-I was bored and found a way to lash out. The special team intrigued me a little, honestly, there was no purpose apart from causing a bit of trouble. The town felt boring and dull,” he changed into jeans and a loose shirt.

“You were bored and decided to pick a fight with everyone?” Undrar asked rhetorically.

“Well, I guess so,” Tharis though destroyed yesterday, was fixed with a bit of tinkering. The structure itself was untouched; tis was the magic circuit inside – a fix that Staxius accomplished without much effort.

Three hours went by, time was at hand. Menacingly, Staxius walked, the gaze fixed on the upcoming battle. The adventurers could but admire the man who had the guts to stand up against the military. It lit a fire and passion unlike any other.

‘Death to those who oppose and threaten my companions,’ the gun aimed, ‘-allow me to guide you to the afterlife.’ *BANG.*

Chapter 207: Xenos

‘It’s been around two and a half months since father disappeared on the mission. Queen Shanna, also known as my mother, was very accommodating. We had fun even when he wasn’t there. Who knew that an unwanted child like me would have the opportunity to experience what life in a loving family was. Though the people around the queen... sorry, mother, were mostly eccentric with a perpetual smile. Arda is a good place to live in. Currently, I decided to start writing a diary. I don’t know why but it came to me on the day I arrived at school. With my photographic memory, forgetting isn’t a trouble, however, putting the memories I deem worthy in here feels more real. The inter-magical tournament is to take place next month in March. Preparation has been taken care of, my training with the Director began as soon as I returned. Instructor Sophie partook in said exercise as well – she had a different feel to her, almost like one who had been set free from a heavy burden. The smile she gave was clearer and devoid of sadness. Well, it’s time to say goodbye, my roommate has been urging me to leave – it’s Friday, meaning; Good food.’

A new year, a new start, a new journey. Both Rosespire and Arda began their construction and deliberation about how the embassies would work and get along. For Arda, the small town was being built. It would take another two to three months to be fully operational. On Rosespire’s side, the Queen decided to build a separate building, one lavished and worthy of an Ardanian ambassador to stay. This was her way of atoning for the discrimination many had forced onto the Ardanian’s in fear of their disparities.

The underworld was taken asunder – the balance of power laid on a fine edge. The Dark Guild, the organization which had ruled over said empire for decades – was challenged by a new group. One still unnamed but powerful, their invasion began the day Sprinkles was hit. Bosses of various families and factions grew scared of one another. Gang-related shootings and murders happened all across Hidros – it didn't matter where people hid or took refuge. This new organization had the ability to track without fail. Rumors began to float around that Kreston had a hand in such a deed. Still, being as almighty as they were rumored to be – the Dark-guild didn't take this declaration of war lightly. Pulling all their resources together, the Overlord ordered for all who seemed a threat to be killed on the spot without interrogation. To that end, the Assassination Sect got involved to carry out his bidding. Thus, a war began – a war between the Dark-guild and some unnamed organization. Cake who now worked for Staxius was drafted to lead the operations. A job request that only a strategist like her had the prowess to do. To which a phone call later, her leader accepted. The condition laid was that Cake would only work through phone and remain in a secluded office inside Rosespire. No one had the authority to try and meet her in person, else their life would be at risk. A message from the famed Shadow, that the others respected. As for God's ale; delivery was made without anyone knowing who or what did it. The boxes would appear suddenly on the day of departure.

The substance was a great hit, Renaud rejoiced. Through that alone, Shadow's name grew slowly. The other bosses were curious about who this mysterious guy or group was. A name that sent shivers; the people responsible for eliminating the Red Seals. Each week, as promised, cards filled with gold were sent. Jason took the liberty of personally delivering the payment. Alas, with no activity from the man responsible, he could but hold said commodities. It had been so long; none knew where that man was – gone as if a Shadow when the light fades.

Void Flame Aspect, three gunshots echoed around the field. Drenched in sweat and blood, those who stood behind cheered loudly. "IT'S OVER," they screamed, time was the break of dawn.

"Good job everyone," dressed in a white buttoned shirt with torn jeans, the man responsible turned. "Time to head back," he ordered to which the adventurers obeyed. About five kilometers away from the would-be wall, they marched forth. Recruits went around collecting loot and Qaisar.

"It's been two months hasn't it sister?" Emma voiced.

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"I think more sister, but it sure has been a long time," Emmy replied. The wind blew, the sun rose, the air cold and refreshing.

"Master," waved the leader of a squad of marksmen. A thumbs-up was the only response he got.

"Here they come," after a few minutes later, stood before the newly rebuilt Reforge; Reinhardt and Jannette. The town seemed more alive than before, more people were willing to stay over and work. Most importantly, smiles, they had grown braver, monsters didn't phase many.

"Lieutenant, Sergeant" he stopped with a quick bow of the head as a greeting.

"Good morning, Staxius," Reinhardt returned the gesture with a smile. Rather than speaking, the Sergeant saluted instead. Behind him, around fifty to sixty of both men and women walked. Built strong with the aura of killers, it seemed as if their eyes lit brightly red, a mere illusion of their killing intent

manifesting in whoever chose to gaze upon them. As soon as the first step inside Reforge was taken, their eyes relaxed into one tamer and friendlier. A frightful change of persona. All nodded at the officers and headed inside. Rumors and chatter resumed; the sleeping outpost awoke.

