

Death Magic 261

Chapter 261: Xula's resolve

Scheduled to start at 16:00, many made way to the town of Claireville. For weeks, all the preparation led to this event. All special guests rested in the noble district. Including the actors in Autumn's Blossom with Aceline, a pleasant experience. As for the students, Eira and those taking part tomorrow would rest in the dorms. The unit from the Order had arrived as well. Their location would remain unknown until the start of the tournament.

Not only had the Academy gotten readied, but the town participated. Stalls were built over there as well, the streets covered by ribbons and wishes for a good event. All around, faces held smiles, families walked hand in hand.

Lizzie's death came as surprise for Julius and his group. They were awestruck, discovering that Staxius had amassed a fortune on his own. The mansion, the cars, the people inside, the furniture, and more. Undrar explained their situation leading up to what transpired. The sight of him shooting himself remained fresh as the car returned to Julius's mansion. None had the guts to speak out, the change felt unreal.

"Guess he did make a family," Millicent added as the scenery went by.

"You're right," voiced Adelana, "-though, his daughter died," her voice remained unaffected.

"What is done is done," Julius spoke out, the voice held a little resentment, "-we shouldn't bother them. Let's wait till Staxius makes the first move, I don't want to trigger anything unwanted," a good concern since the emotionless face stood true.

"Isn't that him?" Autumn pointed out the window. A black car drove past as if lightning, a still picture of his stoic face confirmed it.

.....

"Guess he's headed to the tournament too," mumbled Fenrir.

"Look at you people," Adelana added in a not to pleasing tone, "-weren't you all excited to meet him, what happened to the vigor?" a snicker followed.

"Shut it, Adelana, we don't care about thy antics any longer," Ayleth refuted back with a sharpened tone. Relations between the siblings had grown unstable. Adelana took a change for the worst, none knew why, but the lady had some issues to deal with. Only Julius managed to get through her thick skull, anyone else would either be ignored or insulted at times.

"Scott, SCOTT," in the changing room turned makeup room for the performers, Aceline voiced loudly.

"Over here," he waved with a bottle of water and a few snacks, "-what's the matter?" he scurried to her.

"Is Sugar ready?" she asked with a sigh behind curtains.

"No idea,"

"Well go and check," a live feed of the arena was shown, the place jammed packed.

“Sure,” he headed over to the men’s area. There, a summary of the opening was given per Aceline’s order. The day had come, Eira remained in the dark about the death. Staxius said it best to not bother her mind; since the two weren’t acquainted, it wouldn’t matter.

Sat in the VIP area, north of the podium where only very little had taken place, Xula held one of the highest seats. Besides, Queen Gallienne, she sat with Raulf and a few dukes, in the bunch, lady Goldberg.

“Mother,” said the girl, “-have you heard the news,” her face held a smile, “-Lizzie was found dead.”

“Is that so,” the lady gave a smile in turn, “-I’m just glad the murderer was found and killed. No more of our children will be endangered,” her entourage contained other ladies who smiled and laughed obnoxiously.

novelusb.com

“Do forgive my asking,” Gallienne leaned, “-is what they say true?”

“Yes,” returned Xula, “-I’m afraid so,” after which they regain their posture.

‘I’ll put what has happened on hold. The words I said earlier were very hurtful to Xula,’ Void parked next to other luxurious vehicles, ‘-if she hates me, that’s all the better,’ a few steps towards the back entrance, one reserved and heavily guarded, a lady walked at a slow pace.

“Queen Mother,” Staxius called and approached.

“If it isn’t King Staxius,” she stopped and smiled.

“I presume Queen Gallienne has arrived?” he asked in a polite tone.

“Yes,” she replied courteously.

“Do forgive if I overstep my boundary,” he held out his hand, “-care to let an ally escort thee?”

“That’s very thoughtful,” her eyes warmed, “-I’ll graciously accept. The stairs have grown into my worst enemies. They vex me with each step.”

“You jest, my lady,” they walked up, “-in no way have thy grown old. I’d say thou art as pretty as ever before. A flower, refine and dignified, a sight to behold,” the words held weight.

“Quite a master of speech,” she gave a little nudge, “-I’m impressed. The boy I saw as a destroyer so many years ago has grown into a fine gentleman.”

“The angelic Queen Sely of memories remain as radiant as ever,” he led the way. Up, a bright light came in view. Guards armed with guns awaited.

“Queen Mother,” called Theodore, many turned their eyes. The VIP seating was a room under the commentary booth, protected from the weather with food and drinks laid on a table further inside – a lovely experience. Apart from those of Royalty; none were allowed to sit on a select few chairs. Separated from the rest of the nobles, it had a better view, more comfort, and different foods and drinks. Duchess Goldberg, a few meters away, though hidden, boiled inside. Her dream was to be queen

once. Resentment turned to scrutinize Lizzie and her household, she joked without much concern. Gallienne could but ignore their frivolous attempt at comedy.

"Greetings to you as well, King of Arda," Theodore bowed and led the way to the royal seats.

"Did he say the king of Arda?" many upfront turned for the King of Arda was but a myth. Queen Xula and her entrancing beauty must have had a lover.

"Hey, mother," Dorothy slowly pulled on her sleeve.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Isn't that..."

"Master Alchemist," voiced Luther.

"What do you mean?" confused, she turned and stared. Many of who had come to pay their respects earlier, returned when the coffin left the mansion. Since it took hours, heading to Claireville on a special train cut the trip into half an hour.

"Greetings Queen Gallienne," he nodded, "-same to you Raulf," a quick exchange later, he sat next to Xula. Her face kept a smile, but her eyes refused to cooperate, 'Staxius is an idiot at times,' she thought about what was said earlier. 'Carrying all that burden to not add any on mine shoulders. I swear he's the worst idiot of them all, though I do love him to death.

"That can't be him, surely," argued Carla. To their surprise, they caught his eye, "-thanks for coming earlier," mumbled without sound then followed by a wave.

"Oh lord," Carla held her head, "-I've badmouthed a king."

"At least we won't get to see that man's face ever again," fired lady Goldberg, "-with the daughter dead, he'll be put back in his place."

"Don't," he tried to stand but was stopped. Xula held his hand tightly. After which she pointed to Gallienne.

"Lady Goldberg," the queen voiced loudly, "-I'd ask thy to refrain speaking ill of a girl who died. The reason being that said girl came from the Royal Ardanian household; speaking ill of them is equated to speaking ill of Hidros, have I made myself clear?"

"Yes Majesty," she turned, saw Staxius, shuddered, then focused upfront.

Fingers interlocked, Xula glared, "-listen to me," she spoke so that only Staxius could hear, "-about the question earlier," her glare turned as sweet as honey, "-I'll wait an eternity, I care not. I've heard all about the curse of misfortune from a book given by a trusty spirit. Become the harbinger of death, what of it, aren't you the god of Death, you've attained divinity; if you are so pleased, Lizzie can be brought back at any time. Opposite the one holding dominion over the realm of creation, resides a being as powerful who holds dominion over the realm of death. Similar yet different, the one opposite creation has the power to destroy, though, as opposed to the supreme being, the wielders of death are humans by birth. Souls who've transcended the norm; as such, they have the ability to create. Bringing back the

dead to the living isn't much trouble for he who's awakened symbol of power," a passage straight from the book. "The decision is up to you, bringing back the girl will require effort though not impossible."

"What are you saying," confused, the eyes narrowed.

"What I'm saying is that Lizzie can be brought back. Not from the resurrection, but by placing her soul into an empty vessel," at that moment, she pulled his hand and placed it atop her belly, "-let me carry thine child," her eyes seemed desperate.

"Don't," he pulled his hand, "-I can't hope to ever have a child of my own. The curses, my boons; my new body, it's all for naught."

"Listen to me," she reached out and grabbed his face, "-are those based on the truth or some fantasy you made up from a vision. Don't forget, I'm an angel, and you're a god; the laws of reality don't apply to us. Our souls exist on a higher plane, one where gods, angels, and demons live."

"I d-d-don't b-believe it," he tried hard to look away.

"Staxius Haggard," her voice sharpened, "-will you listen to thine wife for once," her eyes held contempt, "-we are bound by the vow of never parting. You are mine and I'm yours; let me guide you out of the darkness again. Losing Lizzie must have hurt, to see all crumble before your eyes, to see the world turn to the abyss. The Curse of misfortune may well rest above thy head," she pointed upwards, "-I've inherited the Boon of fortune. Just as water extinguishes fire, let me be the one you're to protect. Leave that curse to me, your burdens are my burdens, like it or not, lord Death, getting rid of an angel who's close to attaining the status of Demi-goddess would not be that simple."

"I've warned you before," a spirit shot out his body. "-Hold up," voice Staxius, a single motion and it stopped.

"Master, can't you see she's trying to make thy weak. Embrace the darkness of being a harbinger of death, it's for the best. Distance thyself from the people you love, that's the only way to protect those you want," Daemonum Gladio argued wholeheartedly.

"I agree," he voiced in a monotonous voice, "-I've killed the person I was, Staxius Haggard has died," the eyes remained cold, "-I've learned much from her death. Losing a daughter, someone close will never be fully healed," the grip grew tighter. "Despite that," the dullness remained, "-I'll put my trust where I did so many times before. Cold as I may be now, I do love Xula. I'm her conduit and she's my guide – if it wasn't for her, I might have not seen the bigger picture," dangling from the top, a tiny thread, one held by Xula.

"As you wish," the spirit sighed, "-show me what you can do, master death, call on me when that feeble morality is to be forgone. Until then, I'll be watching," turned to dust, Xula watched intently.

"Welcome back," she reached around for a hug.

"Thank you Xula," he whispered, "-sadly, I'm still not going to return to how I was. That state of mind was feeble. I'm going to find a way to be better, both mentally and physically, wait for me."

"Waiting is all I seem to do," she laughed, "-nevertheless, take as long as you want, my husband, my love for thy shall never end."

At the same time, the stage came to life with fireworks; music played loudly, Sugar and Aceline sang. The crowd went wild, screams and cheers, the tournament began.

“About killing a whole nation, were you serious?” Xula asked out of concern.

“Yes,” the reply cold, “-I’ll avenge and destroy those who treated my girl so badly,” he leaned and gave a quick kiss on the cheeks, “-not now though. There’s something we need to create first,” he eyed her belly.

“Yeah, yeah,” she turned his head forwards, “-Lizzie will be brought back as thy blood. I’ll have a chance to see her growth too.”

“LET’S GO,” screamed Aceline, the arena trembled. Having learned more about the god of death from Undrar, Xula held a better understanding of where Staxius came from. She grew to know how much he suffered daily. Having a babe would be a tall order; “-it’s not impossible. Clarity will reveal more, I’m sure that there’s a solution. Attaining divinity comes with more than the title of god,” words of courage from she who has stood true from the day the heir awoke.

Chapter 262: Opening Ceremony

‘I got yelled at by Xula,’ staring off into the distance, Staxius thought about how his wife got mad for the first time. She got mad for a good reason, the man she loved had nearly crossed the line into the realm of no return. Daemonum Gladio, the elusive sword, one that had saved him during the fight for the Symbols of power. For long he wondered about the many voices which spoke inside the mind. Always hidden behind the stoic gaze, the wielder of death wasn’t as powerful as he seemed. Constantly bombarded by thoughts of murder, chaos, woefulness; emotions that on their own would tear from the inside out. Lizzie’s death, a tipping point in the meticulously balanced emotions and mindset; it was as adding a drop of water into an already filled cup – the result, an overflow. ‘Without her,’ he stared at her green hair, ‘-I’d have sunk into my many personas,’ the concert played grandly; all present cheered. ‘Daemonum Gladio, who would have thought that a sword would be so imposing on its wielder. My inner thoughts, the savage side, the side that wishes to destroy, Lord Death’s true intentions. Inheriting the symbols of power has made a hole in my soul. Attaining divinity, I did it, I’m a God standing in the mortal realm; there’s a change. It’s subtle and slow, but I feel it, the voices are growing in volume, my mind constantly assaulted by premonition, the cries of those who’ve died. Not that pleasurable,’ he gazed fondly at his palms, ‘-the pentagram has turned crimson red. A pair of golden wings in the center. Goddess Nike, I’ve never known about such a deity before, the lady of victory spreading bliss over those who fought heroically over the battlefield. Whoever you are, thanks for the help,’ the eyes wandered to the evening sky, ‘-without you or the help of what has been bestowed upon me, I’d have fallen low.’

“Hey, focus on the front,” Xula called with a smile.

“Will do,” the attention turned forward, fingers interlocked, the couple watched as the ceremony began.

“The day has come,” inside the eastern area of the arena, divided into five parts, the participants waited. In charge, their instructors and supervisors. Eira represented Central Claireville Academy, the place where the majority of the previous winners came from.

“No need to say it twice,” Eira gave a jestful reply, her face glowed as the prospect of fighting against stronger opponents stood true. ‘I’m sure to win this tournament,’ a crest of a blue-snowflake had carved itself onto her right arm. Hidden behind the long-sleeved uniform; tis was a secret known to her alone.

“Participants,” an hour into the performance, an announcer rushed inside the changing rooms. “Line up by school with each representative on thy sides. Time to decide the next Prodigy is here.”

