

## Death Magic 221

### Chapter 221: A new Friendship

“Who would have thought it,” the queen spoke with a sign.

“Unexpected, but we should leave the unanswered questions alone,” he voiced unimpressed by the current events.

“Shall we get back to our meet?” now sat where she first was, Gallienne waited with her mind filled with information about what Queen Mother Sely had said.

‘In fairness, the book was the only thing that linked my past and present together. Guess it’s time to move on,’ folded and neatly rested on his lap – Staxius thought. “If father gave you this,” he broke the ice, “-then it’s best that it remains by thy side,” with a gentle motion, the book was returned to its owner.

“Are you sure about this?” Gallienne asked.

“Yes, at one point it would have been useful,” the head shook, “-however, it’s now just a relic that links two eras together. It would be best kept in thy hands, majesty,” no second feelings nor second thoughts, Staxius had made peace with all the unanswered questions long ago. Today came as a surprise, all happened spontaneously that there was no way to predict such a development.

“Thank you,” she replied with a smile, one gentle and relieved, “-shall we get back to the thing at hand?”

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“With pleasure,” he nodded in agreement.

“As Master Serlo has already told you, this meet today is concerning the Platinum quest and the promotion in rank. I’ll spare the details for it’s unworthy and not necessary,” her hands reached underneath her desk, “-here,” a small box, almost like a treasure chest, was placed onto the table. Lined with silvery lines in a rose-like design, the lock opened with a gentle click, almost like a bell. “May I have the guild card, and the guild necklace?” she asked courteously. The strange devices inside said chest was laid for all to see. Obligated, he did what was told.

“You must be thinking why a Queen would do such a task,” she said whilst manipulating the intricate devices. A glance at Staxius’s face later, she continued her explanation, “-it may seem out of order and out of place, but tis an honor. Being able to promote and see the people who might bring everlasting change to our kingdom. I’ve personally met a few of the golden-ranked adventurers, though their visits were less lively than ours,” she giggled a little for the encounter with her mother a few minutes prior brought joy. “In any case,” the guild card now updated, was pushed towards her guest.

[Staxius Haggard]

[Guild Leader: Kniq]

[Ranking: Gold]

[Potential: Platinum]

"Is it that simple to update a guild card?" a relatively mindless question.

"No," her reply fast and swift, "-there's a lot of procedures first. From the Guild Master to the Sages of the Order then finally I, prerequisites have to be met," her eyes focused onto the necklace, "-quite peculiar," she voiced deeply intrigued, "-silver, gold, and platinum. The three top-tier rankings on a single piece of jewelry, I dare say it's amusing."

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A few seconds later, "-the usual order would have been to replace the necklace with one new and updated. Honestly, I'm at a loss for words here," she scratched her head forgetting her prestige as queen.

"I do prefer the weirder looking necklace; no change is needed on that front,"

"No harm done," a smile later, "-onto the rewards," a card similar to the one the bank uses got taken out the same box. "Use this at the bank, they'll know to transfer the funds."

"What about the funds I collected from monster slaying?"

"Those are in Serlo's possession, for some reason the man was adamant on handling the procedure personally," thus the meet ended.

"Before you leave," he whispered and leaned closer to the table.

"What is it?" she asked intrigued by what he had in mind.

"Is there any way I can purchase property in the noble district. This does, in fact, sound extremely presumptuous and rude – to ask such a thing without being a member of thy court..."

"King Staxius," she interjected, "-I apologize for cutting you off, but what you ask is..." her eyes narrowed, "-it's completely fine, there's no need to be threatened," to which each relaxed. "Normally, this transgression would be punished, normally that is. I'm queen, therefore my word is the law. Firstly, as the son of someone I looked up too, and the king of the first nation to ever ally themselves under the same banner, it would be an honor to allow thee to take up residence in the noble district," her voice and aura felt innocent and pure, no ulterior motive, what she said was true.

"You sure have changed," he added perplexed by how easy that was.

"I supposed you thought that the heartless princess would refuse and rein havoc," she asked with a coy look.

"I do apologize,"

"No worries, my friend, I'm grateful that my misgivings in the past have been overlooked. Thank you very much, turning Arda into an ally was the last thing on the agenda. One that had the highest difficulty, once again, I'm grateful for all that has been done, words can't describe how much I appreciate thy actions, Majesty," she bowed yet again.

"A queen should not lower her head so often," the voice sharp, "-majesty, do be mindful of thy stature. There's no better pleasure than to see someone strive to become a better person. Being referred to as a

friend by Queen Gallienne herself is a great honor. As a way to show my appreciation, I can promise one thing, if ever I see that you might be straying off the path of thy own ideals – I'll personally endeavor to guide thee back to said path. Of course, that means if people have to be killed, they will be killed," he spoke in a casual yet firm manner, "-as your friend, if the time ever comes where help is needed, don't be afraid to reach out," he held out a hand.

"I see that I'm not the only one who's changing," she added in a smug yet casual tone to which they shook hands. "As for the right to buy, I've got a few properties on the line. It will cost a lot – but their worth each coin. Do you have anything particular in mind?"

"Let me see," he thought, "-the mansion must be big, a yard on which two to three helicopters can land, a garage that can hold five to six vehicles," it was said sarcastically.

"I've got the perfect location then," she didn't catch onto the fact that it was meant as a joke, "-there's a mansion, with a yard as big as required sitting alone. The place is secluded and near the start of the noble district. I'd go as far as to say that the property is the more luxurious one to be built," she paused and laughed, "-I sound like an estate agent," Staxius joined with her laughter. "As I was saying," her mind recomposed, "-the estate is surrounded by a wall after which trees span across the barrier. By what was said earlier, the place you need must be secretive."

"You sure are witty, a place at the start of the noble district and secluded to boot. With that, there's no risk of the other nobles to be on edge. Taking its secluded nature into account – I fear for the people who are on thy bad side."

"Care to visit?"

"Sure,"

"Then let's get going," she spoke with determination.

"Are you coming along, what about your duties?" he asked confused about her sudden change in persona.

"It won't take long, besides, there's that teleportation spell."

In said manner, Gallienne exited the castle walls without much trouble. Staxius managed to collect the reward from Serlo. After a few minute's ride, they arrived. The place wasn't as the queen had described. The roads did, in fact, led to the castle. Along said path, prestigious mansions were built, those of Viscount and lower. Uninhabited, for the most part, it didn't seem as lonely as one might think. The streets were cleaned regularly.

Hidden from prying eyes thanks to elevated stone-brick walls – the duo entered the property. A medium-size road led up a small hill – to the right, a massive yard on which three to four helicopters might land. They were surrounded by trees and plants, all well maintained. The drive continued up the road till it curved to the right. There, on the left, a gigantic mansion that held two floors with slated roofs. It was a third of the length of the yard. The design was elegant for the front had differing heights all with slated roofs. It all mixed in with the main building, one that had a creme and blueish-grey rooftop. The windows were of the same blueish hue – the level of intricacies of the design reflected the

architect's skill. Further up the path, after the mansion, laid another building with a similar design – the garage.

"How..." the car stopped before the entrance, "-who in their right mind would build such a thing," the eyes wandered from left to right. Inside these walls, it seemed like a different world, a haven inside the capital.

"The culprit is right here," Gallienne mumbled.

"I see," he faced the yard, both now leaned on Void, "-want to tell me more?"

"There's nothing much to it, I decided to build it on a whim. I thought that one day the castle might become a place of fighting and hate – thus this place. I wanted to live alone, away from everyone else. It did take around five to six years to complete; I never had the guts to head out and live on my own," heaviness filled her voice.

"It doesn't really matter, this place sure is a haven," he smiled, "-I like the feel it has. A place where one can feel safe," their eyes met, "-without looking inside I can tell that this place was built to resemble home," the glances broke, he stared at the entourage – it sure was peaceful. "How much," the tone serious.

"W-what?" her face lit with shock; never did she think that someone would grow to like what she had done. It was sure built for comfort but buyers always thought of it being way too extravagant, none saw what she wanted to emulate. "We haven't even looked inside yet, what do you mean price?"

"I care not, tell me the price," the voice adamant.

"I spent 150,000 Gold to do everything," she added in a shy tone.

"Nonsense," he sighed, "-this place is worth far more than 150,000 gold. It's like a whole other world – I couldn't put a price even if I wanted too," the hands reached for a cigar, "-how about this," he took a good look around the vicinity again, "200,000 gold for it all, it includes the right to the land as well."

"Are you insane?" throwing around that big of a price tag as if it was nothing sure was insanity. Even for royalty, that amount of gold was a fortune – the reason why she spoke in such a shy tone was that the 150,000 came from the underground – one of her many dark schemes.

"Call me insane I care not; this place is perfect. I'm willing to pay right now," the stance determined and face serious.

"You're not pulling my leg, are you?" she asked with a smile. Someone had acknowledged that this estate was worth its value. Most wanted to buy for no less than 85,000 gold. "I'll sell it for 175,000 gold, keep the rest," she smiled, this negotiation was completely inverted. As opposed to raising the price, the seller was lowering the price whilst the buyer wanted to pay more. The idiocy in that transaction made them both laughed, "-eccentric is what fits us best."

"You're right," the deal was settled, "-180,000 for the property, the lands, and all the rights."

"Deal," she smiled – both were happy. For a piece of land this big and in the capital no less, that price was a bargain. Not to mention it came from the Queen herself. A quick visit inside later, they returned to the castle – the details had to be finalized.

## Chapter 222: Mansion

"And it's finalized," Gallienne voiced triumphantly, papers relating to the mansion were readied. Stood in the same room as before, Staxius waited patiently for her to finish.

"Payment wise, do you have a separate account?" he asked to which she nodded.

"Yes," hands reached for the desk where a card rested. "Alright," he smiled, mana infused with his card revealed, [202,988 Gold/500 Silver]. A touch of the card later, 180,000 Gold was transferred instantly. 'The bank sure has gotten efficient over the time,' he wondered whilst the Queen held out a pen.

"Sign here, here and here," she pointed to three spots, after which – Staxius gained ownership of the Queen's would be home.

"I appreciate all you've done, majesty, it's a pleasure to have been able to clear all our past together. Let's head into a new tomorrow with a fresh start," the tone casual – what she thought was a grudge was quelled. The fact remained that said grudge she thought he held was just imagination.

"The pleasure was all mine, King Staxius," she nodded in agreement, the door closed, the task of obtaining a residence had been accomplished.

"Is it over already?" from the back, Adete hovered over his head.

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"Yes, it's all done," he replied with an uninterested tone.

A few steps later, on the way down – rested against the wall; the guild master. He stood with eyes closed and arms crossed, the man had been waiting to ambush. Not wanting to garner attention, Staxius tried to slip away, "-hold up," the attempt resulted in naught.

"What is it, guild master?" the face devoid of emotion and voice as if a walking corpse.

"There something I need to ask," he approached and eyed out the window, Staxius could but stand beside and wait, "-are you going to go on quest soon?"

"Not to my knowledge, no," the reply quick. 'There's something wrong with him,' he thought, '-by the way he speaks and acts at this moment, there's an issue that wanes on his mind.'

"Good," the voice relieved, "-I'd like for you to not go on quests," they both face one another, the request felt more like an order.

"Care to elaborate?" he asked without much interest, or so that was what he made Raulf think.

"You having cleared the first platinum quest and getting promoted to Gold-rank is sure going to place a target on thy back. I know full well that those things are inconsequential, you defeated me after all, but for the sake of Hidros, don't do anything that may cause trouble. This is a warning from a friend, don't try to get on the bad sides of the top-guilds, some want Kniq to suffer and fail," tis was a call to stay on guard.

"Prideful humans with their weak egos," a sigh of disappointment later, "-don't worry. I wasn't planning to join the fight against the monsters. People are far eviler than those relatively tame beasts," he patted

the guild master's broad shoulders, "-I won't kill nor hurt any of the adventurers," the voice calm yet menacing. "In no way is this a promise – Kniq will continue to do quests. That is under Viola's control, my job is handling the magical shop," from only the head facing Raulf, he turned, "-all will be fine as long as no one tries to get in my way. Try and hurt one of my members," killing intent oozed slowly, "-and I swear I'll rip the guilds apart top to bottom," as opposed to the stoic face, he smiled which revealed the sharpened teeth, "-don't underestimate a vampire," to which a step later, the man vanished.

"What the.." caught off guard, the guild master looked around cluelessly.

"Have a good day, friend – if you ever require my assistance, give a call," the voice came from behind. Footstep after footstep, he disappeared into the somber hall.

