

## Death Magic 231

### Chapter 231: Guild Master

“Adete, could you please go entertain Axius for a while?” sat next to the kitchen counter, the same place as a few days ago – Staxius asked with a serious tone.

“Sure, take your time,” she hovered away, Axius could but contain the excitement.

“Right,” Claudia handed over a steaming cup of tea. “About the opening a guild in another kingdom. I did the research and asked around the Order. Turns out, the prerequisites aren’t that hard to acquire. Well not now anyway,” the hand reached into a small bag – a notebook was pulled out.

“First: A guild master of at least Tier-Two Gold must be in charge of supervising the activities.”

“Second: The new guild in which it will reside must have permission from the ruler of the neighboring lands.”

“Third: The Guild Master must have a primary team of adventurers to leave at any given time.”

“Fourth: Once all aforementioned requisites have been met; the one in charge must meet the Queen of Hidros. As one of the leaders of the adventurers, paired with Raulf Serlo, her authority surpasses even The Order.”

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“Fifth: Headquarters from where Quests are to be handed out. In said building, the evaluation orb will be placed to facilitate the process of recruitment.”

“Sixth: The new guild master will have an obligation to help out any other foreign guild if the situation calls for it. Bound by the same line of work, independent or not – when an ally is in need; help will be provided no questions asked.”

“And that’s about it,” she finished and returned the notebook to her bag.

“I see,” the cup had time to cool, “-basically I need permission from Queen Gallienne and Raulf. After which, I need a guild building and purchase the Orb,” he took a sip, “-it’s easier than I thought.”

“I guess since monsters are only a problem in Hidros – Queen Gallienne sits atop the hierarchy for adventurers. Though in the public eye it’s Raulf. The Order links the world of magic to the world of adventurers, it’s a simple yet effective system,” her face had a reluctance whilst muttering those words.

“You fear that guilds might go to war with one another?” an educated guess.

“Yes,” she finished her cup.

“You’re making that based on the fact that mages went to war with one another?” the atmosphere tensed up.

“You know everything,” she turned and headed for the sink, “-the all-knowing brother, you sure have grown,” she averted what he said.

“Believe it or not, I always thought of you as the better version of me,” he finished as well, “-I was jealous of your magical abilities. Such promise from a young age, father and mother were both proud of you. Due to my once weak constitution; using magic wasn’t in my means. If it wasn’t for father, I’d had never gotten to where I am now. To fight my weakness, he made me into a cold-hearted killer, one who doesn’t bat an eye when taking a life.”

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“I see that,” they stared at one another, “-there are no emotions behind those eyes. The smiles you give are acts – to match and use emotions and facial expressions to get into your opponent’s blank spot. There’s no mistaking it, mother was right, you did inherit father’s crazy idea of an artificial element,” her head shook, “-it doesn’t matter now, mages are too far gone, adventurers are the new evolution for humanity. Let’s just hope that things don’t turn into the same mess sorcerers caused so many years ago.”

“I’m sure they won’t, since most of them hail from an impoverished background. Fighting to save their family, fighting for a better cause than to cause havoc – that’s what they are, heroes. Unlike us mages who fought to only satisfy the lust for power and greed,” with that line, the aura around the room lessened, Staxius spoke true.

“I’ve got a question,” she asked but didn’t wait for his approval, “-what are you, adventurer or mage?”

“That’s tough,” he paused and thought, “-I’m neither, just an irregular. Those terms only apply to humans,” his finger pointed at his face and eyes, “-I’m not human.”

“Well it’s been fun to speak to you brother, thanks for taking care of Axius,” a hug to end the conversation later, Staxius headed out.

Now that all the prerequisites had been found out, there was but one thing to do. Establish the guild at last. A call to Raulf later, Staxius was given the audience. It was wise to make all those connections whether, by threats or good-will, it came in handy. Since the castle was close, the journey didn’t take that long.

“Greetings, Guild Master,” with a nod of the head, Staxius arrived.

“It’s good to see you,” Raulf replicated the nod, and both headed inside. All was told over the phone, to which, the Queen waited in her private office – the same as before.

“I’ll leave you both to it,” the large door closed with a resounding echo.

“Greetings, King of Arda,” she welcomed him with a curtsy.

“Greetings, Queen Gallienne,” fist placed on his chest followed by a bow, both parties respectfully welcomed one another. Once sat, the conversation began. Staxius went into greater detail as to why a guild was to be made in Arda. A gamble since it exposed his kingdom’s weakness in dealing with that threat – though, it was done to place the queen into a dire situation. A subtle move, one that she didn’t see coming, it blindsided her. Arda’s problem with monsters now exposed, Gallienne either had to agree or disagree. The former would be the ideal choice. However, if she chose the latter, things would get difficult in the future.

“My, oh my,” she took a deep breath, “-I realized it too late,” a smile appeared, her bafflement was a compliment. “Either I accept or risk the whole alliance falling into pieces since I’m the one pulling the strings. Well played, friend, god thank me that you’re an ally instead of an enemy.”

“I apologize for the less than honorable way of negotiating. Sadly, there were too many variables – I had to choose the one that gave me an advantage. Since I exposed my kingdom’s monster problem – as our ally, her majesty must try to help. To keep the still shaky relation stable, I had to use thy weakness when it came to unifying Hidros,” he gave a wink.

“It’s no matter, there are no harsh feelings on my part. It was well-executed, a double edge sword – all or nothing. A completely different approach from the first time we met, Staxius Haggard, you are very astute,” each took time to breathe and settle the nerves. “I must say this,” her voice turned serious, “-even if you hadn’t pulled that move – I was going to accept the proposal either way,” her gaze turned warmer.

“Once again, things had to be done.”

“I understand,” her hand reached for the drawer, “-I’m sure you know about the prerequisites. Though there’s one that not many are told, the Guild-master must be a noble of the title Duke or higher. If that isn’t in place, anyone could up and become a guild-master, we don’t want that,” her fingers signaled for him to hand over the guild-card.

“Let’s see,” a screen came from out the table, a faint trace of mana was sensed. The previous guild card got dropped and shredded. “Bear with me for a second,” her gaze focused on the semi-transparent blue screen.

[Name: Staxius Haggard]

[Title: Guild Master of Arda]

[Noble Rank: King]

[Adventuring Rank: Gold]

[Personal Guild: Kniq]

A new card materialized right before her eyes, the information above embedded itself with a fiery red beam of light. The information about the Noble Rank was removed. Now on a purple-colored card with diamonds on the back, this was the proof that one was a Guild Master.

“Watch closely,” a touch from her gentle and soft looking index finger on the card toggled a screen. Similar to the one she had in her table, it shot out as if a computer screen. “This is another invention made by the crazy scholars from the capital,” she stood and walked over, “-look into the interface.”

[Host recognized] “Greetings Guild Master,” a voice spoke.

“This little thing has the cumulative knowledge of magic and technology up to now. It’s the best of what the human race can make at this moment. There are only three in existence, I, Raulf, and now you. Through here, once the guild building is established back in Arda, it will give information such as the number of adventurers currently registered. Quests that are being displayed, call for help if the need arises, it can also function as a phone,” her explanation ended.

“I see,” rested on the left palm, he browsed around the interface that materialized from nowhere, “-who knew that magic and science could work and make such a thing,” another toggle later, the screen vanished, “-I’m guessing it requires mana to operate.”

“Congratulation, you’re now the guild master of Arda, acknowledged by the Queen of Hidros, Guild Master Raulf, and the Order as a whole. The Evaluation orbs will be sent to Kniq’s headquarters in a week. For now, I think it’s best to locate headquarters for Arda,” they stood and shook hands. “-Before I forget,” she called and handed over a necklace, “-this is the emblem for a guild master, keep it close,” shaped like a star in a deep purple color, yet another trinket to add to the collection of emblems, “-wear or safe-guard it, tis the card that matters in the end,” they walked side by side.

“Now that I’m bound to help by the contract, it will be my pleasure to assist in any way I can,” near the doorway, they stopped.

“You’re growing influential by each second, not as a noble, but a man of many connections. It’s wise to be on the lookout, the shadows are far more unforgiving than one might think,” on those words, she left for a maid requested her presence urgently.

‘A warning, I guess she’s right. I did step out of the shadows – all these titles and fame will bound to make the name Haggard known throughout the land. Just another step in life. On a good note, Arda will finally have a way to recruit people as adventurers and pay rewards for the monster-slaying. That incentive alone and the ability to include everyone as a whole will make things so much easier in the end. I can say that this quest is accomplished.’ Waiting in ambush, Raulf – a few exchange of words later, Staxius left the castle. All that was needed from this place had been gained, it was time to inform Xula. Time was three in the evening, slept on the dashboard, Adete snored.

‘Best be on guard, a target has been placed on my back. I wonder who is gutsy enough to try and kill a Shadow. There’s no information about the UO. Fighting an unknown with an unknown, I wonder what Cake will decide in the end.’

Back to an empty mansion, he was welcomed with a note saying that everyone went out to have dinner. ‘This could not come at a better time,’ he thought and headed to Pandora, from there, the return to Arda.

‘He’s here,’ Xula felt the aura pass through. ‘Prophecy, go meet with Staxius at once,’ she ordered, a white aura shot out her body and straight into the portal room.

“Majesty,” Prophecy arrived with her body semi-transparent.

“Greetings, is something the matter?” he asked seeing that it was on rare occasions that Xula sent Prophecy.

“Not really, my master is meeting with the representative from a newly established village. They are of a new race. Winged wolves twice the size of a normal human. Located at the bottom of mount Blanc, tis where the pack has made their village.”

“Is it alps?”

“Yes, located around at about two-weeks on a horse carriage to the north. The area where not many reside, a territory relatively undiscovered,” she explained.

“I did forget that Arda is the largest province in Hidros. So, are they friendly or?”

“Not from what I sensed; their intent seems courteous. Rare have I seen a race with the ability to change form at will. In the latter’s case, the change is impartial – the wings remain once in human size. It could give the illusion that they were angels but are just wolves.”

“Tell her majesty to not be worried. I’ll be on the second level looking for a place to drink – the quest of opening a guild here in Arda has come true.”

#### Chapter 232: Winged Wolves

“Thus, your grace, we’d like for our small village to join the alliance of races. I do apologize for the bluntness. Sadly, there isn’t much time left – our home is under attack from frost monsters hailing from the alps. A few years back, the establishment of the Ardanian crown was something that had reached our leader – though we didn’t pay heed for politics always planted the seed for chaos and misunderstanding,” knelt formally with a single person staring at her majesty and speaking, the winged wolves were desperate. “Therefore, selfish as it may be, we’re still inhabitants of the bountiful land of Arda – all we want is for the protection of our village,” the plea ended in silence. Peering over the balustrade above, low-ranked nobles who came for a visit. Wine glass in hand with elaborate attire and accessories, they listened with the utmost care.

The winged wolves were a race of demi-humans unknown to many. Their stories reached back till the ancient age – angels that disguised themselves as wolves. Thought to have been extinct long ago and no purpose in venturing into the alps, their race remained untouched and unknown. Now that monsters had begun to plague the land, it grew too difficult to hold back the beasts. The kingdom was at its tipping point – sooner or later, the monsters would overwhelm the defenses. A war of attrition, in the long run – they would suffer consequences that had deeper implications.

‘It’s becoming redundant, monsters are the sole bane of this kingdom. I wish I could take to the battlefield and exterminate the source,’ the face devoid of emotions, Queen Shanna thought long and hard about what was to be done. A new race joining the alliance would have both advantages and disadvantages. The former would mean more items, manpower, knowledge, and money. The latter would mean that it was the crown’s responsibility to dispatch a platoon of fighters to the alps. ‘Our forces are already thin as is, from dwarves to high-elves and not to forget the general populous, the royal guards can spare no man.’

In that moment of doubt, a messenger returned, “The King has returned victorious from the long-awaited quest. He’s now the guild-master of Arda.” From blank to suddenly cheerful, she stood without notice.

“Majesty,” the old sage called for it was out of character.

“Today is an auspicious day, my people – our king has returned from the capital. He comes with great news,” she spoke loudly. \*What’s happening?\* many asked to no avail. “King Staxius has been acknowledged as the guild-master of Arda,” the glee on her face was as if the first ray of light at dawn. \*Seriously?\* the nobles atop could neither believe their eyes nor ears. At last, after so many months, the king returned victoriously.

“Winged-wolves, I, Queen of Arda, formally welcome thine race to the alliance of races,” after which the room filled with chatter and murmurs. It didn’t take long for the information to reach every representative’s and high-ranking noble’s ears. A guild meant for Arda alone – it would open up many opportunities. People could have a place to leave quests for others to fill. The monster slaying would mean more money, which in turn meant that the fighters would be paid to risk their lives. Not to mention the evaluation orb and machine, a way to differentiate between the worthy and the pretenders. Independent guilds – more autonomy for those who wished – an army of adventurers under the king’s rule.