"Care to join me for breakfast?" Reinhardt asked with a courteous smile.

"With pleasure," he replied with a matching smile, "-care for me to wash up first?" the gaze changed from the officer to his clothes. "It would be disrespectful for me to partake in a meal like this."

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"I apologize for being tactless, may we meet in thirty minutes?" the voice polite and dignified, the conversation ended with nods from both parties.

'It's been so long,' the walk continued, '-look at them all,' the eyes peered at all who stood and chatted. 'Confident and filled with the drive to win as opposed to fighting to the death. A pleasant change if I do say so myself.' Now stood under a shower, steam fogged up the mirrors and windows around.

Outside, many sat with legs crossed in the courtyard. Two of the squads that were to lead the assault a few months prior, spoke.

"Man," sighed the first leader. Built strongly with brown hair and eyes with a diagonal scar on a rather large nose, he stared up at the sky. "We sure have come along."

"Yea, I agree," build similarly with darker hair and tanned complexion with a scar on his forehead, the second leader added.

"Ferry," called the first leader.

"What is it, Jon?" asked the second leader.

"This has been clawing me from the inside, but I feel like Guild Leader Staxius might disappear someday," the voice filled with worry and tension, Ferry's eyes felt empty as if losing someone precious.

"It's a given," Jon sighed for he had a more rational way of thinking, "-with that much power at his disposal, spending time hunting monsters and protecting the wall isn't going to do much. Remember the day he created that havoc? Most of our men were skeptical of his words. They thought of him as a showoff without any proof to back that confidence."

"Yeah I do," Ferry interjected, "-imagine my surprise when he told us to stand back and do nothing. In a single flash, the horde of monsters that approached was killed. I could not see anything, just faint flickers of light. What impressed me most was that that fight continued till the night was over."

"We were all taken by surprise," Jon added, "-that night felt like minutes. A single man fought against that overwhelming number with a gun alone."

"How can we forget the sunrise that morning," Ferry's eyes lit with wonder.

"He returned with a nonchalant look, the eyes screamed of death and destruction. The red hair felt as if it were alive," Jon completed the thought.

"Xenos..." Ferry added.

“Yeah, Xenos, the curse of destruction from the elder tongue,”

“Excuse us,” a girl from the party that sat around the men were drawn into the conversation.

“What is it?” Jon asked with a gentle voice.

“Care to tell us more about this Xenos thing?” she asked with intrigue.

“Oh,” Jon let out a small chuckle, “-Ferry, care to do the honors?”

“Xenos, ay,” he wondered, “-it’s a word that comes from the ancient tongue. Not many know the real origin nor how it came to pass. Legend has it that, Syphon was once mortally wounded. Her status at that time was of an Angel. The god in charge of taking her life was the Death Reaper. After months of arguments from Qhildir the God of philosophy, the Death Reaper could but resent that feeling. Hence, as a compromise, the world was plunged into darkness by a processed named Xenosious. With a new life, Syphon lived to see another day at the peril of the world which had been sunken into the abyss. As repentance, she vowed to help those in need, to which, after many years of trying to reach the status of Goddess, her lifeforce was exchanged into the light one sees at night. This was the condition laid before her by the God of death. To which she accepted and died after Qhildir’s attempt at fighting back the inevitable. At that moment, when the angel clipped her wings to fall into the pits of darkness – Creation spoke. Her will to be the beacon of hope was felt throughout every realm. As punishment as well as a boon, Syhton became the Goddess of Stars. Bound to remain living yet dead, she served as the faint lights representing hope. From that, the word Xenosious, else known as the curse of eternal darkness, came to light,” Ferry stopped.

“Xenosious, which shortened to Xenos, the nickname guild leader Staxius got given. It came out involuntarily from a recruit’s mouth. From that day forth, many decided to refer the man by Xenos,” Jon concluded the story.

“That story sure is sad,” the girl voiced woefully. “Look, isn’t that him?” she pointed at Staxius who returned from the shower.

“Good job as always,” he complimented the leaders and headed for the military building.

“Xenos, the curse of eternal darkness,” Ferry mumbled underneath his breath. “It fits him perfectly, not as an insult but as a compliment, one can’t help but wonder what’s behind those fierce eyes that always seem unbothered.”

“If he’s Xenos, then I wonder who Syphon is?” the girl asked joyfully, to which the party laughed.

“Oi vampire,” Adete stood with her hair wet, “-you didn’t dry my hair,” she pouted.

“I forgot... or rather, I chose to forget,” he voiced with a smirk.

“...” agitated, her teeth sank into his cheeks.

“Stop it,” a quick tug later, he held her in between the thumb and index finger, “-biting people isn’t very lady-like,” the voice monotonous with an underline tone of mischievousness.

“Stop treating me like a doll,” she wailed, “-if you had taken care of me, this would have never happened.”

“Fine,” he sighed and placed the little girl on his left palm. Using the right hand, after taking out a handkerchief – he dried her hair while she sat.