"Staxius Haggard," Raulf mumbled, "-did you grow even more powerful from our fight?" the head shook with fear, "-he has the power to rip apart the entire kingdom. I fret that there's more power hidden underneath. Not a savior nor a destroyer, what side will you choose in the end, my friend," with a grin of his own, Raulf headed the opposite direction.

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"You sure love to play the villain, don't you?" Adete voiced in jest.

"Do you really think me a villain?" he asked in a melodramatic tone, Void came in sight.

"Not really, the villain would be a child compared to what you actually are," she chuckled.

"It's pointless, labeling someone as good or evil is subjective. There's no middle ground to take reference from. Frivolous waste of time," the engine roared, the destination was the new estate.

'A thirty-minute drive from the castle,' the car reached its destination, '-I still can't fathom how massive the capital actually is. Though it's to be expected, Void's limited by the roads – such restriction makes it longer to reach places. Outside the capital, journeys get ten-time faster. A trip that would take ten-hours can be done in one to two hours,' the gate opened with a push of a button. Slowly, he drove up the small incline.

"This whole estate is mine," the car stopped shy of the main entrance, "-who would have thought," he stood outside and stared at the yard. Well-maintained with open space to do just about anything one might have liked. 'I got one hour before going to pick-up Lizzie, time to explore,' the first order of business was the yard. He walked across and breathed in the fresh breeze that came from the trees surrounding the vicinity.

'That's new,' a sculpture piqued the interest, located on the top-left of the yard, small relative to the size of the plain, a pond with a statue of what appeared to be Syhton in her full glory. One hand held a staff while the other held a star. 'Good spot to lay and relax.' Once the front was explored, he teleported back to Void. Along the trip, Adete remained in awe – the beauty of this place took her breath away. 'As far as concerned, there's nothing of interest around the main mansion. Next to the latter laid a garden protected by a black fence. A stone-path led deeper in the middle where a small table and four chairs rested.

"The moment of truth," he voiced and stepped inside. Immediately, a welcome area with a large staircase leading to the first floor. Two doors, one to the right and one to the left. The one to the right

led to a common area, a place where guests were welcomed – rather large. Before each room, laid a hall that linked everything together neatly. After the common area, a dining hall – one that filled out the whole space. This was at the front of the mansion, behind the first set of rooms – laid a kitchen and work-space area for maids and butlers. A place where they could both do laundry and much more, nothing extravagant but a large space in fairness. The kitchen, laundry room was located there – anything the was required for comfort.

All that was the left side of the mansion facing the yard upfront. Now came time for the right side – a big open space reserved for entertainment. Couches, television, a piano, and other commodity, tis was the front. At the back, a bar – filled with booze, one the same size as the entertainment room. Though access was restricted by an always closed door. Finally, the room behind the staircase, a lounge for those who wished to rest whilst enjoying a drink away from the bar.

On the second floor, the stair reached up to large window panes that peered outback. Surrounding said stairway – balustrade with a big chandelier up top. The layout of the second floor was simple enough. Right after coming up, a hall led to the middle of the floor then separated the two sides. All the rooms except for one at the back were bedrooms. Four in total with two toilet and baths in the end. The ones on the front of the house had access to a balcony whereas the ones at the back didn't. On the left side, a study at the back and a library at the front. In the middle of the library and one of the rooms, rested another room – one that led outside; a rest area for a late-night chat.

'I'm tired just from exploring,' stood out on the main balcony, the mind thought. 'The attic will be the place where armor and weapons will be stored. To put each room's size into perspective, they are twice what the others are living in. Four rooms in total, each capable of holding four people, if necessary, a few tinkering could separate it all into eight rooms. Though I doubt they'd want to stay apart. This was built per her majesty's specification,' already furnished, he stood with a smile.

"My own mansion," he mumbled.

"Yes, it's yours, congratulation," Adete gave her good wishes, the lady was happy for once.

"A place to call home at last," after which he headed into one of the bedrooms. Two-bed the size of Void in width laid across each end. In no way did he know what Gallienne wanted to accomplish – three people could easily and comfortably sleep in one of those beds.

It had been forty-five minutes; now the owner of a magnificent mansion, Staxius teleported back to Pandora. Sat in the RFS, he drove forth to pick-up Lizzie.

"Undrar?" telepathy was utilized.

"Yes, what is it?" connection made.

"Can you kindly gather everyone and wait at the shop?"

"Sure, may I ask the reason?"

"No, you may not, tis a secret," the small conversation ended.

\*Driing,\* the bell rung – waiting in another high-end vehicle outside the school, the other families could but feel the pressure.

"Over here," he called.

"You came," with a smile, Lizzie rushed over and gave a quick hug after which they headed back.

"Where are we going today, and why did you bring this massive truck?" she asked for it was overkill to bring a military-grade vehicle to just pick up someone. "Nothing much, don't worry about it," he replied with an uninterested tone. A few hours later, stood before Pandora, everyone waited. This included the Lymsey sisters who had been left alone for the entire day.

"Did something happen?" Deadeyes asked with his rifle ready to fire.

"Are we going to fight?" Avon had the same mindset.

"Why would master call Auic and Lizzie if this was a combat mission," Undrar voiced a good point. Thus, chatter about the reason why they were called echoed down the street.

"Get in, I'd rather show than tell," the face unreadable, they entered.

\*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* the entire unit was transferred to a few kilometers away from the noble district. Silence followed by someone hurling into a plastic bag, the drive continued. None dared to speak for they were awe-struck by the scenery.

Once up the hill headed for the noble district.

"Sister, sister," Emma called,

"Yes sister, I think we're being summoned to the castle," Emmy figured a guess.

A push of a button later, they entered the newly bought estate.

"Where are we?" the same question went around.

\*Click,\* the door opened, "-welcome to my estate," Staxius proclaimed and jumped off the RFS.

"..." silence, "-amazing," Undrar mumbled – her eyes wandered around.

"Your estate?" Achilles asked with the same reaction.

"Talk about being rich," Deadeyes voiced in amazement.

"This is so pretty," Avon ran around as if a kid.

"Did you purchase a mansion this big?" Auic asked, "-I thought that what was said before was in jest..."

Lizzie and the twins had nothing to say, they kept silent and grabbed onto Staxius's shirt.

"Listen up," stood on the porch, "-starting today, this mansion will become our place of residence. Viola, Avon, Deadeyes, Achilles, Auic, Emma, Emmy, and Lizzie," they remained fixed in place, "-welcome home," the voice gentle and comforting, the girls couldn't keep from shedding a few tears of happiness.

"What are you waiting for," surprised by why they stood in place, he spoke loudly, "-go explore and make the place familiar. I'll take care of the hotel. Everything within these walls belongs to me, do what you want, no one is here to judge – a present for us all."



“Thank you, master,” they spoke in harmony and bowed in tandem.

#### Chapter 223: First Night

“Load it up inside,” fingers pointed at the RFS. A few hours had gone by – the sun sat a few minutes ago. Assistants from the hotel came to aid in the loading of Kniq’s items and clothes. It had been a few months to which clothes were bought along with that duration. Over watching the process, Staxius, he stood with arms crossed with the hotel’s manager. The price paid was 50 Gold since it had not been that long a time. He used the card in which the reward from monster slaying was stored. In total, he had two cards, one with money earned honestly and the other, money from the underground.

“We appreciate the business,” obliged, the manager shook hands warmly. The guests came to watch as Kniq’s stuff left. Somewhere sad whilst others relieved for the demi-human would no longer plague the surrounding.

“The pleasure was all mine, thanks for having taken care of my companions for so long,” the conversation ended, the RFS turned on. Slowly, the vehicle drove forth, in the rearview mirror, the neon-light faded into the distance.

‘Everything has gone to plan. Never did I think that all that monster slaying would bring in so much cash. Getting a place to call home has been accomplished. The next task is opening a guild in Arda. Queen Gallienne has me in her good graces, not to mention the guild master himself. There are still unknowns to the process of opening that establishment. We’ll have to wait and see – I might need to visit my little sister since she’s a part of the Order,’ inconspicuous, the vehicle continued its journey through the warmly lit streets. ‘How does my mother tie into that organization?’ he wondered, ‘Eira’s tournament will begin soon. There are rumors that the two-versus-two tournament has been canceled, this means that she won’t have to fight. In fairness, that’s probably for the best. The inter-magical tournament isn’t a walk in the park,’ stone-brick came in view. ‘Gergusser, the lady of ice. I wonder why one of those ancient dragons wanted to possess Eira. If the seals are being broken, it’s not far off to say that other people have been in contact with them. An interesting development – dragons coming to life,’ he parked just shy of the porch, ‘-I’ve got the strongest dragon to ever live in my corner, what’s there to worry about,’ with a quick chuckle, he stepped out.

“Master,” Avon waved, he stood near the entrance.

“Kindly fetch the others,” Staxius asked whilst unloading boxes.

“On it,” the spirit scurried inside. Hearing that master had arrived, the others rushed down the stairs.

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“How’s the mansion, do you like it?” Staxius asked, the question directed to Lizzie and the Lymsey sisters – the three youngest.

“It’s amazing,” Lizzie answered with her eyes wide open.

“It’s very big,” Emma replied, “-and spacious,” Emmy added.

“Glad you like it,??? he returned a warm smile. \*Dark-Arts: Sense Personality,\* still unsatisfied by how the twins had changed, as opposed to asking, the decision was made to directly see what they thought.

'I knew it,' he sighed, '-they still haven't gotten over the grief, it's all but an act to make me feel better,' the head shook subtly.

"Master, you came back," Deadeyes arrived at last.

"Each of your names and personal belongings have been stated clearly on the top. Take what is yours and leave," to which, the whole crew walked and searched for what was theirs.

A few steps away with his back resting on the RFS, he watched. "I need to know how much gold was spent," Undrar asked, both stood side by side.

"Not that much considering the estate," a vague reply that implied the reluctance to answer. Viola could but give a side-glance, one of disappointment. "If there's something you want to say, then do it, I care not for playing childish games," the tone cold, he caught her anguish.

"Honestly," she sighed and placed a hand atop his shoulder, "-there's nothing the matter. It all seems too good to be true, it's why I'm reluctant. The curse of the Death Reaper looms in the air, I can't but feel anxious. All that we are building might crumble down any second,"

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"Is that so," he voiced softly, "-that curse is a pain. However, being bound won't do us anything good. As far as I'm concerned, if it activates, the man you know as Staxius will disappear in a blink of an eye.

"There's no helping it, but a curse is a curse, there must be a way to break its effect," a point well made.

"It's more like a trait – a limiter to stop the Death Reapers from becoming more powerful. Removing it completely is a fantasy, a dream; things that I can't afford to do. Hope isn't lost, if I can somehow find a way to locate the curse and decipher its workings and conditions – there might be a slight chance to change and focus the damage onto myself."

"Limiting the damage, not a bad idea," she spoke with a smile.

"For that to happen, I need books and knowledge," he glanced over with a conniving look.

"You're not going to the Hall of Rebirth," she fired back adamantly.

"You best go fetch the books for me then," he winked.

"Fine," a pitch on his cheeks later, "-I'll have it ready by tomorrow," Undrar was happy to have been able to rejoin with her brother.

"On another note," the pile of boxes emptied, "-how did the others respond to living in a mansion?"

"The first few hours were tough; most were intimidated by the size and prestige. It was then that Achilles decided to speak out – a speech that evaded my mind in all honesty. The essence was that everyone had a roof and a place to live; most importantly, we had freedom and remained under the protection of one of the strongest men in Hidros."

"Way to blow things out of proportion," the RFS turned on, "-I'll go park this in the garage."

Sat around a large and long table with Staxius at the head, they waited for the food to arrive. Auic, Achilles, and Undrar with the help of the girls had taken it upon their heads to make a feast. One that

would be remembered for the ages. Chandeliers, decorations, portraits with heavy curtains blocking out the outside, they sat and had dinner.

"Truly succulent," he complimented the food, "I didn't know that we had such great cooks in our midst," to which many laughed. The atmosphere around the table was joyous, none paid heed to manners for it was an auspicious moment. Smiles and laughter, a good meal in the company of good people. 'This moment, this instant, seeing all those smiles, it makes doing all that work worth every single drop of sweat and blood. I wish Eira and Xula could join us, either way, Kniq is my family – nothing's going to change that fact.'