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‘This place sure hasn’t changed,’ the scent of alcohol and sweaty men gave a punch as soon as he entered one of the taverns. ‘Human or not,’ he took a seat, ‘-they all act the same around this drink.’

“Prophecy,” now inside her bedchambers, Xula called on her spirit.

“Yes, my lady?” the audience outside was concluded with the winged-wolves joining the Ardanian crown. They were welcomed with open hands. A boy was left at the castle to act as the guide back into the alps.

“Where’s Staxius?” she asked whilst changing into a lesser cumbersome outfit. From the heavy royalty dress to now a black long-sleeved shirt with grey skinny-pants, her tone seemed anxious.

“On the second floor,” a firm answer.

“Good,” with a cap on, she leaped out the balcony.

“MAJESTY?” confused, Prophecy jumped after her master and left.

Meanwhile at the tavern, having mugs of ale atop mugs of ale, Staxius drank without restraint.

“Slow down there boy,” one of the dwarves called, he smiled with a mug in hand. Since it was rare that the king visited the lower-floors, many forgot how he looked. Not to mention the change in hair color and physical appearance – a new man in the eyes of the others.

“I wish I could,” another mug emptied, “-but this is too delicious to let it go to waste.” the crowd of drunks gathered. “One more, one more, one more,” a chant began.

“Lemme show ya how it’s done,” the dwarf approached.

“Here we go again,” the tavern lady voiced with a cheerful smile.

“Should we not stop them?” one of the assistants asked.

“No, tis a drinking contest between men, our job is to provide booze and food – let them fight it out,” the lady headed back into the kitchen leaving the assistant to mount the counter.

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“Drink, drink, drink, drink,” feet stomped in consortium thus creating a rhythm. One heavy and loud, one that got the dwarf and Staxius ready to drink.

“There you are,” the tavern lady came with mugs filled with ale – not the ordinary, but ones that were stronger and more vicious. “A duel special from the house,” she said in a sadistic tone, “-can you handle mama’s special blend?”

“Oh no,” the crowd laughed, “-this is going to be tough,” they could not believe it, “-mama’s blend, someone is getting knocked out,” amidst all this playful chaos, a lady dressed in a black shirt arrived. The assistant quickly guided her towards the growing crowd, “-care to watch this duel before I serve ya?” her voice friendly, the visitor could but take a seat and watch.

The rhythmic stomps and chants continued, both adversaries stood face to face with a mug in hand. “Let’s go, boy, I’ll show ya how a dwarf drinks,” it started, one after the other, mugs on top of mugs, they drank.

‘This is some strong stuff,’ Staxius thought at one point, the dwarf remained untouched – the geezer had experience. “Come on, vampire, you better not lose,” Adete whispered playfully.

“MAMA BRING MORE OF THAT BLEND,” a voice came from inside the crowd.

“More?” she turned and faced her assistants. “They said more,” the assistants confirmed her doubt.

“Coming,” she fired back with another sadistic smile.

“How much are they planning to drink?” the visitor asked rhetorically.

“This will go on for a few minutes, the effect is going to kick in soon,” the assistant who bared bunny-ears and tail, answered, “-want me to get you something?” she turned and faced she who had spoken.

“Yes, could I have some fries?” the voice soft and dignified. The bunny-girl could but reach out and grab the lady’s hands, “-you’re so cute,” after which she ran inside the kitchen.

‘Who would have known,’ she thought, ‘-who would have known that the King and Queen would once sit at a tavern and relish the pleasures of what our citizens enjoy,’ the fries arrived with an extra serving. “Thank you.”

“Psst,” slouched onto his chair, the room span in circles. “-don’t want to ruin your fun, but I think that’s your wife sitting there having chips,” Adete pointed at the counter – to a girl wearing a cap.

“Surely you jest,” a glance later, ‘-shit, that really is Xula.’

“Here’s the fifth round,” the tavern lady arrived, “-good luck,” she left.

“What do you say...burrh,” \*cough, cough,\* “-boy... hic... Ouff, this is strong.”

“Let’s end it,” hands-on mugs, tis was the final. Both had reached their tipping point. “I bet on old man Ackee,”

“I bet on the new dude,” in that fashion, the customers placed free-drinks on the line as opposed to money. A loud thump caught many by surprise later. “The new boy is the victor,” \*HELL YEAH!\* The drinking contest ended. Cheers and applause filled the room.

“The loser gets the tab, right?” with an unbothered smile, he stood as if sober. “-Tell old man Ackee that it was a pleasure drinking.”

“HAHAHA,” they loved it.

“Let’s go,” money on the counter, Staxius left the establishment and walked hand in hand with Xula.

“That was quite the welcome, wasn’t it?” Staxius spoke and pulled her into an alleyway.

“I wanted to see you, that’s all,” she leaped into his arms to which his body leaned against the opposite wall. “It’s been far too long, and now that the quest has been accomplished, you’re returning home, aren’t you?” softly, she stared up – her eyes had a gentleness and warmth unlike anything he’d seen before. It always amazed how pretty and delicate his wife actually was.

“I don’t think so, there is much to be done at the capital still,” her head rested on his chest, “-I’ll be back after Eira’s tournament.”

“Unfair,” her arms tightened.

“Don’t worry,” a peck on her head later, “-I’ll always return home,” he said in a warm tone.

“I know you will,” her grip lessened, “-shall we head back?”

“No,” without notice, he grabbed her hand and ran, “-that drinking duel has removed all my sense of tact. Xula, I love you,” \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* instantly, they jumped from Arda to Rosespire.

“Where even are we?” stood in the middle of a giant yard with a lovely mansion upfront.

“My mansion,” since the others were out for dinner, it didn’t matter, “-come on in,” he led the way.

“This sure is new,” she giggled.

“What is?” he asked whilst climbing the stairs.

“You taking charge and being bold for once. Usually, my husband is the type of person to remain calm and compose in front of everything,” she stopped abruptly, “-how many live here beside you?” a chill was sensed in her tone.

“Oh, my party,” after which he went into further details onto each individual.

“I see,” her eyes narrowed.

“Come on,” in a blink, Xula was held in a princess carry, “-don’t say that my wife is jealous,” a cheerful smile remained on his face.

“No... I’m not,” she pouted, “-just...” the words wouldn’t come out, “-forget it,” she yelled and stared away.

“In that case,” he stepped out the mansion, “-let’s go meet them,” Void turned on. “Mark your territory,” he said in jest, “-I’ve wanted for you to talk to the people I depend on.”

“You’re cruel,” she stared out the window and thought, ‘-how can I ever doubt your integrity. The way you speak and talk is as if I’m being a child, though it does feel nice. I’m glad to have you as a husband,’ the car drove.



A few minutes later, “-before we go have dinner, let’s get some clothes,” parked outside a luxury shop, Staxius walked in. “Let me spoil you today.”

“As you wish,” she gave a kiss then headed off to try outfits and clothes. Anything that fancied her eye was bought without checking the price.

“Just look at those two, can you be any more obnoxious with spending money?” a few visitors gave side-glances. Annoyed, Staxius returned the glances with a bone-chilling gaze.

“I’ll wear this one,” A pink with shades of light-green frilly short dress. One that had a rose made out of ruby pinned onto the left side where one’s heart would be. Her green hair complimented the outfit fully, after changing – it even took Staxius by surprise. Not too formal and not too casual, the perfect balance.

“Heaven on earth,” he said in a baffled tone, “-thy art Venus who’s braced this unworthy man.”

“Cut it out,” she tapped on his head joyfully.

“You sure are radiating,” the flattery didn’t stop for it came from the heart.

“That would be 50 Gold, sir,” an enormous price for a few outfits.

\*Beep,\* “thanks for your patronage,” with a nod, the helpers smiled.

“That sure was expensive,” she added and entered the car.

“Let me spoil you, dearest wife.”

Chapter 233: Bait

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” along the road, Void continued to move.

“Sure about what?” he turned with a smirk, “-wasn’t my wife getting jealous earlier, what’s this change of heart all of a sudden?”

“Oh please, don’t forget who I am,” she pinched his arms, “-in seriousness, are you sure about this?”

“You’re Shanna Islegust, not the Queen of Arda, but my lovely wife. None knows who the ruler of said province is, therefore – thou art but a flower in the glimmering sunlight,” on that note, the car stopped shy of the town-square. Parked in a lot at the back of the restaurant, arms locked, the couple walked through the door.

“Let me say this already,” he whispered, “-people are going to stare; don’t order Prophecy to go on a killing spree just because of a lustful gaze.”

“I’m not some blood-thirsty killer,” she smugly tugged onto his arm, “-unlike someone I know,” to which, they climbed the stairs. Taken asunder by the lady who walked in, many of the gents and ladies could but avert their gazes. Her aura was intimidating and her beauty unforgiving, a simple look told it all.

“Guess I’m not the only one who has an immense presence,” in jest, he voiced and arrived on the first floor.

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A twist of the doorknob later, a dimly lit room with candles atop tables and mild whispers. Waiters and waitresses stood at the ready to assist whoever stepped through. A comforting smile and a respectful bow, “-how may I be of help?” they asked for it was a place reserved for special occasions.

“They are with me,” from a shadowy corner, Undrar stepped out and took charge. “-As you wish,” with another bow, the waiter stepped away.

“Quite a fancy place you’ve chosen,” he commented.

“I didn’t think you’d come,” she voiced in a baffled tone.

“Good evening, Viola,” a soft and gentle voice came from beside Staxius – she didn’t notice till the lady stepped forward.

“...” baffled by who the lady was, the dragon stopped and stared.

“Snap out of it,”

“Queen Shanna?” she asked.

“Quiet,” he demanded not wanting to raise suspicion.

“Yes, it’s a pleasure to see you again,” Xula smiled, one with the same warmth as a babe laughing, innocent and pure.

“I’m glad you could make it,” both ladies bowed their heads to one another.

“Shall we get to dinner?” Staxius asked, impatient for they were low on time.

“Yes, yes,” Viola guided the way to their table. Sadly, only one seat had been saved – a problem that was fixed immediately. Two intimidating auras approached, one was of their master and the other unknown.

“Who’s she?” asked Achilles.

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“She’s pretty,” Emma voiced,

“Yes, sister, very, very pretty,” Emmy added.

“I apologize for the late introductions,” stood at the table, Staxius spoke, “-this is my wife, Shanna, she’ll be dining with us.”

“Greetings everyone, I’m Shanna Islegust. Please, don’t be tactful on my account. A friend of my husband is a friend of mine.”

A reluctance to speak went around the table. None knew what to do nor ask, dinner was ordered for the late visitors. “Your grace, pardon my asking, what is it that brings you here?” returning from the washroom, Auic, her face turned pale after seeing the queen.

“Good evening, majesty,” Avon reached out and tried to grab onto Shanna’s hand.

“Back off,” shooting out of her, Prophecy, fully materialized. “It’s not a good evening since you’re here,” she voiced and stood in between the two.

“It should be fine,” Xula calmed her spirit.

“But majesty...” separated from the others, the risk of people overhearing their conversation was nullified.

“If master is the king of Arda, doesn’t mean that Shanna is the queen?” after a few seconds, Deadeyes told what he found out.

“Good job, genius,” Achilles gave a sarcastic remark.

“Let me properly introduce everyone,” not keen on witnessing the awkward exchange, he took charge and went around the table.

“First of all, this is Auic, you’ve already met therefore I’ll skip the details. Since the day we left Arda, she has been taking care of most of the tedious household tasks – a super secretary,” a few steps away, “- here’s Avon, my trusty guard, a bit too fabulous for his own good.” In the same manner, the introductions continued, “-here’s Deadeyes, reliable marksman as well as a good friend. Next is Achilles, the strongest fighter in our guild. Then we have, Viola, my sister, but you’ve already met again. Afterward, the Lymsey sisters here’s Emma and here’s Emmy, both are strong and good fighters – Kniq’s newest recruits,” now reaching the end of the trip around the table, “-this is Lizzie, once a rogue but now a part of the family. She’s like my daughter, no scrap that, she’s my daughter,” the ending line made her flutter with joy, “-thus, concludes the introductions.” Food arrived, the rest chose to have dessert and accompany the couple. Still awestruck by how pretty his wife was, the ladies could but smile and watch.

Once the meal was done, Shanna took charge and spoke to every single person. Since she was a queen by status, the others knew not how to act. By taking the first step, the awkwardness reduced. A good sign, it didn’t take long for them to open up. Minutes turned to hours, their table filled with chatter and laughter with Xula in the middle.

‘We better move, the castle must be going crazy right about now,’ the phone rang, the caller displayed Cake. “Hello?” not wanting to intrude, he headed to the balcony.

“Hello boss, are you free by any chance?”

“Depends, what is it that you want?”

“Well, there’s going to be a deal happening soon at one of the warehouses in the business district. Do you think you can make it, I’m going to leak the information that Shadow will be present for the deal.”

“I guess that you’ve managed to find out who the spy is?”

“Yes, though it’s speculation. This leak should be our way out of the UO’s grasp.”

“When is it?”

“In one hour, I have a feeling that the assassins might show up. This might be out of line, boss...”