Outside, “-thank you all for being awesome,” yelled Aceline out of breath. Next to her, Sugar and his bassist bled from the fingers, they had played the guitars till the skin sliced. Aceline’s guitar, the one given by Staxius, had lit with many hypnotic hues – an awesome show. A bow later, the screen blacked out, musical aura faded.

.....

“As the chosen commentator to this year’s Inter-magical tournament, on behalf of the school and faculty, I’d like to welcome all who are present,” dressed in red with a mic, Sophie Mirabelle. Cameras pointed to her face, the big screen behind also portraited what they saw. Broadcasted to the nation as well, many were glued to their screens.

“As it’s tradition, I’d like to explain how the tournament will work,” after which, diagrams popped onto the screens. “For months, all around the continent, magical schools and dedicated academies allowed, organized private tournaments to choose a representative. Age and status don’t matter for what counts is a skill and ability to overcome their troubles. Thus, 14 students are to battle it out for the coming days. Regardless of how many students there are, the opening battle is always a free-for-all. A contest to find eight students who are to take part in the decisive battle. Depending on time, we’ll be free to change the scheduling. Being smart with saving stamina, mana, and more will be another factor. Pacing one’s self is crucial,” the explanation continued for thirty minutes.

“We made it,” footsteps came from the stairs.

“Prince Ernis, do wait a little,” called a female voice.

“This brings back memories,” stood at the entrance, a blond-haired pretty boy.

“It sure does,” said the voice behind, black-hair with almond-shaped eyes.

“His imperial highness,” Gallienne stood with a smile.

“Queen of Hidros,” cheerful, he approached for the usual exchange of pleasantries. Engaged with speaking to the Queen’s mother as well, Ernis could but show his charismatic side.

“Do apologize my asking,” in the background, someone with a familiar pony-tail stood out, “-I’ve heard of Arda gaining its independence. Is the lady with the white and red hair the queen?”

“Ha-ha,” laughed Gallienne.

“Naturally, I mean no disrespect,” he fired-back quickly.

“No, highness, that over there is the King of Arda, beside him is the Queen. You might have heard of the king; he guarded Aceline on the trip to the main continent. Staxius Haggard, he did cause quite a commotion.”

"Are you serious?" he leaned sideways for a better look.

novelusb.com

"Don't be overly familiar," whispered Lucy, "-Hidros isn't that nice a place," to which his posture straightened.

"Your Imperial Highness, I'd implore for thee to take a seat. The announcements of the students are to start soon."

"Now then," still on stage, the explanation ended. "Here's the moment of truth," the spotlights turned to the Eastern gate. "Give a round of applause for those chosen this year," fourteen pupils of differing gender, race, and age. Beside each, a representative.

"From the Central Claireville Academy, we have Eira Haggard with Director Josiah as her representative," one by one, they queued according to their name.

"From Eastern Claireville Academy, we have, Nathan and Natalie Green with their representative being Sister Jules Parker."

"From Western Claireville Academy, Erlareo Enbalar and Ygannea Enbalar with the White Sage as their representative."

"Next, from Sepmora, School of Witchcraft: Tatiana Redwood, Cedonia Wolfmoon, Ursa Lovelace, Helga Grail, with Director Dalila as their representative."

"A very special welcome to Vipan Eqihr, Adarin Odalf, Ewaelle Itarish, and Evira Menyll, and Lady Shanaxis Asigreth II."

"Last but not least, Gurdan of Blade's End with Luna Nova as his representative,???" stood as she had called, the fighters. All had stern faces, ready to fight, ready to become the next Prodigy. The ceremony continued with each representative giving a speech. For the most part, it was standard, they enforced the importance of being humble to not get careless, basic at it's best.

'It does come as a surprise that only an adventurer is participating. Here I thought mages were nullified, guess we'll see where this takes them,' he thought and stared.

"What do you want?" Xula felt the gaze, her tone was one sarcastic.

"The sage is down there with those two who've eluded me since the time I came to Arda. Guess they were students..."

"Yes, the elven siblings, the ones you tried to kill," she chuckled, "-not to worry, they are strong individually."

"Now that everyone is introduced, the free-for-all is set for tomorrow," the participants returned, "-give them a round of applause," Aceline rushed in with new clothes; the concert resumed.

"May I please have your attention," voiced an attendant, "-the opening ceremony has concluded," not saying anymore, the lady headed back inside.

"We're free to leave," voiced Carla as she headed out.

'Why...' lost in thought, memories continued to ail, '-why did you leave all of a sudden. I attained divinity and broke the curse of starting over so that we'd have a happy family. Why Lizzie, why did you leave, that playfulness, the smile that always cheered my day. Just as I grew to enjoy taking care of you, it had to end...' held back, he eyed the ceiling.

"Staxius," whispered a voice, "-wake up," Xula's face stood a few inches away.

"Quite indecent to ask a kiss in public," he said in jest.

"Oh hush," she gave a tight pinch and stood, "-the opening ceremony is over, we're to do what we want," she stared over at the leaving spectators.

"I see," he stood, they locked arms, "-shall we?" he led the way. Slowly, the memories were buried, thinking about her death wouldn't be any good for anyone.

"Excuse me," a familiar voice called, "-forgive my asking, but are you Staxius Haggard?" a lady with straight long hair stood next to the double door leading into the inner arena.

"Lucy Villareal," he said with a nod, "-no need to be formal," the tone felt comforting, except for the blank face, "-I presume Prince Ernis is here?"

"Good," she breathed a sigh of relief, "-the prince pestered me constantly to go find thy location," to which, a pretty boy came in sight.

"Staxius," he reached for a hug.

"Good to see you too," Staxius reached around for a tight hug, "-I do love how you never care for formalities," a wink.

"We're friends, are we not?" he smiled, "-imagine my surprise when I learned about thy title as King."

"Do forgive me," Staxius took a step back, "-I'd like for you both to meet my wife, Queen Shanna of Arda." Lucy gave a curtsy whilst Ernis took her hand for a kiss, "-you keep on giving, don't you, friend."

"Could you elaborate?"

"I thought you played for the other team, the way Scott and you bonded was quite interesting. You do seem to not care about genders," Ernis involuntarily referred to the time in Iqavea.

"Prince Ernis," voiced Shanna with a scary smile, "-why don't you join us for dinner. I'd like to learn more about the whole bonding business with Scott." Ashamed by his tactlessness, Lucy looked away.

"My queen, it's not that big a deal," he tried to defuse the situation. "-Let's, I'll recount all of Staxius's antics," the prince interjected.

"I'm going to murder you," mumbled Staxius as a joke.

"Try it," the prince pulled out his tongue, to which, they all headed into where dinner was served. 'Marie's here too,' Staxius noticed she who stood in the corner.

"You coming or not?" Ernis asked as he stopped.

“Carry on, I’ll join you later,” just as the prince tried to refute, Lucy reached out and grabbed his shoulder, “-don’t,” she mumbled. Upon asking why, a summary of the passing was given. Ashamed by the indiscretion, he headed in.

“Marie?” stared off into the distance, the girl watched woefully at the concert.

“Go on without me, dad, I’ll be back soon,” her voice seemed to tremble.

“Sorry to say this, but I’m not Luther.”

“What do you mean?” she turned and stared with reddened eyes, “-Lord Staxius,” a few sniffles followed by her hands searching for a handkerchief.

“Here,” one white with yellow edges, “-use mine.”

“Thanks,” she cleaned the would-be tears, “-sorry for my not so lady-like state.”

“Don’t worry,” he patted her head, “-don’t cry over her death,” he stared off into the distance, “-Lizzie still lives on in our memories. The girl would have taken arms if she saw us in such pitiful states. That smile of hers will never be topped,” he turned, “-keep that pain close to thine heart. It’s something worth holding onto,” he gave the signature wave and left.

‘It’s easier said than done,’ she smiled, ‘-I’m sure she’s up there getting angry for me not enjoying the moment. I’ll miss you, my best friend, you were always close to my heart.’

“Mother,” a piercing voice called, “-the man you despise so much has contact with the Imperial family as well.”

“No need to worry, dearest daughter, it won’t matter. He may know the entire kingdom for all I care, none will stop my ambitions.” Off in the distance, atop on the arena, a faint glimmer was spotted. ‘Wait and see, King Staxius, I’ll break thy family and credibility soon. Messing with the Goldberg and humiliating me, one who’s had all she wants, will be the last thing you ever did.’

Chapter 263: Divinity

“Viola, Viola,” two voices spoke in tandem.

“What is it?” she turned and asked; still a little sad from the passing – the companions headed out after the introductions were made.

“Do you think master is ok?” asked Emma.

“Yes, yes, do you think he’s ok?” added Emmy. Worried, their eyes remained on the ground.

“Honestly,” she paused and watched as a crowd gathered around the stalls and merchants, “-I’ve no idea,” they stood overlooking the yard; grass trimmed to perfection, the lighting, though the night – seemed as if day time. Claireville Academy pulled all the stops.

“He’ll be fine,” added Achilles with Scott in tow.

“I’ve heard the news, from Aceline and I, we’d like to pay respects and offer our sincere condolences,” Scott nodded with a truthful tone.

.....

"We're grateful for the thought," replied Undrar with a smile, "-I presume this is the man you're working for?" she turned to Achilles.

"Yes, I'm on guard duty for the idols," she confirmed what was asked.

"Could you kindly pass this message to Staxius?" a note was handed, one that Scott covered with both hands, "-it's for his and his eyes alone, secrecy is vital," a whisper to which the duo headed to the Arena.

'All seems gentle and calm on the surface,' she turned to the crowd, '-though underneath brews something else.'

"-Are you alright?" Avon pulled her hand.

"Yes, shall we visit the stalls, the scent does arouse my appetite," thus, they ended up spending most of the night sprawling around to forget their worries.

Lit by a thousand flame of which came from the crystals making up chandeliers atop the dining table, Royalty had dinner. The ceiling, not as high as most were accustomed did leave an impression. From an Arena made for battle, it turned into a place worthy of being named a fancy restaurant. None knew how long it took to renovate. Beautiful architecture with tapestries of invaluable worth and paintings fetching into the thousands decorated their entourage.

Sat with their meal complete, Ernis engaged Xula in conversation. The topic, Staxius and his trip to the main-land. Not wanting to be heard, he turned to Gallienne and the queen mother. The duo joined after he politely asked, the more the merrier.

"Do forgive my asking," away from prying ears, "-I haven't seen Prince consort Piers?"

"Funny you should say so," she faced him, "-I've not heard anything either. The last I know was that he set off to Dorchester."

"I see," the tone emotionless, the gaze befell the tapestry opposite him.

"Listen," whispered the queen, "-I've heard about the death of Lizzie. It came as a shock when the media spread the news as if nothing happened. Pains my heart to see such a lovely lady suffer a horrid death. As queen, you've my full support, do what you must, Staxius, I'll help in avenging her life if that's what you desire," the words straight from the Ice-queen.

"I'm glad to hear that, really," the look behind the dulled rubies was one of warning, "-sadly, what I plan to do will not be that pretty a thing to see. People are to suffer; one might say I'm planning something big. It could potentially trigger a war between two kingdoms," the gaze remained, "-so you see, majesty, if people are to find out my support, thee are most likely to be exiled and killed for treason."

novelusb.com

"Is that so..." her voice faded, "-what about Arda, if what you say is true, what about thine kingdom?"

"They'll be fine, I've no intention of bringing harm to Hidros and it's people," no emotions nor doubt, he remained steadfast.

“It was a pleasure dining with you all,” spoke Ernis, the time had come to leave.

“Likewise, your highness, likewise,” voiced Staxius in a bland tone.

Goodbyes exchanged, escorted by Royal guards, Gallienne headed out to where they would stay. The dorms turned hotel for her majesty, guarded and empty of students with only a few individuals.

“See you later,” waved Ernis as Lucy led the way to the dorm.

“What about us?” asked Xula.

“We could always just teleport to the mansion.”

“I see,” her cheeks flushed, “-lead the way then,” her head remained at his feet.

‘Honestly,’ sensing the change, he could but watch gently. She who had been angry till now grew to be bashful. The main culprit, “-let me carry thine child,” the words echoed in her mind. “Before we leave, I’d like to check on Eira, is that fine with you?”

“I’ve been meaning to give her a few words of confidence too,” she added with reddened cheeks. A call to Josiah sorted everything.

Stood under a tree with its reach across a few meters, big and strong as the wind blew, a girl with white hair. The moon made it easier to see, the clouds didn’t seem to intervene either. Slowly and surely, footsteps, muffled by the music inside the area, made its way to said tree.

“You look different,” called a voice.

“Father,” from leaning on the tree, using her back, she gave a little nudge and rushed into his arms, “-you’re the one who looks different,” a tight embrace later, she did the same to Xula. A lovely reunion, seeing her face gave a jolt of energy; a face innocent and ready for anything. Minutes turned to an hour, the trio sat and spoke. She laughed, Xula laughed, Staxius remained stoic. When asked why, “I’ve got a sore throat, laughing doesn’t help either,” an obvious lie.

“If you say so,” more than him, she spoke to Xula; the two grew to be very close.