Time went on, from the dining hall, they moved to the opened space, the entertainment room. As per his orders, the bar was kept closed. In that manner, many indulged in different activities. Deadeyes and Avon watched television. Lizzie and the Lymsey sisters played around with musical instruments and they did things normal teenagers would. Achilles and Undrar remained at the back of the room with a glass of wine and a good book. Avon and Auic were nowhere to be found to which he assumed that those two were off somewhere flirting. Staxius, on the other hand, sat outside and looked at the garden whilst the cold night breeze brushed aside his hair.

"Alright people," time now was around ten, he spoke after waking. "As you know, there are four bedrooms in which each has two beds and enough space for four people to live together. Therefore, the matter at hand is who will get what room," a serious matter.

"Why don't we keep the usual sleeping arrangement we had back at the hotel," Deadeyes voiced.

"It's not like a separate room will do us any good, being together in case of an attack is far better," Achilles nodded in agreement.

"Master, you needn't worry, as a family, we don't mind sharing beds – strength in unity," Avon winked.

"You people are the best," the stoic face gave a smile for he had been worried that they would have been unsatisfied by the sleeping arrangements. Little did he know that Kniq didn't care about that sort of thing as long as they were under the same roof.

"What will it be then?" Staxius asked.

"I'll decide the arrangements," Undrar came forth, "Avon, Deadeyes can have one room. Achilles, Auic, and I. Then Lizzie and the twins can have the other rooms. Last but not least, Master will have one of the bedchambers with the balcony."

"I don't see the issue," everyone agreed.

"I guess it's fine as long as no one has a problem with the arrangements. Do but reach out if anyone wants to be my roommate," he ended with a wink.

"It could not be any better," Lizzie gave a thumbs up.

"Master, master," Emma called, "don't be alarmed if we sneak into thy room late at night," Emmy added in jest.

"Sure," he patted their heads, "just make sure to not wake everyone else," index finger on his mouth, a gesture that swore them to secrecy. Obviously, they all knew that he was joking.

"Well it's best to call it a night," he patted Lizzie's back, "-you have school tomorrow," after which all headed into their bed chambers. Avon and Deadeyes had the first room, the next was for Undrar and her group. Then came the rooms at the front of the house, ones with balconies. Directly opposite Undrar was Staxius's and next to him was for Lizzie and the twins. The first night at the mansion – tomorrow would be another day off.

??I'll need to ask Undrar to place a barrier spell around the mansion later tomorrow. Who knows when people might attack,' he stood out on the balcony and stared the night sky.

"About that curse," Adete came forth, "-I think there might be a way to control it," she proposed in a stern voice.

"Do tell," elbows resting on the balustrade, he asked with intrigue.

"Since I'm part of you now, exploring the subconscious and hidden powers and curses grew to be a passion of mine. You're so complex it's unbelievable,"

"Get to the point already," he yawned.

"Ungrateful," she kicked which felt as if a mosquito bite, "-long story short, I might have found the curse of the Death Reaper. Locked behind so many spells and barriers, it took months to crack down on the many facades. Now that it's open, the curse that I saw wasn't anything I had ever seen. It's not as black and white as one might think for it resembled a dormant egg. I guess that when it breaks or hatches, it's then that the whole curse thing is activated."

"Is there any way I can transport myself there?"

"Maybe, but for now, I'm clueless," she added with a shrug.

"This is unlike you, bringing up a subject without an answer, I don't bite it," he stood and waited for the response.

"Heh," she chuckled then flew to hover with her back turned to the moon. What Staxius saw was a silhouette, "-I can promise one thing. As long as you get more powerful, I'll do what I can to stop that egg from breaking. I've got a suspicion that if it hatches, something bad will happen. Therefore, my master, you need to gain more power both as the heir and as a vampire."

"I see," the voice monotonous, "-kill and be killed, the cycle of life and death. Kill to increase my power as a vampire and be killed for the death element, it all comes down to the natural order of things."

"Surely you don't think getting killed is the only way to train the death element."

"I suppose your right, guess it's time to study and train. Killing myself would be far easier," he mumbled the last sentence.

"There's a question I wanted to ask," Adete returned and stood on his palm, "-why is it that you seek power."

"Simple, to annihilate anyone and anything that might stand and try to hurt me or the people I care about," the murderous gaze returned, it sent shivers down Adete's back.

## Chapter 224: Orenmir

Awaken by the clattering of footsteps outside, at around six, a new morning began. The past few days had been overwhelming, to say the least. Information given yesterday by Adete had forced the mind to work throughout the night. "I feel empty," he mumbled whilst opening the curtains behind which laid the balcony. A step outside into the heartless freezing dawn had made chills pierced through the skin and into the bones.

"Lovely morning," Adete voiced still half-asleep, her head leaned on Staxius's neck.

"It sure is," he proceeded to stretch and yawn thus breaking the prison that bound all to this world – sleep.

"Lively bunch," she added in jest, no response as usual from her master. He instead made way into the hall with only a t-shirt and boxers, nothing more nothing less.

"Lizzie, stop being a brat and get back here," Auic sprinted across from the bath, their eyes met for a mere fraction of a second. The excitement of living together with her guardian made the tom-boyish girl ecstatic. She enjoyed every single moment; it was proved by how active she was. As if the mother to her, the fox ran around trying to fix the girl's hair.

"Off they go," Adete pointed as the duo disappeared near the stairs.

"Morning master," coming out their rooms, Avon and Deadeyes. With only boxers, the men in said mansion didn't care much for being tactful.

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"Morning," the greeting returned with a high-five.

"It feels weird to be able to stay like a family," Deadeyes added whilst brushing his teeth.

"I agree," Avon nodded and gargled.

"I guess so," Staxius agreed and wiped Adete's mouth, "-it sure feels nice to wake up to a lively home as opposed to a desolate room out in nowhere," not wanting to draw attention, the last part was said without them noticing.

"We'll shower later, you go first, master," Avon nodded and left.

"How can I describe this," he stood and stared himself in the mirror, "-do I deserve this?" he asked, Adete gave a keen ear. "A home where my friends and companions lives, does a killer have the right to a peaceful life... I wonder."

"Don't be pathetic now," teeth sunk into his neck, "-who cares what has been done. They have a place to stay and call home, just do what you do best, my dear master. It happens, moments of doubts – I'm afraid to say that this will be the last time you'll experience such feelings. As a vampire, and one bearing the purest blood, thou shan't dwell on such matters. Thy humanity has long been gone; thou need but live for a single purpose."

"I get it, no need to repeat, I was just joking," the shower-head turned on. Meanwhile, downstairs, Undrar and Achilles got breakfast ready. The boys ran laps around the yard, keeping in shape as adventurers. Auic took care of Lizzie, the Lymsey sisters were in the kitchen – watching and learning the culinary way.

"Morning everyone," he walked, 'look at them,' a faint smile portrayed itself. Lizzie dressed in her uniform, waited patiently in the dining hall. For a teenager, she didn't act her age.

"Morning master," the rest greeted.

"Let me help with that," wanting to aid, Staxius assisted in setting plates to serve breakfast. Almost in tandem, as if it was second nature – all who were off doing their own things returned with smiles.

Once breakfast was done, Auic immediately took off for Kniq's headquarters. Apparently, some files needed to be compiled. Diane had outdone herself; the payment was made months ago before departing for the quest. Achilles and Undrar had plans to spend the rest of the day out in town. A trip to also restock supplies for the kitchen. "Are you sure about not needing a maid or butler?" Staxius asked.

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"No, its fine," Undrar replied whilst doing the dishes, "-we're accustomed to household chores. Taking care of this mansion isn't that big a deal," she turned with soap on her face, "-we're a family, everyone has their duties."

"What about me then?" he wiped off the foam on her cheeks.

"Take care of us, most importantly, take care of the twins and Lizzie. They seem cheerful on the outside though I feel a sense a reluctance between those three,"

"You felt it too..."

"Come on," Lizzie rushed into the kitchen, "-we're going to be late."

"On it," he patted Viola's back, a sign that said everything would be fine. Outside, from the garage, Void drove forth to the front. "Let's go," he called, Lizzie bid everyone goodbye then left.

"What now?" Adete asked, the car left the school and headed towards Pandora.

"God's ale, what else," a few hours later, they arrived. "It sure would be faster to just teleport around."

"But you made a promise to Lizzie," Adete interjected.

"Yeah," the door opened with a ding. From the knowledge amassed, he conceived a spell, one that had the ability to freely manipulate mana. It followed a strict guideline, all that was required was a sliver of his own mana. The god's ale would be brewed with no need for intervention. The ingredients were provided by different shops. He made it so that none could ever trace back to him even if the secret got out.

\*Driing,\* the phone showed Cake's information.

"Hello?"

“Morning boss, sorry if I’ve inconvenienced you,” her tone sounded worried.

“What is it?”

“There’s a weapons deal that will take place in 1-2 hours at Rotherham. It all seems familiar. Call it woman’s intuition, but I feel like enemies are to make a move.”

“On what basis?”

“Fighting a war from the shadows isn’t easy. Our organization has a firm foot in every dark-trade you can imagine. Contrary to us, this new group doesn’t have that much authority. They need weapons and funds to wage a war – what better way to get two birds with one stone,” the strategist had been working tirelessly.”

“I see, how’s the progress of the war going?” a question asked out of curiosity.

“For now, I’ve no clue. Lack of information, the other side is unpredictable – it’s almost as if they are being controlled by another higher entity,” her voice trailed off.

“No worries, give me the location and what is needed to be done.”

“It feels weird to give the boss orders,” she sighed, “-the deal will happen at that location,” a text with all the details was sent, “-as far as we’re concerned, that deal is between the arms traders and some faction hailing from the main continent. Our job is to intervene if the UO decides to make a move. Before you ask, UO, stands for Unidentified Organization, it was decided by the others – lackluster, I know.”

“Basically, kill and maybe try to capture the outsiders. Though I doubt they’ll speak. If UO is as smart as you said, in no way will influential people be sent, probably sacrificial pawns,”

“Right on,”

“Before ending the call, I need a favor,”

“Yeah?”

“Can you gather information about a group that calls themselves the Grey Guild?”

“The frauds, should be simple enough, are you sure that’s all?” she had a vague idea.

“Yeah, send me as much information as you can,” the call ended.

A deal happening in Rotherham, one that could end in a fight. Just the thought of a battle breaking out, it filled his mind with anticipation, the thirst for bloodshed. “I see,” Adete licked her lips, “-some action at last,” her face lit with glee.

“The thirst for blood, more specifically, the killing – I can’t wait,” they stood before a portal, “-being a vampire is more fun than I had thought,” it led to Arda. There, after a quick chat with Xula in her office, Staxius headed to meet with the scholars.

“Welcome back, your majesty,” they stood in line – the same team that had given every weapon and gear used up to this point.

"Is the weapon ready?" he asked in a deep and stern voice.

"Yes," the scholar in charge headed into a closed silvery room. In it, a briefcase that sheltered the weapon. "As specified, this weapon is a replica of Orenmir. Standalone, there's not much power, however, whilst channeling blood-arts into the handle. The strain of having to conjure the sword is reduced thus rendering it twice as strong. It all depends on the wielder's power," to which the case opened. It revealed a slightly curved long sword, the perfect length, and width. The sheath was black with crimson-colored flowers of which what felt like blood dripped, was laid across.

"You've outdone yourself yet again," he replied whilst paying a closer look at the new partner. "It's perfect," with a smile, "-how much for the trouble?"

"There's no need, your majesty," the leader solemnly refused, "-the information given about the research on ancient scrolls is more than adequate," to which he bowed.

"As you wish," with a handshake, Staxius returned with a new partner.

'Now then,' the sword rested on his work table. '-This trinket might come in handy,' he held out a piece of the God of Destruction's helm. 'A sword is the reflection of a swordsmen's soul,' he mumbled; "-Therefore, it stands to reason that the sword I wield must reflect what I have inside," the mind went into a trance. "All the people I've killed, all the souls I've taken and imprisoned," the words rolled off the tongue. In no way was it an incantation, "-it's time to return where you belong. Former cursed sword, this is thy new host," the finger touched the blade, the trinket had been installed in the handle, "-now go and serve thy master," the pentagram and ancient writings lit vividly.

From silvery to boiling red hot to then white, and finally – black, the entire room was engulfed by all the hopeless souls. Their screams and fight for freedom resulted in a deafening cacophony with Staxius at the center. It took a few minutes for the blade to be readied. He who had impressed him long ago, the hoodlum that fought despite all odds had his spirit infused with the weapon. The black-blade had golden and ruby-colored dots all around with silvery fissure marks separating each spot. The aura that surged took the form of a lady knelt and begging for salvation. The same that was seen during the fight against Raulf. In a single motion, Orenmir was sheathed.