“Go ahead and say it,”

“Could you get yourself captured, the more information we get from them, the better it will be in the long run. The weaker you seem, the better it will be,”

“I understand, send the information,” the phone hung. ‘A personality change, I’ll have to make sure that the mask doesn’t get removed. The weaker you are, the more confident the other will get, and the more confident they are, the more information they might willingly give out. Though I doubt someone’s going to reveal their master plan. All we need is any information they give. It’s going to be tough; they are out to kill me – honestly, I could just torture and get what I want that way,’ a chilly breeze blew by, ‘I’ll go with Cake’s plan for now,’ an exhale later, he walked inside.

“I’m sorry everyone,” he apologized and called onto Xula; “-however, we need to leave early. I’ll see you all later,” the door closed and the couple headed out.

“They do care about you,” she voiced whilst in the car.

“You read their mind, didn’t you?” he chuckled, “-in any case, I won’t be returning to Arda anytime soon – a job request just popped up.”

“I understand, do come back soon,” now in Pandora with the portal leading to Arda active, “-I’ll be waiting,” a tight embrace later, she left.

‘Come back soon,’ he laughed and jumped back to the mansion, ‘-I better keep everything I hold dear safe,’ knelt before a chest, the various necklaces, the guild card, bank card, and everything else was safeguarded, even Xula’s glove.’

“Are we going to war?” Adete asked for she had remained hidden for the entirety of the time Xula was present.

“Yes, this might get ugly,” anything that could trace him back to being related to Kniq or the Haggard name was left out. “Tharis and Orenmir,” dressed in black, with stripes of red, Shadow headed out. \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Thread,\* the only way to make the mask a part of his body was to channel blood inside its structure. In turn, the disguise had changed in appearance and remained stuck to the face by the power of blood.

Hidden in an inn, “-wake up Aiden,” Elsa mercilessly stepped onto the boy’s hand. Unable to retaliate, he sat and waited. “We’ve just gotten a tip that Shadow will be present for the deal happening a few minutes from now on. Get ready, it’s killing time,” she said with a smile.

“A worthy person to snatch their heart, what lovely news.”

The cloudy night sky had a change of heart. As opposed to being nice and friendly, it rained or rather poured. The combination of rain and wind made Staxius shiver as he drove through the streets at neck-breaking speed. ‘The deal is real – there’s no chance of an ambush. I killed the last group that tried to attack us,’ ten minutes out, countless possibilities and outcomes played till a likely event was found. ‘The number of people trying to kill me is unknown, I’d guess two or more. Going by that, one of the assaulters will try to start up a fire-fight or something. They will do so since I’ve got the advantage of being hidden. It’s their first move – how I deal with the situation will decide how they react,’ after which, he arrived.

Located on the southern outskirts, a place not that popular, inside a small warehouse, he arrived. "Good to have you onboard, Shadow," the DG members greeted the man with open arms.

"I'll take to the high-grounds," a jump later, he vanished.

"That's him for ya," armed to the teeth, the guards were confident.

'Now we wait,' sat behind the crates with Adete up top, the all-seeing eye was used. Jumping from person to person, he had an overview of the whole vicinity. 'Let's see what you're made of,' the customers arrived in a blacked-out SUV. In the middle, arms with Angel's Dust, an experimental drug that was brewed following the success of God's Ale, the deal began.

"SURPRISE," below, an explosion blew off the door, a boy with a chained as his necklace walked in. Gun in hand, he began to shoot, "-get down," the guards laid down and fired. The bullets deflected off the boy's skin.

'Right on schedule,' Staxius added nonchalantly, "-listen up, Adete, I want you to always stay at least ten meters away from me. You will act as my eyes in the sky, in return, I promise to get you a lot of blood."

"If blood is on the line, then who am I to refuse – go out there and do your job, vampire," she took flight at the same time Staxius jumped down. "Come to me, my sword," the concealment spell broke, \*ting, ting, ting,\* fragments of bullets fell right behind.

"You can cut bullets," the man who rushed exclaimed, his face had similarities to a dragon, "-let's have some fun," gun in hand, he continued to fire.

"-get back, leave this fight to me," armed with a sword, Staxius jumped in. Slash after slash, any projectile that would remotely come close was stopped. 'A dragon...' a flash image of Eira came in mind, after which he charged forward. \*Clang,\* the swing stopped before reaching the target, the boy blocked it with his arms, one hardened with scales. "Weak," with a push later, Staxius was sent back.

"Why don't you speak, Shadow, is that all you got?" cockiness filled his voice.

'Time for you to shine, my gun,' unholstered, twelve-bullets were fired – all hit the exact same spot near his heart. "My scales are far stronger than metal," the face held a smug expression. Without wasting time, the pistol got thrown in the air, it distracted the boy for a few seconds.

"Rest in peace," Shadow voiced whilst in mid-air, "-the tip of the sword connected with the same point the bullets made contact earlier – it cracked.

"Impossible," before it reached any vital organs, "-that's enough," a female voice ordered after which a hand reached out, grabbed onto his legs, and threw him backward.

Chapter 234: Schemes atop Schemes

\*Crash,\* Through the wall and into the garage where trucks were parked, the noise resounded across the empty and somber streets. The rain continued to pour, visibility was poor.

"Why did you intervene," now partially a dragon, the boy argued.

“Shut it,” a push of a button later, Elsa sent jolts across his body. Unable to speak nor move a muscle, Aiden fell to the floor as if life had been sucked out of him. “If I hadn’t jumped in, you would have died,” a disgust filled voice later, the lady walked out the warehouse and into the garage. There, an unconscious man was found, “-this is the fabled shadow,” she knelt. “Nothing really stands out, no presence to speak of, a well-built body that’s for sure,” her eyes went around the man, “-an interesting choice for tattoos,” she stood. \*Click,\* the shock stopped, “-get over here, Dragonkin,” she ordered.

“As you wish,” half of his strength drained, he stumbled out.

“Pick him up,” an SUV was brought in – tied and gagged, Shadow was captured instead of killed.

‘Now that’s new,’ Adete flew and tailed the vehicle. Minutes turned into hours, the night turn into dawn – the rain cleared leaving fog, they drove out of the capital. ‘Did my master get defeated or...?’ confused about why that happened, she continued on her duties, ‘-I’m counting on you, lady who smells of sweets.’

Back in Rosespire, it was now morning, reports about the deal rushed through Cake’s screen and phone. “Good,” she exclaimed, “-they took the bait. I doubt anyone could defeat my boss. We’re ready to go to war,” the door knocked.

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“Let’s go,” she answered and left whilst dressed in a black leather outfit. “I assume that we’ve found the spy?”

“Yes,” the guard said without much interest, a car in which Jason sat, waited outside the apartment complex.

“Let’s go,” he demanded for time was of the essence. Last night, at the same time Shadow fought, Cake led another operation. A fight happened under the guise of the then cloudy night sky – one that none from the public knew, the underground was active. With Jason’s help and Karlson’s intervention, it was tracked to the Twin Jellyfish Bar. It took days upon days to clear out the other possible locations.

“Shadow is on the move, spread the rumor across the bar,” a text rang signaling the start of the operation. Rumor alone would not get the spy’s attention since the latter had remained a mystery for all these months. That was were Karlson came in – hand in hand with Jason, acting as if something major was to go down; they purposely tried to not stand-out. The rumors were rumors, though it must have originated from somewhere, that was what Cake relied on the spy to think.

Per her plan, it worked, trying to stand out would have ruined everything. By doing the complete reversal and leaving a small opening for the man to exploit, it was easy to reel in the catch. Many agents under Jason’s direct command waited – it might not have looked it but that lowly bartender was the right-hand man of Karlson. The moment someone tried to act out of order, one guard would track his movement. More often than not, the ones being tracked were but drunkards. As luck would have it, the spy wasn’t in the bar – but in the private pleasure rooms. Karlson’s meeting room was bugged with a microphone.

“Give me a second,” laid on the bed with a girl atop, he stopped unnaturally, his phone vibrated.

\*Skill: Far-sight,\* “It’s him,” the girl whispered into another mic after checking onto what the man did. The target was confirmed, “-capture him,” a reply from Jason. The next thing the man saw was a pair of breasts then – darkness; knocked out. The door opened with the bar-keeper leading the charge.

“Good job again, Scarlet,”

“Spare me the flattery,” wrapped in a blanket, she walked out, “-that job was disgusting, I’m expecting a raise,” after which her footsteps turned mute. Thus, the operation to flush out the spy succeeded. Many traps had to be placed, the end might have seemed simple and easy. A testament to Cake’s genius, ever since she had taken helms – apart from the incident when Sprinkles was wiped, no other major incident happened. Staying two to three steps and sometimes acting as if the DG were clueless. It was undeniable, her wit had brought the mystery of the UO closer to being revealed.

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“How fearsome can a woman be,” Jason voiced in jest, the car headed out, they were being led by someone.

“You tell me,” window lowered, the wing brushed against her face and hair. ‘I wonder how the boss is doing, we’re coming,’

\*Drip, Drip, Drip,\* Echoes of droplets broke the unconscious state, “Rise and shine, Shadow,” chained with a mere iron bar separating the two cells, Aiden voiced.

‘A dungeon, the supposed Dragonkin chained, the aura around here seems subtle at best. It worked,’ not wanting to reveal anything, he crawled and rested against the opposite side of the cell. The face pointed at the ceiling.

“Desperation, despair, none are coming to save you, nor me for that matter. Welcome to my home, dearest Shadow. For some reason, Elsa decided to take you in alive,” an air of insanity loomed from the boy. His facial expression didn’t match the speech, “-DON’T IGNORE ME,” loud clanging resounded, he tried to get away, “I’LL KILL YOU; I’LL KILL YOU; I’LL KILL YOU,” it repeated in conjuncture with the frivolous tugging.

‘I’m glad I left Tharis and Orenmir behind, the fight that happened last night was a pain. I wish I had a limiter – holding back is far harder than going all out. Nevertheless, my recon starts now, Adete should be somewhere around here,’ carefully, he scanned the ceiling, crevasses, and corners until a girl was spotted, she sat with her feet moving back and forth.

‘Looks like I can use magic, the bars don’t seem that solid either. Are they seriously trying to keep anyone from escaping with that weak of a defense? There must be foul play at work,’ the constant noise from the dragonkin grew annoying. From the ceiling to straight into Aiden’s eyes, a merciless and ominous gaze befell. It sent shivers, the screaming stopped for he cowered in fear of what had happened.

\*All-seeing eyes,\* from inactive to fiery red, the eyes burnt. A push on the ground later, the consciousness jumped out – now free to move, a closer inspection of the premises began. ‘We sure are far underground,’ the climb to the surface took a few minutes.

'Would you look at that,' above ground, hidden amidst trees and inside a cave, away from civilization, a mental map of their location was made. It didn't seem like the headquarters; no progress on that front. The search continued, both above and underground, it went on for hours.

"You're awake," a sharp voice knocked him back into the body.

"Why did you not kill me?" as if nothing happened, a nonchalant question was asked.

"You caught my interest," the cell opened with a screech, "-not many people can survive my hands," cold fingers caressed his face, it was Elsa.

"Are you going to torture me to fill thy lust?" a monotonous voice.

"Of course," she chuckled, "-not, getting my hands bloodied isn't my style. Besides, my orders were to restrict Shadow by killing or capture. The strategist leading DG's forces sure is smart. However, don't underestimate the power of the Syndicate, their intent is flawless. This instant, Cake and Karlson's right-hand man are riding to their death. The supposed spy they caught was just a lure, to exterminate Cake," she held a watch, "-these are cute and all, but the information we gave out was to seem as if we're drawing out Shadow,"

"In reality the real target was Cake," he interjected, "-a well thought out plan," he laughed. "Telling me this right now means that the deed has been carried out?"

"Yes, the human bomb must have exploded by now," she said in joy.

"And what you say is probably true," he stood, "-though you underestimate my strategist," \*BANG,\* the door flew opened. "I present you, DG," without wasting time, he reached out and got Elsa into a headlock. Footsteps stormed the room, men in black tuxedos armed with assault rifles, "-did you think that I was unconscious for all that time?" he asked rhetorically. Adete flew out from her hiding spot and sat atop his shoulder, "-my companion here relayed real-time information to Cake, the route and whatever I heard. I'm afraid, Elsa and Aiden, you were the one who we targeted as well. Killing so many of the DG members – someone has to pay."

"You got it all wrong," she laughed, "-Lord Desmond had planned for this possibility as well. One stone, two birds, prepare to DIE."

"Shadow, a large beam is inbound for the dungeon," the radio turned on, it was Cake, she stood outside as watch.