‘I wonder how that secondary aura is doing,’ eyes closed, he held her hand, ‘-I see,’ he continued to watch, ‘-doing any kind of magic might disrupt her element. I best leave it for now,’ what he saw was the crest of the ice-dragon; a snowflake. It had grown to be essential to her Ice-element. Rather than get involved suddenly, as Eira seemed to not be on edge, the trouble was left for another time.

“Eira,” called a familiar voice.

“Over here,” she stood and waved.

“Sophie,” voiced Staxius.

“It’s you,” she walked over and shook hands.

“Thanks for always taking care of my daughter,” he gave a nod, Xula followed suit.

“No need for thanks,” she smiled, “-it’s as you said,” her eyes turned to the queen, “-her majesty does look sublime. There’s no way anyone could compare to her beauty; honestly, it makes me a little angry,” to which she laughed.

“Surely you jest,” voiced Xula with a smile and gentle tone, “-thine fiery hair and eyes are fierce and strong, I’m positive that men dance around thy fingers.”

“Not really,” she chuckled, “-my finger is bound to one man,” she showed her ring, “-in any case, we rather leave, uncle is growing impatient.”

“Good luck, Eira, I’ve placed a lot of bets on you winning,” Staxius said in jest.

“I better get a cut off the profits,” she fired back, “-take care of father, dearest mother,” and thus, their figures disappeared into the night.

“Shall we get going?” Staxius held out a hand.

“O-ok,” not physically and mentally ready, as though it was her first time, she blushed. In fairness, both had shared countless passion-filled nights. Without care to birthing a life, they sat back, enjoyed, and gave in their carnal desires. More meaning behind the intimate act, the pressure rose.

At home, on the bed, with Staxius atop the blushing Xula, he asked, “-are you sure about this,” the voice firm, “-caring and raising a child will be hard, I don’t wish to be selfish and impose this on thee.”

“Shut up,” she pulled him closer, “-I don’t want to hear anything else,” she whispered. ‘What I want is for you to have a reason to come home. I wish to see that smile again, the one devoid of woe and hardship, the one you gave when speaking about Lizzie and the companions. The smile you give when I do something out of character, I want that smile to return,’ her truest words kept inside her mind and heart.

“Thank you, Xula, I love you,” he bit her neck; the eyes closed, the man slipped into Clarity. He needed to find a way to impregnate Xula; going at it the normal way with two bodies bonding, wouldn’t be enough. Instead, god and angel had to share more than their bodies – it involved their souls as well.

Heed mine call, soul whomst departed the living, I, Staxius Haggard, the god of Death, give thine a chance at life, echoed in the hall-of-rebirth, a familiar voice.

“It’s father,” awake, Lizzie ran to the main room, a place where the current lord of death slept. As opposed to being reborn instantly, Jessica made a plea. She followed her best friend’s movement since the day in Krigi. Knowing a bit about how he thought, the decision of letting Lizzie live for a few days was forced. As it was her first-ever request, Lord Death gave in her words.

“Go, my heir calls on thine soul. It shall be a rebirth; your memories will come too after a certain age is reached; this is my gift to him. Go, lost sheep, he who you love awaits,” with a smile, he watched as the soul headed out. ‘So, you’ve attained divinity, you do surprise me, Staxius, here I thought I’d have to wait a few centuries for you to call onto the symbols of power. Nike, Kronos, it’s as Qhildir said. Not only are the mortal realms in danger, but every single dimension, realms under other god’s dominion too. Titans will return, at the helm, the heir to Kronos, the god-killer, one who took Nike’s life out of spite. Be strong and live hard, my heir, it’s not far till we’ll have to call onto thy power.’

“What do you say Creation,” he turned, “-have you seen the importance of having an heir yet? Entrusting your belief onto them. You were wrong, young as he might be, the boy defeated three god-ranked spirits.”

“I acknowledge his strength,” she walked over, “-I’ve my doubts,” it paused. “Time will tell, dear friend, time will tell.”

A portal of white color, one that signified rebirth, materialized. Coming out of it, a hand with a pentagram, ‘-you did come for me,’ without hesitation, she took the hand and was pulled out the hall.

“Lizzie,” levitated in a tunnel as souls went past, a figure spoke.

“Father?” in a bubble, her hands rested on said transparent wall.

“Yes, it’s me,” the face materialized, “-time is short. Before you go, I’d like to say I’m sorry, this is the only thing I can do. You’ll be reborn into the world of the living as my child and Princess to Arda. It comes with shelter and three meals a day.”

“Way to make it sound exciting,” she smiled, “-I knew you’d come back. Thanks for everything, father, I can’t wait, being reborn as thy child; we’ll be a family,” sucked into an opening, a final wave.”

“-you did great,” without warning, the moment the mind came out of Clarity, he fell to the floor.

Cough, blood spewed, unconscious Xula remained still. Her neck had a few bite marks, Staxius’s chest was torn by scratches. What transpired was a thing to be kept secret till their deaths.

“What do we do now?” asked Avon, it had grown late.

“Let’s find a place to stay,” Undrar led the way to a moderately priced inn.

‘Now then,’ sat in a luxurious car with the Goldberg crest, the lady with her child headed to the noble district. ‘I’ve called in favors from the pope. Let’s hope the team sent will be strong and clever enough to carry out an assassination whilst making another person take the blame. Tomorrow will be the day the plan goes into play. Don’t fail me now, you corrupted man of god, may thine sin be known to Tharis.’

At midnight, with an unreal solo from Sugar, the opening ceremony ended. Many were left standing; all had jammed the whole night. The next concert would be on the 28th after the finals. Bets were made; hearing the name Blade’s End, did shock many. A single adventurer in the basket of mages trained for this day alone.

Sepmora, the school of witchcraft, was rumored to have had the toughest selection. In such a manner, talks about the possible winners and losers went around town.

Chapter 264: Inter-magical Tournament

“Staxius, is that you?” chills ran up the legs, a clock mounted on the wall revealed 7:00.

“Yes,” outside on the balcony, puff after puff with the body leaned on the balustrade, Staxius smoked a cigar and watched as the trees came to life, “-sorry if I woke you,” the voice reminiscent and clear of doubt.

"Did you sleep well?" Xula's warm voice came from behind, still wrapped in the blanket, her hands went around his chest. Her head rested on his back, comfort unlike any other.

"Yes," he breathed another puff, "-I feel so much better than the past few nights," left hand placed onto the arms locked around him, the cigar reached its end.

"I'm glad," she smiled, "-I didn't expect this," the grip lessened.

"What do you mean?" extinguished, he turned and asked with half-awaken eyes.

"Here," she took his hand, "-sense it," the face's glee matched the rising sun.

.....

"A secondary presence," he commented, "-it worked, didn't it," the face lit with joy though the mouth remained stoic.

"Yes, it did," her hands caressed her neck, the bite marks grew apparent.

"Honestly, I'm baffled," he breathed deeply, "-that's Lizzie's aura, there's no doubt about it," he stared, "-thank you," a tight embrace, the warmth felt by both was as gentle as the smiling face of a new babe.

"I'm carrying our child, you better not run off somewhere. I don't want to hear anything else. This is reason enough to wait, I know that you want to head to Iqavea and avenge her death," she approached the balustrade, "-nevertheless, it's wiser to stay in Hidros for a few years more. We're immortal, time isn't that big a thing." Obligated, Staxius followed her to the railing, "-promise me one thing," she turned, "-promise me that you'll be by my side forever. Promise that you won't do anything foolish, I can't stand the thought of you falling prey to that spirit. Destroyer or not, Staxius Haggard, you're my husband and a father to Eira and the babe I'm carrying," her greenish eyes watered to the point of sobbing.

"Fine," he sighed, "-I'll stay by your side. For better or worse, you're the one who manages to find and give me a sliver of light to hold onto. Living on the edge between insanity and outright murder, tis a very thin line. I'm glad you're my wife, Xula, I'll say it again, I love you."

"I love you too," they hugged one another.

Far, far away, preparations for the free-for-all resumed. It was set to start at 10:00. Eira and the other participants woke early to prepare and warm-up. Many interesting characters were set to arrive today, mainly, the characters from Autumn's Blossom. Undrar and the rest stayed at the town of Clareville. Julius with the Silver-guardians settled in the noble district. Ernis, Gallienne, and other high-ranking nobles rested in the dorms. Barricaded with guards and soldiers, security was tight. For the idols and performers, a cozy, well-priced inn, sufficed.

"What should I wear?" Xula yelled across the hall, it reached the stairs.

"No idea; we're headed to town, maybe something between casual and formal. Don't make it overly obvious about your title of Queen," he stopped and stared down the hall. "I'll make breakfast, don't take too long else the food is going to get cold," on that, he headed to the kitchen.

“Alright,” she fired back in the middle of undressing. ‘Looks like the news of Lizzie being reborn as our child has restrained all his worries. I doubt that he’ll get over it,’ the shower turned on, “-in any case, I’ll do my job as a wife,” she carried a smile.

“You sure are lucky,” stood on the shoulder, Adete commented.

novelusb.com

“No doubt about it,” veggies chopped, meats cooked, a standard breakfast.

“Queen Shanna, the only one you trust fully,” she jumped down and began eating the unfinished meal. “-she’s a good person. A soon to be demi-goddess, you sure are lucky. Talk about being cursed with misfortune, that lady practically radiates with fortune, I’ll go as far as say that she blinds thy darkness.”

“No eating,” he gave a gentle slap, “-and you’re right. I’ve noticed it too, her coming into my life did bring a lot of change. Long gone are the days living outside and doing odd jobs for a morsel of bread,” plated, they walked to the dining hall, “-look at us now,” he chuckled, “-living in a mansion only a few could hope to purchase. Backed by major players and not to mention attaining divinity. All that good will be bound to be counteracted by something bad. It had to be her death, as they say, living in the past isn’t going to do much. Look forward and march,” footsteps scurried down the stairs. ‘Even so, I’m not going to sit idly. Snow will pay, that’s for sure; might need to call in a few favors from Cake and Renaud.’

“How does this look?” she stumbled into the room. Dressed in an oversized leather jacket, a scarf, tight pants, and ankle-high boots, with a few accessories.

“You copied that from a magazine,” the eyes narrowed.

“Is it that obvious,” her gaze turned downwards.

“I didn’t say it was a bad thing,” the voice gentle, “-the clothes befit thee to the point that I might fall in love again.”

“Silver tongue,” she smiled and sat, “-what about you?”

“What about me?” dressed in a t-shirt and boxers with teddy slippers, “-oh, I see. I don’t take that long to change.”

“Yes, we change quick,” out came Adete from the bar with a bottle of whiskey, “-I’d like to have some,” she pouted.

“The first progenitor I presume?” asked Xula.

“I go by Adete, tis a pleasure to formally meet you, majesty,” placed on the table, she sat atop the cap.

“Likewise, Adete,” her focus turned to the food.

“Isn’t it a bit too early to drink?” he argued.

“No, it’s never too early, just pour me some,” she remained adamant.

“Turn alcoholic, whatever,” obliged, he poured the drink.

Time moved without stopping, in a blink, the tournament was to start. Already strolling around town, the royal couple headed to the arena. There, sat separate from the nobles, a special area for the stars and idols. In the bunch, Aceline, Sugar, and the bassist. Scott remained backstage for there were things to make sure of. On the way inside, Undrar handed a strange note, one that he read on the spot.

There's a strong suspicion that someone or something is moving behind the scenes. Be on guard, we've no idea what it is. The wind doesn't feel right. I trust you to protect Aceline and the others.

'Not even hired and he asks me to guard my ex-employee,' sat far apart, Aceline waved from across the room. In turn, he gave the same greeting. Xula stared with narrowed eyes. Ernis and Gallienne changed seats to be closer to the Ardanian couple. The four had grown closer during last night's dinner. When it came down to it, despite their rank and prestige, humans were humans. Cracking jokes whilst Lucy glared, Ernis didn't care. Gallienne gossiped with Xula as the Queen Mother recounted tales of the previous king and Tempest to Staxius, tis was the set-up. Of course, this familiarity between the two kingdoms had a few people on edge.

"Can't believe that a king joined us on stage once," voiced Sugar. Despite the change in appearance, he got recognized immediately.

"Who would have thought," Aceline added without much care.

"Good morning everyone," changed into a battle-arena, the speakers came to life. In the middle, Sophie with a mic, "-today marks the start of the inter-magical tournament," as introductions were given, back in the eastern ward, the participants stood in one room.

'The time of truth has come,' eyes closed, the ice-princess focused.

"Highness," a voice call, "-pardon the intrusion," bowed, Erlareo Enbalar and Ygannea Enbalar. "We wanted to wish you good luck in the coming tournament," the brother spoke as opposed to the girl who remained silent.

"I do apologize, but do I know you?" asked Eira with a polite tone.

"We're sort of acquainted with queen Shanna and King Staxius. Her Majesty has granted us more than a few favors in the past. Knowing that Princess Eira would be participating gave us a boost in morale," he smiled. "That being said, we'll do anything to win, good luck, princess," as courteous as possible, he bowed whilst the sister gave a curtsy.

'Well that was considerate,' her face remained blank.