"Orenmir and Tharis," the trance broke, "-welcome to the team," they rested on the table in full glory.

"A new cursed blade?" Adete asked.

"One fit for a vampire as well as the heir to the god of death. It's a combination of both powers. Most importantly, this blade has been forged with the strongest material to ever be made available in Arda. Said material was also infused by the mana of the highest grade. On its own, this sword has the rank of Legendary. Now add the enchantments and curses placed by yours truly, it surpasses the rank of Relic – it stands on the level of Cursed-items just below Demonic and Heroic swords. Cursed items aren't necessarily that rare, but it all depends on what sort of enchantments had to be given. For now, this is the best I can do. Daemonum Gladio, the true weapon of the Death Reaper, hasn't deemed me worthy yet. What I used in the past was but a tiny speck of its potential."

"Let's go to war," Adete voiced.

"With pleasure, let's paint the streets red," he added in a stern tone.



“But first,” the hand reached for the drawer, “-Shadow must remain hidden,” a mask given by Jason as a gift. It was handed over when the tin-box containing cigars was sent over. “I’ve been hidden up till now. Sadly, Knig will grow to be popular. People are sure to find out who Shadow is if I don’t take precaution.” It wasn’t full face, but one that only covered half, most importantly, the symbol of power underneath the left eye.

“Half a mask with a loosely worn shirt,” she chuckled, “-Shadow sure looks impressive...” it was but a sarcastic remark.

“If people lower their guards seeing my apparel – who will have the last laugh I wonder.”

## Chapter 225: The UO

“I presume the payment is in full?” a man in black-suit asked.

“Yes, and the cargo?” another man asked, this time – he had but a hoodie on. Both had their entourage covered by bodyguards. Each with a menacing aura and guns in hands – waiting ever so patiently for trouble to emerge. Stood on the edge of Rotherham, inside a factory owned by a private company – the deal took place. Away from prying eyes and away from the public, none knew what was to happen. For a town ruled by the underworld, these sorts of deals were a regular occurrence. From a few silvers to a thousand golds, each had a different purpose and scale. For days now, Cake had been analyzing data from every source at her disposal. The strategist needed information. It was a few days prior that someone, an unknown individual contacted one of the dark-guilds lowly members. A tip-off about the UO planning an attack. Under normal circumstances, in no way would this deal happen for large amounts of money and arms ready to take on a platoon left to the open, was foolish

“So far so good,” said the man in black-suit in a whisper. The dealer was in direct contact with Cake. It was both an arms deal and a bait tactic. One reckless at best, losing here would mean a massive blow.

“Continue with the deal, don’t lose focus – the money coming from this trade will help later on,” she said in a stern tone. Enclosed inside what appeared to be a hangar, the men waited. The high yet slated ceiling made each noise echo throughout. With only a wooden box separating both factions; after negotiations were finalized, the deal was complete. All that was left was to give a handshake – both took steps forward with the ever so vigilant eyes of their guards placed on the opposition. The tension was at an all-time high.

“GET DOWN,” cried one of the guards from the dark guild. In a blink of an eye, two RFS broke through the barrier and into the hangar. Explosions, gunfire, and smoke – it was as Cake had predicted. “GO,” screamed another, the dealer and client were escorted to a secure room whilst the guards on each side joined forces. Usually peaceful, the outskirts of the town turned into a battlefield.

“Cake, this is bad,” gunshots went past his ears and into the wall behind. The attackers were shooting through the walls. “I know,” she fired back whilst biting her nails, “-pin them down, try to fight back,” to which the gunfire increased. With the two RFS parked in a V-shape, they had made cover, a good point of access to have. Smoke grenades were utilized in tandem with poison gas.

“It’s no good,” voices came from the now blocked off hangar, the gunfire stopped.

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“There’s neither guns nor money,” the voices seemed erratic and on edge.

“We’ve been had,” a loud voice yelled, “-kill anyone in sight, else the Syndicate will kill us,” from silent, the chaos ensued.

“A message,” Staxius called with eyes on the road. To help, Adete took out the phone and read, “-the battle is already underway.”

“I see,” more mana injected, the car went into overdrive. “Can’t this go any faster,” Adete asked, her face changed – it now had the gaze of someone ready to kill at any time.

Back in the hangar, “-it’s all gone to shit, CAKE, THE CLIENT IS DEAD,” the dealer lashed out. A quick peek towards the middle later, it revealed the beheaded corpse of the client. Blood flowed continually; gunfire raged.

“Oh, calm down,” her tone uninterested, “-Shadow is on his way,” the transmission went on hold. ‘I hope this works,’ sat behind a screen with data on the location, she waited.

“Hold fire,” the same deep voice yelled. He felt it, an immense presence. “All eyes up front,” he ordered, from shooting at their primary targets, the attackers now faced the opening. Crouched and eyesight lined up, they waited.

“What do we do? The gunfire has died down, this is the perfect time to escape,” one of the surviving guards offered.

“Don’t move or do anything,” he said whilst peering through a hole made by bullets, “-Shadow is coming to provide backup,” he gulped, the guards could but shudder. A name thought to be a myth had come to reality.

\*Clop, clop,\* the smoke cleared, a figure approached. ‘This feeling, the smell of blood; one that reeks of death – it’s nostalgic.’

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“Fire,” the leader ordered, sights now set on he who had come, bullets raged forth. \*Death Element: Absolute Barrier,\* a snap sufficed – all the projectiles stopped. Magazines got emptied by the second, in no way were they going to be frightened by that trick.

“What are you waiting for, just kill them,” Adete stood atop his head, the bullets which stopped created a wall. “It’s no fun,” he shook his head, “-killing them will be a waste of time,” a sigh later, the constant sound of gunfire grew to be annoying. Another snap later, the bullets fell, the man was nowhere to be found. “SEARCH FOR HIM,” the leader yelled.

“Too late,” a voice came from behind, a faint glimmer of red-light later, the attackers fell. \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* the blood wove itself into a thread. It turned into an orb that Adete held. “The blood of humans is more delicious than the blood of monsters,” the fight ended.

Faced away from corpses that turned pale – ‘I should probably get a limiter. That wasn’t even a sliver of what I can do, just a normal quick draw technique with nothing magic related. Even the speed used was half of the usual. Getting cocky now isn’t going to accomplish much – when the time comes where it’s needed for I to go full-out, then it’s probably the day I’ll be defeated,’ sheathed and hidden by a

concealment spell, he turned and headed to where the dealer hid. The corpses behind were turned to dust, Adete went overboard when using Bloody Mary, as opposed to only the blood, she consumed the bodies entirely.

"Come out already," stood near the entrance, Staxius ordered.

"Thanks for the help," the dealer stepped out, "-Cake wants to talk with you," he handed over the headpiece.

"I did what was told, now what?"

"Nothing much, thanks for the help," she relished for this fight had other motives. A quick scan of the area later, the empty wooden box, what appeared to be the client's bloodied mess on the floor, and the same weapon was given to each guard; it seemed fishy.

"Hey, Cake," he asked in a whisper, "-Is this truly the place the deal is happening, or is it..."

"Stop right there," she interjected, "-that's the place where the deal was to occur," simultaneously, he got a text, one blank. \*All-Seeing eye,\* 'that's her location,' \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

"Anyways it's a job well done, thanks for the assistance," the transmission ended. "Shadow sure is an expert when it comes to killing people," she voiced in the comfort of her room.

"I appreciate the compliment," a voice came from behind, "-who stands there," she reached for her gun then shot instantly towards the noise.

"Come on," he caught the bullet, "-is that a way to greet a friend?"

"...boss," her eyes opened, "-what are you doing here?" it fazed her a little but paid no heed in the end.

"The blank text," he showed the phone, "-wasn't it the deal that if ever I received a blank text – I'd come immediately?"

"You meant it literally," slouched on her chair with numerous screens in front, the head shook from left to right. The room was typical, a lot of books, posters, and a small bed. Not to mention empty drink cans on the floor.

"Well, let's get right to the matter," she turned, "-from what you were about to say earlier, that place was a decoy. The dealer and client were both members of the dark-guild. The UO really thought that we'd undergo such a process with the sun out and about. To be fair, that operation wasn't to draw out the enemy from the outside, but one from the inside," her gaze sharpened.

"A spy?"

"Precisely," she tried averting Staxius's gaze.

"I get it," the posture relaxed, "-what better way to draw out an enemy with good bait. However, the deal wasn't the bait – It was me, wasn't it? The God's ale, that was what you wanted the spy to catch on."

"As I figured, you realized the whole scheme. I do apologize for keeping you in the dark. Tis was the only way, apart from you, no one else suspects that we have a traitor in our midst."

“Did you get any useful information?”

“Time only will tell, there are much more that must be set in place,” the sharpened gaze turned into one relieved, “-whoever is behind will grow to fear Shadow. Best bet that the UO will think twice before trying to attack.”

“I see, a display of power – scare off any unwanted attention and create a haven for the DG to continue their trade. Cake, I must say, you sure are very shrewd.”

“Awh, thanks for the compliment boss,” she gave a smile.

“Praises must be given to those who are worthy. You ought to be more careful next time – I do admire the reckless tactics,” he paused, “-try and keep it to a minimum,” thus, the return back to Void.

“Did you know you were being used as bait?” Adete asked with a crimson orb in hand.

“I had my doubts but that’s just how I usually am. Cake did impress, a scheme within a scheme – leaving the strategy to her is best,” the drive home began.

“How does the human blood taste?” he asked out of interest.

“It’s a feast,” she replied with her lips covered with the now congealed liquid, “-wanna try some?”

“Why not,” a bite later, the eyesight sharpened, “-what is this?” he asked, a warmth came from within.

“That’s Bloody Mary, turning blood into pure-strength. Drinking from a human would accomplish nothing in the great scheme, that is why I said killing is the way to be stronger,”

“I see – guess I’ll ask Jason for some jobs that involve killing later,” the drive carried on.

Far, far away, hidden in a place not known to many. “I’m afraid the deal was a bait,” an informant relayed.

“I see,” sat in a dark room, “-relay that information to the Syndicate. The DG will fall soon enough, the man known as Shadow is our immediate threat.” Images from the fight were shown, “-should be easy to deal with,” the voice sounded slow and fatigued. “Elsa,” he called, “-take Aiden and bring me the head of Shadow. If anyone gets in your way, kill them.”

“As you wish, Lord Desmond,” knelt with long black hair, the girl left.

“Is it time to go have some fun?” chained in a dungeon, Aiden mumbled frantically. Light brown hair with a scar in the shape of an X on his forehead – the man sang in a jingle.

“Yes, it’s time,” the lock opened with a loud clang, “-Lord Desmond has asked for us to eliminate someone that goes by the name of Shadow.”

“Yes,” his eyes opened, “-I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him,” he repeated the same words till, “I’ll KILL YOU,” he lashed out and tried to kill his rescuer.

“Calm down,” a press of a button later, he fell to the floor, “-you’ll forever be bound by Desmond, vile dragon spawn, nothing you do will ever cause harm,” mercilessly, she stepped onto his face, “-try to kill me ever again, and I swear I’ll end you without batting an eye. A chained guard dog is what you are,” the

crushing step changed into kicks, “-KNOW YOU’RE PLACE,” she spat, the constant kicks broke his jaws and a few bones.

“Stop,” as if possessed, he grabbed onto her foot, “-I care not why humans despise us,” he healed, “-but hurting my host isn’t something advisable. Best keep that hatred bundled inside, little Elsa. You don’t want another repeat of the past, now do you?” the voice shady as if mocking her.

“Whatever,” she stepped out, “-meet me outside when ready, we’re leaving later tonight.” Another press of a button later, the physical shackles were released.

“Bitch...” he wiped his mouth and spat blood with a few broken teeth.

## Chapter 226: Planning

“How was school?” the door opened.

“It was awesome,” Lizzie sat with a smile.

“Are they treating you right?” Void turned on.

“Yes, very much so, the attitude from the faculty changed quite a bit – I feel accepted.”

As if nothing happened, Staxius returned to the capital, fetched Lizzie, and headed to the mansion. Cake kept her promise and sent information on the Grey Guild. The latter was but a nickname.

“I still can’t believe a girl like me is living in such a grand mansion,” her face sparkled, almost radiating as if the sun during summer. “I can assure you it’s not a dream. Long enough have you suffered – we’re a family now, blood or not, you’ll always have a place here,” a quick pat on her head later, she stepped out of Void and headed inside. There, Auic waited to welcome the energetic girl.