"It's over, DG, we'll die and take you guys with us as well. There's not much use for a witch and a dragonkin in this world,"

"Oh shut it," \*Spell: Augmented Mana Output x2, Death Element: Unleash Aura x2, Undrar's Blessing: Dark Element.\* "Heed mine call, I, Staxius Haggard, call upon thy strength. Stop all who dare oppose mine own will, Death Element: Magical Barrier, Pentagram Variant, Hell's Gate," the headlock lessened, the right hand reached up to the ceiling – a black and white flame shot out and engulfed the caster. The symbol, hidden underneath the mask, glowed vividly, '-total annihilation.' Above ground, a giant pentagram, as large as the cave itself materialized. It burnt with a dark purple aura. Flickers of light as powerful as a thunder strike hit with one another, it rattled the surrounding. \*BOOM,\* a deep low



resounding explosion sent shockwaves around the vicinity. Trees uprooted, the air pressure turned any living being directly underneath the impact into a mesh of blood and guts.

As soon as contact was made, Staxius's hand shot back down. Whoever had cast that attack wasn't human, no normal mage could summon such power. It took a few seconds, "-turn to dust," the open palm closed into a fist. Outside, the pentagram followed suit, it closed onto itself. \*Dong,\* it vanished with the powerful sound of a bell.

"What JUST HAPPENED?" barely able to make it out alive, Jason voiced in shock through the radio.

"Calm down, and bring the SUVs, we've got two people of interest to interrogate," unbothered, he grabbed onto Elsa and left the dungeon.

"I must ask, who are you?" she asked for he had halted an ancient spell. "Stopping The Fallen's Judgment isn't a mere coincidence. That spell has the power to destroy a town. Why do you think the dungeon was placed in such secluded space – it was so our master could cast his ultimate spell."

"I'm but a Shadow. You're going to die soon, tis all in the hand of our boss," at the back of the line, the duo walked. "Something did intrigue, I'd like to know what would happen if I somehow manage to let you two free. I want information on the dragonkin."

"Surely you jest, nothing would happen. In no way am I going to roll over and change sides. Witches and Dragonkins aren't meant to live in human society. For too long has the shadows been our home. Death is honestly our only salvation. Aiden isn't going to talk either – the only thread binding that boy from falling under the grasp of that dragon was severed. Nothing you do will accomplish anything, Shadow, it's over – farewell." The door closed, inside the same vehicle, the assassins drove forth.

"All that scheming for nothing?" He approached the two who remained behind.

"Good to see you, boss,"

"Hello there, Shadow."

"I'd wouldn't say that it was all for nothing," she added, "-we know that there's someone else pulling the strings, The Syndicate."

"A job well done for an alchemist," Jason shared a cigar

"I appreciate the compliment," he blew a puff, "-I doubt it's the last we've seen of those assassins."

"Elsa, are we going to die?" Aiden asked with a smile, the SUV drove slowly on the uneven terrain.

"Yes, Lord Desmond promised to kill us," for the first time, she patted his head, "-it will all end soon."

"MASTER," Adete charged forth, "-another beam..." gone, the cigar seemed to levitate.

\*Death Element: Magical Barrier, Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* '-this is annoying,' in a blink of an eye, wings sprouted. Blood came out his back and crystalized into four massive pillars. The magical barrier was summoned with both hands. Support from the pillars and power of the magical barrier was sufficient to deviate the spell. In the process, two of the supports broke, the momentum sent the vampire flying into the opposite hill.

“You’re annoying,” a loud thundering voice came from above.

Chapter 235: Desmond

Smashed into the hill from the blast, rocks scattered all around. Dazed by the shock, it took a few seconds to regain his bearings. ‘Two powerful spells in less than five minutes, whoever it is, sure is powerful.’

The SUVs came to a forced stop, the pathway was blocked from the impact. A large boulder stood before them. “Stay inside and don’t move,” ordered the guards to the captured. From the entrance, Cake and Jason rushed closer to Staxius.

‘I’m amazed,’ he stood and dusted the dirt off the clothes, ‘-this vampire body sure is resilient.’

“You’re alive, how lovely,” black wings from which feathers fell, the one responsible hovered menacingly. The face was hidden behind a helm made of an unknown material. Purple and black armor, one that had small spikes on the shoulder and knees. An armor as illustrated in the ancient books about gods and demons.

“MASTER,” below, the door blasted opened with blood. Aiden had gone berserk and so did Elsa. “You’ve come to set us free,” she knelt. The still half-formed dragonkin with a mouth dripping from blood followed suit.

“Desmond, I presume?” nonchalantly, a voice came from the hillside.

“Don’t you speak my master’s name so casually,” in a fit of rage, Elsa turned with the intent to kill – her eyes looked vile and unworthy a lady. \*Pang,\* a pebble flew across her face and hit Aiden in the back of the head.

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“Don’t you dare use that tone with me,” with an aura as impressive as he who hovered, Staxius marched forth. The boy who got hit, fell instantly, the pebble went straight through his head – it left an opening, “-I regret trying to save you both, should have killed on sight.” \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* as opposed to earlier, this time, the aura was unleashed outwards as opposed to inwards. The difference between the two was that the former manifested his strength as pressure outside, as opposed to the latter which served to boost the body’s defenses. All who stood in a ten-meter radius fell to the ground, it included the guards except Cake and Jason who remained hidden behind another boulder. Scared beyond recovery, Elsa went into shock. The half-dragon died in a blink of an eye.

“Don’t get in the way, puny witch,” the ground cracked, with her catching the full blunt of Desmond’s punch. Her body, now unconscious, flew twice as far as Shadow did. “Let’s get to the matter at hand,” an aura equal to Staxius’s landed. It clashed in the middle, a deadlock between two strongly matched opponents, lightning could be seen fighting in the middle. The ground around burnt, the air turned violent, the blue-sky changed into one cloudy and filled with an essence of despair and hatred.

“State thy name, spellcaster,” Desmond ordered.

“My identity isn’t what you should be worried about, Lord Desmond. For you see, thou art not going to see the ever-slumbering dusk,” the eyes turned emotionless, the hair levitated slightly. A powerful being

had appeared. The body unconsciously began to change, it was ready to go into battle. The breathing stable, the stance without opening, the eyes ready for any sneak attacks, a major battle was to start, from every fiber to the bone's marrow, the body could feel it.

"Do as you see fit, spellcaster. I had come with the intention of a peaceful talk; however, I now see that thou art ready for a fight," similarly, he raised his guard.

"Who are we kidding, all it comes down to is the survival of the fittest. Now then, Lord Desmond, prove thy art worthy," following that sentence, both leaped and charged forth. As opposed to fighting with weapons, with Tharis and Orenmir out of the picture – using the Death Element, he fought as if a battle-mage. Each tested the waters before going all out. Desmond held his own, \*Demon-Arts: The Fallen's Justice,\* after the first blow, he went full out. Left to right, dodge followed by Void fireballs – Staxius fought a defensive battle. Desmond didn't sit idly, he matched every move that was made against him, matched with double the strength. With Desmond up in the air and having the lower ground, Staxius was at a disadvantage. The wings couldn't be used just yet, the impact from earlier still had lasting issues. 'I doubt we can go head to head,' the eyes closed, Shadow-step activated, tis was a combination he would have used with a sword since it best suited close-quarters fights. Desperate, increasing the speed and avoiding any damage, he focused on a more flexible combat style, '-let's go.' \*Void Fire Ball,\* he disappeared from Desmond's field of vision, "-you're opened," a voice came from below. Inches from hitting its target, a flap of the wing later, the opponent dodged.

"You call that a sneak attack?" \*Demon-Arts: Mimicry, Heather's hand,\* semi-transparent palms forced their way down.

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\*Death Element: Magical Barrier,\* '-he used the same spell as Elsa did,' strike after strike, with each one with force equal to that of a full-power swing from Raulf, the circular barrier began to crack. 'I need to get away,' the pressure atop grew heavier by the second. \*BANG,\* the ground exploded, a giant hole appeared amidst the dust and rubble.

"You got away," he laughed, "-one must know when to give for a human fighting a demon is unheard of. A weak race who wishes to go against the will of my supervisors. One day or the other, all of this shall end, the world will be cleansed."

\*Huff, Puff.\* "If it wasn't for that last-minute jump, I'd have been turned into a crape." Now resting with a knee on the ground, he stopped. \*Spell: Augmented Mana output x15, Death Element: Unleash Aura x10.\* 'Limit break, the combination I used against Gallienne's Hydra, the best of what I can do with my magical element,' a black mist enveloped the caster, \*Death Beam,\* he jumped with both arms close to one another, a variation on the fire-beam spell. As opposed to channeling the Void flame, the spell was one that used the dense mana as the weapon.

\*Demon-Arts: Mimicry Enhance, Abyssal Return – Death Beam,\* the moment Staxius cast his spell, Desmond did the same, "-sweet dreams," he whispered, in that instant, before each spell made contact, Desmond's attack reached his opponent. The beam was twice the size of what Staxius had cast – unable to retaliate, the body flew across and into the hill. The impact resounded across the land, bones shattered, the inside turned into nothing but liquid – instant death.

“Did the boss...”

“Don’t look,” Jason patted her head, “-Shadow is dead, no one could ever hope to survive that sort of attack. The blood pours out without sight of stopping. It’s over, we need to get away before it gets too difficult,”

“We can’t leave him,” her face felt empty, “-I need to go to his side.”

“Shut it,” \*Slap,\* “-This isn’t some fairy tale where a kiss is going to revive he who fought. The man is dead, that’s the reality, we’re in a world where the strongest survive. Shadow was strong, but not strong enough to take on a demon,” hand on her arms with a tight grip, the bartender tried to move.

“For a human, you fought well, spellcaster, I admire the efforts,” from hovered, he landed and walked over to he who had been defeated, “-sadly, not even an SSS-ranked mage could ever hope to compare with the likes of unworldly beings. We transcend the limits placed onto humans; our powers are far stronger than one might have imagined.”

“Wait...” she remained adamant and watched.

“What is it now?” forced to look, Jason glanced over to where Staxius was.

\*Spat,\* “-I agree with you on that front,” the lifeless body spoke, the auto regeneration kicked in, “-humans are weak,” the mask fell, all the blood stopped pouring, the bones returned to normal, a dense aura filled the air. “Sadly,” the eyes opened with a crimson glow, the canines grew sharper, the hair levitated, “-I’m not a human,” a step later, wings sprouted from his back. ‘By nature, the Death Element is a defense element. This is why I had to focus on using weapons and augmentation. The only real fire-power is the Void-flames. Dark-arts would have been useless against anything that isn’t human. On the contrary, Blood-Arts is attack-oriented, fully offensive with unlimited fire-power. The perfect balance.’

“This can’t be true,” Desmond took a step back, “-Nightwalkers, I thought that race had gone extinct. They who went against the wishes of both God and Demons were left to rot for all eternity. How is it that there are survivors?”

“It’s simple,” \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* “-its because the second true-born vampire is still alive and well,” \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* a halo of his own blood materialized.

“Don’t tell me you’ve received blood from him?” a mild fear was sensed; Desmond grew on edge. No response, a horizontal cutting motion of the hand later, the nauseating sound of body parts being ripped was heard. The blood halo disappeared for it was used in the slaughter of all who remained unconscious. All that blood flowed into a single point which resembled an umbrella, “-we’re ready to fight,” at the helm, Adete with the blood flowing directly into her mouth. It all came from the guards who came to help in his rescue.

“The more blood we have,” now behind Desmond, “-the more powerful we get.” The demon’s arm sliced off and turned into liquid, without looking, the Crimson Threads took on many forms to accomplish what he wanted. The demon’s armor could but look as if a piece of cheap fabric.

“All that precious demon-blood,” he smirked, “-we can’t let it go to waste now, can we?” without a second thought, Desmond’s head sliced right off. From blades to tiny crystal balls, the demon’s body suffered the same fate as the arms.

“A lower ranked demon, how pathetic,” it happened so fast that all Cake saw was a massive pool of blood getting swallowed by Staxius and Desmond turning into dust.

“Can I, can I?” asked Adete seeing all that food.

“Eat your fill, my dearest companion, feast for its thy reward,” he approached where Jason and Cake hid. Behind, Adete went wild in turning all the corpse into orbs – her face seemed joyful.

“How are you both doing?” the body returned to normal, the wings vanished, the eyes stopped burning and the canine grew smaller.

“O-ok?” said Jason in utter confusion, “-care to explain what the fuck happened?”

“You’re not human, are you...” Cake added with the same emotion.

“Is that a problem, though I do apologize for killing the guards, I don’t feel the need to justify my actions,” he turned and pointed at the SUVs, “-that girl is still alive, she might prove useful in getting information about the UO. I did get carried away – killing her master might not have been the smartest choice,” he faced the sky, “-I couldn’t help it. A worthy opponent presented himself, I needed to show what I could do.”

“That’s not the issue,” Cake voiced, “-you died, I saw you die, how can you come back from the dead?”

“Have you not heard of vampires?” he turned and asked, “-the immortal race shun by all who lived...”

“I thought it was just a myth,” Jason said in disbelief.

“Think about what you want, I care not. A warm bed is what I’m looking forward too. No need to worry about the corpses, my trusty companion is on clean-up duty. The immediate threat of assassins has been resolved, the Syndicate might have beings far stronger than Desmond, be careful.”