‘I think it’s time to go investigate Updust. Reports have come that the fog has started to grow less and less intense. Not to mention Cake with the war against that organization, this place has gotten a lot more complicated.’ The door to the office opened, ‘-once again, I left Eira alone without saying a word. I’m such a great father,’ to which the head shook in disappointment.

“Right on time,” sat in the center, Reinhardt welcomed with a smile.

“Shall we begin?”

Chapter 208: Two and a Half months later

The tapping of keyboards, operators worked nonstop with the Lieutenant supervising the operations. Tis was the way every morning started. A report to the other outposts followed by a damage report.

“Care to explain more about this supposed breakfast?” Staxius asked, the voice neutral and face emotionless; the usual.

“Pardon me,” Jannette coughed and approached, “-it was but a fa?ade to get you here,” she spoke without malicious intent.

“And of course,” Reinhardt added, “-you knew about this,” he smiled.

“You know me far too well,” followed by a bow of the head, Staxius waited for the real reason to be told. In all honesty, there was also something that he needed to say. Two months working and training the others to become more competent whilst defending the border took its toll.

“The reason for this meeting isn’t anything much. We’re grateful for everything Kniq has accomplished for us. To that end, all the rewards and gold associated with that cause will be sent over to the main guild,” the lieutenant ended.

“If I presume right,” Staxius wondered, “-am I finally cleared to leave the operation?”

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“More or less, yes,” Jannette voiced, Reinhardt chose to stay silent, “-you’ve fulfilled the promise of showing how people who fight with the intent of winning and killing as opposed to going to die. The changes you’ve brought to Reforge is incredible. The people assigned to our defensive platoon have been promoted from Tier-9 Obsidian to Tier-8 Steel, and some even Tier 7 Sapphire,” her face lit with glee.

“It’s hard to imagine how our defenders have changed since you took control of the whole operation. The casualty reports for the past few weeks has been zero. Not even light injuries,” Reinhardt was as baffled as Jannette.

“With all due respect, the fighters were being held back by you. I care not for flattery, the men and women who fight under me have grown to hate but embrace death. Nothing beats the will to survive; when in peril, whether one flee or fights, the outcome is the same, the body moves twice as fast and becomes twice as strong. My goal was to harness that power, change the instinct into fight rather than

flee. Obviously, there also required some guidance. A balanced team with personalities that complimented one another must be factored in. For example, the vanguard with Ferry and Jon are a force to be reckoned with. I won't say their unbeatable – despite this, their will to fight and survive outclasses even me. To which I say this sentence with full confidence, under their supervision, the new recruits will grow to be powerful warriors. An injury means defeat, tis the mindset I engraved into all of the warriors. Despite how light it may be, using one's body to defend must never be done," he paused for the rest stopped their work and glued onto his face.

"We apologize, sir," the operators bowed their heads, "but you see, the way you speak about the ones who protect us have drawn our attention."

With a reassuring smile, Staxius continued, "-all that being said. I dare not take credit for that growth. I only taught how to fight the fear of death – and how to perform best under pressure. It's Kniq's handy work that rendered Reforge's platoon a formidable force. Deadeyes oversaw the training of the long-range fighters. Achilles took charge of the vanguard; her swordplay is most fitting for normal people as opposed to my style. Viola trained the mid-ranged mages into both offensive and defensive magic. Last but not least, supportive magic, that spot was filled by Avon – a balance of offense and defense," he ended.

"I guess the rumors were true," Reinhardt added woefully.

"Care to elaborate?" Staxius asked without much intent.

"He speaks about rumors of Xenos leaving Reforge," Jannette replied.

"Xenos..." he paused, "-guess that's the adventuring nickname the warriors have given me?" a rhetorical question. The story about the origin of that name was known to him – Xenosious – the curse of eternal darkness. Rather fitting to which Staxius was proud to have such a name. "And yes," after a few seconds, "-I'm planning to leave Reforge earlier tomorrow."

"Oh..." the whole room sighed, "-we wish you well on future travels, Xenos," the chief operator spoke and went back to work.

"We're grateful for everything you've done, Lord Staxius," the officers stood, "-as the lieutenant of Reforge," they saluted, "I thank you from the bottom of our heart. May thy sword slash through stone and may thy arrow hit its mark." A sentence that had been used over the generations as a way of wishing good luck.

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"The pleasure was all mine," he turned and reached for the door.

"Before you go," Jannette interrupted, "-is it too much to ask where Kniq is headed next?"

"Isn't it obvious," he turned around, "-my quest of investigating the border isn't done just yet," a wink followed by the signature wave, the so-called breakfast ended.

"Any idea to what he meant?" Reinhardt asked utterly confused by the word obvious.

"Updust Outpost," Jannette sighed and went back to work.

“Guess we’re on the road again,” Adete spoke.

“Not for long, after this – we need to head to the capital. Kniq needs a break. Fighting here is like war, they all go to sleep thinking if tomorrow they’ll wake up,” they stepped out.

Kniq’s exploit became known to the outposts. A guild that trained and fought without back-up nor weakness. Led by a single man, without mortal casualties, the nickname of the adventurer known as Xenos slowly spread throughout the land. They were mainly spread by travelers and merchants. A man with hair as white as ash from his prey and red from the blood spilled, tis was what spread. Ever since that rumor, more people were willing to make the journey to the border. The crew sent by Pegasus was stationed in Stonegrove whilst the one sent by Blades end was at Ground-zero.