“Now what?” Adete asked.

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“We’ll go pay my sister a visit,” he said without much concern.

“I see,” her eyes narrowed, “-sure, let’s go. Don’t forget about the trip back to the bar. You promised to ask about missions that involve killing,” flirtatiously, she licked her lips.

“Don’t worry about it,” the car turned and headed from whence it came.

“You heading out?” on the pavement next to the gate, Undrar and Achilles returned with grocery bags.

“There’s business to attend to, I might come back late, no need to wait to have dinner. Take care of the rest for me,” a quick nod later, the car headed deeper inside the noble district.

“A new mansion, shouldering his responsibilities, Staxius is well on his way to becoming someone we can be proud of,” Undrar added with a smile.

“I can’t believe he’s the one who brought my soul over to this world. On top of that, I was given a new body. All in hopes so I could experience life again,” the hero from another world was happy too.

“I have the suspicion that things might get hectic,” they walked up the small hill.

“What do you mean?” Achilles asked, the words Undrar chose piqued her curiosity.

“Nothing major, just the feeling that someone or something is out to get us. Either way, Kniq isn’t going to back down. A demigoddess, an ancient hero, a spirit that is well-versed in combat and support, a talented marksman with the addition of two new bloods, our fighting prowess without brother is formidable,”

“You’d think that we’d be unbeatable; don’t forget what happened a few months ago. The whole incident with Swift, I do wonder what they’re doing.”

“That was then and this is now, Achilles, our team has grown stronger. Not to mention that Staxius is on our side now. Killing him is a futile effort, each death makes him twice as strong as before. Though it comes with the cost of having more curses inflicted,”

“I didn’t know that, isn’t it dangerous?” they arrived at the porch.

“No, not as far as I’m concerned. Heroes are blessed to get stronger, you’ve experienced that too. The inverse could also be said, demons are cursed to be stronger,” Undrar pointed out strongly.

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“Aren’t you ashamed to say that the heir to a god is a demon?” Achilles asked with narrowed eyes.

“No, why would I, the god of death isn’t close to being righteous. That man, for as long as I’ve known him – he’s the complete opposite,” hand in hand, they made snacks and prepared dinner. “Dealing with death constantly must take a lot out of a person. There’s no room for compassion nor empathy. Their consciousness is hung by a single string, one that keeps their power from overflowing and taking command. For the current god of death, that thread is his passion for jokes and laughter. For Staxius, I want it to be stronger than laughter and jokes, the goal is to make that tiny thread bigger. What better way than to have something to protect,” the stove turned on and food was prepared.

“I see, but still, isn’t that information meant to be secret?”

“Not really, I felt like telling you because you’re from another world. These words might help in understanding the man who we call master. The righteous sense of justice you have is strong and admirable, however, when the time comes – Staxius will lose what little humanity he has left. When that day comes, which could be tomorrow or next week – he’ll stop caring about most of the things he holds dear. Part of the reason why I think he decided to get a mansion and bring everyone together is to have that feeling of protecting something kept ablaze,” tears flowed for she cut onions.

“Staxius Haggard, our master sure is a weird one. I’m positive that when that day comes, nothing will change. In no way can we ever read that man, let’s just support and help out when he needs it,” Achilles threw a smile.

“As expected, you’re more understanding than I give credit for. Let’s focus on the food – though it’s nice to talk and know where we stand.”

A few twists and turns here and there in combination with teleportation, they arrived at Claudia’s residence. The house looked unchanged for the most part. A quick scan of the area with the eyes closed – revealed two auras inside.

\*Knock, knock,\*

"I'm on it," a childish voice was heard – tiny footsteps scurried to the door. Left ajar, the boy peeked out to see who it was. "Who is it?" he asked, a foreign man with white and red hair stood.

"I see," he knelt, "-don't you remember me?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't," the boy remained adamant. "-who is it?" a lady's voice came from the back of the house. "I don't know mom, it's some man," to which three loud steps echoed.

"State your business," the eyes cold with the door now wide opened, Claudia stood before Axis – she guarded him with her body.

"Really?" he shook his head and stood.

"Who are you?" her tone piercing.

"It's Staxius, I admit I've changed but not that much," the face remained blank. Her eyes narrowed then stared from top to bottom.

"Still not convinced, ask Axis to use Spirit Sense," to which he whistled the tune only known to the Haggard siblings.

"Mom," the boy grabbed onto her dress, "-it is uncle Staxius," to which he jumped into his arms.

"Slow down there, little man," with a smile, he picked up the boy and span around. Axis could but giggle joyfully, "-come on Claudia," they stopped.

"Fine, come in," she gave and accepted, the main reason was Axis – the boy did, in fact, use Spirit sense. Sat near the kitchen counter, tea was served whilst Adete played with his nephew.

"Care to explain?" Claudia asked whilst blowing gently on her cup.

"Long story short, I became a vampire," after which he proceeded to show the long teeth and crimson eyes.

"You managed to forgo of that human side you so despised," nonchalantly, she took a sip.

"Things happened, but that's not the issue at hand," the voice stern.

"Go on," her guard lowered, by his mannerism and way of speaking – it became obvious that it was her brother.

"I need to get in touch with the Order – and from what you said before, mother works there and is high-ranking, I presume?"

"Yes, but why do you need to meet with them?"

"I'm sure you read the news about the first platinum quest being cleared. The Guild known as Kniq is under my command. I don't remember if I said this before but I'm married to a lovely wife who also happens to be the Queen of Arda. An alliance between Hidros and Arda has been created. I'll spare the details – my purpose for coming to the capital was to find a way to establish a guild in Arda. Not one under the main-guilds command, but one independent for it's another nation. You know the disparities

between humans and non-humans – ever since declaring independency, most demi’s here have moved over to Arda. Sadly, monsters are running rampant,”

“I get the picture,” she finished her tea, “-you want information on what prerequisites one needs to have before opening a new Guild, one that will oversee all the operations?” her question was answered with a nod. “-let me think,” her cup lowered onto the counter, silence whelmed the room.

‘What is she thinking about. Come on, sister, say something,’ he waited patiently.

“Ok,” she spoke at last, “-how about a deal?”

“What kind?”

“I need to head to the main continent; a summons has been issued by the Order. Which leaves two options, either I take Axius with me or I hire someone. Since we don’t have relatives here, the former was my prior decision. It will take around four days – on your behalf, I could speak to mother and ask what can be done,” she paused.

“You want me to babysit Axius for four days?”

“You’re his uncle – some quality bonding time,” she laughed.

“Thou art but an imposter to she who is mine own kinfolk,” he added in jest then looked away. It was meant to be seen as disgust.

“Jokes aside,” she grabbed onto his hands, “-taking him to Iqavea will be dangerous. Don’t turn a blind eye, thou art responsible as well, dearest brother,” she let go, “-besides, he’s got school – it should not be that hard.”

“As you wish, I’ll take care of Axius for four days and in return pull as much string as is needed. I need information and if possible, a way to finalizing the process – money, and repute isn’t an option. This comes from a King – there should not be that much trouble. In the rare case that something does come up, try to reach out to the lady in charge of Hotel Villareal and get her number. I’ll pull some strings on my end.”

“You sure are confident,” she voiced with a smile, “-just leave everything to your little sister,” both hugged.

“Thanks for everything,” he stood outside.

“I’ll wait for you tomorrow at Ciel’s Junior Academy,” she waved.

“Ciel’s Junior Academy,” he mumbled, ‘-guess Claudia will handle the Order. I’ll have to ask Raulf for more information, its best to prepare as much as one can – don’t want to get blindsided. Tomorrow Knig resumes it’s activities, which means that I’ll have to get back to work on researching Scrolls.’

“The bar, don’t forget,” Adete voiced loudly. Thus, he headed to Pandora. The evening grew closer, dusk was on the horizon. Oblivious to what happened behind the scenes, adventurers and the general populous lived their lives without much thought. Peaceful by night and hectic by day – it was the way the world worked. Another month was predicted until the Ardanian embassy would be built. Queen Shanna still hadn’t decided to whomst would be sent as ambassador. Rumors about the fake embassy



were brought to her majesty's ears by the various spies across the capital. The order to find and execute whoever tried to ensnare demi-humans was issued. The operation took weeks to complete, those who were captured were traced back. The ring-leaders, hoodlums without much backing nor power – were killed. The prisoners, those in the capital – were sent via convoyed to the Ardanian border. Both sides tried their best to get along willingly.

Once at the bar, after a few hours – Jason gave out a few jobs that involved killing defectors of DG. People who betrayed the organization and tried to live a modest life. Their locations were lost – only a picture of their faces was given. In total, there were three assassination jobs. Normally, it would be sent to the Assassination Sect – though, that day was special. The job request came from the Assassination Sect, the god-father of that branch wanted to test the famed Shadow.

“The payout is 200 Gold per person,” Jason whispered under the cover of music.

“To think that human life is worth a mere 200 Gold,” he chugged a beer as opposed to the usual whiskey.

“That’s what Stanley offered. You shouldn’t be surprised, out of all the branches, it’s God’s ale trafficking that brings the most money,”

“Give me around two days,” he stood, “-should I bring their heads on a platter or?”

“Why not; let’s piss off Godfather Stanley,” they laughed.

#### Chapter 227: Taint

At around ten at night, the gate opened – Void slowly and quietly made its way into the garage. From there on, with Adete now asleep on his shoulder, he entered the mansion. ‘Guess they’re asleep,’ the bedroom door opened. Tomorrow was the day Kniq would begin its activities. The focus wasn’t on said occasion since the deal struck with Claudia. To take care of Axius for four days. Those thoughts in mind, the eyes shut. Dawn came faster than predicted.

Nothing changed, the same ruckus of Lizzie running out the shower and Auic following behind. A lovely new day was what he thought; a glance outside revealed grey clouds and not to mention the drop in temperature. During that glance, Deadeyes and Avon were spotted doing laps around the yard; keeping in shape, a good habit. A nod of agreement later, breakfast was served courtesy of Achilles and Undrar. Both seemed to have bonded and grown closer over the past few days. They weren’t the only people feeling said change – the Lymsey sisters were also pretty joyful.

“Thanks for the hard work,” he stood with Lizzie in tow.

“We’re headed out, see you later,” she waved with a smile.

“You ready for another day at school?” Staxius asked – the car slowly drove out the gate.

“Yes – I can’t wait,” her demeanor calm and confident, the journey to the academy began.

“Have you made any friends?” a normal question, the role of father-figure slowly took effect.

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“...look at those trees,” she pointed out the window trying to avoid the question.

‘I see,’ he looked over and wondered, ‘-making friends in that environment must be hard,’ the focus returned in front. ‘It’s all good, if she conquers that fear and makes at least one friend – one that will not betray nor harm her, then it will all be for the best. In no way is this girl weak – her will to reject her past is admirable. Sadly, if the day where killing someone to save another’s life comes – I wonder what path will be chosen. The defining moment.’

“Don’t fret,” he patted her head, “-you’ll get there. Just be true to yourself. Those who hate will hate and those who are interested will try to approach – just be wary, this world isn’t safe.”

‘I wonder at what time I’m supposed to pick up Axis,’ Void stopped shy of the entrance. \*Ding,\* a notification that came from Claudia – 13:00 it also contained information about the location.

“Alright then, I’m off,” the door opened, as students came in, the moment she stepped foot inside, Lizzie was lost in the crowd. Meanwhile, at the mansion, Auic headed out to headquarters. Kniq with the Lymsey sisters, headed for the adventuring guild. It was back to the usual routine – as for Staxius, a few hours later; he stood before Pandora. The shop could open at last. From closed, the sign changed to open. Stocks were pretty full considering that it opened for only one day.

Minutes turned to hours, from idly sitting downstairs, Staxius headed to the lab and worked. Undrar kept her promise and brought over books that had knowledge about curses and blessings. Most importantly, information about Relic class items – scrolls in particular; the schematic still was a work in progress. It had taken months and months, and yet another mountain stood in the way.

“Help,” a voice yelled and entered the shop. The bell rang, to which he rushed downstairs. “What’s the matter?”

“We need potions,” an adventurer cried – dressed in leather armor, he carried a girl with the help of what seemed to have been a cleric.

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“Please, is there anything that can treat her?” the cleric asked with deep breaths. The apparent patient was hurt, her face seemed paler than usual – the fingertips and earlobes black.

“Was she bitten by a cursed beast?” he asked in a calm and reassuring tone, it helped control their nerves.