“I’m done,” Adete rushed over with her mouth covered in red.

“I see,” with what remained of the sleeve, he wiped off her mouth and teleported away.

“Shadow is a vampire, we best keep this a secret,” Jason took charge, “-that goes for you as well, Cake. Human or not, you should have been accustomed to non-human beings. Let’s just finish up the operation.”

Meanwhile, inside Pandora as opposed to the mansion, Staxius jumped into bed.

“Why did you not use the vampiric power from the get-go?” Adete asked whilst getting ready to sleep.

“I wanted to see how my older self would have faired against such a being. The old Staxius Haggard who only had the Death Element and a few spells to fight. It’s awfully obvious now. If I hadn’t changed – there would have been nothing else I could have done, defeat was what awaited me in the end. I don’t regret becoming a vampire, it has opened up a plethora of avenues... \*Yawn,\* “-let’s leave it for tomorrow, I’m sleepy.”

Chapter 236: The bigger picture

Following the encounter with Desmond, a low-tier demon – Staxius slept through the day till Tuesday came by. None pay heed to where he had gone, Kniq went to work, as usual, Lizzie did find it weird though it didn't matter in the end. Missing a day wasn't that big of a deal – for he had already said that his job would often leave her to her own devices. That spirit in mind, the continent continued to move.

Azure's wall grew confident of the past few weeks – a change brought by the intervention of Blades End. The news about the first platinum quest did hurt their ego. That in mind, and with the prospect of getting ranked up; a team of five was dispatched. The back-up from Pegasus and the other guilds remained to this day. The Guild leaders came to a realization, fighting on that border would be both beneficial to the kingdom as well as their personal wealth and strength. More troops at their command – more building companies got involved, more mages were sent from the Order. Tis was only part of the bigger picture.

Another quest loomed over the horizon. A tower as tall, if not taller than the highest building out in Iqavea. A place made of rock paired with veins and other natural materials. Rocks that seemed unbreakable. The top could not be seen with normal eyesight. An entrance, shrouded in mystery had opened itself. Each night, bone-soldiers, also known as low-tier Undead, would rush out said entrance and guard the vicinity. It became apparent that camp Updust would never be found. Many speculated that it was a dungeon. An exploration expedition was planned for March. Guilds that were directly involved with Azure's wall planned tirelessly. A base had to be built first. The decision was made to continue the wall's construction on the outer layer of the Tower. It would take more time and more materials – however, a worthy endeavor. The new outpost would take refuge a few kilometers to the north from where the old base stood.

With the announcement of a new apostle a few months prior, Rosespire had grown more popular amongst the believers. The god most prayed had sent an emissary. More money, and more faith in Gallienne's rule. Having been forgotten, the Church which now only influenced Kreston alone – were livid. The Pope didn't take lightly to the news. Awfully and menacingly, he refused to comply with the Queen. Many messengers were sent to negotiate and try to get said province into Rosespire's good-graces. The efforts ended in naught. Drawing out the opposition wasn't working out. Despite all that trouble, her majesty kept a cool and level head. Under her direct control, a special group of spies was sent as pilgrims into the land of the fanatics. An operation that had been launched on the same day the apostle was announced. No response had come through yet, patience was key. Gallienne waited, she waited for the day Kreston would make their move. Schemes atop schemes, both parties played a long and exhausting game of cat and mouse.

Away from all the conspiracies, a festival had the general populous excited. The inter-magical tournament. All the months of preliminaries and local tournaments were finalized. Ten students from different schools and provinces all around the continent were picked. An addition of four students from a branch of the Order in Vlaiwia, would also come to participate. Their names remained hidden till the opening ceremony. The tournament to decide the prodigy – the one who would be backed by many influential people. Rumors had it that idols and singers would be sent from the main-land. This included the pride of Hidros, Aceline. The latter had recently starred in a well-received television drama. It recounted the tale of a lonesome fighter who would climb his way to the top. She played the role of a little sister. On the surface, it was just another story about a reject becoming a hero, however, it touched many hearts. The realistic feel of the human interactions, the romance, and the grit of losing

someone precious ??? an instant hit between men and women alike. For the past few days, Eira had asked for Josiah to make her training harsher. The dormant dragon whispered one thing, power. Her focus was on mastering its strength, a mere fraction could be the deciding factor between a win or a loss. Compared to her real objective, this tournament felt like child's play. A faint silhouette of a man who got farther and farther away by each day. A dream, almost a nightmare, for the man was none other than her father. Rumors about idols coming to perform for the opening night had many hooked. Even those who weren't necessarily interested in the tournament were intrigued.

Now for the Dark-guilds, the organization had been shaken up by the whole war against an invisible enemy. Renaud could have cared any less about that frivolous attempt. The Godfather had but one thing in mind; selling god's ale. The quality that arrived on a weekly basis kept on increasing. Godfather Stanley, upon receiving the heads of the target he had sent over to Shadow, couldn't contain his laughter. The man intrigued him a lot. A test that he passed for if it had failed, someone would have been sent to challenge in person. Elsa now captured; information about who was behind the UO grew abundant. She told all that they wanted to know – without restraint nor fight. Aiden died; Desmond was massacred before her eyes. She had but one thing in mind, to find out more about Shadow.

\*Yawn,\* through the hublot, the morning ray shone. Sleep broke, confused to what time nor day it was, Staxius sat on the edge of the bed and wiped his eyes. "Good morning," Adete said in a fatigued voice.

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"Good morning," he stood and stretched. A quick glance outside revealed a sunny day, people were on the move. The clock showed 6:10, "-it's Tuesday..." he checked his phone..."IT'S TUESDAY," the state of drowsiness broke. "We need to move," \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

\*Boof,\* a heavy noise of something falling echoed down the hall.

"Ouch," a girly voice mumbled whilst in agony.

"Be more careful," he stood.

"..." it took a few seconds, "-you're back," a cheerful scream followed by a hug.

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"Yes," he returned the hug, "-running in the hallway isn't that smart if you ask me," following behind, Auic with a towel.

"Good morning," he greeted with another smile.

"Welcome back," her eyes wandered up and down.

"What's the matter?" he asked, confused by her reluctant gaze.

"You smell like blood and iron," Lizzie took a step back, "-I know that smell very well," she stared up, "-you killed, didn't you?" her voice serious and eyes cold.

"Must have been tough," Auic added whilst covering Lizzie's half-naked body. "Just look at the state of thy clothes, master. Torn, covered with dust and blood," she chuckled, "-I'm glad you didn't get hurt."

"It doesn't matter," Lizzie went over and gave a quick kiss on his cheeks. "-Be sure to clean up, today's a special day since my guardian has to attend the school meeting," she scurried down the stairway.

"School meeting?" he turned and asked Auic for a clarification.

"It's a meeting between parents, students and the school. Though not mandatory, you'll get the chance to ask questions about how the student is doing and such. It's a good way to get acquainted with the other parents – a way to make a good impression. Happens twice a year, at the start and the end," she approached, "-please take care of Lizzie. She might be a ball of joy, though her heart is fragile.

Yesterday, her demeanor had us all worried. I mean, you disappeared without telling anyone. She thought that you had left and gone back to Arda with her majesty. In no way am I telling you how to live, but do be careful, master, girls are most fragile at this age," she headed for the stairs, "-in any case, we're glad that you're back," she disappeared on the way down.

'I did it again,' with a sigh, they entered the shower, '-I left without telling anyone. It's a force of habit, I can't help it. Need to get my act together, for Lizzie's sake. She's honestly like a daughter now. Eira's the responsible one, I can trust her with everything I have. She was brought up by Undrar and the Silver Guardians. She's stronger mentally and physically," the showerhead turned on, '-it's different for Lizzie. Having fought so much to stay alive, being rejected, and treated like trash. I'm such a fool,' he laughed, '-there's much more to learn.'

"Why are you laughing?" covered in soap, Adete asked as if implying he was a lunatic.

"Nothing much," a few minutes later, both exited with light and fresh bodies.

"Welcome back," two voices came from out the hall, it was Avon and Deadeyes.

"Thanks for taking care of the mansion."

"Don't mention it, master, it's our home too, we need to take care of it," Avon replied with a wink and scurried off into the shower.

"I must say, your wife sure is beautiful, king of Arda," Deadeyes said in jest then entered the bath in turn.

'They'll never change, will they,' with a smile, he entered the bedchambers and got ready. 'A meeting between parent and the school. Guess I'll dress smartly,' the closet opened, revealing the same grey uniform that Arda had made. The one that screamed of rich and famous. 'It's good to be back,' a nostalgic scent came from the suit, memories about the time spent so many years ago rushed. 'It all began with me joining and studying at Claireville Academy under Sophie's tutelage. That life was never meant to be. The plan was to study and graduate, get a job, and try to clear my father's name. It all changed the day I met Undrar – so many fond memories. I wonder how Dorchester is doing these days.' Hair tied in a pony-tail, with the adventuring necklace, as well as the dragon crest and the new guild-card. The emblems of being an Alchemist as well as a trader were left behind. 'Can't forget these,' he reached inside and grabbed Tharis and Orenmir. Holstered inside the jacket whilst Orenmir was concealed on his belt, it was time to head out.

"Good morning everyone," he entered the kitchen.

"Now that brings me back," holding a dish, Undrar said in a nostalgic tone.



"It sure does," he stepped in and helped.

"Master sure is looking smart and handsome today," now sat around the table, everyone began to point out the outfit.

"Flattery isn't going to work, dear Avon," he returned in a joyful tone. The rest spoke and joked, none asked to where he had been yesterday, it was best to not pry.

"It's time for us to move," he stood, everyone else finished breakfast at the same time. 'Time to go out and see what the school is all about, I guess. I need to make a good impression on the other parents. If it's a hierarchy driven school, I'll have to establish my prestige from the get-go. Nobles are far worse than devils.' Few steps away from Lizzie, he looked with a gentle gaze, '-I'm thy guardian. I'll do whatever is needed to be done for you to have an easy life,' a warm smile portrayed itself out of habit.

"Let's go," Lizzie energetically grabbed onto his hand and returned the same smile.

"Have a good day everyone. Drop by the shop later, I've some potions and scrolls I need to give to you all," with a wave, Void, shiny and clean, turned on, and headed out.

"Time for us to move out," Undrar took charge and jumped into the RFS, "-we're going out on a quest outside the capital today," she gave a quick summary.

"Where's master?" still in pajamas, Emma rushed down the stairs.

"Did we miss him?" Emmy followed behind.

"Yes, he just left," a pat of the head later, "-he'll be at Pandora soon. You can use the portal up in the attic. Don't overdo it, you need rest," the RFS headed out as well.

"Shall we go to sleep?" Emma turned and asked.

"Yes, sister, lets," they climbed back up, and thus the day began.

## Chapter 237: School Meeting

"Before we arrive," a few turns away from the main campus, Staxius broke the ice.

"Yeah?" Lizzie turned with intrigue, she played around on her phone before he called. She seemed so involved that he thought there would be no way a response would come without screaming a little.

"Care to explain more about this so-called school meeting?" at a relaxing pace, the traffic cleared, allowing the jammed line to move.

"I wanted to tell you this yesterday," she said in a woeful tone, her face matched her voice. The phone slipped into her bag, "-today is a new day," a big inhale later, the entire aura changed, from woeful to cheerful in less than a second. "The school meeting is as the name implies, a meeting between the school and the student's parent. Auic had planned to accompany in case you didn't show. I'm glad you came," from him, her gaze wandered outside at the bystanders. "I've never been in one, I've no clue. From what I heard from my classmates – it's more or less like a party, a place to show one's authority. The ways of the rich are unknown to me. It's a bragging right – people will show with expensive clothes and cars just to rub it into the faces of those not so lucky nobles," an air of disgust took command.

"Is that so," he patted her shoulders, "-it should be fine," he smiled, she turned, "-don't forget who your guardian is," a childish wink to calm her nerves.

"Yes, my father is the king of Arda," she laughed loudly.

"Yes, ha-ha, you needn't worry," eyes forward, the expression changed immediately. Two guardsmen stood in front of the Junior academy. White gloves and guns holstered on their belt, with a simple motion – all who had come were permitted to enter the premises.

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"Please head to the right and into the parking lot," one of the guards indicated. As instructed, he drove in slowly. Men in suits as well as ladies in dresses already engaged one another under the warm sky. Vehicles of different brands and models were lined in a tidy way. The moment Void roared and parked, parents who held their children's hands were baffled. Someone of interest had come, someone very powerful and rich. The aura that emanated from said figure could not be described.

"Oh my, who's that?" huddled in a group, four women with their hands on their mouths spoke. "I know not," tis was the common answer. Their kids, four classmates of Lizzie's, four girls – all bearing blonde hair in different shades. The mothers' outfits screamed of rich.

\*Click,\* the door opened, Staxius stepped off first. A glance inside showed a reluctant Lizzie. She had seen her classmates in the rearview mirror. \*Click,\* her door opened, "-shall we go?" standing outside, a handsome man with an approachable demeanor.

