

Death Magic 281

Chapter 281: Birth of Phantom

Brr, Brr, flashes of light across a dimly lit room. As if replicating thunder and lightning, the table vibrated, ‘-who is it at this hour,’ focused on her screen, Cake reluctantly reached for her phone. Lollipop in mouth, the sender read, Shadow. Dumbfounded, the candy fell to the floor, “-it’s him,” without a second left to spare, reaching for a trench coat – the door barged open.

“Lady Cake, is something the matter?” at intervals stood guards dressed in black. Each wore glasses with pistols and assault rifles.

“Gather the troupes,” glasses off, she walked, her high-heels clopped menacingly. Order’s given, three of the guards sprinted down the stairs – an elevator was called to the fourth floor. Outside, two runways of two kilometers in length with lights to help at night. Back against the office building, to the right, two hangars as big as the office itself. The latter, despite how it appeared, was immense. To its left, four helipads with guards on the lookout. Around the perimeter, a five-meter-high wall with guard-towers on each corner. The overall architecture was clean and solid, nothing stood out apart from the fancy looking office building.

“We’re here,” stood in line, around twenty men dressed the same of which their skin complexion differentiated from one another.

“Good,” as the leader, she faced them full on with a glare, “-listen up,” they went on guard, “-the leader of Phantom sent a message. As most of you know, the one in charge of our family is Shadow, else known as the alchemist or sometimes referred to as the Black Death,” she paced from left to right. ‘The message I received, was blank. It read in the note that if ever he was in trouble, he’d give a sign. I figured as much. Eight months to build a fortress,’ her gaze wandered despite being challenged by the night. The moment I spoke to Karlson about what Shadow’s dream was, he instantly called the Godfather. The next thing I know was hundreds of kilos of gold in bars traveled across the ocean. Not only that, but many construction companies were employed, with that amount of manpower, the process grew easier. As for the land, a former member named Viper sent over deeds of lands which had Staxius’s name as the owner. The border goes as far as the eye can see, I can’t imagine what string he pulled,” far away, rotors came to life. Loud and intimidating, the blades spun without care, the pressure lifted dust off the landing pad.

“I want two units of five members, each unit will have its own helicopter. We’re going on a rescue mission, the destination is the border between Oxshield and Kreston,” they walked over, “-as for me,” she stared the main character, an attack helicopter with shark-decals.

“Boss, we’re ready for liftoff,” yelled across one of the squad leaders.

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“Good,” an armored door slid open, “-we need to make it there before sunrise. Don’t fire unless I give the signal,” headphones on, each was connected with one another. Apart from the one Cake used, the other two were also armored but without guns, mainly used for transportation of people or cargo.

'I can't wait to see the look on his face,' she smirked, three helicopters took off. In formation, they moved towards the border. 'The RS-F2, which costs around 125,000 Gold, and the RS-F1: Armored-Variant which is around 70,000 Gold each. I've no idea why and how, but Renaud gifted the RS-F1 whilst the Overlord, a man so secretive none knows his voice let alone face, sent over the RS-F2. Shadow is loved and admired by the whole organization,' focused, the sun rose, it glared across the cockpit. Aviator glasses on, the pilot, also a member of Phantom as shown by a blank badge, flew without stopping.

Meanwhile, barely awake, close to passing out, Staxius moved. The girl they rescued slept; her lightness turned into a heavy burden as the time continued. The impact of forcing Nike's wings made itself apparent – Blood-Arts could barely keep the injuries in check.

"Sorry to say this," drowned, "-we won't make it," voiced Elliot.

"I agree with him," nodded Sharon, exhausted. "We've been running for god knows how long. Their forces are sure to catch us soon, I can feel them coming," as she said, the bushes behind moved briskly.

"The fence," pointed Elista, "-f-freedom," she came too, "-s-so c-close yet s-so far."

"It's not the time to be poetic," fired the sniper. Backs against the fence, the entrance was around two-kilometers to the right.