"Eira Haggard, disciple of Director Josiah," the four pupils of the Order approached. Dressed in black robes, their faces couldn't be seen properly, "-you might not realize it," spoke Ewaelle Itarish, a girl with tan-skin and light-grey hair, "-everyone here knows who you are," the voice held no particular emotion.

"I am flattered," she bowed, "-may the best win."

"Yes, may the best win," after which the group walked off to where Dalila stood.

'Am I that popular?' still focused, she examined the surrounding.

"Excuse me," a voice called, "but are you the daughter of the leader of Kniq?"

“Yes,” she turned, a boy and a lady stood.

“An uncanny resemblance, you’re definitely the daughter of Xenos. Either way, may the best win,” she left as suddenly as she came.

“Someone sure is popular,” whispered the witches from Sepmora. They glared Eira who remained nonchalant.

“That’s to be expected,” a deep voice called.

‘Another visitor,’ she sighed and turned.

“Don’t look so distressed,” Josiah laughed, “-people are curious about who you are. Eira, you must realize the heritage you’re carrying. This day is about you, and you only. Out there, many have come to see who is worthy of being called the Prodigy. Apart from that, there’s also the fact that you’re his daughter, a man that makes waves everywhere he goes. Let it inspire thine heart, you’ve trained more than anyone I know. Absorb every piece of information I gave, what remains is to take that crown. Show them you’re Eira Haggard and not just the daughter of Staxius Haggard.”

“Yes master,” the posture straightened, the mind focused.

“All participants, please make way to the arena,” an announcer called, to which they followed.

The crowd cheered, stepped into a blinding arena, adrenaline rushed through the body. Some held weapons, whilst others came unarmed. Eira, a swordswoman by heart, came unarmed. Erlareo Enbalar held light armor with two daggers whilst Ygannea Enbalar had a bow. Those from the Order were unarmed and as for Sepmora, each held a staff of different size and design. Less potent than those used in Arda, these were an original design from the Director. Last but not least, with semi-heavy armor and a long-sword on his back, the warrior from Blade’s end.

“Listen up everyone,” called Sophie, “-entering this tournament means that death can come at any time. There will not be any limit to your powers nor skill. Go at it with the intent of killing. Just bear in mind, if one is ready to kill, one must always be ready to get killed. No regulation, nothing, once a participant is deemed unable to fight, they’ll be marked as defeated. If by mistake, a student goes to hurt one who is defeated; they’ll be disqualified instantly. That being said, to advance to the next level, you’ll have to survive for one hour,” with a snap, training bots came out the floor, “-the highest rank bot here is SSS. After the first six of the participants have been defeated, all who survived will advance. As it’s Claireville Academy, we’ve added a bonus, defeat the SSS bot, and secure a spot in the semi-final. Teaming up won’t do anything, you’re alone.”

‘Pretty straight forward,’ thought Eira, she scanned all the opponents and bots. ‘Defeating the SSS-bot has both advantages and disadvantages. If you get hurt and manage to get to the tournament, you’re doomed. I can see it in their faces, none is going to try and fight the bot, they’ll focus on staying alive and picking off the weaklings. They’re going to come for me,’ she smiled, ‘-I can feel it. I’m alone with a bounty on my head. Why do you have to put the standard so far up,’ she turned and eyed Staxius, ‘-if you defeated one of those bots, then so can I,’ she smirked.

“I see,” he mumbled, “-you’re going for the SSS-bot,” unimpressed, the arms crossed.

Chapter 265: Qualification

At last, after months and months of training, the bell rang. The rang which marked the start of the fabled tournament. Watching as the participants conjured forth spells, displayed excellent weapon handling, the nobles; royalty included, could but smile.

'Their numbers don't diminish,' each step taken called forth ice, Eira skated across the arena with her magic. The path she took didn't stay frozen for more than a few seconds. It turned to dust, leaving the dry ground, moist.

Fire Elemental, a rocky figure with fiery veins came forth. Not only was there a fire elemental, but the other elements as well. Water, Earth, Air, and Lightning, Sepmora went all out from the start. Strength in numbers, with a smirk, the ladies from said institution began their onslaught. Barely able to survive, the students from the Order used sheer force to stop the attack. Elemental spells against an individual's magical Element. Any bots who stood in the way were vaporized; Sepmora wasn't here to play. The staff also made waves, conjuring without stop, each spell with the strength of a B-tier spell.

'Guess the Order wants to make their prestige is known to all,' thought Eira with a casual grin. The northern part of the arena turned into a battlefield, with no heed to training dummies, a four versus four.

"Highness, help," a soft voice pleaded from the back.

Ice Element: Frozen Barrier, without thinking, she turned and conjured a semi-circle of a wall. 'What happened,' the mind came too, a subtle change; the barrier shielded her from a backstab. The students of the Western Claireville Academy, the Elven siblings, were on her tail. Bow in hand, the sister fired barrage after barrage of arrows with differing properties.

'Better get back,' startled, Eira fell back as the brother retreated to his sister's side.

.....

"Don't forget us," *CLANG,* two longswords with the church's crest.

"That'd never work," whispered the ice-princess, Greatsword in hand, one of a white and blue color, she blocked the incoming attack. This time, the Eastern branch, else known as the Holy Church. The participants had but one look, the look of wanting to win at any cost.

"Retreat," they jumped back, subtle as it might have been, she noticed something. The participants of the church were troubled. 'Their hand,' she remained alert, '-filled with blood,' unable to take a breather, Gurdan came charging with killing intent.

Ice Element: Surge, palm on the ground, spike sprouted out, it clipped the boy's right leg. From Icey white to crimson, the first injury. *Dark Element: Ethereal Binding,* stopped, the adventurer stared up, realized the sheer power these mages wielded and cast healing spells.

"That's sad," voiced someone in the crowd, "-Gurdan's about to lose," it sighed.

"Don't be so sure,?? fired another.

"You're not going to get the best out of me," healed, *Skill: Physical Enhancement,* muscle tensed, focus heightened, grip tightened, *Sword-Arts: Level 2, Karzai Strike,* named after the creator, Gurdan grew serious. He vanished in a blink, *Slash,* cut across multiple places, Eira held her injuries.

novelusb.com

“Damn your tough” he sighed, *Sword-Arts: Level 2, Spitfire,* the blade took on a fiery aspect, “-that ice armor needs to be melted,” he yelled and charged.

“Don’t be so sure,” thought to be unable to fight, Eira stared up from standing still, “-you got careless,” her fingers gestured to the right. *BANG,* without explanation, Gurdan was sent across the arena, he hit the wall pretty badly that it made a splash of blood. What he didn’t realize was that Eira took the damage on willingly. Young adventurers were often prideful and most likely going on instinct. Seeing an opening, one as big as hers, forced him into giving the final blow. ‘Shadow Element,’ she smiled whilst ice formed around her cuts. It latched onto his leg without knowing, then with a single swipe, she activated the spell. It pulled him to the wall as opposed to the floor, an innovation onto that spell. Normally, Ethereal Binding used the host’s mana into velocity. The stronger the opponent, the stronger the force to which their tied to the floor. From binding them on the floor to the wall, it pulled, thus the result, Gurdan of Blade’s End, defeated.

Simultaneously, four students got blasted away by a final strike. Two from Sepmora and two from the Order. The bots kept on coming, or rather, the sheer number increased dramatically. Caution and restraint were thrown to the wall, tis was a fight for survival. The bots added more pressure than the combatants themselves. In this setting, none really could be classified as strong – it mostly came down to luck. Like Sophie said, teaming up would not matter. Each fought on their own, not against their comrades, however. The battle raged on without stop, Eira got caught in the crossfire between the Eastern and Western Claireville Academy. The intent to kill was palpable, those sent from the Church were appalled by the sight of demi-humans. Not in word, but in action, the disrespect shown, the act of looking down, it forced the Brother into the mood to kill.

BANG, an explosion which reeked of oil and gunpowder.

“SISTER,” a voice screamed amidst the turmoil.

“Oh boy...” said the commentator, “-it seems that the SSS-bot has been unleashed,” covered in blood with a broken bow, Ygannea.

“Participants,” now defending against a giant, Sophie spoke through the intercoms, “- the six combatants have been eliminated. There is thirty-minute left, either survive or fight; all who stands in the arena are advancing through the tournament,” not even bothered, the transmission ended.

‘The real battle starts now,’ mumbled Eira, ‘-get injured and you’re handicapped in the actual tournament. Stamina, awareness, and mana capacity will be the deciding factor. It’s as if getting the opportunity to do as much harm to a competitor on the day prior,’ all around, they fought with minimal effort, none wanted to go all out. The pressure to qualify out of the way, the focus turned to defense.

“This is a waste of time,” ice sprouted from the ground, “-playing defensive,” an ice-cold glare at the fighters, “-how pathetic,” the snowflake in her arm lit. “I’m bored,” white-hair turned partially blue, she leaped towards the SSS bot with a sword in hand. *Clang,* not even a dent – “how dare you mock us,” behind, a volley of spells. A few words and the look of contempt forced their hate outwards.

HURRRRR, as loud as it could be, the machine slammed its large palms on the ground, the shockwave made was charged with electricity. On the head, a few guns popped out and began to fire.

“Now you’ve done it,” laughed Sophie, “-good luck, the bot has gone into overdrive in the last five minutes.”

“Forget the bot, focus on Eira, get her out of the running,” adamant, a pupil from Sepmora yelled across.

“Good luck about that,” those sent from the Order made a tiny yet strong barrier. Sepmora and the Order were on bad terms, “-worry not, we’re all on the same boat, doesn’t matter if we help you or not,” unwilling, Vipan Eqihr added.

“We also need to avenge our teammates,” Adarin Odalf jumped in as well.

“Let’s do it,” *Dual Caster: Fire and Lightning – Engulfment,* Fire on top and lightning on the bottom, it closed shut. Hot winds blew across, the bots crumbled as their circuit fried from the lightning.

“Don’t leave me out of it yet,” in the back, *Rogue-Arts: Backstab,* pressed against Helga’s back, a dagger that pierced her stomach.

“You son of a …” *SLASH,* turned into a lance, the sword of the church pierced Erlareo’s leg. From a free-for-all, it turned into a bloodthirsty battle. The SSS bot made constant waves, the church went full out with the premise of Devine intervention. Blood splattered across the ground, it turned into a killing contest. First Helga, then fell her partner, Tatiana Redwood from a shot to the head – their eyes didn’t seem normal.

“Do you see this?” a voice whispered, “it’s the ballad of misery,” their gazes fell on her, “-what will it be, Lady White, should we demonstrate our strength?” Surrounded by carnage, a warm feeling came from inside, “-yes,” unleashed, pure ice, *Ice Element, Gergusser Variant: Niflheim,* similar to Unleash Aura, Eira unleashed her true potential. A blizzard froze all, it went up the barricades and seeped into the spectator’s booth.

“This isn’t the level of Carnage I wish for. Too weak, not sufficient enough,” half of her face frozen, the ruby eyes turned pure blue, “-you, monster made by man, shall perish on accounts of heresy. Foul play all around, are you people never going to learn,” hands pressed, the air turned into a mist then into the snow; unable to move, the bot cracked.

“It seems like the bot has been defeated,” unknown to what had transpired, the crowd applauded as if it were part of the show. Deep down, the representatives and those close, knew the truth – what happened inside wasn’t a show, it was real blood lust.

“Shut the light,” ordered Josiah, “-we’ve got critically wounded students inside,” to which, it turned pitch black. Questions about what happened were asked, it soon turned into a cacophony of confusion.

“This way please,” armed with flashlights, security escorted the crowd out on the pretense of electrical failure.

“Staxius?” a troubled voice asked, “…” the seat empty, “-seriously,” she sighed.

“Please this way, majesty,” requested Theodore, “-you’re coming with us,” added Lucy. Ernis, Gallienne, and Xula were guarded close for none knew what happened.

“Quick, quick,” ordered Josiah as he led the healers and medics into the arena, “-amazing,” covered in water crystals, not meant to kill but heal, the participants were shielded.

“Eira?” he asked, a small dragon had perched itself onto her shoulder whilst the face remained expressionless.

“Heed my word, mortal. There’s trace of foul play, I know not who or what it was,” its wings flapped gently, “-though the attack was centered around my host. I was able to help today, tomorrow is another story, be sure to guard her, else, all who come with the remote intent of malice, shall perish.”

“So you’re the Lady of Ice,” teleported, a voice startled the dragon.

“Who might you be???? it spoke with caution.

“No one particular,” a single touch on its head made it shudder, “-I’m neither pleased nor displeased, ancient dragon Gergusser. I see you’re here in good faith,” he pulled his collar, “-I’m allied with the strongest dragon to live. Therefore, my lady, I wish for one thing alone, the guarantee that you’ll never do nor let harm be done to my child,” the voice had a differing tone, one more serious than before.

“My purpose in taking asylum is for one reason, we’re not the only ancient beings being reborn. The War waged between gods, demons, dragons, humans, and other entities, though long extinguished, has had a new purpose. The crowning of the new god of time, he has long waited for this day, and it has come. Kronos will come to take back what is rightfully his, Zeus and the others shall pay. Once a supreme god, the ruler of time is thirsty; he waits and watches. Goddess Nike’s dominion, the land of Argonauts has been savagely ravaged. There are more to come, do with it what you wish, God of Death, I’m here as a byproduct. I’ve no interest in being sealed again, my purpose is to live as this lady’s partner,” to which, with a snap, it turned to icicles.