“Y-yes,” he pointed at her leg that had already grown necrotic.

“Why didn’t you take her to the hospital?” Staxius asked; the sight of the girl was pathetic.

“It’s too far away, we were hoping to get some potions to slow down the spread of the taint,” the cleric explained whilst the other held the girl’s hand tightly. Her consciousness faded in and out, the eyes seemed to want one thing, death.

“I’m begging you, do something,” they cried out.

"I'm pretty sure that holy water would do the trick in treating the taint. Sadly," he approached and crouched; "-it won't do much now, the leg is beyond saving. Amputation is an option," having to check her visible symptoms, he paused and watched the people's faces.

"Come on," the Cleric's face seemed desperate, "-aren't you an alchemist?"

"Alchemists are the top scholars currently present in the capital. Being a doctor is a prerequisite to becoming one," the other had a good point.

"Amputating her leg is an option using normal means," a trip to the counter later, "-there's another way to heal this lady. Sadly, this will not come cheap, we're looking at a few gold coins here."

"If it saves her then we'll pay without restraint,"

"No guarantee that she'll be safe," after which, an uncommon healing scroll was wrapped around her leg. In addition to that, a few magic symbols were written on blank papers and placed next to the girl who now laid on the floor. Mana injected, the scroll activated, a greenish light enveloped her legs. Without notice, it went from green to purple, a bad sign – in that instant, Staxius channeled his mana and controlled the taint. As if the piper guiding rats with his magical pipe, the taint followed his command. The blank papers turned black and then to dust from a whiteish flame.

"Make her drink this," the treatment ended, a rare potion got handed over. Slowly but surely, as the girl drank – her pale skin regained its color and hue. The taint got treated – from having kill me in her gaze to thank you, she was relieved.

"You did it..." the cleric could barely stand, "-just who are you?" he turned and asked.

"No one particular, now for the bill," nonchalantly – he headed to the counter and spoke whilst writing. "One Uncommon Healing Scroll and one Rare Healing potion, the cost is 1 Gold and 500 Silvers. However, considering that I removed a powerful curse, I'll round it up to Two Gold pieces."

"That's expensive," the adventurers voiced.

"Listen, I'm not keen on charity, either pay up or I'll take her leg as compensation. There are probably some necromancers out there who are willing to pay at least three gold pieces for a maiden's leg," the voice cold and unfaltering, the trio could but shudder. "Listen, I'm not trying to overcharge. If the same procedure was to be done by another member from the Alchemist sect – I can bet that they'll ask for twice what I asked for."

"We'll pay up," the girl coughed, "-her hands shook and reached for her pouch, "-two gold pieces," she stumbled her way to the counter. "Thanks for the business," he gladly accepted the payment.

"On another note," he called, her two-companions grudgingly stopped. "-Care to tell from where you got that injury from? Curse-beasts aren't that common, not to mention, the taint that infected thy was quite potent."

"On the outskirts of the capital, a beast with a tier rating of Tier-five Ruby," her tone seemed frightened, the shock from the encounter must have done quite some damage on her psyche.

"I see," he nodded, "-thanks for the information and be sure to come at any time," the trio left.

“Care to explain this taint business?” Adete hovered and asked.

He headed upstairs, “-it’s a curse that is transmitted by monsters. Not all of them, a few that have outgrown their potential. Abnormals or irregulars – the guild hasn’t decided on a firm term yet. Their appearance is rare thus the lack of credibility.”

“How did you treat her though?”

“It’s nothing special, similar to treating a curse – I did the same to the taint. Don’t forget I’m an alchemist, I’ve got knowledge when it comes to that sort of thing,” he held the gold pieces.

“Alchemist or not, have you forgotten what time it is?” Adete pointed at the clock. 12:15, the next thing on the agenda was to go fetch Axius. ‘I wonder why a cursed beast would appear now of all the time. I’ve got a feeling that this incident is related to a greater plot. It’s the same as the time when the evolved humanoid goblins attacked. What is happening around this continent – a lot of major players who want to join. It’s not far off to assume that some crazy necromancer might have found a way to turn a monster into a cursed beast. Time will tell, I best focus on the thing at hand,’ to which Void headed to Ciel’s academy.

Meanwhile, around the outskirts of the capital, near the north-eastern region. The reports were true, low-ranked adventurers were attacked by a monster turned abnormal. The low-ranks were out on a quest to escort merchandise from a small village and into the capital for trading purposes. Lucky were they that the village used a truck as opposed to horse carts. A few stayed back and tried to halt the beast’s fury, the escorted were taken to the capital safely. The same could not be said to those around that vicinity – carnage ensued. As fate would have it, the main returning party from Pegasus destroyed the monster. A call for help was issued to Kniq, though it was called back as they were out on another quest. One that would last two to three days. It was both an escort and reconnaissance mission. The town in question was Riverwood, the place where the Greenday’s Guild resided. Hailed as the Savior of Riverwood and Slayer of Gritt, Kniq was the best option to send in. The quest in question was related to a rumor that dead people were apparently coming back to life. Most viewed it as a miracle, though some smelled foul play. The escort part was about taking the messenger back home. All and all, with Undrar at the helms, the RFS drove out for the first quest after so long.

Permission to use the vehicle was given thanks to Auic who related messages and status update from Staxius and to Kniq. ‘Two to three days with only Auic, Lizzie, Axius and I, should be interesting,’ the car drove till arriving at the destination.

“Claudia,” a faint voice came from the right. Stood with the campus behind onto which Ciel’s Junior Academy was written, she waited. It was nearer to Lizzie’s school than expected.

“You’re here,” hand in hand with Axius, she waited with two suitcases.

“Those seem heavy,” he voiced and walked, Adete flew over to Axius and engaged the boy in a little bit of fun.

“I’m leaving my son in your hands for the next four days, better take care of him,” she commanded with authority.

“Coming from parents who go off to do a covert mission at any given time. Yeah sure, I’ll take that order seriously,” the voice filled with sarcasm.

“Touché,” an embrace later, “-I’ll see you soon, brother,” she jumped inside another car and headed out.

“Well then,” he turned and faced Axius, “-come on,” he said in a friendly voice.

“Uncle,” the boy ran and gave a high-five, after which they headed to pick-up Lizzie. Like clockwork, Lizzie returned with another big smile. The sight of Axius in the car made her face melt, the little boy was cute. She took a liking to the nephew almost immediately. In turn, the boy did the same, both became friends in less than a few minutes. Sat on her lap, Axius played around with her cheeks and told stories. Not wanting to intervene, Staxius’s focus remained on the road. ‘I wonder what Eira is doing right now.’

‘News about an adventuring party clearing the first-ever platinum quest has taken over the school by storm. I guess father and his guild are back. It’s good to see auntie Undrar’s quote on the paper. For sixteen years I’ve called her mother – and she is my mother in some weird way. My father’s sister was my mother during that whole time... think about that. Nevertheless, preparation for the Inter-magical tournament is underway. I’m both excited and scared. Excited because I’ll have a chance to prove myself and scared, due to this cold feeling inside. The last combat training I did with father forced me to use the power of the ice-dragon. She speaks to me in my dreams; do you wish for power. The constant questioning, it’s annoying at times – though I’ve grown accustomed to it. The lady of ice is a part of me now, it’s better to accept what has happened as opposed to rejecting reality. Time to sign off, Instructor Sophie is banging on the door,’ another entry complete.

## Chapter 228: Purgatory

“Here we are,” stood on the porch whilst he parked, Lizzie took charge and showed the young nephew around. Auic would make it later tonight. ‘Time to relay the locations together,’ he walked up to the attic, from there on, portals that connected to Pandora and Kniq’s headquarters were made. It took around fifteen minutes to set-up each one. That out of the way, the return downstairs revealed Axius demanding to stay in his uncle’s room. A whim that was granted without much trouble. Lizzie was happy to play around with the new temporary resident, it included Adete as well. Both as a friend and a bodyguard, she played that role per Staxius’s orders.

‘Now that’s taken care of,’ sat on the main balcony, the All-seeing eye was used. The search for the three targets assigned to be exterminated began. A photo on which had a faint trace of their mana – the process would take hours, if not days. Nevertheless, with the information gathered, it limited the search range to a few villages and towns.

At the same time, far from the capital, Kniq headed to Riverwood. It would take another five to six hours to reach. The escorted sat in the middle of Deadeyes and Avon. The other agenda was kept hidden for it was a request by the Alchemist sect.

“Are we here yet?” covered by a black cloak, two individuals stood near the entrance of the capital. An entry fee and clearance were done by the Royal Guards with the assistance of Adventurers.

"We should be there soon," led upfront, a girl that looked to be in her early twenties, her long black hair flowed with the wind that came from the right. Dark eyes, red lips, a nose-piercing, her tone dignified and menacing at the same time.

"Ten coppers per person," a guard hailed, behind, another batch came to inspect their bags. A quick little check, the capital was lenient to what a person was allowed to bring. However, if things seemed too suspicious and could cause major harm, the order to subjugate said person was given.

"Here," she handed over the coins and both were allowed entry.

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"Listen up Aiden," now past through the gates, she stopped. "Lord Desmond gave us a job to accomplish. Though I hate working with a dragonkin – orders are orders," she held a keychain, "-the man we're looking for goes by the nickname Shadow. We don't have any information apart from this picture," a faint shot of a man wearing half a mask.

"You have a plan?" still holding a grudge, Aiden reluctantly asked.

"Yes," she paused and scanned the area, "-we'll target the Dark-guild. Since its war between us with the Syndicate as back-up, we're in the clear. Sooner or later, Shadow will have to come out if we cause enough of a mess. The first targets will be their low-ranking members, dealers and such," after which, a list got handed over, "-it contains information about the members we know are in the DG. I'll take half and you take the other. The mission starts tonight," the walk resumed.

"Would this not have been safer to have this talk in private?"

"One might think that, however," her eyes filled with killing intent, "-the walls have ears. Best be in public were all is chaotic."

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"As you wish," he held and watched the list closely. 'People to kill, how joyous.'

Dusk came faster than usual, the search ended with positive results. The three targets were found, 'turns out they never left the capital. Hiding where the DG is most active, talk about being bold. It's the last place one might think to look – these guys sure are witty.'

"Auic," he called whilst walking down the stairs.

"Yes?" she yelled.

"Take care of Lizzie and Axius, I have an errand to run."

"With pleasure, do be safe out there," she yelled from across the kitchen.

"It's time," Adete added playfully. The use of Void when carrying out jobs for the DG might cause a problem later in the future. Though he loved to drive around in that car, it was time to find another means of transport. One small and easy to travel in, with those thoughts, Cake came into mind. A phone call later, the strategist agreed to lend her motorbike.

"Since I'm stuck at home; you can have it till this whole war behind the scenes is over."

"Thanks for the help," he teleported inside her apartment. Startled, the keys were handed over – a roar later, the bike headed out. 'Should be fine, it may be expensive and ludicrously fast – the black color and common design will put people off my trail. There are others out in the continent with the same machine. If they were to trace back the bike, it would lead to Cake – who in the public's eye is a good citizen,' the agility and maneuverability made driving through streets and dodging traffic easier than before. He went twice as fast as he would when using Void.

Mask on the face, Tharis holstered inside a plain jacket with Orenmir concealed on the belt, the bike came to a stop. Nothing but darkness, the building had shattered windows and broken-down doors. Moans and screams could be heard faintly coming off the few lights turned on. The foul smell of the sewers grew more apparent. Parked in front of a tight alleyway that led into an unknown area, Staxius walked. Laid on the ground, bodies, none could say if they were alive or passed out drunk. Above, on the electric lines, crows eyed down viciously.

The more steps taken, the warmer the light grew. Murmurs and whispers turned audible. A caravan with three individuals sat under the starry night had beers and a nice chat. In the corner, a few corpses of what appeared to be young boys and girls – the walls were smeared with the latter's blood and organs. It didn't take long to make a mental map of what had happened. Those children were probably orphans; killed in cold blood out of ire. Staring at that sight, he felt nothing. The lifeless bodies had flies and insects coming out of the skin – nothing.

"We should have thrown the corpse in the drain," one of the men added.

"Nah, it would have been too much of a hassle," another one replied.

"Just look at the wall, it's a work of art, don't you think?" the last one chuckled. "Pitiful creatures, they came looking for food and found the ultimate salvation," the feet rested atop a decapitated head, one of a girl who was aged around the same as Lizzie. Her lips kept a smile despite the pale and broken-down skin.