"There's only one thing to do," placed on the ground, "-try and take out as many as you can," ordered Staxius, "-I'll break the fence."

"You can't," argued Adete, "-we don't have enough blood. All is being used to stop thine organs from breaking – if you fall here, we're all doomed."

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"I know," tearing open the right thumb with a flick, *Blood-Arts: Orenmir,* barely long enough to be considered as a short-sword, *Lightning-Strike: Shadow Variant,* eyes closed, what little mana was left transferred to the last attack. *Clang,* clean-cut, he fell as soon as the fence broke. He laid and faced the orangish sky, "-go on and escape. I'll catch up in a few hours," he ordered, "-I want to sleep." *BANG, BANG,* laid beside, "-I made a vow that I'd be your servant if my sister was rescued. A servant must always stay with his master, that's the contract I signed – say what you want, I'm staying right here," one by one, the infantry unit of Kreston jumped out gun's blazing.

"Just go," grass as tall as him had overgrown the area, it made it hard to be spotted.

"LISTEN," yelled Adete, "-take the girls and escape. Don't worry about us, we'll be fine," her voice held contempt. One by one, the soldiers closed in, the sun rose – "let's go," urged Sharon, "-It's not time for heroics. The old man will be fine," to which after a closer look, her eyes turned in shame. Blood had blackened around the face, body, and clothes – half of the thumb missing, an eye barely opened.

"What happened to the plan about an escape?" asked Sharon, "-was it but a lie, a white lie so we'd not lose faith?"

"Shut up," he smiled, "-back up has arrived."

OPEN FIRE, Gatling gun reigned supreme, the sound of a dragon breathing fire. No concern to its surrounding, missiles, explosions, heavy arsenal of weapons – everything used.

“What is this?” laid, a rainbow of fire, the ground trembled in fear, bodies flew, limbs landed from one place to another.

Go, go, go, ordered Cake, hovered, the squads jumped and ran.

*Bang, bang, bang,” some silenced, and some deafening, men in black tuxedos surrounded the escapees.

“Who are you people?” asked Elliot.

“We are those without name, we are those without homes, we live and die in the shadows, we’re Phantom,” to which, “-let’s move,” the squad leader ordered. Hands around broad shoulders, Sharon, Elista, and Elliot were escorted whilst being backed by other fighters. The Gatling gun continued to fire without end, a gunfight began between Kreston’s infantry and Phantom.

“Lady Cake,” through the earpiece, “-Master Shadow has been found and identified.”

“What are you waiting for, take him in,” she ordered.

“The heart rate has stopped, no pulse, no sign of life, ma’am, he’s dead,” said a medic.

“I don’t care, just bring him in,” her voice seemed agitated over the transmission, with nods and looks of shock, dragged across the grass – a lifeless corpse placed inside the same chopper as Cake. *Let’s move out,* without fail and no casualties, they returned.

“Shoot anyone who dares to point a gun at us, we’re still not in the clear,” headphones removed, “-I’m going to check on him,” she stood and moved to the back.

‘Look at him,’ she thought then leaned against the door. “Are you dead?” a few taps on the cold-cheeks made her shudder.

“Don’t kneel and look as if you’ve lost a loved one,” in came Adete, “-don’t you have some mana potions or something. I’m pretty sure that they’re ready for sale,” eyes narrowed, she asked as if a strict mother.

“Matter of fact,” stood,”-we do have supplies for adventurers,” she reached into a medical box, “-I doubt how it might help a dead-person,” the fear in the words being said was felt through her shaky tone.

“Pour everything in his mouth,” bold and unthreatened.

“Sure,” blurred, with a lump in her throat, Cake poured flask after flask into the body. It seemed disrespectful to treat someone deceased in such a manner.