‘The god of time, the raising of beasts from the war that has ended. Better stay on guard.’ Topsy, Eira was carried off to the side, her injuries weren’t that bad. ‘It mentioned something about foul play,’ he stared, ‘-this lingering sense of dread. I’ve experienced it before, it’s nostalgic.’

“Doesn’t it remind you of the time in Iqavea with that crazed scholar?” added Adete as the students were carried off.

“You’re right,” he stood, “-this is exactly like that time,” to which the mind kicked into gear, ‘-if what Adete says is true, then someone might have gotten a hand on that research. To what ends though, as far as it seems, the injuries are treatable, far better than what it looks... wait,” realization hit, “-a decoy...”

Chapter 266: Blackout

We’ve got confirmation on two of the three targets.

Track their position, send team Beta, orders flew at one another.

“I can’t believe what is happening?” voiced one of the nobles.

“Tis very much weird, I hope that the tournament isn’t canceled,” in order without worry with the help of guards, the arena cleared.

“Majesty, please don’t stray off too much,” from the shadows, Theodore’s tone changed to stern.

“As you wish,” she agreed and stuck close to Lucy and a few guards.

Down the stair, after a hall, came the outside. Surrounded by trees with the administration building not far off. In the same fashion, on the other side, one where commoners and the general folk had entered, left without much hassle. The blackout didn't come as a surprise. Most of the credit went to the security, their quick judgment averted any large-scale panic.

.....

"This way," on guard, Achilles kept Sugar and Aceline close, they left using another exit. Despite being in the same area, the nobles and idols were treated differently for good reasons. Not worried about such trivialities, with her safety entrusted to a good ally, Aceline kept a smile.

"Right in sight," breathed a man, laid in wait, he watched through a scope.

"You're allowed only one shot, Wielder of Knightfall – show why thou art fit to use me," laid beside in a seductive manner, a lady with black hair parted to the right. Long nails and eyelashes that seemed to flow into nothingness her gaze was one of a femme fatale.

Get ready, the target is a male bearing blond hair, white and golden suit.

"This way," holding a flashlight, a guard in uniform, he pointed to the right that led to a more opened area. Serious, Theodore, Lucy, and Prophecy remained on alert.

The salvage unit is on the move, hold fire, itching to pull the trigger, the marksman twitched.

Target sighted, spoken in a displeased tone.

Leading the charge, Theodore, they made good progress around the arena. "The evacuation zone is to the left," voiced another guard stationed in regular intervals, they gave instructions. The plan, in case of emergencies, was to head to the first arena, one that would be used later on.

Permission to open fire.

"Undrar, are you ok?" asked Avon.

"What, why?" she turned with a baffled look.

"What do you mean why what, something caught your attention, what happened?" the spirit remained adamant.

"It's just..." she paused, "-I've sensed this before," her eyes scoured all around, from seats to the people in front, through the walls and more.

Granted. Echoed across the rooftop, the sound of death.

novelusb.com

"PRINCE ERNIS," he fell, Lucy screamed, no sound, nothing, a bullet wound. The white suit turned crimson; time felt as if it stopped. Panic ran rampant, Xula's eyes opened, she immediately caught the Prince. Theodore shielded the Queen, Lucy, shocked as she might have been, conjured a barrier that served to blackout any unwanted attention.

Target hit, long straight hair covering the left eye flowed.

“Job well done,” the lady wrapped herself around him, “-evacuation should be there in a few seconds.” Not even the cartridge case was left, gone without a trace.

“Get him to the hospital right now,” ordered Lucy, Xula cast countless healing spells to no avail.

“This is bad,” voiced Gallienne, emotions slowly took its toll, “-it’s going to spell disaster,” her heart raced, “-if this gets out to the main-continent, we’re doomed.”

“My lady,” Prophecy appeared, “-his highness is losing too much blood. There’s a curse embedded inside the projectile,” on the wall, the bullet, “-if proper treatment isn’t given, he’ll bleed out.”

“No need to state the obvious,” hands doused in blood, the queen tried her best to stop the bleeding, “-Is there nothing we can do?”

“Teleportation,” voiced the spirit in quiet.

“No helping it,” eyes closed, “-GRAB ONTO ME,” her voice grew loud. *Ancient Magic: Teleportation,* inside the hospital, knelt on the floor as blood flowed, Ernis who had grabbed onto Xula’s shoulder. “Am I going to die?” he asked with a petrified look.

‘If ever something happens to you or Eira, one that can’t be healed using magic. Then remember this place, it’s where Doctor Jona, a lady who’s saved my and my comrades’ life one too many times, works. She’s very talented, I’m sure you’ll be fixed without worry,’ before the event, Staxius gave a tour of the town,’ in a moment of peril, his words came to mind. ‘Did you plan on something like this happening?’ she wondered as the injured Prince was taken away with Jona by his side.

Back in the arena, the news of the prince getting shot, one of unknown origin, spread around. The populous had no idea, only those who’d be affected directly.

“Nephew,” inside the temporary medical camp, with combatants being healed using magic and potions, Josiah approached with a woeful expression.

“Did something happen,” tending Ygannea’s wound, he turned.

“Could I speak to you in private?” he looked to have seen a ghost. From the green-colored camp to farther inside, a trip onto the upper levels, away from prying eyes. An hour had gone by, the light flickered into life.

“Director, you rarely call me as nephew,” he moved close to a barricade, one from over which Josiah overlooked the arena, scorched, frozen, and bloodied.

“Thing is,” he turned, “-something bad happened.”

“Is it about the prince getting shot?” asked Staxius without any concern.

“You knew?” baffled, he took a step back.

“Obviously,” tired, he stared the arena, “-I was told by a guardian spirit and Jona’s already working diligently.”

“I assume you know why I’m here then?” disheartened, the director seemed like a shell of his prior self.

“There are many possibilities, but I’d like to hear it from thy mouth,” below, workers gathered scraps of the many training dummies.

“Sure,” he sighed, “-this isn’t just an issue of Prince Ernis getting shot. If not handled properly, I’m afraid it will change into a massive problem. Firstly, our Queen could be called a traitor to the imperial crown. Hidros could be alienated and cut off from the empire. Not only that, but they may also go another way and choose to launch a war. Alone, the academy doesn’t stand a chance; everyone will be held accountable, not only the kingdom but the people.”

“You wish to silence this issue,” said in a shady tone, he demanded answers.

“I’m sorry,” Josiah gazed the floor in shame, “-asking this of a king is insolence at its peak,” the head raised, “Even so,” the face held determination, “-I must ask this on behalf of Hidros, please make sure that this issue doesn’t leave the town of Claireville,” he bowed.

“That’s a tall order,” voiced monotonously, “-for the sake of Hidros,” he paused and thought, “-I’ve one condition.”

“What will that be?”

“If people are to be killed for the quest to be complete, then I want permission to kill, even if it’s noble. Agree to not ask anything about my method, then I’ll consider,” the face had a differing feel, one of grandeur and absolute control.

“Though it pains me, I agree to thy conditions. Dearest nephew, do what you wish, I’ll do whatever is required.”

“It’s settled then,” a pat followed, “-I’ll get to clean up duty, leave everything to me. Make sure that the tournament proceeds without interruption and tie up any loose mouths that might be lurking around – we don’t want this to blow up.”

In the hospital, covered in blood, Xula waited with Gallienne, Theodore, and Lucy. All who were present beforehand headed home.

“Are you worried?” asked Xula with Gallienne beside.

“Yes, very much so,” she lifted her hands, it trembled, “-I’ve no idea what to do. If the Prince is to perish here, it’s going to spell disaster for Hidros, I could be executed and the people forced into slavery, the Emperor isn’t that nice a guy.”

“Let’s hope for the best,” they held hands, “-I’ll welcome thee with open arms if you ever seek asylum,” Xula comforted the best she could.

“Is that all?” outside, a very informative conversation ended.

“That’s about it,” to which, a curtsy later, Prophecy returned to her host.

“What do we do?” asked Adete worryingly, “-might have bitten more than you can chew.”

“Let me think,” teleported to the roof, he stared as the sun went down, ‘-from what I was told, only certain nobles were present. I fear that the one who orchestrated this whole ordeal was one of those.

Making a list and asking one by one will feel unnatural. For now, priority must be put on blacking out the information network, far out, a large broadcasting tower. 'I'll need at least two days to silence those who know too much. Might need to call in a few favors,' phone taken out the pocket, from Cake to Karlson; Shadow called asking for backup. Without batting an eye, Cake agreed to come by the next day – having her here would be beneficial. On top of that, Karlson agreed to send a few hundred men – it seemed as if they moved to war.

"I'm glad you called, boss," with a relieved tone, Cake laughed.

"Don't rest just yet, coming here means a lot of work," he fired back with a friendlier voice.

"When do you not put me to work," she sighed, "–make sure that you cause a communication blackout. The moment the tower goes down, that town will be stranded. I'll meet you at the train station at around 9:00 tomorrow. I've got news from Karlson, we're bringing new toys."

"Good, be sure to not leak this information," the call ended, wings sprouted, the tower became the next objective.

"Are you going to blow it up?" asked Adete, the duo flew.

"Probably not, I'll make it look as if it was a freak accident. A fire that destroyed, we'll blame it on human nature."

Burnt eternally in my domain, I, Staxius Haggard, the god of death, call forth the flame that purges gods and demons alike. Set ablaze for I've ordered so; Abyssal Wrath, a large pentagram appeared round the tower, *snap.* '–That should suffice,' the intense heat caused more damage than expected. Similarly, the duo headed to different areas and sabotaged devices essential for communicating.

"Josiah," teleported inside the office, "–just letting you know that the town has gone offline. It's off the grid, a complete information blackout. It should prevent anyone from trying to contact anyone of real value. Make sure some excuse is made," message delivered, teleportation was used again.

'That takes care of the issue at hand. If Ernis shows up with injuries to the event tomorrow, then it may raise some suspicion,' he walked through the door, '–I've no idea if Josiah has spoken to Gallienne yet,' the lady seemed in despair with Xula holding her tightly. 'If this was indeed a well-orchestrated assassination, finding who it benefits the most and how it does will also be crucial. There are more players involved in this game,' he stood close to Lucy, '–moving in the shadow will be hard,' he breathed, '–outplaying them all is going to take a toll,' Jona returned with a relieved face.

News given; the prince was out of danger but unconscious. On that, she headed out for a break, the entourage breathed a sigh of relief. 'I can't rule out the possibility that Gallienne had a part in this game. Judging by how she's acting and the emotions, I can safely take her out of the picture. Lucy, Theodore, everyone here is a suspect, even Xula.'

"Queen Gallienne, Queen Shanna, Lucy, Theodore, mind coming to the roof?" a sudden request that got their attention. Obligated, they followed closely whilst being on edge. Many had questions as to why such a request was asked. Gallienne had the worst stance out of all, the worry of what it could end into made her heart shudder. The dream of unifying Hidros, one that felt close the day prior, now felt miles apart.

'Time to see if attaining divinity did anything good, let's see who's on my side and who's the traitor,' facing the moon, *All-seeing eyes,* hands pressed, the eyes burnt and consciousness jumped out the body, "I know who's responsible for the assassination."

Chapter 267: Cake's arrival

Chatter filled the station, stopped in the middle with a few passengers, the express train. Onboard, a tattooed lady that waved the moment she stepped off.

"Hey boss," holding a briefcase, she waved with a smile.

"Hey Cake," cigar thrown in a bin, Staxius helped in carrying some of her luggage.

The gathered crowd dispersed near the entrance, taking a left turn, Claireville town came in view. "This place sure is lively," a comment after having seen the amount of decoration and cheers.

"Let's get you settled first," the voice tired from not having slept well, a few alleys later, surrounded by a nice yard, an inn. Comfortable with warm colors; it seemed more like a cottage. Though it looked cheap, the price told after stepping inside was 2 Gold per night.

"That's expensive," squinted, Cake tried to see if there had been an error in the pricing.

"No, my lady," voiced the receptionist, "-tis the price we charge for it is at the center of town. Not to mention, we've got an indoor bath, a garden out back, and very comfortable and spacious arrangements."

.....

"Excuse me," voiced Staxius, "-I've but one question?" the gaze as sharp as a knife.

"What may that be, sir?" she returned the gaze without fear.

"Is this place safe," a vague question at best.

"Yes, very safe," she slid a piece of paper across the counter, "-welcome to Jason's Cottage. I apologize for not saying anything, but this is my assistant, Hae. An ex-member of the assassination sect; it's perfectly suited for hiding out."

"I presume you were told about our arrival?" he asked yet again.

"Not really," she took back the paper, "-the master of the cottage is a very meddlesome person. Thus, orders to keep an eye on a certain individual was given. He'd known that sooner or later, said someone would come by this place; hence the note."

'Jason sure knows how to give a surprise.' Confused, Cake looked around as if she searched for something lost. "You're going to stay here."

"Oh-" she jumped, "-don't start speaking without notice," startled, she sighed, "-fine."