"Thank you," her hand reached out.

"Isn't he a bit too young?" the ladies asked without filter. "I must say that it's surprising to not have seen that nobleman around here before."

"Mother," one of the girls called, "-that's Lizzie," she pointed with a conniving smirk.

"Is that so?" all turned, "-the commoner, I presume?" another asked.

"Are you sure she's a commoner, darling? Seeing what she arrived in, and how well dressed both are, I doubt it. Those fabrics and accessories aren't cheap," by accessories, she referred to a ruby flower hair clip he had bought when Xula came to the capital.

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"Excuse me," with a dignified tone, Staxius approached those who had thrown speculation upon speculation onto his name.

"Yes, how may we help?" the leader of said group took command. Dressed in formal attire, with her brownish light hair combed masterfully, the aura that oozed off was that another monster. By her side, the leader of Lizzie's class, a girl named Katherine Goldberg.

"Would you be so kind as to point us in the direction to where the meet is supposed to occur?" smooth and flawless, Staxius's personality and speech changed.

"Good morning, Lizzie," the girl spoke out, her face seemed prideful and posture asserting confidence.

"G-good morning, Miss Goldberg," her grip tightened around Staxius's palm.

As if nothing happened, Lady Goldberg indicated inside and gave information according to what he asked. At the same time, Lizzie and Katherine exchanged a few words. 'I see what's going on,' whilst speaking, he thought, '-Goldberg must be one of the families that hold titles in the upper nobility. The ladies behind are but followers, spineless, and fake. And as it would be, little miss Katherine has inherited her mother's traits.'

"Lizzie, why don't you come and have a chat with us?" a few minutes had gone by, the parents' chitchat came to a close.

"What do you say, Mr. Haggard, shan't we let our children speak to one another, the meet is due in five minutes," a request that seemed awfully suspicious.

'Please don't,' Lizzie's face screamed of fear, he felt it.

"I am thankful for the invitation," the eyes stared directly into Katherine's face, "-I doubt that my daughter will gain anything of value if she stays at one spot. One must always broaden his mind, for you see, the world is much bigger than we combine. We are but floating dandelions unable to move nor fight with the wind as our guide," followed by a courteous nod of the head, he left without batting an eye.

"That man sure is witty," Miss Goldberg gave a snarl, most might not have got what he said prior from leaving. The words resounded inside her mind; it was an insult disguised as a piece of prose. One that implied that Lizzie wouldn't get anything from staying with her child, for he had called them ignorant, '- don't underestimate the power of a family that bears the title of Duke, Mr. Haggard.'

School continued as normal; the parents were brought into a different part of the academy. There, each sat according to their rank and wealth. One after the other, the assistant showed the guardians to their seats. The first seat, one that had been the throne for Miss Goldberg was left untouched. She had been placed on the second seat.

"Surely, there must be an error," she pointed out to the director.

"All the seating has been done with the utmost diligence of our teachers. Are you to say that our establishment is incompetent?" the gaze stern, the lady could but graciously accept her fate. It raised eyebrows; most were intrigued to whom was to seat at her former throne. Last in line, footsteps echoed, Staxius took charge and sat where Goldberg would have. Many of the lower-ranked nobles hid their laughter. A guilty pleasure of seeing a duchess being humiliated. For too long had she thrown her weight around.

After said debacle, the meeting with the Director continued. It addressed any questions parents might have concerning how the academy was to proceed. For the most part, the conversations were tame and baseless. Nothing of interest happened, Lizzie and her year had classes.

"Before we end, I'd like to hear Mr. Haggard's thought on how the academy is being run," Goldberg asked in a curious and uninquisitive manner, a friendly question.

'I see how it is,' he smiled, '-they sure are unpredictable. Trying to break my still fragile presence. The others have no idea who I am, most are suspicious that I might be a fake. I don't know her rank, but it

must be high. Luckily,' he stood, '-there are people in this room that are joyful to the new change in order – Barons have been led as if sheep up to now.'

"Before we begin," the voice deep and soothing, "-I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Staxius Haggard, a noble hailing from Arda," a quick pause to scour the auras later, he continued, "-I know full well of the discrimination between humans and demi-humans. Still, since Queen Gallienne has officially allied with Queen Shanna, nobles from each province are placed in the same hierarchy. I say this as to not cause any further confusion,"

"Could I interject for a moment?" a middle-aged man asked.

"Please do,"

"I do agree that the alliance may become beneficial for both kingdoms in the future. Doesn't that imply that thou art not human, and what about thy children?" the question that most had in their mind.

"You're right, I was once human," the gaze cold and unforgiving, "-that has now changed. My personal life isn't up for discussion, I respect thy curiousness, however, one must also respect another's privacy. Truthfully, I'm appalled that a nobleman such as myself would be so bold as to try and invade mine own private life," \*Dark-Arts: Sense Personality.\* "Lord Fran?ois, how would you like if someone would come around and began to pry. Let's say that you had more than platonic relations with thy assistants whilst being married. I'm sure that it would cause more trouble than is due."

\*Cough,\* "I apologize for prying," he sat back down and had water.

"Please keep the questions for after the meet," the director ordered for all to remain silent.

"Let's get back to Lady Goldberg's query. I have no qualms with how the academy is being run. It's a place for nobles, and people that are gifted with wealth and prestige. I was once a student at central Claireville Academy. The latter was the place based on merit alone and not one's social backing. It's the ideal place and example of how an institution must be run," he paused and stared the director, "-I see that this school had tried to follow the example set. Sadly, it failed miserably, the commoners were alienated and forced to quit. My daughter, Lizzie, who had been picked, was the only one standing. It came to my knowledge a few weeks prior. I must have been more observant. Nevertheless, Lizzie shares the name Haggard. What I seek is a friendly environment where students and teachers are not bound by prejudice. Learning is a thing of glory, it must be relished – for knowledge is what truly makes someone wealthy," on that, a silence spread throughout the room. \*Clap,\* slowly, it came from behind, the Barons and Baronesses. What Staxius had said touched many hearts. It gave a lot to think about, short as it might have been – a clear impression was left. One of a man who knew what he spoke of, a man wise as he is scary.

"Thank you for speaking such words, Majesty," a slip of the tongue that a minority heard. "Next is a discussion between parents and instructors. Do take some time to rest at the school's cafeteria," one separate from the students.

"Lord Staxius," in the hall coming, two sets of footsteps were heard behind.

"Yes?" he turned with a friendly voice.

“What you said earlier was beautiful. Care to have a few words with me and my wife?” the man seemed kind and gentle.

“Sure, can we head to the cafeteria first? Being formal at all times must be tiring. Shan’t we all relax and converse behind a warm cup of tea.”

“With pleasure,” the trio headed up. A few twists here and there, the entire academy felt as if a morgue. A pin-drop silence, the students worked diligently.

“And you were saying?” three cups of the highest quality were ordered. The price, 750 Silvers each. The couple stared at one another in confusion, 750 silvers to spend on a cup of tea was insanity. Noble by title but average at best, they couldn’t afford to spend such sums on mere drinks. Unwillingly, the man tried to speak out.

“Worry not,” Staxius spoke first, “-it’s my treat.”

“I don’t know what to say?” the lady was embarrassed, she kept on looking at her husband for answers.

“I can assure you that there are no strings attached,” the voice calming, the couple settled down.

“I appreciate thy generosity,” the man nodded, “My name is Luther Remington and this is my wife, Carla Remington,” she nodded as well. “The reason we wanted to speak is on a hunch. You see, my eldest daughter attends Central Claireville Academy – she always comes home and speaks fondly of a girl named Eira Haggard. I was wondering if you were related, since from what I was told – her hair is as white as snow.”

“Your assumptions are right, Eira is my daughter. Though I doubt that tis the only reason we’re having this chat,” he implied that there were more than they let on.

#### Chapter 238: The Remington’s

“Quite perceptive,” Luther cleared his throat and coughed. At the same time, a waitress brought over the ordered tea. Lady Remington kept a smile during the whole conversation, “-I can assure that there’s nothing shady nor strings attached. We do have a small favor to ask,” at this point, the sweat gathered on the forehead glistened with the overhanging light.

‘An ulterior motive, I doubt it’s anything as scandalous as killing someone or getting a hold of the DG. Their intent isn’t one vile nor malicious. I feel bad for them, the hesitance must be embarrassing,’ to soothe the would-be awkward exchange, a tiny smile, one of compassion and understanding.

“We’ve heard that thou art a talented alchemist,” the moment they gazed upon said smile – some unknown courage raged from within, “-if tis the case, I’d like to hire thy services for a patient hit by the curse of the demons. It’s my second eldest daughter, she has always been an active girl – cheerful and wanting to go live the life of an adventurer.”

“Please,” the wife interjected, “-Is there not something we can do?” her hands locked and seemed as if she was ready to get on her knees and beg. The desperation in both the voice and face whelmed he who only wanted to have tea and chat.

“There isn’t a need to lower thyself, lady Remington,” he sipped tea and waited. “Before we proceed,” after what seemed like an eternity, he spoke, “-care to tell me how that information was procured? It’s not as if I intended for it to be a secret, though it does raise suspicion for I’m unknown.”

Obligated, after exchanging a few glances paired with a nod of the head, Luther answered the question. “Our butler was out on town the day you saved the girl who had been cursed beyond recovery. Through the window, he recounted that a man had healed one who was already at death’s door. Gathering information was simple, Pandora is linked to the guild Kniq, one that has grown in popularity for the past few months. By process of elimination, the one in charge was none other than Gold-ranked adventurer, Staxius Haggard, nick-named, Xenos.”

“I see,” the cup finished, “-good research yields results. I admire the efforts,” the cup rested onto the table. “In no way can I make promises about healing thy daughter. I’m not a god, there are limits to what alchemy can accomplish,” he leaned in, “-if it’s necromancy, I can also help using said method,” the posture relaxed with a chuckle. The chill when the word necromancy was spoken in such a cavalier fashion could but add to the fire of intimidation.

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“Father,” a voice came from the hall, footsteps scurried till the table.

“Hello Marie, how are you doing?” the face kind, voice gentle and mannerism caring, the Remington’s stopped to meet their daughter.

“It’s good to see you father,” she gave a smile that turned blank upon staring at Staxius, “-did I interrupt?”

“No, my dear, we were about to finish the conversation,” with a smile of his own, it placed her at ease.

“About our deal..?” the lady remained adamant about getting an answer.

“I-” another pair of footsteps distracted Staxius.

Before the sentence could be formed, “I’m back,” a cheerful voice came and hugged from the back of the chair.

“Lizzie, is that you?” he turned.

“Yes,” she leaned forward.

“Good to see you in such spirits,” playfully, he bumped his head onto hers.

“Marie?” the girls laid eyes on one another.

“Lizzie?”

“Do you know one another?” Luther asked.

“Yes father,” Marie replied joyfully.

“She’s the first friend I made when I came here,” from hugging Staxius to now holding hands with Marie, the girls seemed close.

"The world sure works in an enigmatic way," he voiced nonchalantly.

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"I do agree on that front," the lady nodded.

"I apologize for the late introductions," Marie stepped back and stayed at her parent's sides, "-Lizzie, I'd like for you to meet my parents."

"It's nice to meet you, Lizzie. You sure are adorable, aren't you," the mother said truthfully.

"A pleasure to meet a friend of my daughter here," Luther chuckled.

"Thank you for the compliments, Mr. and Mrs. Remington, "-with a bow, she stepped back.

"I'd like for you to meet my father," as opposed to being formal, Lizzie gave another hug.

"Marie Remington," hearing her name from the mouth of such an individual, she jumped a little, "-do take care of my daughter here and come by if ever you want to play or study together."

"I will," she nodded.

"Back to the matter at hand," the focus returned to the lord and lady, "-since our daughters are friends, I'd like to take on the job. Depending on the condition, the price might inflate or deflate accordingly, do you agree with said terms?"

"Anything to save her," Luther pleaded.

"I'll see you both later in the afternoon. Once this meeting is over, I'll have to gather supplies, could I have the address?" the phone handed over, the details transferred. It ended with a handshake.

"We'll be waiting," the trio remained whilst Staxius headed into the school.

'Another victim of the curse, guess my services as an alchemist will come in handy once again.'

"Hey, what was it that you were talking about with Marie's parents?" Lizzie asked whilst hand in hand on the way to the director's office.

"A business deal, apparently your friend's sister has been ill. They asked if I could help,"

"Will you help?" she asked with puppy eyes.

"Yes, it's part of my job after all." The day continued in the same dull and uninteresting manner. Entertaining nobles in pointless chats followed by a meet with the various instructors. One after the other, it came to an end. The common factor was that Lizzie was below average in all subjects.

Outside standing near Void, the girl held a sullen face – it got to her, all the disappointing remarks.

"Don't worry about what they said," the door opened, "-studying is a thing of pride. One must enjoy the pleasures of learning and its applications. Don't focus on the textbook, look for ways to apply what has been taught to you into the real world. Anyone can recite a poem but none can truly break it down and reformulate the words for another purpose. It's the same for magic – if you ever want to try and follow the ways of the mage, learn how to think outside the box, it will help in the future."