Attacks were regular and predictable. Since the protection of the construction was handed over to Reforge, the operation advanced quickly. At that rate, it was predicted that in six months, from the second checkpoint to Reforge would be built. Then from Reforge, another year or so till the third checkpoint. The checkpoints were located in the middle of the wall from one outpost to another. It did help that more workers and companies decided to get involved. With how low the casualty reports were – many thought it best to invest to place the kingdom in their debt. Still, for the whole structure to be built, another five years was needed.

“Master,” Avon called, the party was seated inside a tavern.

“Hello,” he greeted and sat. A quick scan of their faces revealed smiles and glee, though there also displayed an underlying feeling of tiredness. Fighting for all this time took its toll. A feeling that related closely to homesickness.

“Sir,” Deadeyes called, “-how long are we going to continue fighting?” the tone curious with his hands gently stroking his rifle that leaned on the edge of the table.

“Not long,” he smiled and ordered food.

“Master,” Achilles called, “-will the monsters ever stop attacking?” she pouted, not very hero-like but adorable.

“No idea,” drinks arrived first, rumors went around the edges of the room. Xenos, many whispered, for those who weren’t chosen for the defending force at night saw him as an object of fantasy. A man who hailed straight from a story. Kniq’s exploit became known to the guilds, thus their repute grew.

“Brother,” Undrar called in turn. Irritated, “-can you all drop it,” a sudden outburst, “-I know many want to return home. I do too, however, the quest is yet to be complete,” the tone subtle for the outburst didn’t garner the attention of others apart from those who sat.

“You get me wrong,” she continued with a cold gaze.

“My mistake then,” the head shook and the attention turned to the food that arrived promptly.

“What are we to do with those two?” she pointed at the table closest to them.

“Sister, sister,” called Emma.

“Yes sister,” Emmy replied, “-We must hide our intent,” she advised caution.

“But sister,” Emma urged.

“Lymsey sisters,” Staxius called, “-come over here why don’t you,” he offered a seat.

“Sister, sister,” Emma voiced again.

“A trap, sister, I feel it,” Emmy’s eyes narrowed, to which they held hands and walked slowly.”

“That’s very unlike you,” Avon added with a hint of coyness.

“Shh,” Staxius winked rather than answer.

“W-we’re here,” they stood beside the leader.

“Here,” Staxius offered the two juice, “-grab and seat and let’s discuss.” The others watched carefully, it might not have looked, but those two were the most prominent fighters out of the personal squad led by Staxius. At first, he led everyone, then as time went on, as different roles emerged and to give a sense of autonomy, the members of Kniq were assigned separate squads. The vanguard remained under his direct supervision, to which the role of leader was relegated to Jon and Ferry after a few weeks.

Seeing how the others were performing with new training, Staxius decided to take in four members. Two close-range fighters, one healer and one ranger – this small squad was separate and worked independently from the main force. The job was to use the shadows and attack on specific nights or when it was necessary. It comprised of the twins, a healer who came from Ground-zero and a ranger from Scarlet Watch outpost, the sixth and last one. After a few days, the other two quit – leaving Xenos alone with the twins.

The sight of those two staying despite being scared – reminded a little of when he was a kid. Not necessarily weak, but lacking guidance. Naturally, the want to guide those teenagers as if they were his children took over. None needed to go through what he did – if it helped a little to overcome that feeling of being without a purpose; it was well worth the effort.

“I never asked what guild you girls belonged too, care to share that information?” he asked with a deep voice.

“W-we d-don’t h-have a guild,” Emma replied.

“W-well we do b-but,” Emmy interjected, confusion and fear were overabundant on their faces.

“Come on,” Staxius sighed, “-Which is it?”

“...” the sudden rise in pitch forced the girls to embrace one another.

“Stray cats,” he sighed, they sat next to him.

“Aren’t you supposed to be a father?” Achilles voiced, “-do something fatherly, master,” she pulled out her tongue.

“Yeah, what she said,” Avon backed the hero.

“We’re waiting,” Undrar stared with a smug look.

“You can do it, master, making a lady cry isn’t gentlemanly, show them what you can do,” Deadeyes cheered.

‘I swear,’ the head shook with a smile, ‘-this is my party, Kniq. The adventuring guild that helped save Reforge. We’re supposed to be hard built fighters with a thirst for victory and bloodshed. Well, the bloodshed part is kind of my fault. The rest hate the thought of killing another human, well Achilles in particular – her ideals as a hero don’t allow such things. Undrar and Avon are the closest to how I feel on the matter. It’s to be expected, a demi-goddess dragon and a strong spirit, it’s normal that they wouldn’t feel anything. Deadeyes, on the other hand, surprises me, he fights for the sole purpose of surviving. If it came down to saving himself or a partner, he’d choose himself. A thought that I appreciate; nothing to be ashamed of. People aren’t saints, one must think for oneself. For me, I don’t know. My emotions have grown over the past year – just a little bit. Nevertheless, this thing called humanity has long been left behind. To fight a demon, or a monster, one must become a demon in turn. I’d rather take on that role, the role of the one that is evil to save the conscience of my companions. No one has to walk down the path of bloodshed as I did.’