"Nah you're just a monster," the rest laughed as if it was the funniest joke to ever be said. "In any case, we sure have cleaned up this area pretty well. Shooting those orphans was fun."

"Talk about being merciless," Adete whispered.

\*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* "get ready," the entire aura around him changed – dark, vile, and heavy, the murderous demon oozed out every pore. Imagine that instead of the girl, it could have been Lizzie who was used as a foot-rest, the emotions remained neutral. That didn't stand true for the killer.

Tharis in hand, he walked, "-a work of art," the gaze without pity, \*Normal Aspect,\* three gunshots later, the targets fell to the floor. The aim was at their legs. Normal Aspect was a skill imbedded in Tharis, as opposed to channel his mana and spell into the gun's bullet, the Normal Aspect used the mana around the host to conjure forth weaker bullets. Ones without any special traits.

"Who the fuck are you?" they yelled.

"Shadow," the reply cold, grabbing forks on the ground, he stabbed their tongues to their palates, "I'd have given a fast and easy death," he stared at the decapitated head, "-sadly, seeing this work of art makes me want to create my masterpiece." Tharis got holstered, \*-tap,\* Orenmir broke out the

concealment spell. The moment it unsheathed, the screaming souls of so many that came before raged out, “-eat your fill, my sword,” not wanting to get involved, the cursed souls lashed out at the three who were unable to speak. The damage was more excruciating than normal attacks for it targeted the individual’s soul and mana. In addition to that, the low damage proved to be another unexpected boon.

Left unsheathed and hanging off his belt, the spirits tormented and tortured the targets in his stead. They screamed and tried to get away, \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* in no way could normal people get out of this trap. Death by a thousand cuts – uninterested to watch the torture, the attention turned to the lifeless bodies. “Guess this is how life is meant to be,” he faced corpses with the cries for help behind, “-Survival of the fittest. You might have lived a better life if things were different,” the eyes closed, “-souls who’ve been lost and are bound to this world for perpetual suffering, heed my call. I, heir to the god of death, grant thee salvation. Follow mine voice, tis the place where the dead are reborn, tis the place where wrongdoers are to be purged – in my name, those who are to be judged, will be judged, and those who are to be saved, will be saved.” The voice changed into one deeper, two orbs manifested, one of a golden color hovered over the right hand while the other of which had a dark-crimson hue on the left hand. “To be purged or to be saved, I shall stand as the judge,” the atmosphere grew nauseating and dense. The wandering souls of the fallen came forth, mainly the children who were saved. Each walked conscious but semi-transparent, the sight of the people who did them harm placed a smile.

The golden orb lit each time one of those children walked, Staxius decided to grant something only the god of death could offer, a peaceful death. Smiles paired with tears; the orphans headed for the golden light, the a path to the hall of rebirth. Concurrently, on the left hand, souls of those who had done wrong were sent to the purgatory. A person’s action was judged not on the life he lived, but on the way the soul reflected on its action. A crack echoed down the alley; the three targets died. Their souls shot out and tried to force their way into the golden light, “Eternal suffering is what awaits those who I deem unworthy. Hate me, fear me, thank me, I care not for tis my purpose. Hell awaits, the prison from where I draw my strength.” The orbs vanished; the heavy atmosphere dropped. Orenmir who was left unsheathed, returned from whence it came. The three souls got send to hell.

“So that’s the power of the god of death,” Adete commended whilst holding a big crimson crystal.

“I know not how to reply to that. Those events were beyond my control – it was as if a warmth came from within – my mind said but one thing; save those who were wronged.” \*Snap,\* the bodies turned to ashes. “Were you able to get enough?” he referred to the blood.

“More than enough, the darker the blood, the stronger we’ll get,” she began eating.

“In that case,” as promised, the three heads – drained of their blood, were cut and placed in a black bag. The bike turned on and they rushed through the night till arriving at the bar.

“Hello Jason,” a figure walked in from the entrance.

“Shadow,” he replied with a smile, “-it’s a pleasure,” the smile turned into a smirk.

“Here’s a parting gift,” placed onto the table, three heads, “-do deliver it to Godfather Stanley, compliments from Shadow,” with a wink – the figure vanished into the darkness.

“HA-HA-HA,” no longer could he keep from laughing. Serving the heads on a platter, Staxius took the words to heart.



“Another job well done,” Adete voiced, the stomach now filled, she slept. The bike continued to head for the noble district. Cake sent a message saying to keep it for it would be inefficient to return said machine after each job. Mask now kept away, they stood before the gate. Warm light came from inside, Auic, Axius, and Lizzie waited with open arms. “I’m back home, everyone,” he walked in after parking the bike.

## Chapter 229: Carry on Living

Between caring for Axius and Lizzie, the three days went by in a blink of an eye. Nothing of consequence happened, Pandora worked with the few customers here and there. Its name still was barely known as a magical shop. Rumors about it hosting an Adamantite armor did spread, though people were reluctant to visit.

Kniq would return later that day. As a treat, Staxius decided to take all three out to town. Though a two-seater, Auic decided it best to head out using public transport. This included buses, trams, and taxis. The commercial district was the destination for it housed multiple activities that both children and adults could partake in. Not wanting to draw attention, Auic wore a straw hat and a white dress with blue splashes of color here and there. Her ears were covered and so was the tail. Lizzie wore shorts and some t-shirt with a guy playing guitar, someone familiar – the man who Staxius met whilst in Iqavea. Axius wore a blue overall with a white shirt underneath.

“It sure is lively on the weekends,” he commented with Axius on his back. The boy fell asleep right after lunch.

“I agree,” Auic voiced softly – her arms were locked with Lizzie who couldn’t contain her excitement.

“Lizzie,” he stopped and stared at a toy shop.

“What is it?”

“Here,” he handed over a gold piece, “-go buy anything you like. Auic and I will take a break near the part over there,” the fingers pointed upfront.

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“Awesome,” she nodded and sped off.

“How’s the guild doing?” sat underneath a tree with couples all around, he asked in a cold tone.

“Currently, despite the publicity we got given, people are still afraid to approach us. As opposed to the high-tier guilds getting precedence over hard-quests – our strengths have been acknowledged by Raulf himself. When it comes to coins, a few kill quests here and there suffice to get us by. Not to mention, the magical shop; murmurs but no action yet. It’s bound to become popular soon, master, I’d not worry as much.”

“I see, if that’s the case then there’s nothing to be worried about,” he paused and stared off into the distance, “-what about the team, how’s morale?”

“As far as I’m concerned, everyone is happy. Living in that new mansion has been eye-opening. Away from prejudice and away from hate, you made good on the promise, majesty, to which I say, thank you

very much. Without that push from you and Diane, I'd have lived in the past; words can't express my gratitude."

"Enough," he sighed, "-there's no need to say thanks. After all, I'm leaving the majority of the work in your hands."

"That's fine, majesty, I'm thy secretary. It's an honor to serve and remain by your side."

"Father," a girl called, she sprinted towards the trio and waved around a teddy.

"Father, you say," he gave a smile, "-what is it?"

"I bought a teddy and this robot for Axius," her eyes lit with glee.

"Very considerate," he patted her head, "-we should leave."

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'Tomorrow is when Claudia will arrive. I've received no calls from her yet – all I can hope for is that she's doing fine. Once the guild in Arda is opened, I'll head out to investigate the strange structure out in Plaustan. The return to the border should be a fun little trip. But before all that, I best give the Lymsey sisters their revenge. Moving on without something to boost their morale will be hard.' Minutes turned to hours, they arrived at the mansion with fatigued faces.

"I'll put Axius to bed, take care of Lizzie," he spoke to Auic who could barely walk straight.

'The grey-guilds,' leaned on the balustrade of the balcony, he stared out at the yard with a cigar in mouth. 'From what Cake told me, they're the worst kind of guilds out there. The name grey comes from their inability to listen to reason. All they want is to ensnare new adventurers and force them into missions that are way above their ranks. Bait for other guilds to use – many die in the process of which some never returned. It's also rumored that after one of those baits has died – the body is sold off to necromancers. The ones I'm looking for are men wearing eyepatches. The nickname given is the one-eyed freaks. Time to hit up the guilds and try to get in contact with at least one of the members.'

\*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* thus the hunt for information began.

The first stop was Jason – nothing came out of him. Normally, the second person to consult on the matter of magic would be Claudia. Alas, his sister was off to the main continent. Since they were technically adventurers, a visit to the guild was halted by a not so nice Diane. She adamantly refused to give out information – not wanting to create a scene, he headed out. A phone call to Raulf later, after a few hours, gave a lead.

"Rotherham, the one-eyed freaks are in charge of said area. I had no idea that the grey-guilds could pass by our security," the guild master commented over the call.

"No need to worry, these guys are far smarter than the watchful people you've got stashed around the capital," the phone hung. Not wasting time, he teleported shy of town. 'Who would have guessed that this place was run by the underworld,' he worked with Adete in tow. 'Asking questions here will blow my cover, I best rent a room and start investigating,' to which, 125 silver coins later, they sat in a room at one of the cheapest inns.

‘Time to investigate,’ the eyes closed, hand on the floor, \*All-seeing eye,\* a push later, the consciousness flew out the body. Able to travel through walls and fly as if a ghost – the search began. In addition to that, with the ability to see Auras through walls, a mental map of where people of interest hid, was rendered accessible. Not a second wasted, with Sense-personality on stand-by. He examined every individual with the slightest bit of evil intent. It took a few minutes, but in the end, located near the town-square, hidden underneath an apartment complex, inside a basement; one of the Grey Guilds. The one-eyed freaks were found.

“Thanks for the room,” a nod later, he vanished. ‘All we have to wait for is their return,’ now sat in the study, he worked on researching Relic Scrolls. Minutes turned into hours, as dusk settled in, a roar outside broke the concentration, ‘they’re back,’ grabbing a coat left hanging on his chair, he made his way down the stairs.

“Welcome everyone,” he greeted the returnees. Auic stood with open arms, a hug for her much-loved companions.

“Master,” Avon leaped and latched onto Staxius. The twins did the same, Deadeyes gave a high-five, Undrar smiled, Achilles gave a wink – the quest ended with success.

Sat around the dining hall, Undrar went into greater details about what they had found. “The first report we got was that supposedly dead people came to life. Since we were familiar with that village, getting information was done with haste. The guild leader of Greenday remained as enigmatic as ever. We tried hard to detect any trace of mana that might have given us a lead. All came out blank until the last day, Deadeyes spotted a black caravan that had a strange aura oozing off. Upon further investigation, that moving caravan had none inside – it moved on its own. Long story short, we decided to use a concealment spell and take a ride. Thus, arriving at the enemies’ base – it was true, necromancers tried hard to revive dead people. What came as a surprise was that the bodies were of Porcelain-ranked adventurers. Achilles being herself took charge and subjugated them – currently, they’re being held at the castle’s dungeon. Despite a request for the Alchemist sect, we had to turn to the guild master.”

“We did get paid so,” Deadeyes added after Viola finished.

“Sister, sister, those people sure were disgusting,” Emma uttered without care.

“Yes sister, their guts spilled on the floor and looked like...” Emmy got stopped by force. “Don’t go into gruesome details,” Staxius had his hand on her mouth, “-we’re eating, be a little tactful.” She nodded and the meal continued.

“I’m sure you want but one thing,” Staxius stood, the meal ended after a few minutes, “-and that’s sleep. Call it a day, we’ll speak into more details tomorrow,” the rest stood. “Not the twins, care to stay behind, I’ve something to say in private,” they stayed back with baffled looks.

“Let’s go outside for a walk,” he led the way and headed for the garden.

“What is it, master?” Emma asked.

“Did something happen?” Emmy added.

“Yes,” he stopped shy of the entrance, “-you still haven’t moved on from the whole Grey guild ordeal, have you?” he turned and watched with a stern look.

"W-what a-are you saying?" Emma tried to avert the question.

"Of course we haven't," Emmy jumped in front of her sister, she wanted to shield Emma's weak heart.

"Then say so," the tone relaxed, "-you needn't put up a front," he patted their head and leaned closer. "How does exacting revenge sound?" a menacing whisper.

"Did you find out where they are?" Emmy stood unimpressed, Emma, on the other hand, could barely speak for the memories rushed down her mind.

"Yes," he stood up straight, "-we can go right now if you want."

"Please, I've dreamt of this day for so long," Emmy's face lit with determination, killing intent flowed.

"On one condition," he interjected, "-I'll accompany you both. Leave the killing to me, you need but watch as I slaughter those who've done thy wrong. In no way am I letting two lovely girls stain their hands with unworthy blood."