"We'll take the best room," voiced in a serious tone, Hae nodded and handled the formalities. Up the stairs to the third floor, on which rested four rooms, they headed farther to the back. One secluded and devoid of activity, at the far-right corner.

"We're here," the door opened. As opposed to having paintings hanging in the corridor, there were wooden logs onto which rested wood carvings and statues. The roof was brown – none would have guessed a place so small on the outside would be this spacious.

The layout, general without nothing jumping out, the trio walked in. "Lady Cake," Hae whispered as luggage was placed on the bed, "-over here," she gestured.

novelusb.com

"What's the matter?" at ease for a member of the assassination sect protected the vicinity, her tone felt friendlier.

"This room is special," she walked into the toilet.

"Don't tell me," Staxius mumbled, '-there's going to be a secret door behind the shower, I'm sure of it,' as predicted, a door opened. "That bartender, I swear," the head shook.

"Did you say something?" asked Cake.

"Not really, let's just go in," not worth discussing, flickers of blue light came from inside.

"Welcome to Jason's Cottage, a very special room for very special guest," against the wall, many displays of which had important information. A circular table right behind with couches. "On the wall here," she tapped a button, "-is the control panel. Soundproof thanks to magic, one can toggle barrier whenever desired. Make sure to turn it off when the room has been used. For the most part, it can go run for a week without stop." A few steps later, "-there's also this button here and two lights. One of them is under my control while the other is under yours. It's for an emergency, if something happens to me, then the right one will turn on while the other is for thine use."

"Intricate for a cottage," she smiled, "-I've got the basic layout. Good to be working with you, Hae," on that, the lady bowed and left.

"I suppose this will be the command center?"

"Right on, I had no idea that Jason controlled a cottage here," she turned with a curious look.

"I had no idea either," he knew what she wanted to know, "-I just thought that the place was perfect to give out orders. It's a perfect fit for a hideout, cheap looking for expensive. The price makes it only accessible to the rich, not only that, the amount of space at the back is excellent for hiding any unwanted merchandise. Garden as she said, I took a look around yesterday, its nothing like a garden, the trees are big and overpowering. The foliage is so dense the sun is blocked. Might seem annoying, the fact of the matter is that it fits all the requirements," now sat on the couch, he waited.

"Fair enough," her stance relaxed, "-I'll go get the toys, gimme a second," excited, she hummed and skipped out the room.

'Yesterday,' the eyes closed, '-flashbacks from the time on the roof.'

"-I know who is responsible for the assassination," the All-seeing eyes worked tirelessly in finding what they thought. 'None of the three knew anything. Rather, their responses were those of utter disgust, they wanted to know who'd done such a thing. My suspicions were right, I couldn't trust them based on

prejudice. Normally, I can only work out from what the person feels and translate that into possibilities of thought. Yesterday, the eyes felt more powerful, the symbols of power, I felt it surge, especially Nike's wing.'

After a rather troublesome exchange, they gave information.

"Are you sure about this?" asked Theodore.

"Shutting down the whole town is a bit extreme," voiced Gallienne in concern.

"Please," Lucy begged, "-do what you wish and find whoever is responsible," her face, fueled by hate, distorted from beautiful to vengeful, "-I'll make sure they suffer."

"Are you going to be alright?" close, Xula asked with her fingers pinching his sleeves.

"Yes," with a warm voice, "-the request came from Josiah. I can't well ignore him who has taken care of my daughter. This tournament is important for her as well, tis a stepping stone to her adulthood. It just so happens that the fate of Hidros intertwines with my desire to see my daughter grow," the feeling of woefulness from Lizzie being gone even with Xula bearing the child, never left. A hole in the chest, one that took away the growing compassion towards humans.

"Whatever the reason is," visibly shaken, "-as Queen of Hidros, I'd like to ask a favor," the words felt as if it didn't want to come. She wanted to cry but was held back by her title.

"Listen to me," hands locked with Xula, he walked closer to Gallienne, "-Queen or no, I care not. I'll help whoever I want," hand placed on her shoulder, "-I'll do whatever I can to handle this situation. Just make sure to cover for me if anything should happen. You're a friend to Arda," the face seemed at ease,"-not to mention that you've grown close to Shanna," he stared his wife gently, "-it wouldn't be nice to let this growing friendship waste."

"King Staxius," bowed Theodore and Lucy, "-we'll help how ever we can."

"I appreciate it..."

"Wake up," a sharp voice broke the nap.

"How long was I out for?"

"About twenty minutes," muffled, the voice grew clearer, "-though you need to come to, I've got everything set up." Sat behind screens that changed colors, Cake typed without end.

"Sorry about that," awake, "-what's the status of the army Karlson was about to send?"

"Look on the table," she pointed without turning, "-each dot represents one of our agents," they were all around the town. "Next to it is an earpiece, it was made on special orders. Separate from the main network, we can communicate with one another despite the blackout."

"What about you?" he asked, "-isn't using that interface useless?"

"I've my methods," she turned, "-should I remind you of who I am?"

"I got it," he stood and took the earpiece, "-any plans yet?"

“From what you told me; the prince got shot. It could cause chaos; thus, you were asked to silence the affair as stealthily as possible, am I correct?”

“Yes,” he took a seat next to her, data was placed onto a timeline, “-that’s why I called on your help, none knows the Shadows better than the Dark-guild.”

“It’s going to be fun,” she smiled, “-let’s get working then,” everything gathered, assumption excluded, was noted.

“I see,” she thought, “-there’s too many improbables.”

“Honestly, priority is shutting off the town, none can escape. Blow up the railway,” he said in a serious tone.

“For real?” baffled, she coughed.

“Yes, blow it up; shut it off completely. Not here but close to Rosespire. Karlson should be able to do as much. Since the town has two paths, one leading to the north, towards the capital city and south, to the monster-infested region – any informants will be forced to travel. The ones responsible are here this instant, roaming around with smiles and relishing at the thought of their success.”

“I understand,” to which orders were sent across, “-we’ll make it look like a truck had an accident with the train. As for the people who’ll leave – what about them, should we kill them?”

“No, not now anyway, I doubt the informant will risk standing out. All who came to this event will remain till it’s over, there’s no doubt about it. They’re smart, since the blackout; their guard will be up. Should provide enough time to trace back the events.”

“Hey boss,” she paused, “-you sure are amazing.”

“Flattery isn’t going to get you a raise,” he stood, “-I’ll head out, can’t risk looking suspicious before the crowd. Monitor the populous and keep me informed. Let’s show them how scary the Dark-guild can be,” with a wave, he teleported to the hospice.

‘The war against snow took a toll, not to mention they killed Boss’s daughter. The only thing I can say is this, Renaud, Karlson, Jason, and I, are pissed. Bringing an innocent life into the ways of the underworld is sacrilege. That realm belongs to us, any who tries to disrupt it will pay. Worry not, Shadow, revenge shall come,’ hand on keyboard, they began.

‘The issue here is Ernis. The assassin thinks he’s dead. The populous, however, think that he’s alive. I’ve no idea to go on, the only link so far is that brain control magic. If Ernis were to show up uninjured, it will have two effects, depending on the puppet master. Either, they’ll try again and grow careless, or change plans, to attack without being seen,’ sat on a metallic chair, he waited beside Ernis’ room. ‘Now if the prince doesn’t show up, the populous will be suspicious but not that concerned. In actuality, that’s what they think we’ll do, an excuse to say that he’s been sent back. What’re their motives, blacking out information was the only thing I could come up with. What’s the real objective – if it was the prince’s death, I doubt that they’ll sit idly by, wait,’ something clicked, ‘-why would the marksmen go for the body. In no way would they have wanted to hire someone incompetent. A bullet to the head would have been a simple task, not to mention that it missed every single vital spot. The more I think, the more convoluted this scheme becomes,’ he paused, ‘-think, what if the prince wasn’t the only target, what if

there's more. A warning, a show of power, a threat – what are the demands, who stands to benefit. Hold on,' instantly, '-what's the succession line for Hidros. What' if Gallienne is to die, I doubt Xula and I are targets. I remember them not having a child, if that's the case, the one closest to her bloodline will get the throne. The only way this makes sense is if it's for a fight for the throne.'

Chapter 268: Chess

"Staxius,"

"Yes?" startled, the mind came to.

"He's conscious, I've done all that is within my power. He might be a little tipsy and weakish, just take care," with a pat, the doctor headed off.

"Thanks again," to which she faded into the hall crawling with patients.

'Time hasn't caught up to her,' he breathed, '-still the lady I remember from memory,' with a push, the door opened.

"Who's there?" hidden behind a curtain, a voice asked.

"Death, I've come to take thine life, little one," spoken in a deep and menacing accent, the curtain parted suddenly.

.....

"I've not gotten married yet, please, let me live," came a reply, monotonous and uninterested, the gaze remained firm.

"Good to see you're doing better," closing the curtains, Staxius sat and asked normal questions to how the man felt.

"Honestly," deep breath in, "-didn't expect to get shot. So, what is it that you're after?" Ernis understood that the visit held more than was let onto.

'Good question Ernis,' he thought, '-I need to decide how this is going to work out. How to layer a lie with another lie. Showing up injured is out of the picture. There's only so much I can do for now; I'll take a back seat and let them make another move. Probably not that good an advice, but should be sufficient,' the stare turned into a glare, one murderous. Shuddered, Ernis tried to crawl back without making a sound.

"I do apologize," noticing the movement, he came too, the eyes regained its neutral stance. "Ernis," he called for the latter lost focus and was a little frightened. "There's something I need to say. The assassination attempt was most likely a decoy. Having you injured will force the Queen to place more security on your location. In turn, her safety might grow to be less adequate. Not to mention, if they did mean to kill, you'd not be breathing this moment. I've no clues nor proof, it's mere assumption at the moment. The only way it makes sense is if that tis a battle for succession. You getting hurt does two things: first, it makes her guard detail sloppy, and second, it lessens her credibility as a competent ruler. Tis all I've concluded so far, hence, I need thine help."

"I follow," Ernis focused, "-how though, I'm bedridden till next week. Showing up injured will help to reinforce the fact that she's incompetent. Isn't sending me back to the mainland the best course of action. I would assume that they think if I headed back, the news of my unfortunate fate might crumble the rule over here."

"Yes, what you say is true, that's why it doesn't make sense. I first thought that the plan was to create havoc, anarchy of some sort. Slowly, I realize that we're being outplayed – the blackout on my part wasn't necessary. If it's a fight to undermine Gallienne's rule, then, involving the Empire will be for naught," paused, he waited.

"The Emperor might charge in without thought. That's the kind of man he is, not to mention that all the nobles will be held accountable. It will bring reform to the current monarchy," thumb in mouth, Ernis snacked on nails.

"Very astute of you," hand reached inside the pocket, "-I shudder to think that we were manipulated. Causing that blackout worked in their favor, not ours," a little resentment was felt. "-In any case, let's get you patched up for the tournament. We're two steps behind," he snarled, "-tis very much fun."

Scrolls and potions used, Ernis returned to normal. Fatigue for he was fully healed. A good sign, "-Alchemy," he smiled, "-now that I think about it clearly," sat on the bedside, "-you've gotten yourself mixed in a very complicated game. All that was said could be passed off as imagination, no concrete proof, what if it all is but a double bluff. They make you think that Gallienne is the target whilst I'm the real target," footsteps echoed into the room.

"That's a good point-" interrupted by the door opening loudly, he thought.

"HIGHNESS," In rushed Lucy with a relieved look. Following behind, Theodore, Gallienne, and Xula.

novelusb.com

'I've haven't had to use this part of me for a long time. My brain, it's working at full throttle. This scheming is tantalizing, I've no idea I could have this much fun in politics. All of them are my pawns, like actual pawns to use – I can slowly visualize it, a chessboard. Their side is naught but a blur, though my side is,' turned to face the people, he smiled, for at the same moment, the mind saw it all as a game. On the white side, the pawns, King being Ernis, Queen being Gallienne, Theodore, and Lucy being the knights. Cake being the Bishop, and the Dark-guilds acting as the countless pawns. No castle and a lack of another Bishop, tis was but one way to look at the situation. 'Stimulating,' knuckles cracked, "-lets all head to the arena, they are to decide the upcoming matches," nonchalantly, arms locked with Xula, they teleported.

"We'll go get ready," voiced Lucy as she stood close to the prince.

"Let me come too-" a sudden pull knocked her out balance, "-what are you doing?" asked Gallienne for the rough treatment was rude.

"Listen to me," stood close, "-does the Riverty family have any heir if you're to die. What's the succession line?" asked in a stern voice, Staxius watched as her eyes blinked several times.

"No, we don't have an heir just yet," she caressed her stomach, "-it's not far off though. And for the matter of my death, the royal blood ends with my name. Since its closest, the most probable candidate

for the crown will be my father's illegitimate child. An offspring from his not too ideal acts," she breathed, "-my older sister, I've not met her in person though from what I was told, she married into a Duke's family. She's the only one I can think off."

"Majesty?" called Theodore.

"-I best leave," pushed aside, she ran off to the butler.

'Now we have something to go on, an illegitimate child, one older. Married to a Duke; what Ernis voiced earlier can be nullified fully, this is a fight for the crown.'