“Master?” a few seconds went by, the rest leaned closer and asked for he daydreamed.

“Oh sorry,” he stood and quickly moved behind the twins who held their eyes shut in a perpetual hug. “You needn’t worry,” the tone suddenly affectionate and friendly, “-I was only asking because I may have a job for the two of you,” he patted their head and smiled.

Chapter 209: Fraud

“Huh?” the twins opened their eyes to an affectionate leader as opposed to the stern man. The would-be sobbing halted, their emotions changed from threatened to confused. That change in persona from Staxius took everyone by surprise.

“Sister, sister,” with a runny nose, Emma called whilst breathing heavily.

“Y-yes sister, t-the m-man is l-less s-scary,” Emmy replied whilst trying to remove snot off her face

“Now, now,” Staxius intervened. Using his white sleeves, he wiped the twin’s messy and unbecoming faces. A spark in the girls’ eyes, one that showed a feeling of relief. “About the question,” now knelt with the sisters facing him, Staxius continued. “Is there a guild you belong to or a party that needs you to return?”

“Y-yes,” Emma answered.

“And no,” Emmy continued, conflicting statements to which they elaborated further.

“We don’t belong to a guild but do if that makes sense?” both voices in harmony, they spoke as if a single person.

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“I see,” he stood, “-you have no idea if the guild you belong to is alive or dead. Must have been months ago now, the day you arrived at Rosespire, Melisa said something about a third companion.” Afterward, silence befell the table, the companions watched as their leader sunk into another world. The twins

were baffled, to which they moved their head from left to right as if a pendulum. Avon being the ball of joy, he watched till unconsciously the movement was repeated.

“Oh boy...” Deadeyes shook his head. Meanwhile, Undrar and Achilles focused on the steaming hot food that arrived.

“Got it,” a sudden burst, it took the table by surprise “-do you have the guild cards?” he asked courteously.

“Yes,” Emma spoke.

“They’re in our bag,” Emmy added then proceeded to hand over the objects.

Written on it was their name, rank of which had was Tier-Seven with a faint glow of green. A glow that indicated the eligibility to advance in rank after a visit to the main guild. Below, after a few lines describing their strength – [Guild: None] was displayed with a greyed-out box.

“I knew it,” to which the error was pointed out. “I’m afraid to say this...” a few seconds later, “-but you girls were fooled. The guild to which your supposed allegiance was is but a fraud. Look at the guild box, incidents like this have been happening around the kingdom lately. The guilds are there at first, they recruit as many low-tier adventurers as possible. Then, those inexperienced souls are sent to do dangerous quests under the premise of training.” A quick look on the faces around displayed anguish and hate. “As figured, tis but bait for less than admirable parties.”

“W-wait...” Emma’s demeanor dropped.

“T-that’s not possible,” Emmy voiced with an opposite feeling.

“Our f-friends were there t-to p-protect us,” the elder sister by a mere few minutes sunk into a feeling of helplessness.

“F-fraud,” the second sister, Emmy’s mentality was of one hell-bent on revenge.

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“You’re s-saying t-that w-we were s-sent here to act a-as bait for the other teams?” the sobbing that once stopped began again; Emma stared deeply into Staxius’s eyes. The tears had a shine. At that moment, Staxius stood and watched as the two little ladies had a breakdown.

“B-bait... we were bait, all the friends who died were expendable,” a raging fury lit, Emmy’s hand slowly reached for her weapon.

“We better do something, quick,” Achilles urged, they sensed the auras. One of killing intent and one of helplessness.

“Wait,” Undrar grabbed her arms, “-look,” she pointed forward.

“Is that it,” Staxius spoke at last, “-here I thought the Lymsey sisters were the only two other girls who survived countless battles with me,” the arms crossed and stare cold and piercing. “Wallowing in self-pity and getting devoured by anger, how pathetic,” the hand reached for Tharis. Emmy glared with the

full intention of hurting anyone who stood in her way. Emma, on the other hand, stared at the ground, tears dropped as if mild showers.

“M-master,” Emmy gritted, “-t-thank you f-for everything. But I t-think i-it’s time for us t-to part ways,” amidst the anger, a tear flowed. “Let’s go, sister,” she grabbed on Emma’s hand and forced her to walk. The latter remained as if a statue stuck in place without the will to move.

“Listen closely,” Tharis unholster to which the gun was placed onto Emmy’s head. “Remember what I said the day before we set off on the quest?” monotonous and deadly, the voice echoed around the tavern. People were glued on the unfolding scene. From cheerful to now this tension that could be cut with a dagger, they watched. Xenos was as menacing as depicted from the countless stories.

“In no way am I responsible for your life, tier-seven should be able to fight on their own. Hold me back and I won’t blink twice before ending your life myself,” he repeated the sentence, killing intent oozed.

“Whatever,” Emmy snarled and faced away, her sister stood without moving. This, in turn, forced the little sister to stand by, her anger subsided for fear. The air cleared; the cold barrel now dug into her head.