"As long as they pay, I don't care. I don't want anyone to ever go through what my sister and I did," she embraced Emma tightly.

"Then let's go," the aura changed drastically, from a friendly and approachable leader to now cold and distant, from his voice to his mannerism, the true self came out. \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\*

"Man fooling tier-one kids is so easy I could do it in my sleep."

"No need to get cocky, as long as the pay is good, I'll throw even a baby to the wolves if that's what's needed," whispers came from the other room – he teleported with the twins in tow.

"That voice," Emmy whispered, "-that's him," she gritted, her anger and hate could be felt. Emma could but stay in Emmy's shadow.

"Let's go pay them a visit then," \*BANG,\* a single bullet tore a hole in the wall.

"WE'RE UNDER ATTACK," the leader yelled and grabbed for their weapons. \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* a single snap and all fell to the floor. "Prostrate thyself in my presence, insolent fools," nonchalantly, he stepped onto an unknown warrior's face.

"Leader," Emmy walked in, "-it's good to see you," she smiled with obvious killing intent.

"You two," he glanced, "-you should have died, what's the meaning of this," slowly, the man desperately tried to break away from the immense pressure.

"What's the truth, TELL ME, WERE WE NOTHING BUT BAIT?" she yelled.

"That's right," he managed to get up to his knee, "-you and everyone else, you were nothing but bait. Weaklings with no hopes of survival, I'm glad your sister was devoured to death, so young and so tender. ADMIRABLE AND DELICIOUS, HER SCREAMS WERE MUSIC TO MY EAR," maniacal laughter followed, the man had lost his sanity. Hearing those words, Emmy's mind revisited that dreadful day, both sisters dove headfirst into despair.

\*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* “-Get ready,” he ordered, “-it’s time to hunt.” the stance, one of a quick-draw technique, “-this is going to get bloody,” a single step later, the sword re-sheathed with blood from his foe spraying behind, all that liquid turned into crystals.

Back to back, the sisters were lost in despair. A prison of doubt and regret, the feeling of helplessness. “Let me go,” they tried, the memories continued to ail.

“Wake up,” admits that cacophony, a single voice stood out, “-it’s time to go,” it held out a hand, “all that suffering is something to embrace. Become stronger so that it never happens again.” Reluctantly, they each accepted and grabbed onto said hand.

“Welcome to reality,” Staxius stood with a smile, “-all who’ve done you wrong are no longer part of the living,” blood dripped from his cheeks. Pale and lifeless corpse littered the room. “Today is the day you’re free to leave the past behind, in this room where all thy regrets rest. What will it be, carry on living with a new purpose, or stay in the past?”

“Carry on,” Emmy spoke first, “-LIVING,” Emma ended the sentence with a yell.

Chapter 230: On the move

“Welcome to Knig, Emma and Emmy, you’re part of a big family now. The past has been left behind, what awaits is a bright future. Adventure to your heart’s content, have fun and most of all – stay safe. Our line of work demands that our lives are to be put on the line,” a pat on both their shoulders later, “-it’s part of us, the scythe of the death reaper, it can strike at any time,” \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\*

“Emma, Emmy, where are you?” in the distance, Undrar and the others cried out for it was time to sleep.

“See, you’re not alone anymore,” the hand they grabbed on whilst in despair, pointed in front. “-That’s your new family now, they all care about you both dearly,” two quick pecks on the top their heads later, “-and I do too.”

“Here,” Staxius waved.

“There you are,” she ran out with blankets, “-stay out at this hour and you’ll catch a cold,” she took charge and headed inside with the girls. Each sister stared one another and laughed – their face felt easier, their aura relaxed and emotions; stable.

\*Dark-Arts: Sense Personality,\* “It’s gone,” he sighed, “-the fear and doubt that hid inside their hearts.”

“Don’t stand there and gawk, get inside, brother,” she gritted the last word and paired it with a cold glance.

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“Coming,” with a smile, he walked.

“I must ask, why is it that you do such things? sometimes it’s out of character, why do you want to help someone when you yourself have said that you’re not a hero,” Adete raised a good question.

"I've explained this so many times," the head shook in disappointment, "-I'm not keen on repeating what I've said. Therefore, you best scour thy memory in search of the answer. Also, the thing about being a hero – one doesn't need to be righteous or good to save someone. Even the bad guy in books and stories had something to protect. Though it might have been the wrong thing, the feeling of trying to protect and save a person was there – tis the intent that counts," that said, now in bed, it was time to call it a night.

"Is that them?" a voice reluctantly asked.

"Yes, KILL THEM," shouted a girl with black hair.

"You'll pay," tied to a tree, "-the DG will get reven..."

"Shut up," held out on the right hand with long nails, a human-heart, "-killing is messy," he complained.

"Stop bitching and continue the slaughter," sat with her legs crossed, Elsa watched under the moonlight sky. It had been a few days since their arrival; the duo employed to assassinate an elusive being went to work. One after the other, people relating to the DG were killed. It was decided that the list that Aiden held would be their primary focus. A large-scale massacre would bring the attention of the guilds and royal guards. It was best to kill the important people before it grew out of hand. Amongst the victims; a well-respected trader, a foreigner, and a little boy that worked as a covert killer for the Assassination sect.

"Hey dragonkin," after a few minutes, the lady spoke, "-was it you that flew over that village a few months back?"

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"I can't remember," face and body painted in crimson, he turned with eyes that resembled a beast, the face had partially altered itself into being more dragon-like. "I do have memories of flying over something. Needless to say, it was Desmond that captured me, anything I did prior was wiped from memory," a spat of disgust followed.

"I guess it doesn't matter," she stood, "-are they dead yet?"

"Without a heart, they better be," he replied with a chuckle.

"Dump them into the sewers, make it look like a murder, or eat them, I care not. Heck, leave them out in the park for all to see – the quicker we get the attention of Shadow, the faster Lord Desmond can bring down the Dark-guild."

'Assassins, Lord Desmond, Dragonkin,' sat behind her monitor, Cake overheard what went on, '-it was smart to ask all our members to wear these black-watches. Inconspicuous, none would ever guess that there's a microphone that will transmit whatever the host is hearing. How I love outsmarting the opposition. UO, I can't help think that this is a trap – one thing is sure, Shadow is the target and a massacre will follow if they are not given what is due. What a predicament,' now crouched on her chair, she bit her nails and thought. 'AHH,' turned around, '-I'm too tired to think,' she jumped onto her bed and slept.

[Bodies found at different locations] The morning newspaper was covered by a black and white picture of the heartless corpses. The report read, "On Sunday the 20th of January, the cleaners in charge of the sewer and park were greeted by a gruesome sight of several corpses. Paralyzed by shock, it was a passing adventurer that made the call; the bodies were sent to the coroner. There is yet to be an answer, is it the return of the Masked Murderer or has the capital turned to ruin by the invasion of a monster? Time will tell, the issue is being handled by the Royal Guards in collaboration with the Adventurers," a summary read by Undrar.

"Another string of murders," Deadeyes voiced whilst eating pie.

"There's probably going to be a quest related to that later tomorrow," Achilles added her thoughts on the matter, "-it's best to wait and see."

"Worrying about things that can't be changed is a waste of time," Undrar said whilst feeding Axius. The Lymsey sisters and Auic remained in bed for fatigue caught up. Lizzie, with the absence of Auic, helped Viola in the kitchen. She learned how to make an omelet. Proud, the latter was handed over to Staxius. "Looks edible," he took a bite, '-salty,' the eyes twitched subtly after which he gobbled down the whole thing. "Delicious," a high-five to the cook later, she headed upstairs to take a shower.

"Don't act like we didn't see that," Achilles caught the subtle movement.

"W-what did I miss?" Avon came out of the common room.

"Nothing major, just master eating the saltiest omelet to ever be made," Adete voiced loudly. Laughter filled the room, "-a glass of water," he asked with one eye shut.

"Xenos, defeated by a mere omelet," Avon added, "-what a day," the laughter intensified.

"Yeah, very funny," Staxius said sarcastically whilst drinking water. 'A family bound not by blood but mutual respect and admiration and a sense of duty. I can definitely get used to this,' he thought and watched – the residents had a sense of relief on their faces.

"Uncle, uncle," Axius scurried over from his chair and into his arm, "-today is when mother arrives?"

"That's right, her flight should have landed by now."

"Can we go meet her?"

"Not really, she's going to take the train back from the airfield. I guess we could wait at the train station."

"Yes, yes," the face lit joyfully.

"I never realized that Rosespire had a train station," Achilles spoke in a baffled tone.

"Well it's outside the walls, the railways aren't that obvious since it passes through caves and over rivers. It's secluded to keep its passengers safe. That means of transport is for nobles to get to key-locations faster, thus the secrecy."

"Does that mean that your sister is a Noble?" Deadeyes asked.

“No, remember when powerful mages had the authority of nobles – that privilege still exists. Combat-mages might have been overtaken by adventurers, but we do have a role to play. The study of magic to make the world a better place or so that’s what the people are told. A quick search here and there and you’ll realize that the study of magic leads to one end – for military applications. Remove the host and turned the magic into weapons – similar to Tharis here, there are many weapons out in the world. Made by the same people who created the Xerxes series cars. Weapons of mass destruction. Viola has more information about it, we did fight against a wielder of that weapon – a battle that nearly cost the life of one of my comrades.”

“Is that true?” the gazes turn to her.

“Y-yes, the weapon that gave us so much trouble was Knightfall, a deadly sniper rifle,” she concluded.

“I’ve heard of that,” Deadeyes voiced, “-a weapon that chooses its master as opposed to the master choosing it.”

“Let’s not get side-tracked,” the chatter stopped, “-basically, mages are now using their knowledge to try and get back power through arms. It’s not a bad idea, thus the reason why my sister has the privilege to use the train. She’s part of the Order – and so is my mother, it’s bound to come with advantages.”

“Nepotism at its finest,” Achilles said in jest.

“Anyways,” he stood, “-its Sunday, you guys are free, I’ll be going to meet with Claudia. Viola is in charge as always,” hand in hand with his nephew, they walked out the front door.

\*Beep,\* \*I’m sure you’ve read about the news of the killings that occurred. I’m afraid that the people who were targeted are members of the DG. It’s an attack by the UO. My precautions paid off, we have a lead. Apparently, the leader is a person that goes by the name, Desmond. It’s also wise to say that there might be a dragonkin involved. Shadow is their target, watch your back, much love – Cake,\* the strategist sent a message about what was learned up to now.

\*What’s up with the much love,\* even on text, Staxius came across as cold and heartless. ‘I’m a target. The dragonkin, I can’t help but think that it might be related to that Potential Dragon spotting quest a few months back. Desmond... remove the S and D, and it spells demon. Honestly, there’s no time to worry about conspiracies. If it turns out the man is a demon, I might die of laughter,’ Void drove out of town and headed to the east – a place slightly elevated and covered by trees. The roads leading up were guarded.

“Here,” he pulled out his dragon-crest, the barricades lifted. Once inside, the duo waited. The marble floor seemed excessive, the lack of people walking showed how lonesome this place was. A few meters away from the elevated station – another one for commoners. It seemed livelier down there – so far, the line relayed all the provinces to one another except for Arda, Dorchester, and Totrya. For Plaustan, the line ended at the start of the province. Going further south would reveal Azure’s wall. People still preferred using vehicles to travel. Trains, though available to commoners, were viewed as too high of a standard. This didn’t stop rich merchants and commoners from using it. The roads and railway were planned in such a way that the two would never cross. A decision made for in case of a war, if one supply chain is broken, the other could take over.



\*Screeeeech,\* sat in a deserted café, the sound of the train coming to a stop snapped the mind out the thoughts. “Mother’s here,” Axius voiced, he had unwillingly used Spirit-sense.

“Let’s go meet her then,” a few steps later, Claudia got off. Surprised by her welcoming party, the briefcase fell and she rushed to hug Axius. ‘Look at them,’ he picked up the case in her stead.

“Did you miss me?” now held in her arms, she proceeded to assault the boy with a plethora of heartwarming kisses. Axius could but giggle. ‘It is true,’ a few meters off, men dressed in expensive attire stepped out. The mannerism and dignified walk were a clear give-away. A side-glance followed by a humph, they walked off as if disgusted.

“That’s nobles for you,” she stopped her barrage of kisses, “-always looking down on people. That hierarchy will never end.”

“Did you get what I needed?” he asked without care to what was said about nobles.

“Who do you think I am?” she winked, a good sign.