“But they all said that if I don’t pass the next exam, they’ll kick me out,” the stress got to her.

“Listen to me,” a pat on the head later, “-I’ll tutor you if it ails you much, I’m your father now – try to depend on me once in a while. It will be only the basics – I’ll teach about how one can apply what has been learned and using it in a more valuable way,” the car turned on, “-it’s in thy hands.”

“Please do,” the reply was quick and easy.

“Good girl,” the car sped to Pandora.

An hour later, the door opened, “-welcome back, master,” the twins stood with cleaning attire. “It’s good to see you both,” taking the portal, Lizzie headed back to the mansion since the day had been heavy. Minutes turned to hours, time was spend chatting and working with the twins.

‘They seem to be doing much better since that day,’ it reflected on their auras, ones cleared from doubt. The next minute, the door knocked once more.

“You’re here,” tis was Undrar, they had come for supplies, “-here,” he gave each a backpack filled with potions and scrolls, “-tis all you’ll need this month. Do say if there may be changes to be done concerning weapons or enchantments. Each one of you is the sword of Kniq, be confident – I shall assist from the back.”

“Thanks for the supplies, the Qaisar will be deposited at headquarters later tonight. We’re off again,” with a smile, Undrar headed out.

‘The wings on their back sure is nice,’ time felt as if it stopped. Paired with the sun from outside, it seemed as if angels returning to heaven.

“Head home once you’ve had these,” two cups in which laid a crimson-colored drink, “-it’s medicine to help heal. Don’t act as if nothing happened. I heard from Viola that both of you were hurt,” the voice stern, “-be more careful, there’s no next time after one’s dead,” on that note, a quick hug later, he headed out. The twins were told off for being reckless by both Undrar and Staxius. As opposed to being sad, they were happy. Happy to see that there were people who cared.

“You sure have taken to the duty of the father,” Adete voiced playfully, “-I’d go as far as say that you’re the father of the whole group.”

“Is that a bad thing?” they were now on the way to the noble district.

“Not really,” the voice didn’t seem to agree with her words.

“Spit it out,”

“Fine, I fear that you might be going soft. I’m afraid that if the time comes where one of them dies, it might break thy spirit and will to go on. Remember, vampires are immortal. One day or the other, those people you care about will die due to old age. You’ll be left standing, all alone and wandering. That goes for Undrar as well, she’ll be ready to ascend to the status of goddess.”

“Yeah, I know, when the time comes to let go, I’ll let go. Besides, there is much to accomplish, living on forever doesn’t seem that bad. Watching how humanity evolves and ends itself might be a show in



itself," no feeling nor attachment, death was a privilege to the living, an event that he'd celebrate even if someone close would have died.

"Guess I was worried for nothing," she laid atop his head, "-don't get lost in the maze of lies you've created, dear master."

"You sure have grown bold."

Hidden in the middle of extravagant mansions, a small road that led to Remington's estate. Around a forty-five-minute drive from his mansion, Staxius arrived. A small yard and a small house compared to the others. Though in fairness, the mansion was big in its rights. Alone in a village, it would have looked as if a lotus in a muddy lake.

"You must be Lord Staxius?" a butler stood near the entrance. Void drove forth and parked shy of the house's porch.

"Yes, Lord Luther must have informed of my arrival," with a bag packed with supplies, he stepped out

"Do follow me," he led the way up the stairs and continued down the hall. A room secluded from the rest of the household, in the farthest corner.

"I'm glad you could make it," Carla waited impatiently before said door.

\*Click," "I apologize for the smell," the door opened with an instant whiff of dread and nauseating smell of decay. Besides her daughter, hand in hand an unbothered from the smell, Luther waited.

'This doesn't look good,' he stepped inside. "Where and when did she get injured?"

"Two weeks ago, the cut started as small, but," he pointed at a purple rash growing from her arm, "-it's getting worse by the day. We've spent most of our fortune into getting holy water from the church, hiring doctors, and more, all ended in naught."

'That's why they seem desperate for money,' bag placed on the floor, "-I've got a vague idea, could you kindly leave me to tend to her wounds?"

"Yes, do what is needed," he reluctantly left with a woeful tone.

"And under any circumstances, don't enter this room – even if it's filled with the scream of pain," a stern glance sufficed, "-this is an order, not a request. If I don't have thy word, I'll be forced to reject said assignment."

"D-do what is n-needed, just b-bring her to us," the door shut.

"Now then," the focus turned to the victim, "-you can hear me, can't you?"

"Y-yes, w-who's there?" a fatigued voice followed by violent coughs.

"I'm an alchemist," the hand reached inside the bag, "-I wish I could put you to sleep and start the treatment. Sadly, a conscious mind is necessary. The pain you'll feel will be unlike any other. This is just a heads-up, there's a possibility of going insane from the shock – do you wish to continue?"

"Yes, I want to bathe in the warm sunlight once more," her tone craved for freedom.

“I’ll do what I can.”

#### Chapter 239: Astral Binding

“Mr. Alchemist, before we start,” \*cough,\* “-is t-there a c-chance that I’ll die?” her body and mind now close to shutting down due to fatigue. She fought the pain to get another sentence out.

“I can’t say,” focused on sorting out his supplies, Staxius wasn’t interested in making idle chitchat. The girl was just another patient in his eyes.

“I see,” her breathing grew heavier, “-t-thanks for trying,” faint smile followed by coughs.

“Try not to speak, I’ll need you to be of able mind soon,” using the thumb and index finger, he parted her long hair, ones that covered her face. “It’s going to be a hard fight,” deep breaths in, “-try not to speak too much, focus on staying conscious.”

‘A low-tier curse that fed on her mana until it evolved into one of mid-tier. A day later and it would have devoured her from within,’ the eyes shut, focus heightened, the temperature around the room dropped.

“Let’s begin,” the eyes reopened, the persona changed completely. No emotions, nothing, the same face used when people were killed. At the five-points of an inverse pentagram, blank scrolls hovered above in circle. A faint black thread led each point to one another, it formed the same symbol on his palm above the girl. In tongue, a complex and intricate incantation that not even a human could understand. The words seemed like gibberish but were in fact, words of power. Knowingly, he slipped into Clarity for a mere fraction of a second – the knowledge that came from the depth was of an ancient binding ritual. One used to imprison demons and creatures of ill-intent during the war of the gods. It took the saying, fight fire with fire, to heart. The ritual required a man who had slain countless lives without batting an eye. A man who lived on the edge of insanity, a man who embraced the dark side.

\*Snap,\* from the five points, the lines attached themselves to her hands, feet, and forehead.

\*AHHHHHHH,\* the ritual began. She screamed and screamed till it reached a point where her vocal cords could shatter. Lost in the inner workings of the ritual, the focus had heightened so much that the outside world grew inexistent. From screaming to paralyzed by shock, her mind remained conscious – the pain was far worst than death. Let me die, finish it, I want it to end. Said thoughts came through her mind constantly.

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Tears dried, her eyes strained and mouth gritted. “It’s over,” she mumbled since the mind felt oozy. It had been fifteen minutes, the pain intensified ten-fold. “-I’m l-losing my mind,” the physical sensations shut off completely. A defense mechanism, from left to right, her head bobbed. Random outbursts of giggles followed by laughter and nonsensical words.

“I am he who slays without fear, I am he who shall be the last of what thy see. Heed mine call, thou whomst dared to fight the natural order, tis the day thou ought to be destroyed, Ancient Magic – Astral Binding.” \*Clap,\* it echoed around the empty room. The frivolous giggles stopped; the taint released its grasp. Each five of the black scrolls stuck to where the injury was. Shortly after, another snap later, the Astral Binding finished.

'I'm surprised she managed to stay conscious,' close to falling asleep, a rare class healing scroll was placed on her stomach. Next, two rare healing potions. Faintly, a dim green light lit from above her face.

"You did a good job, now rest, let the body recover. You'll be able to bathe in the sunlight soon," to help in her recovery, he dressed her wounds and finished up with enchantments. One that had part of his mana infused, it would slowly help in regaining the lost strength.

\*Click,\* the once dim room lit in delight. The windows opened, the fresh evening air rushed inside, the putrid smell gradually faded into the vast nothingness. "Quite a good view," he leaned, "-even for a mansion like this," outside, a garden with a statuette of some deity in the middle. After said garden, a wall from where the sound of engines disturbed the peace. 'For the cost,' he thought, '-A rare healing scroll, two rare potions, 12 Gold in total, add my fee and it's 15 Gold.' The gentle breeze continually entered the room – the girl's face relaxed; a heavy burden lifted; another job done.

"Lord Luther," he called whilst walking down the hall.

"Over here," the butler voiced – and walked over to the common area. The lady's face held contempt whilst the youngest daughter cried. The lord could but face downwards in shame, the screams reached around the entire mansion. Painful, heartbreaking, and stomach-turning – the thought of their daughter going through so much pain; the guilt grew unbearable.

"My lord," the butler called, "-Lord Staxius is here."

"Is that so," he stared up with lifeless eyes, in the corner, the lady wanted to lash out but kept quiet. Her hands were preoccupied with hugging Marie. "Did something happen?" he stood and walked with a slumped posture.

"Weak," the voice monotonous, "-how pathetic of a parent can you be?" the words harsh and not cutting corners. "Your daughter fought so hard to try and survive, yet all I sense in this room is anger and sadness," cold and unforgiving, none dared raise another word. "Self-pity, regret, suffering. The guilt must be clawing on inside, isn't it?" the bag dropped to the floor. "If I were in thy shoe, I'd have died ten-times from the embarrassment," the words were aimed at the lady.

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"What do you know!" from the corner, Carla lashed out, "-what do you know about guilt. Do you think it's normal to just sit back and do nothing whilst our own blood suffers, are you insane?"

"SHUT UP CARLA," Luther turned and screamed.

"No, I can't handle this anymore, I'm DONE," she ran out the door, tears flowed.

"Father... mother..." the girl fell to her knee.

"Lord Luther," Staxius said in a soft voice, "-go ahead and follow thy wife. She must be aching far more than you – the love of a mother is worth more than diamonds. Take her to see your daughter, you'll be greeted with good sight," the voice gentle and understanding, a quick pat on the back, the lord ran out, "-thank you."

"If I may intrude, sir," the butler walked over, "-I'm grateful for what you did. I've been in service for the Remington line for almost four decades now. With the miss's illness, our lord and lady grew apart.

Neither could see eye to eye. From the get-go, she remained adamant on not letting you see her daughter.”

“There’s no need to be grateful,” he interjected, “-I did my job,” a piece of paper was handed over, it contained information about payment and how to aid in a speedy recovery. “Good-bye for now,” a wave later, Void turned on and left.

“Carla, wait,” Luther’s voice echoed down the hall.

“No, enough is enough. Hearing how much Dorothy had to suffer up to now has made it clear. You never cared about our family nor our daughters. It’s always been this way – you’re selfish and inconsiderate. My feelings are never taken into consideration,” she turned with watery eyes, “-thanks to you, our daughter had to suffer... SHE HAD TO SUFFER!”

“Will you shut up,” he dashed and embraced her firmly, “-I know I’m selfish. However, I love my daughters more than you’ll ever understand. Can’t you see that you’re being blinded by emotions? You were rude to Lord Staxius based on prejudice. Do you think I’d willingly wish for my daughter to suffer.”

“Y-yes... you would,” she pushed him away, “-it’s your fault that she’s in such a condition in the first place. Can’t you see? SHE WENT OUT AND GOT HURT BECAUSE YOU LET HER GO,” the words piercing and heartbreaking.

“Enough,” \*SLAP,\* “-I’ve kept my mouth shut because you’re my wife. But that’s crossing the line, I care not if you’re a daughter of a nobleman. I’ll do what is needed to make my daughters happy, that is FINAL.”

“F-father, m-mother?” faintly, a familiar voice came behind. “A-are y-you f-fighting a-again?” using the wall, a fatigued silhouette approached.

“DOROTHY,” without care, he pushed away his wife, “-I’m so glad,” knelt on the floor, she gave and rested in his arms. “I’m so happy,” tears flowed and fell onto the red carpet, “-I’m so happy,” he kept on repeating those words.

“Dorothy...” slowly, Carla stumbled her way to her daughter, “-y-you’re s-safe?” she could not believe her eyes, with a big inhale, the tears flowed once more.

“I t-told you,” he reached out and grabbed Carla’s hand, “-I’ll do what it takes to make my daughters happy. I’ll die even if it means saving them,” bloodshot eyes with tears flowing, he turned and spoke what he felt. “You’re my family, it’s my job to take responsibility. That’s why I decided to hire Staxius. Not based on the reports, but based on Raulf Serlo’s words, my uncle’s word. It was he who recommended the man you despised.”

“P-please d-don’t fight,” she coughed.

“Save your strength,” Carla interjected.