“W-what a-are you doing,” Emma looked up, “DON’T KILL HER,” she yelled, the sobbing intensified to which unknowingly lashed out and wailed weakly. Each punch or slap didn’t have any power behind it. It was a desperate attempt to hide what went on inside her mind. Seeing this, Emmy’s head lowered. In the middle of this outburst, the leader stood with Tharis locked onto the second sister’s head, while the first tried to attack.

“Idiots,” a sigh later, in a single motion, he knelt, pulled Emmy and Emma into his arms. They both gave and knelt in turn. “Unbelievable,” using his palms, he rested both their heads on either side of his shoulder, Adete had to hover and take a seat on the head instead. “Let it out,” he whispered, “-I’m here to help,” the voice affectionate and fatherly, the twins gave and cried their heart out. A scene that turned emotional in less than a few minutes. Oblivious to the greyed-out guild – it was to be expected for such a reaction. Seeing friends die during a fight was tough. Knowing that their death wasn’t in vain made bearing that grief a little better. Now, however, after the news about those countless death being nothing but expendable life stock – the pent-up sadness rushed out. Similar to a dying flame, only a slight bit of fuel is needed to rekindle that fire. In this case, the dying flame was the acceptance of their friends dying for a good cause. The fuel was the news delivered by Staxius, and the rest is history.

“Don’t cry,” Undrar voiced strongly then rushed over. Everyone followed her lead, rather than watch and do nothing, Kniq embraced the two girls who cried whole-heartedly.

“Kniq will always be a place you can call home if the time ever comes,” the sentence came straight from the vice leader’s mouth.

“Yes, what the vice-leader said,” Deadeyes added for even he felt bad for the girls. Achilles and Avon remained quiet; their focus was on embracing the twins with their might. All that sadness transferred over to the other tables. The adventurers could but bow their heads. Many of the ladies including the waitresses cried.

“Everything will be okay,” after a few minutes, the leader spoke reassuringly. “Standing still and not moving will be disrespectful to the comrades lost. I don’t care if it takes a day, a week or even a month,

I'll wait. Take however long you need – but I promise, the people who did you wrong will pay. Getting those small hands," from patting their head to now caressing their palms, "-dirty, isn't worth it. Leave the killing to me – that's what I'm good for." Those words hit home, the cries stopped, to which it turned into faint whimpering. After this, they fell asleep. This gave the sign for Kniq to let go.

"What do we do now?" Undrar asked with a fatigued voice.

"What else," Staxius stood and held both girls in each arm, "-as people say, time is the best healer. I should have been tactful when saying what I said, but what is done is done. There's only one thing to do, and that is to take care of them," he stepped out and headed for the dormitories.

"Is it just me or?" Achilles asked.

"Yeah, that's him, Staxius is definitely a father," Undrar added with pride.

"Guess even a demon has feelings, doesn't he?" Avon asked rhetorically with tears.

"A true gentleman, I'm so glad I joined this guild," Deadeyes watched in awe. The display of compassion shown was new, a breath of fresh air. A feeling that they could relate too. All this rendered the trust between party members stronger.

Now sat between two beds in the middle of a dimly lit room, he waited. On each side, Emma and Emmy slept, the murmuring waned. The reason why he was seated in such a peculiar fashion was that each girl had grabbed onto his hand.

"Didn't expect this change," Adete voiced.

"I know," he said softly, "-neither did I."

"I don't mean to say it's a bad thing." Adete hovered, "I'm curious, so give me the reason why?"

"Simple," he looked up and smiled, "-They remind me of myself when I was a kid, and Eira."

"Should have expected as much, father," she pulled out her tongue.

"Yeah, yeah," he dismissed the claims and closed eyes for a few minutes. The minutes eventually turned into hours, news about what happened spread throughout the outpost. Nothing majorly harmful – it was told as a sad story. A story in which Staxius was portrayed as the father and girls as the daughters. Over exaggeration and rumors that the two got news about them losing their mother in war. Obviously, all this was for theatrics, the reason was told by Achilles. Losing comrades and breaking down in such a fashion was common. The rest sympathized and decided to find the good out of the bad.

"M-master..." two faint touches on either side was felt.

'I must have dozed off,' the nap broke. "oh..." puffy eyes with a reddish color around. "How do you both feel?" the relaxed posture straightened, the twins sat on each bed's edge.

"M-much better," Emma replied, still dazed from the shock earlier.

"Thank you for holding our hands when sleeping," Emmy's anger swapped for one remorseful. "It helped knowing that there was someone out there waiting," despite the swollen eyes, she managed to pull out a smile.

“Yes, I agree with sister,” Emma tried to smile as well.

“I apologize for breaking the news like that earlier,” the head lowered in shame, “-I thought you knew. Clearly, I assumed wrong, forgive my tactlessness,” the tone genuinely concerned, it was the last thing he wanted to do.

“No, we apologize,” they spoke, “-knowing you care is more than enough,” they leaped to embrace their leader. “It was hard,” Emma’s voice felt sadder than ever before, almost to the point of breaking into a sob with each word pronounced.

“We thought our friends died for the sake of a better future,” Emmy added, her voice felt the same as the other.

“There’s a single reason why,” Emma felt it best to tell the truth.

“We lost both our elder brother and younger sister in that supposed fight for justice,” the speech harmonious again.

“Elder brother was back-stabbed by a hobgoblin while trying to defend us,” Emma added.