Acting as the catalyst, with each potion, the mana refilled little by little. After reaching a threshold of around one-fifth of his normal capacity, which was half in comparison to a normal human – Auto-regeneration kicked in. From face to thumb to legs, a dark-purple light enveloped its host – a few seconds later, a mark burnt itself on the right arm. “Cough,” sat upright, “-I’m alive,” he breathed, “-we made it out?” as if nothing happened, nonchalant, he asked.

“We made it out?” confused, Cake leaned closer, “-are you alive?” she poked his cheeks.

“Cut it out,” without looking, he held her finger, “-I’m alive,” a cold glance. “Where are we and what is this?”

“You’d be surprised,” deciding not to get involved, she smiled nervously, “-we’re in helicopters. A third of our fleet, there’s one spare on stand-by at the base.”

“Are you saying that the airfield is built?”

“Yes, it’s fully operational,” she smiled.

“Well done,” he smiled, “-what about funds, how much did it cost?”

“Around two-million gold for the base; we were sponsored by The Godfather. Apparently, the project caught the Overlord’s ear – he willingly gave us the money in bars of gold and diamonds. Let me tell you, the amount of cash we have in the bank is mind-blowing – a fortune that not even dukes possess.”

“What about returning the money, I’m sure you know that he didn’t give us the cash for nothing. We’re meant to pay it back in full,” he turned with a skeptical look.

“No need to worry,” she smiled, “-I’ve already repaid the Overlord with interest. From the bars alone, the price was estimated at around three million, using a few tips and tricks, I managed to export it the mainland and sell it for twice the price. I’m not the strategist for nothing,” she laughed proudly, “-Phantom has turned to the selling of arms. There are countries where buying weapons is banned. Therefore,” she stared out the window, “-I decided it would be best for us to take a break in a field that none has really bothered to touch. We sell everything from pistols to magical wands. The more restricted it is, the more profit we get.”

“You’ve been busy I see,” not fully recovered, the mind could barely comprehend what she had said. As the airfield was being built, Cake traveled around the world in good faith. Her objective, to make acquaintance with powerful leaders. Hidros, still ruled under a monarchy as opposed to other places where laws have grown restricting – allowed the movement of narcotics and weapons. Secretive, and under the table, using air as the medium, she bought, sold, and traded many things, some included humans at times.

“What do the other gangs think about it?”

“The Godfathers and Overlord are not opposed to the idea. Rather, they often bring clientele and purchase weapons through us. You see, this unexplored field has many pros and cons.”

“I’m glad,” he breathed, “-Cake, my secretary, you’ve continued expanding and continuing the dream I spoke about. Thank you for everything,” he turned.

“No worries boss, you did say that the underground will be my chance to rebuilt an empire I lost,” she paused, ‘-not only that, the reason I decided to become an arms dealer was for you. The day of retribution will soon come, war will ravage the land, we’ll make money out of death. Once we’ve amassed an army of our own, we’ll take to the frost-land and annihilate Snow and everyone remotely linked to them. That’s the vow I made when Lizzie died – she was thine daughter, and someone important.”

“My Lady, we’re five-minutes till landing,” voiced the pilot.

“On it,” she returned to the cockpit, “-sit tight,” she winked, the massive compound came in view.

Chapter 282: Quest Complete

“We’ve landed,” soft as a fluffy pillow, the helicopter touched. On stand by stood the other guards.

“Welcome back,” the door slid open, Cake jumped out.

“Where’s the stretcher?” she asked with a piercing voice, startled, medics from outside town arrived in ambulances.

“Over here ma’am,” they pointed at the white and red vans.

“Where are we?” asked Elliot as he stepped out, besides, Sharon and Elista. Each was baffled by such a place, enormous and menacing, none would have guessed it from above. Once landed, it put into perspective how large the area was.

“You ok?” fatigued, Staxius spoke and got off with the help of Cake who held a hand, “-never would I have guessed you built the place in such little time,” in awe, the eyes wandered, “-it’s better than I had envisioned.”