"Hey, are you ok?" asked Adete, the girl had remained on his head the entire time.

"I'm fine," he held out his hand, a stable place for her to stand, "-why do you ask?"

Flown over, "-just concerned," her arms crossed, "-you look tired and bearing a not too inviting smirk."

"Really," a few steps forward, catching his reflection on a metallic surface, '-she's right,' the face relaxed, '-I did have a weird grin.'

"Are you coming?" asked Xula in a strict voice.

"Yes, yes," he returned to her side, a game of chess with the puzzle of finding who is pulling the strings and intent, the plate sure filled. 'Thinking about it anymore won't do any good,' after changing clothes at the mansion, they sat and waited for the tournament to begin.

The crowd was slowly seated, this time, the fight would be hosted in both arenas. Since two days remained, the fights would continue until the finalists were chosen. The real fight, the fight for stamina and conservation.

'I wonder what they'll say to address yesterday's incident. Shouldn't matter,' sat with the rest slowly filling the few seats, Ernis chose to stay close to the Ardanian couple, it included Gallienne, they were to the top-right; best seats. Even closer than yesterday, the nobles who sat in the middle, Dukes included, murmured.

"Josiah, Josiah," Sophie ran to the locker room, "-Ernis is fine," she whispered.

"Thank the gods," he felt at ease, "-the tournament is to proceed without interruption. Make sure Aceline is ready," in the second arena, where they sat, Sophie, walked to the middle.

"Welcome all," the mic turned on and so were the spectators, full of energy, they applauded, "-today, marks the start of the long-awaited Inter-magical tournament. As most would have guessed, yesterday was but a trailer of what is to come. Helping me in this endeavor," she pointed to the right, "-is me," a charming and lovely voice, "-the new host," hands thrown in a peace sign, the crowd cheered,"-Aceline," it reminded of Avon.

"Before we begin," spoke Aceline, she pointed at the command booth, "-a few words from the director himself," the dim window turned clearer.

"Thank you all for being here," the crowd remained silent for it was disrespectful. "I'd like to address the sudden power outage yesterday. The cause was nothing more than mechanical failure, we from

Claireville Academy do apologize for any inconvenience. Without taking more thy time, have a good day.”

“You got to hear it, folks, there’s nothing to be worried about,” cheered Aceline, the crowd responded to her energy positively.

“Now then,” Sophie took charge, “-here’s the list of our combatants,” on which, four screens came out the ground: [Erlareo Enbalar, Vipan Eqihr, Adarin Odalf, Helga Grail, Tatiana Redwood, Eira Haggard, Nathan, and Natalie Green]

“Most of might have missed it yesterday,” playback of the SSS-bot getting beat was shown, “-against all odds, Eira Haggard of Central Claireville Academy defeated the dummy. As promised, she’ll be put in the semi-finals,” her icon moved to the upper-brackets. Sadly,” a picture of Erlareo was shown, “-both students from the Western Claireville academy forfeited due to life-threatening injuries. Not to worry, they’re being healed by the best doctors we have,” after which the screen changed back to the brackets.

“With one spot of the semi-final taken, there remain six students. Three battles will be fought in tandem to decide those advancing to the semi-finals. To choose who will fight who, the randomizer,” a diagram of a child popped up, with a smile, she pressed a button. Scrambled, the names were assigned.

“First match: Adrian Odalf versus Nathan Green.”

“Second match: Vipan Eqihr versus Tatiana Redwood.”

“Third match: Natalie Green versus Helga Grail.”

“Since one of the semi-finalists has been chosen, the third match will decide the next semi-finalist as Erlareo isn’t fighting,” Sophie ended.

“Now then, the first and second match will be hosted in the first arena. Depending on the number of seats, spectators will be able to move from one arena to the other. Though I’d advise against it for the battles will happen simultaneously.”

“The fights will start in thirty minutes,” voiced Sophie, hence ended the ceremony.

Target sighted, shall we make a move or hold?

Hold, wait till the semi-finals have been fought. All has gone to plan, no need to get restless – they’re moving as predicted.

“Undrar?” in the crowd, Avon pulled her sleeve.

“What do you want?” they were in the first arena.

“You seem out of it again, did something happen?” he asked the same as yesterday.

“Not really, something is off about this. I’m getting the same feeling,” she stared at the arena.

“I’m sure Achilles will handle everything if something were to happen. She’s the hero of the adventuring guild,” with a smile, Avon returned to speaking with Auic.

‘It’s not as black and white as you think, Avon,’ her eyes closed, “-Staxius.”

“Yes?” he answered through telepathy.

“Something feels weird. I forgot to tell you this yesterday but I felt a familiar aura. I’ve no idea from where or what, but it happened. Not to mention that Ayleth felt anxious the moment the light turned off. Even Autumn picked up on it – be on guard, I felt it again; its closer this time.”

“I see, thanks for the heads-up. I’d advise against going deeper into the matter, trust me, you don’t want to get involved. Keep a low-profile, we don’t want a repeat of Lizzie’s death. The Lymsey sisters and the guild’s safety is on thine hands, vice-leader,” the link cut.

‘I see,’ her head lowered, ‘-I’m sorry for what happened,’ she looked at the guild, ‘-I’ll be more careful.’

Hand locked with Xula, the new piece of intel gave a somewhat lead for it had to be connected with Dorchester.

Chapter 269: Quarter-Finals

Ignoring the brewing trouble, the focus was placed onto the match. In a few minutes, Helga from Sepmora and Natalie of the Eastern Claireville academy would go toe to toe. Coming into this event, most of the combatants were rather unknown. Basing prediction was random, most chose by appearance. That led to many betting on the Adventurer, not knowing that setting and type of combat was best suited for mages. Not just any mage, but students who were trained specially for the time at hand.

Opposite one another, a witch versus a student of the church. If it were a few centuries back, at a time where magic was seen as taboo, this might well have been an inquisition.

“Staff paired with elemental spirit versus a special type of magic, body enhancement. They call it Devine Protection, one original of the eastern branch. From what I’ve seen so far, it turns the wielder into a stronger fighter. The focus isn’t on expelling the mana, but rather, using it to reach a higher plane. Figures as much for the Paladin is chosen from those students,” teleported with a grey mist, the sage.

“Good to have you,” said Staxius with an unbothered tone.

“Likewise, majesty, likewise,” the voice held a grudge.

“Seems that our team was defeated without much trouble,” added Xula in a not so inviting tone.

“Perish the thought,” argued Staxius, “-the elven siblings did more than was let on. I followed their fight closely, during the entirety of yesterday, they protected Eira without letting anyone know,” the face seemed proud, “-serving their princess. Admirable though I feel that their potential was lost due to some feeling of longing towards their home.”

.....

“I do have to give thine eyes credit, majesty, they were adamant on putting her highness to the semi-final. As we speak, the brother, as the crowd knows is bedridden, backed out so that to not cause any trouble. To put it in his words, ‘-I’d rather tend to my sister than fighting our princess. I’m but a rogue, my duty is doing the dirty work, not fight against the one I’ve sworn to protect.’

“I see,” they faced forward, “-good children,” added Xula, her face eased into a smile.

Loud chatter turned silent; the combatants entered the arena. Helga, dressed in light clothes with wands on the waist as opposed to a staff. Brown hair, tanned complexion, and a charming face – her body seemed well-trained for a school that swore to not educate murderers.

Opposite her, a girl in white and gold uniform, a small chest piece, guards for her arms and legs, not cumbersome – lighter than what a thief might use. Opposed to the brother, she had two rapiers each with a flowery guard. Refine and elegant, bearing an unusual shade of blond hair paired with black eyes – her face kept a smile, one dignified and not obnoxious.

At the same time, the first arena welcomed the other four fighters.

“May this fight be fair and entertaining,” said Helga.

“May the gods bless our fight,” added Natalie.

Beep, two horns that signal the start, cheer filled the whole arena. It echoed outwards the academy, even the town – further out, could hear the noise travel.

Instantly, Helga took a long-range strategy, using her elementals, she summoned an Earth and Water golem. The limit for a mage that level was three – that done, she summoned a guardian spirit of the Lightning attribute. The latter floated around her head and transferred mana to her wand.

Using swordsmanship seemed to be disadvantageous, however, all that crumbled the moment she used her Sword-arts. One reserved for the candidates trained to become the next Paladin. Body-enhancement cast, the lady planted her foot forwards and dashed.

novelusb.com

Earth and Water Golem: Mud wall, a wall that made the floor unstable, it grew hard to keep a good balance. Her presumptuous strike was cut short, Natalie could but jump backward. Normally, when an opponent fell back, it created an opening. Not this time, the girl had planned and called forth Hundred Swords of Retribution. A high-level spell, one that was placed as a forgotten art. A dozen sword materialized behind her back in a spiral, each slice she made, the hovering sword obeyed.

Weapons-Art: Wand of Absolute Defense, with a smirk, Helga conjured an SS-ranked protection spell.

Weapons-Art: Wand of Retribution, of the Shadow and Wind attribute, the secondary weapon cast Null, an attack spell of which not many knew what it did. Each with their own secret arts, went all out since it was for the Semi-final. Back and forth, the battle raged, one entertaining and that kept many on their toes.

Meanwhile, in the first arena; divided into two: Adrian Odalf versus Nathan Green and Vipán Eqihr versus Tatiana Redwood. From the Order, Adrian and Vipán dominated their battle. It grew to be so one-sided that the second battle was canceled in fear of Tatiana getting killed. Vipán, holding a grudge, unleashed his unique element; gold. Anything he touched turned into the precious metal – able to break the material and use it how he wanted, Vipán never moved. From Lances to arrows and guns, weapons were called forth as if being nothing but a mere circus act. Unleashed, each weapon traveled at sonic speeds to slice, shoot, and slam his opponent. In less than five minutes, covered in blood – Tatiana fell without being able to move a muscle.

Next to him, Adrian versus Nathan. The former had the advantage – an element invisible to the eye, he used another hidden art, *Invisible Blade,* with only a handle, he fought and landed strikes on Nathan. Unable to see the weapon, tis was a fight unfair at its peak.

“Use as many arts, spell, augmentation, I’ll never lose to the likes of you,” with a scream, Nathan charged, *I’ll fight using all of my strength,* a splash of crimson hue, *Sword-Arts Seven-seas first Strike: Raising Tide,* as gentle as water, the blade flowed.

Hit, Adrian fell despite the odds. Next, unconscious, Nathan followed suit. ‘I did it, master, I fought using all my strength. Relying on the mana will never be something I can do. You saw the potential in my strength – I’ll use every ounce of power I have to fight my way to the top. That’s what I’ll do – to get strong and protect my sister, that is what I swore.

Short as it might have seemed, the battle lasted for a full fifteen-minutes. The fastest win came from Vipan, next was Nathan. To that, the screen came and displayed the third fight for the duo fought. With a smile, the participants left for the medical camp.

“It has been thirty minutes,” voiced the commentator, “-neither does Helga nor Natalie wish to fall. They’re giving everything they got.”

“I do agree,” added Sophie, “-Helga and her special weapons are what has kept her from getting hit. Natalie, on the other hand, looks fatigued, her lost spell did come as a surprise. This has turned into a battle of attrition – bear in mind that whoever wins has another match.”

“GO! GO! GO!”

“FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!”

Moved by their spirit, the crowd chanted without care to who was to win.

“Helga has lost,” commented Staxius.

“How can you be so sure?” argued Xula for she wanted her to win.

“I do agree with his majesty on this one,” added the sage.

“She relied too much on her wand whilst her elemental could be doing so much more. I get using thine best attack and defense since it makes sense. Sadly, in a real fight, what do you do if all the cards are on the table. You’re left vulnerable and easy to exploit, Natalie figured as much – that girl has more in her.”

Slash, as voiced, Helga fell, her wands broke after an all-out attack.

“AFTER A LONG-FOUGHT BATTLE, NATHALIE COMES OUT ON TOP,” the commentator screamed.

‘Guess Eira will be fighting her,’ he stood,’-should be a fun battle to watch. Swords versus swords.’

“Join us in one hour for the semi-finals,” thus ended the matches.

“Theodore, Sage, and Lucy don’t leave their side for an instant,” whispered Staxius on the way out. To which, they headed inside for lunch. ‘What move will you make, puppet-master,’ hovered outside, the All-seeing eyes activated.

The fight has ended, what are we to do. Target One returned without a sign of injury, did the marksman even hit?

Yes, he hit the priority target. Don't forget our real objective; we must wait for the opportune moment. Move Team Beta to the front, we'll switch to close range.

"Cake?" a scan of the area revealed nothing, "-I've some new information about the possible target. I'm sure that it's Gallienne – and the threat of a leak is nothing but paranoia. After careful consideration, it would be bad if this got leaked. Move the agents into town, report any and everything. Arrange the best hitmen we have to come in the crowd. Blend in, do whatever is needed, the priority is to have people covering everything."

"Roger that, I'll move at least twenty members inside. A few on the roads, some blending in the crowd at the taverns. I dare say that we've got Claireville under control. There are also snipers. I'm surprised how much weight the name Shadow has. I heard from Jason that the moment Karlson called in a meeting to decide who'd come here, all of them volunteered without a second thought."