“Our sister was clawed and devoured by a wolf,” the sorrow that emanated from the words that painfully rolled off their tongue could not be described. Staxius was at a loss for words, the girls had suffered a ton.

Rather than think rationally, he decided it best to support the twins. Their one-sided hug soon changed into another group embrace, he tightly held onto them.

“Those memories...”

“I-its haunts u-us...”

Chapter 210: Bloody Mary

“How are they doing?” stood outside the room with her back against the window, Viola asked with a concerned voice.

“Much better,” Staxius tip-toed outside, and quietly shut the door, “-I think anyways,” with the back against the door, he spoke.

“What’s the plan now, aren’t we supposed to leave tomorrow?” a good question to which he walked. Viola followed behind, the conversation resumed after a short pause.

“Nothing has changed, we are leaving for better or worst. Those two need rest and what better way to get away from this combat filled zone,” he said in the usual deep emotionless voice.

“I see,” Viola breathed a sigh of relief, “-we’re taking them with us?” she asked, the doorway leading outside came in view, the light almost dazzling.

“Yes,” quick and easy, “-call me soft or whatever, I care not. Those two have suffered enough, I know the feeling of having someone die without a chance to do something, anything. It has happened more than enough time. I guess it’s selfish of me, to want to save those girls when all I’m good for is killing people. Either way, getting them on their feet is a responsibility I’ll take with pride.”

“It’s fine,” she patted his back, “-there’s no rule saying what one needs to do. It’s up to you, guild leader, do what you think is best – we’ll always follow without question,” outside, Kniq stood and waited.

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“Thanks for everything,” the gaze felt warm and clear – time now was around one in the afternoon for he had spent most of the day with the twins. Not comforting but being the one they could lean on and cry without restraint. This was a first, experiencing how painful things were to other people. Those warm tears that flowed left a big impression. One thing was for sure, he was ready to help any way he could – noble or not, the man was prepared.

In said manner, the day continued till night came. At the break of dusk, stood outside with weapons, supplies, and anything relating to combat – the adventurers with Kniq in the front. The briefing commenced.

“Greetings everyone,” Reinhardt spoke loudly, “-as you all know. The briefing shan’t be long. Questions about combat and strategy are to be forwarded to Xenos. With that being said, we have special news today,” he cleared his throat to which the voice’s obstruction cleared. “Tonight is the last night Kniq will fight by our side. These past two to three months have been very educational for both the military and the adventurers. Thanks to them, we were able to bridge the gap between our statuses. All who stand in this courtyard is one, we are united by a single thread; the resolve to win,” a few seconds of silence later, cheers echoed around the outpost.

The rumors were true, many had already braced for the inevitable. The day the guild known as Kniq’s departure, a band of warrior that saved countless lives and killed even more monsters.

“Everyone, say it with me,” Ferry yelled amidst the cheers, “thank you for everything, XENOS.”

“Thank you for everything, XENOS!” it echoed, people were joyful. “Don’t forget Kniq,” Jon yelled in turn.

“Thank you for everything, KNIQ!” this time the applause and cheers were twice as loud as the first time.

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‘These people, I swear,’ with a smile, he raised his right hand and clenched into a fist. The other members followed suit. In that instant, the cheers reached its peak in terms of loudness and energy. Morale was at an all-time high, with this level of energy, nothing needed to be said. The adventurers automatically broke up into groups and waited in front of the members of Kniq.

“Let’s move out people,” Staxius led the charge, two squads followed behind, one in which Ferry and Jon stood – close combat fighters with heavy armor and heavy weapons.

“We’ll leave after two-minutes,” Viola voiced, the mid-range fighters waited, armed with bows, staffs, and daggers with light armor – Viola led a team of people who were specialized in finishing off enemies without bringing attention to them.

“After the mid-range fighters, It’s our turn,” Achilles spoke, a support unit in terms of protecting flanks, they were compromised of a mixture of mages, close-combat fighters, and more. Most wore enchanted robes with chainmail underneath.

“Remember,” Avon called, “-our job is to heal people with bad injuries and support the fighters as much as we can,” the real support unit, one that was devoted to everyone, anything from enhancement to imprisonment spells were cast by that unit, their outfits were light but heavy on supplies. Priority was to not engage in battle, thus the excess weight of armor was removed and replaced by backpacks.

“Last but not least,” Deadeyes spoke, “-one shot, one kill.” He led a team of marksmen, people with the ability to lay on the ground from dust until dawn. Their job, shoot on sight and support. None of them were talkative; concentration at its finest.

Void Flame Aspect, Tharis came out, shot after shot, the incoming horde was drawn to the vanguard. As usual, before the first line of attack could be breached, Staxius had already slain around fifty percent of the enemy forces, though it was only the first wave. There were more to come, the guard remained up for abnormals could reach out at any time. Those humanoid goblins and evolved monsters were never seen again after that first incident. Even so, it didn’t give time for people to rest.

‘Look at them go,’ he watched, Tharis needed to cool down. Despite holding back, the gun could only take so much – when it came to killing people, this thing was more than enough. However, monsters were a different story. The usual one shot to the head wasn’t effective enough. Kill one and two more would take its place, this was why this formation was created. “I’d even go so far as to bet my life on them,” he murmured whilst standing.