“Excuse us, ma’am,” the squad leaders, in total, four, stood before the troupes and the chopper. “May we ask who we’ve rescued?” a little perplexed, unrest settled.

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“Mind thine tongue,” without provocation, her voice changed from friendly to strict, “-the man we rescued is the leader of Phantom. Be disrespectful once again and I’ll have thine life as payment,” cold, the shout reached the other three.

“Things don’t look ok...” added Elista with a cough, “-at least we’re out of Kreston,” she smiled, “-that place is somewhere I never want to hear nor speak about.”

“I agree,” nodded Sharon with an injured arm, “-back home, I feel relieved.”

“Not me,” skeptical, Elliot had doubts, “-this place isn’t something a man can just buy. Do you realize how much money and connection one needs to build such a fortress? Two runways and hangars, there’s also the flying vehicles and fire-power that rivals my weapon.”

“You three,” Cake’s attention turned, “-come here,” she ordered, to which they obeyed. Ambulances were at the ready, “-take them away,” the medics rushed in with stretchers.

“This may come across as rude but,” voiced, “-I think Master needs the attention more than we do,” Elliot gave a piece of his thought.

“Who needs attention?” spoke Staxius, “-I’m fine,” to which he coughed, “-I need rest,” healed to some extent what ailed was the lack of energy and mana.

“Heard that,” glanced Cake, “-everyone who’s remotely injured is going to the hospital,” thus, the two ambulances filled with patients. Direction, a hospice built on the northern side of town – one with the financial backing of the DG.

Massive gates shut with a siren; the scenery changed. Mostly worn out and bullet filled buildings were spotted, some had broken windows whilst others were covered with mold and rust.

Meanwhile, far away, inside Arda, Queen Gallienne sat with a big belly. “Majesty, please take a rest for now,” pleaded a maid with braided hair, her nose covered with freckles and large ears – an elf.

“There’s work to do,” heavy, her movement was a little sluggish, “-it’s not like I’m overdoing it,” she turned and smiled, “-I’ll be fine as long as I complete the minimum required work. Tell the Old sage to not be that anxious, I know everyone is worried but I’m fine, truly,” a calm explanation which forced the maid to bow. ‘Tiresome,’ the door closed, in front rested a table with papers, ‘-eight months,’ she sighed and sat. Memories about the day he left returned, vague:

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“The King of Arda has headed off to Kreston. There was an unexpected development, the scheme involving the Prince and I was but a diversion. The real game happened in Rosespire – Sharon, Apostle of Syhton, was abducted. I’ve strong reason to blame Kreston since the pope views her as a pseudo apostle,” composed, the details were further explained.

“Just like that?” angry with good reason, “-he headed off to that land of fanatic to save someone he has no connection too?” eyes turned red, “-DOES THAT SEEM FAIR?” Xula’s tone didn’t accept what had happened.

“It may seem as if I’m using the King for my benefit,” regretful, Gallienne’s eyes spoke the truth, “-I never wanted to use him in such a manner. I’m already deeply indebted to Staxius – no matter what I say or do; tis was a decision he made. After all, I did promise that if Sharon was brought back safe and sound – then I’d take that burden off his shoulders.”

“Always doing things on your own,” sighed Xula, the memories faded, “-leaving a lady in such a state. I’ve got an idiot for a husband, a loveable idiot,” with a smile and a kick felt, she continued her work.

Inside Rosespire; adventuring grew to be more popular. Monsters evolved and were of higher numbers. In response to that, the guilds recruited more people – together, they fought and grew stronger. Plaustan turned out to be the new destination. A tower reaching several kilometers up with the top never insight – a dungeon. Name given; Tower of Aris. Many expedition groups were sent; monsters were stronger the higher one climbed. A challenge and goal to work towards. The highest party had climbed was Floor 25, the floor of Minotaur and half-spiders and half-lizards. Floor 10, a death-trap for tier 7- Sapphire and lower. Reason for it was a boss-ranked monster name Galiante, a rock-monster with a giant hammer as a weapon. Ranking around ten-meters in size with very strong defense – many have died trying to figure out the weakness. Still, it didn’t stop people from trying, the Qaisars dropped was worth the risk.