“N-no, I-let m-me speak,” her breathing heavy, each word took enormous strength, “-d-don’t h-hate the a-chemist. I s-sensed it, he’s hurting far more than a-any h-human could. T-the only reason I can dream to s-see the sunlight again is b-because he used his b-body as t-the host f-for my c-curse,” after which, sleep took over and carried her mind to the realm of dreams.

\*Sniff,\* “-do you see now, Carla. I can understand where you’re coming from. However, you lashed out at the wrong person. That anger should have been directed at me; I know I was wrong. I’ll never regret doing what is in my power to make my princesses happy. They are the reasons I live and breathe, my sole purpose.”

“I g-get it,” she reached out for a group embrace, “-I should have tried to see the bigger picture. I may be overly sensitive, though tis not an adequate reason to have behaved so rudely to the one who saved Dorothy.”

“Father, mother?” whimpering followed by footsteps, “-please don’t fight anymore,” she cried. It was Marie, the girl was severely affected by what had happened. She heard everything that was said.

“W-we won’t,” Luther gave a smile.

“Yes, n-no more,” Carla replied with the same smile.

‘Lord Staxius, acting as the villain to force the lady’s feelings into the open. You made yourself a target. Scary as you are impressive, thanks for everything,’ hidden behind a pillar, the butler thought and watched.

“Was solving a family issue in the agreement too?” Adete asked in a spiteful manner.

“Not really, call it a bonus,” the car drove forth.

\*Ting,\* for the first time – a message came through the guild-card. A touch later, now parked underneath a big blossoming tree; the details were shown in bold. “The Evaluation orb and Machine are to be delivered in two days at Kniq’s headquarters,” a notice that came straight from the central guild.

‘Someone must have pulled strings; the order wasn’t supposed to be ready till next week. I best head to Arda, we need to make preparations. A guildhall, I hope Xula has some idea,’ back inside, they returned home.

“I’m back,” parked in the garage, he walked over to where the twins and Lizzie were.

“Welcome back,” Emma yelled.

“Oh damn,” \*Boff,\* the girls were playing with a ball. “Let me join in,” he offered.

“Sure, you’re on Lizzie’s team,” Emmy pointed and began. It was as if four children out on the yard. Joyful and full of energy, left to right, he jumped, caught, and threw.

“What are they doing?” Achilles asked; the RFS returned from its journey.

“I don’t know, but I’m joining,” still dressed in uniform, Avon jumped out and ran into the yard.

“Wait for me,” Deadeyes yelled and followed suit.

“Guess we should join them then?” Undrar and Achilles stared at one another.

“I suppose,” though reluctant, a feeling of joy welmed from inside.

“OVER HERE,” Auic teleported from headquarters and joined the rest.

All who made up the big family of Kniq were outside. Sweaty and hot, they ran around, jumped, and played soccer since the number of players increased. Lizzie, Staxius, Deadeyes, and Avon made one team and the other was Emma, Emmy, Undrar, Achilles, and Auic. Four versus five, not favorable odds though Staxius played with the strength of ten people. At times, magic was used, at others, skills unique to adventurers – the game continued till dusk.

“It’s over, 20 to 20, good game everyone,” Adete played the role of referee. Lizzie scored the equalizing goal in the last minutes. To which, the boys threw her up in the air with a big hurray.

Chapter 240: Vampires

“A new day shines over us yet again,” doors to the balcony opened with minimal effort, Adete voiced poetically.

“Did you have a nightmare?” unimpressed, Staxius awoke with the body still tired from yesterday’s treatment. The curse that was bound to him had taken a worse during the night – it evolved into a higher tier curse. One that brought the host misery and pain, most notably, when it came to family relations. The latter had had quite an influence over the Remington’s.

“Not really,” the bat-girl flew over and sat atop his shoulder, “-the curse we took on yesterday has been defeated. It’s just that, each time you die and come back alive, you’re twice as strong as before. However, it also adds another curse onto thy body. Part of the reason why I think the old body failed and was imprisoned during the fight against the Hydra – was the excessive number of curses. Honestly, we should replace the title of heir to the death reaper with; the curse-magnet.”

“Ha-ha, good joke,” he said with an emotionless face, “-I’m laughing, look,” now changed into a loose fit shirt with no pants, they walked out the door.

“Glad to see the humor works...” she fought sarcasm with sarcasm.

“Curses aren’t that bad a thing,” the bathroom door opened, “-there are better than blessings that’s for sure. Take away the drawback from said evil things and you’re left with an endless supply of dark-energy to siphon power from. As opposed to training and getting stronger, I take on curses and split them – then channel their power into the death-element and physical body. It comes with a risk,” he turned and yawned, “-compared to what I get out of it, it’s worth the effort. Always getting stronger, I need to surpass this realm soon. The god of death awaits, there’s a war brewing. I can sense it – titans,”

“I know, there’s no need to remind me, I was the messenger,” she rolled her eye.

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“I was meaning to ask,” oblivious, he spoke, “-care to tell me more about how vampires came to be?”

“Finally taken an interest to thy kind?” she stood and hovered above his head, “-as you already know, vampires are beings rejected by both gods and demons. We were a product of a failed experiment Creation had tried many, many millenniums ago. A sort of mixture between curse and blessings. The first mother, she who inherited the blood, had lived centuries upon centuries till boredom, and the regret of being immortal consumed her existence. I won’t get into details, what really interests you is the part about us being alienated,” a good analysis for his intrigue was as she said. “Well, legend has it that a vampire with the right amount of noble blood and enough time to learn and fully master its a gift – will

have the power to kill any god or demon. As you know, each of those entities are beyond the realm of the living. Killing them requires either a blessing or a curse – not the normal kind, it's the kind that only an elder being could bestow. Tis the reason why heroes are summoned in some stories, blessed by a goddess and paired with a divine blade. It's the only reason they can kill a demon-lord. The same can be said for a demon, a cursed-blade could also kill a god if he was weakened enough. Vampires fit neither group, for you see, their very existence is shrouded in mystery. It was only during the war between gods and demons that their potential became known. The first Progenitor entered the war as an independent party. A week was all that she needed, defeating a demon-general and a demi-goddess without batting an eye. She found a way to turn humans into her kind without giving her blood. Soon, an army of night-walkers filled the planet. They grew overpowering, neither gods nor demons could fight back – an alliance was created to exterminate Creation's fail project. This was where she managed to escape, the few survivors fled and lived for ages to come. Generations upon generations, the vampiric kind lived and survived. At the end, when the progenitor transferred over her pure blood to Lord Balthazar, they had another ruler to rally under. It happened around two-thousand years ago. In the shadows we grew, till around two centuries ago, where another fight began. The fight between humans and vampires; vampire slayers were born. People with the ability to control mana and fight off said threat. One could say it was the evolution of the human race. Then from vampire slayers, to mages, and now, adventurers. Humans have always been highly adept at blending and evolving where it was due. Which brings us to now, that's the reason behind why we were alienated. A true vampire has the power to kill either a god or a demon – the power to ascend to the status of a higher being without its drawbacks. Fate works weirdly, you who inherited the power of the god of death also inherited the First progenitor's blood. Do you know how improbable that is? Lord Balthazar knew from the first moment he laid his eye on thee. You're the only person who can truly awaken the first mother's blood. So, you see, Staxius, there's no fighting it, you will become strong, with or without training. The death element and blood of the first mother will continue to grow. No matter what is done, the day will come when you'll surpass the higher beings."

"The first mother," he stared up and mumbled, "-I'd have loved to see what she's in person. Someone of her strength could take over the world if so desired."

"Did you take only that piece of information from a summary of our history?" with a pout, she stared with narrowed eyes.

"No, there's no need to worry. The history sure is fascinating," \*spat,\* he had been brushing his teeth whilst she recounted the tale. A few minutes went by, all had breakfast downstairs.

"Good morning everyone," a greeting followed by silence for all focused on the food.

"Delicious as always," he complimented Undrar and Auic's cooking, "-now then," the tone changed to one serious, it grabbed the table's attention. "As some of you might know, I was made a Gold-ranked adventurer a few days ago, on top of that, I was given the title of Guild Master of Arda. I haven't said this before, but the reason why I came to the capital was to form a guild for my kingdom. Monsters are also a major burden there. With that goal now accomplished, I'll have to move back to oversee the opening."

"Are you leaving?" Lizzie asked with a saddened tone.

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“What is to come of Kniq then?” Undrar asked with a serious look.

“If master is moving back to Arda, then so am I,” Avon voiced.

“I’m going as well,” added Achilles, “-I’m an ancient hero who formed a contract with Staxius Haggard. Where ever he goes, I go,” chatter filled the room, it grew confusing.

“Shut up everyone,” he voiced loudly, “-I never said I was leaving. Don’t forget, I’ve portals that linked both provinces together. It will be as if I never left. Not to mention, you all are here. In no way can I abandoned what we worked so hard to build. Though, as a married man and the king of Arda – I’ll have to stay for days and even weeks. In my absence, Undrar will take charge, this is not up for discussion, in no way can I neglect my duties.”

“We understand,” the twins seemed to take the news without much trouble.

“As long as you’re coming back, then it’s alright,” Deadeyes nodded in agreement.

“You better stay, Eira’s going to be in the tournament soon, everyone from Dorchester will be coming to stay,” Undrar gave the news she got over the phone yesterday.

“Then the matter is settled,” with a fluid motion, he stood and headed outside.

“Lizzie, grab that helmet,” he ordered whilst in the garage.

“Why?” a roar came forth, tis was Cake’s bike.

“We’re using this today,” a smirk followed, one that was filled with excitement.

“We’ll be leaving in thirty minutes, get to it everyone,” seeing Lizzie off, Undrar ordered the others to get ready.

Hand on the handle, the bike sped off the roads at neck-breaking speeds. It would have taken one and a half-hour. With its maneuverability, cutting corners and rushing down the road was made easy, the journey was cut to an hour.

“Here we are,” they came to a smooth stop, “-have a good day at school.”

“You too, father, have a good day,” she gave a quick hug then walked in.

“Isn’t that the man who took the new first seat at the parent’s council?” rumors whispered all around the ground.

“Lizzie,” a quick tap of the shoulder.

“Who is it?” she turned, it was Marie, she stood with a big smile as students walked in from all over.

“Did something happen, you’re usually woeful and unenergetic,” Lizzie asked intrigued by the change of persona.

“Yes, your father managed to heal my big sister. It made mother and father united again, I’m so happy, our family has grown closer,” the enthusiasm was that of a child getting ice-cream.



“Must be nice,” Lizzie’s voice trailed off, she remembered what Staxius said earlier today.

“Did you say something?” lost in her own little world, Marie didn’t notice that her friend was troubled.

“N-no, it’s nothing, just remembering the lessons father taught me,” one that lasted thirty-minutes, Staxius explained in great detail each subject she had been studying. Nothing that related to her textbook, but a short history of said subjects. A trailer to what was to come, one that would hopefully get her excited to learn.

\*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* “-that’s the reason why you wanted to get the bike,” Adete voiced, they stood in front of Pandora.

“Less mana required to teleport me and the vehicle,” parked in the alley, he entered the shop and got ready for work. The morning began with research on the relic scroll. Another subject was added, the demon’s taint. Potions or remedies to help in healing that form of attack was needed to be found. No customers came, at around noon; the shop closed. Time had come to return to Arda.

‘The fresh scent of nature. A feeling of peace and nostalgia,’ he teleported and arrived in front of the castle as opposed to the garage. ‘How I’ve missed this place,’ with a smile, he headed for the gates.

“Majesty,” the guards immediately lowered their gaze and bowed – ones from the Lizardman tribe, strong fighters with strong body thanks to their scales. A few steps inside, elves were seen atop the castle walls with bows and arrows. They also in turn gave a bow.

Across the yard, a bald head walked by, one of a man who seemed in a hurry.

“Ruslan,” he called out, the man was also a vampire. The white skin and sharpened teeth, a definite give away.

“Your grace,” he turned and bowed, “-how may I be of service?”

“Is her majesty free at this moment?”

“Yes, she’s currently taking a break in her private garden.”

“I wish you well,” he turned and walked off.

‘Wait...’ confused, he stopped and watched, ‘-wasn’t that, the king?’ his body had subconsciously moved and reacted for he was perturbed by a rumor of an uprising in one of the southern villages, “-IT WAS,” the eyes opened wide, “-he’s back,” he said with a smile, “-the protector of Arda is back,” a slip of the tongue.

“Is that so,” Niroz, the general, walked and laughed.

‘King Staxius is back,’ in the shadows, Aurora overheard and vanished into a mist. Soon after, everyone from the representatives of races to the nobles – got the news that the very loved protector, had returned. The one who achieved many deeds, from defeating the strongest swordsman in all of Hidros to allying with Queen Gallienne and now becoming the guild master. Long as it might have been, the exploits done were consequential. ‘A worthy king to protect her majesty and her beloved kingdom,’ was on many’s minds.

'I guess I'm truly back. After meeting with Xula, I should get to finding a place for the guild-headquarters. Maybe her special unit of strong warriors could come in handy.'