“Is that so,” Adete voiced, minutes turned into hours, Staxius decided to stay out of the fight. The attackers grew in numbers, nothing the other could not handle – it was pretty dull.

“So that’s the people you trained,” she hovered and studied. “All of them have the same look in the eyes, the clear intent to kill anything that moved – scary, they’re like you but way, way, turned down.”

“You’re right, their killing intent can never reach me. They are still humans, after all, that intent would fall to pieces if it ever came to killing a single person.”

“Staxius...” Adete’s tone changed, it resembled a kid wanting something.

“What is it?” he knew something was up.

“Can we please join the fight... it’s our last day and I have the feeling that there will not be a fight for quite some time,” she pouted.

“What’s the point,” he sighed, “I honestly don’t want to stand from this spot,” a cozy little seat made of plants and flowers. “Even if I fight, it’s not like you’ll join the fight,” a point well made.

“You’re wrong,” her tone changed into one serious, “-have you forgotten that I’m the manifestation of the vampiric blood in thy vein?” she paused, Staxius listened intently. “-Every time that power is in use, it’s hard to explain, but I also join the fight. Each enemy slain, each life took, whether human or not, I get stronger... or rather, we get stronger,” she licked her lips, the gaze resembled him when it came time to kill.

“No need to justify, I understand what you mean,” he stood, the horde only grew in numbers. ‘It’s been far too long since I used my blood to fight.’ The eyes closed, Shadow-step activated, it added atop with the speed boost from the night-walkers innate speed. In less than a second, he stood before the vanguards.

“Xenos,” Ferry called, “-take it easy, we got this, enjoy the last night,” he said with a smile.

“Yeah, leave these guys to us,” Jon fought back the enemies happily.

“Why don’t you both leave this to me,” the voice deep and focused, “-as a parting gift, I’ll show all of you the power of the man nicknamed Xenos,” the pressure alone made the rest on edge. Whispers and murmurs went around the battlefield, to which the vanguard retreated.

“Why are they falling back?” the other units asked whilst the front line ran past them.

“Ferry, Jon,” Undrar called, “-what’s happening?”

“No clue, Xenos asked for everyone to retreat.” With a nod, Undrar accepted the decision and sent the message to all who were on the field. In a matter of minutes, everyone rejoined into a grey area – a place where if it ever came down to it, the last stand would be made.

“From what Ferry told us,” the units spoke to one another, “-Xenos said something about showing us his power?”

“Is that the case,” Deadeyes relaxed.

“Calm down everyone,” Achilles intervened, “-just wait and watch, this is going to be fun,” a smile could be seen on her face.

“I wish we could,” Jon voiced, “-but there’s like two-hundred monsters approaching, it’s nearly day – their voracity increases right about now.”

“Wait and watch, my friend, wait and watch,” Kniq calmly took a seat.

The atmosphere suddenly changed, it grew heavy and dark. “Let’s get ready to fight, Adete,” he voiced, with the now sharper and longer teeth, biting his thumb felt like child’s play. The wound made was big, a lot of blood flowed. Not only did he bite the thumb, but every single finger on both hands. *Blood-Arts: Crimson Thread,* rather than fall down, it hovered and turned into a halo over the head. The blood crystalized, it was darker in color which meant more potent and more powerful. To stop the bleeding, the Death-element kicked in and regenerated the injury.

With a gentle motion of the fingers, the halo broke and turned into darts, almost shaped like bullets. *Snap,* the horde sprinting across the field, that single snap sent those crimson-darts forth. It took out a quarter of the forces without blinking. From there on, *Clap,* the darts burst and shattered into tiny particles, to which a diagonal motion of the hands which resembled a knife later – it changed into threads that cleanly sliced through the other quarter. Once that was done, from an open palm, he clenched into a fist which forced the crystal blood to return.

Blood-Arts: Orenmir, Blood Blade of the Queen, it changed from particles to a full-on sword. ‘It’s been far too long,’ sheathed on the left hand and right hand on the grip – he took the stance for a quick draw technique – a move that was picked up whilst watching the others fight. The previous swords didn’t permit such a move, however, with Orenmir, with its smaller width size and slightly curved blade – tis was possible. The footsteps echoed through the ground, *Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary.* Blade in hand, the ground cracked, a blink later, following a red light, the remainder of the monsters died without a chance to react. Staxius stood behind the pack with eyes closed and sword sheathed, behind, heads fell as if

ripe fruits of a tree. Normally, after a beast was slain, its blood would gush out till the body turned into ash and disappear. However, with Bloody Mary activated, all that would be gushing blood rather than falling to the ground, followed a singular path that led to Staxius's right hand. It stood there hovered above the pentagram. As time went on, the small orb grew bigger and bigger.

Blood-Arts: Absorption. As the name indicated, all that was filtered than absorbed through Adete who happily ate the orb. The more blood a vampire had, the more powerful he got. A quick and easy way to get stronger though he didn't enjoy the idea of sucking blood off living beings. Dying ones, on the other hand, was the exception.

"Happy?" he asked with a casual tone.

"More than happy," she licked her lips constantly whilst eating the orb that was now twice her size.

"Glad to be of service," he turned, the sun rose.