"Good to hear, keep me inform," to which he landed and headed back inside. 'Your turn,' he sat and had lunch.

Good, they're eating. Let's move in with plan A.

"Queen Gallienne," voiced Staxius, "-who do you think will win the next match?"

"Isn't it obvious," she smiled, "-Eira of course," her face seemed troubled. "Forgive my asking, but are you Eira's biological parent or...?"

"Why do you ask so?" meals came in one after the other.

"It's but a mere urge of curiosity. I can't help but notice her face, her eyes, her hair, and her unusually strong element. Not to mention, her age. The talk we had earlier about an heir got me thinking," she leaned, "-I did conceive a child around sixteen to seventeen years ago," seated far apart with only a few chosen ones. Touching on the rather sensitive subject felt as if it were a must.

'Don't tell me,' the heart shuddered, "-was the babe thrown in a river perchance. Supposed that the said river led to Dorchester..."

"King Staxius," intervened Queen Mother Sely, "-let's focus on the meal at hand," she signaled to the waiters bringing food.

"Hey," tugged Xula, "-I read their minds, I'm afraid this isn't going to be easy to hear, but there's a strong possibility that Eira is her child."

"Yes," the waiters went away, "-it was Piers who took care of the matter, but he did leave our child on a raft hoping that she'd be picked up by someone else," she said in a regretful tone.

"Queen Gallienne," he added with a deep voice, "-I've strong reason to believe that both you and Eira are related. There's no doubt about it, the ice-element is similar. I had my suspicion since the day I first saw her, you both look identical. If she tied her hair the same way as yours, I'd not be surprised if you'd be viewed as twins."

"A-are you saying," her eyes opened, "-Eira is my daughter?" she grabbed his arms.

"The possibility is there," he returned a glare, "-even so, that girl is part of my family. She's third in line for the Ardanian throne, I care not what you say, majesty. Eira Haggard was a babe abandoned and forgotten."

"I understand what you say," voiced Sely, "-though our blood courses through her veins. She could stand to inherit the entirety of Hidros, long has my daughter tried to conceive – the regret felt for abandoning a babe came to hurt her farther down the line," the conversation turned sour.

"Please," interjected Xula, "-I've no wish to partake in a meal through this frivolous argument. Eira isn't someone's property, the young lady will decide her fate," she turned to Staxius, "-my husband has accepted that fact."

'Not again,' all around him grew dark, '-if Eira is found to be the next successor, the assassins might come after her. Why did she have to bring up this conversation? Another one of my children is at risk of death,' the eyes turned empty. "-Queen Gallienne," a subtle aura of dread oozed, "-I care not what you have to say. I'll wage war if it's forced. Eira Haggard will always be my daughter. If she chooses to return to the Riverty family, then I'll happily accept her decision. However," he glared, "-do anything that might remotely be forceful or malicious and I swear-"

"-Calm down," Xula pulled on his collar and fed a spoonful of fruit, "-good, isn't it?" her head tilted with a smile.

Chapter 270: Semi-finals

'Scary,' he thought, the way Xula stared him was far more intense than usual.

"King Staxius," spoke Sely, "-I do apologize if I've offended somehow," she nodded gently and focused on the food.

"Staxius," Gallienne whispered, "-I am very sorry for leaving her alone. Honestly, I just wanted to bear a child, is that too much to ask? An heir to continue my father's lineage," bearing a gloomy stare, she watched as more food was brought in.

"I understand where you're coming from," voiced Xula after having calmed Staxius, "-I can promise one thing, you'll get to meet her very soon. Hiding away her true identity and bloodline will but be selfish. If the girl is going to be independent, I'll leave said choice in her hands," her face turned to her husband.

"It's something I have to live with, there's nothing to it," on that, the conversation ended. The room felt tense, guard lowered, Ernis could but gave a few glares for he understood naught. Lucy, Theodore, and Prophecy remained alert, their gaze ever so wandering.

"My lady, do you wish to have some wine?" a few minutes later, a butler, dressed in an elegant suit, walked. In hand, a very expensive looking bottle.

"Sure," Gallienne accepted, for the gift came from the Goldberg family. Seated a few tables across, the lady and her daughter had dinner. The reason she knew it was a gift, the lady gave a smile.

.....

That's the signal.

BANG, an explosion came from near the entrance. Smoke filled the room, the guards jumped in and screamed, "-protect the royal family."

"What happened?" asked Xula.

"Get behind," without thought, he shielded her with his body, '-three foreign auras,' the eyes closed, '-bearing malicious intent. Are they making their move?' he thought and remained on alert. Doing anything out of the blue could trigger unforeseen events.

"Go Prophecy," impatient, Xula sent her Spirit. Three faint flashes of light through the smoke later, the would-be attackers fell to the floor.

"Is everyone ok?" asked the head waiter.

"Nothing to report so far," voiced the guards.

"Oh my god..." on the floor, laying in blood, the attackers and a victim.

"W-wait..." baffled, Gallienne lost her footing for all three wore the royal emblem.

"Majesty," screamed a noble from across the room, "-are you responsible for this?" her voice held contempt and anguish.

"Gallienne," Sely whispered and took a strong foot forward, "-How dare you to speak with such insolence," the voice unforgiving.

"I'm confused," asked Xula, the smoke cleared. On the floor with the broken bottle of wine, the head-butler of the Goldberg family. He laid a few steps away from the Lady. A bullet wound was seen on his head followed by the weapon on the floor.

"He j-jumped in," whimpering paired with sniffles, "-he s-save m-me," cried the lady. Things looked bad, one might not have realized it that instant. What transpired was just the assassination attempt of another noble, but one with the rank of Duke. Eye-catching evidence revealed that they were sent by the Royal family.

"I k-knew it," she continued to cry, the nobles gathered around in comfort. Speechless, Gallienne could but stare without any feeling.

novelusb.com

"Excuse me," voiced Staxius, "-tactless as it sounds, why would the royal family go after you?"

"W-why you ask?" she turned and stared, "-t-that's because," with a heavy breath, "-I'm King Blain's illegitimate child," her cries grew harsher, "-does that satisfy you?" she wept.

"I'm sure she wanted to silence her due to her blood," voiced a noble.

"Yes, without an heir, her majesty would have to relinquish the throne in case of her being unable to rule," murmurs filled the room at a growing pace.

"Your attention please," in came an announcement, "-the Semi-finals will start in five minutes, thanks for waiting," cut, the chatter came to a stop.

'You've made your play,' thought Staxius as it unfolded, '-you planned this didn't you,' he stared the Lady who seemed to have calmed despite the death of a close one. 'The Goldberg's,' he sighed, '-I should have known. Her being the illegitimate child is proof enough, she's next in line in case of Gallienne's death. Why bring this up now I wonder, surely if Gallienne dies, all eyes would point to her. Is her death the real objective?' the hall emptied. On the way out, said in whispers, doubts of those supporting Gallienne's faction.

'A coup d'état,' he stopped.

"We can't afford to wait, come on," in came Xula, she took his hand and led them outside. Eira's match got her excited.

"Are you ok?" he asked after the queen sat.

"N-no," her face seemed beaten, "-I've not the energy to make my way out of this trap. The opposition is far too great," she rested her head between her laps.

"Don't look so disheartened," voiced Xula, "-didn't Staxius say he would take care of the situation. This falls under his responsibility as well, sit back and relax," added with a smile, her attitude was cavalier.

"Sit back and enjoy," he commented. 'Back to what I was thinking. If the real objective isn't to kill her, then what's the deal. Her death isn't going to happen, that's off the table. Is shaking up the pillars holding her throne that viable a strategy. The unfortunate death of the butler caused doubt. Not to mention the coming of the light of the hidden bloodline. It gives rise to another possible ruler, one that had been hidden so far. Going by the greed these people have, some will try to get in the Duchess's good side after that statement,' peering over the once sobbing Lady, as predicted, noblemen of differing factions, approached with words of comfort.'

"Lucy," Ernis spoke, "-do you think everything is going to be ok? From what I've seen, the other players are on the verge of winning. I can see the tides changing, my injury was first, then came the butler's death not to mention the more than incriminating evidence of the crest."

"No need to broadcast it," gritted, her face remained stern.

The amazement of what was to come next, he stared towards Staxius. 'That's surprising,' he thought, '-why doesn't he look the least bit bothered.'

'Those who are trying to turncoat don't realize anything,' he caught a glimpse of the Queen, her face changed into one ice-cold. 'They're against the shrewdest girl I know.'

"King Staxius," having thought long and hard, the voice, one reminiscent of the olden days, "-I'm sure you realize this, but we're under attack."

"Have you decided to take it seriously?" he asked.

"Yeah, many players wish for my downfall," her fist tightened, "-I swore to not cause harm, sadly," Their eyes met, each thriving for death, "-I'll walk a blood-filled path if it means that the kingdom doesn't fall into those scum's hands."

“Glad to hear,” after which, the commentator came to life.

“Is everything alright?” asked Xula.

“Let’s just say that she got some motivation to change the way things are ruled around here,’ to which, Natalie and Eira stepped inside the arena. ‘The plot might have begun since the crowning of the new Queen. Goes to show how grudges can be kept for months on end. I feel it, the winds of change blow.’

‘The moment of truth is here,’ thought Eira. Greatsword on her back, her entire persona changed from what it was yesterday. Having seen what her opponent could do, it was time to go all out.

“Ice-Princess, defeating that SSS bot doesn’t mean anything to me. I’m going to win this match without you having the time to use that strange power. I care not if I die, I can’t afford to lose this match, you’ll see my resolve,” uttered on the way out, the girl had but one thing in mind, victory.

‘We care not what reason you have, there’s but one thing I’m here for, and that’s to prove my name as Eira Haggard.’

Opposite one another, the crowd grew silent. The tension palpable not even the commentator could bear to speak amidst such heart-tugging exchange.

“Let’s have a good match,” said Eira in sportsmanship.

“Lets,” Natalie snickered.

Beep, instantly, the Hundred Blades cast, then flew as if bullets. Unshaken, Eira planted her feet to the ground and summoned forth ice-barriers without incantation. Her whole fighting style changed. The swords that seemed more deadly earlier, felt as if dulled toys. No time to breathe, Eira charged, using Shadow-step.

Not easy as she thought, Natalie called forth another mysterious skill, then leaped, and landed after a backflip. The skill, unnamed, caused the ground to shake. Shaky balance meant less powerful attacks, not only did it affect Eira, but her also.

Clang, however, that didn’t matter for she had years to train said skill into her fighting style. On the defensive, Eira blocked and parried, her feet didn’t move one bit. The fight might have seemed to be on Natalie’s favor, however, not moving displayed two things: her strength and excellent swordsmanship.

In the first arena, Nathan versus Vipan. Shuddered, no noise, nothing; an explosion left and unconscious body. Presiding over without a sweat, Vipan covered in golden armor. “You fought well for not having any abilities. The sad truth is,” he turned,”-no matter how hard one trains, no matter how much work they put in – there will always be someone who’s done twice as much as you did. Talented, hardworking, geniuses, differing words to say one thing – a person who’s outdone everyone in every single way. Tis the sad truth, reaching the top isn’t easy. Once you’re there, people below will fight to drag you down. Despite that, even if you’re unshaken – the loneliness will turn in thine worst enemy.”

“Argo of the Sword,” muttered by a single man, “-Argo of the Sword: the Returning Hero from the seven-year war against the Frozen nomads.”

“Any idea what that means?” ask Auic.

“I’ve heard of the Seven-year war, it’s a battle that ended two years back. Many were sent to fight off an invasion from an army of undead soldiers. Not that anyone would know about it, the details have been kept secret. In that war, a young man distinguished himself, taking battalion after battalions with golden sword and armor,” Undrar explained.

“If the war was supposed to be secret, how do you know about it then?” Avon raised an important question.

“I’ve my sources,” she averted the inquiry, ‘-whoever wins the next match will go against a boy that embodies the real qualities of a hero. Ones told in fables, ones that are subject to many fantasies of young girls.’

Lightning Strike: Shadow Variant, low to the ground, a single step of which a thin horizontal line sliced across Nathalie, the latter fell with a broken sword. Injured, the tip of the Greatsword clipped her stomach. On her knees, the lady fell with a large injury.

“And the winner is Eira Haggard,” no cheers nor applause.

“Sorry about that,” knelt, the ice-princess performed first aid to stop the bleeding.

“I lost... brother,” taken on a stretcher, hands covered turned red, the crowd cheered. A wholesome display of affection and care, a noble trait that many appreciated.

Sophie and Aceline came to close the event. Time, 17:00, crowds grew around the stalls outside. The town came to life; shaken up, the nobles of Hidros disappeared without a word said. Standing on the roof of Claireville Academy, a lonely figure of a man. He breathed in the air and watched as children jumped and ran towards their parents.

“Must be nice,” a sharp voice came from behind.

“Blissful is the better word, the joy of seeing someone you care about grow. Their changes, subtle quirks, and unique persona – tis all worth it.”

“I heard about Lizzie’s death.”

“There’s no need to bring up the past, what is done, is done,” he turned, “-what is it that brings you here, Queen Gallienne?”

“I’m here to discuss the future of Hidros,” she stood with a determined look.

“As you please.”