On that, everyone with an adventuring tag could enter at their peril. Thanks to that, the Province of Plaustan benefited with the coming business – many merchants, traders, and blacksmiths settled into a makeshift town named Aria.

Kniq's name grew to be popular. Achilles especially, the lady was named a true-born hero by most. Her ability to overcome any hardship gave birth to songs and ballads. Her legacy forever engraved in song. Crossing borders, bards made and carried their art. Relatively small and not having accepted any members, the Guild was known for only going on extreme quests. Dispatched only when the situation grew out of hand – their Wings, once spotted on the battlefield, gave a spark of determination and hope.

Fresh breeze blew from the east, helpless, white curtains flowed and obeyed the winds every command. A radio, soft, provided an ambiance that served to break an otherwise morguelike silence. Stationed around the building, men in black sitting inside cars. "Master?"

"Elliot," awake – the eyes opened with freshness paired with lightness. Checkered marble tiles in white and black, a light, not that extravagant on the ceiling. Besides, on another bed, rested a familiar face.

"You're awake?" Elliot asked.

"No, I'm still sleeping," sarcastically, Staxius sat upright and looked around. "Where are we?"

"A hospital," another voice came from the left, close to the window, "-Lady Cake brought us here," as if a stickman drawn by kids, Elista spoke with half a smile.

"Old man," directly across, "-who the heck are you?" asked Sharon with a confused voice.

"No one particular," dazed to focused, "-Adete," he called.

"What is it?" sat on a fruit basket and enjoying grapes, her tone was displeased.

"Care to fill me on the details of what happened after we reached the border. My memory is vague at best – I can faintly remember a shark as a helicopter."

"You don't remember?" asked Adete.

"Obviously not, else why would I ask?" a little out of character, the words came without filter nor care.

Hovering to his shoulder, a detailed summary of what transpired was given. 'We can't afford to lose time,' wide awake, "-where's Cake?" slid across the bed, feet inside white-slippers, "-give me a second," reaching for the door, a sweat heavy hallway came in sight. People in wheelchairs, a few guards beside the door, and a lady wearing a black leather jacket who spoke on her phone.

"Wasn't that Shadow?" exchanging glances, the guards reached out, "-sir," he stopped.

"What is it?" he turned with a cold stare, "-if it's not of importance, then I'd appreciate you letting go."

"I do apologize," said one of the guards, "-but lady Cake has ordered us to not let anyone leave," unable to see what they thought for they wore glasses, Staxius's patience ran dry.

Death Element: Hand of God, without thinking, an arm fell to the ground. "MY ARM," the screams echoed down the hall, every patient and doctor in the vicinity was alerted, "-HELP ME, SOMEONE," he screamed, "-MY ARM IS GONE," a grown man, one who was in good shape, cried.

'What just happened,' subconsciously, the first spell from having attained divinity was unlocked. 'Hand of God,' he thought, 'I know exactly how the spell works. It's a pair of hands that are invisible and controlled using my mind. I can attack, defend, and do anything a psychic could with her mind.'

"God damn it," phone cut, "-BOSS," in came Cake, "-do be mindful of the people you attack," her voice was more disappointed in how that man lost an arm. "I don't mind you killing people, please be more careful, we're already low on manpower." Laid on the floor in a growing puddle of blood, he continued to cry.

"I apologize," *Death Element: Hand of God,* the limb floated, *Blood-Arts: Crimson Thread,* arm reattached, *Skill: Mana Manipulation,* using the victim's mana – Staxius forced the body to heal itself at a faster rate than usual. "It's going to leave a scar," as easy as breathing, he watched as Cake's eyelids kept on opening and closing.

"How powerful did you get?" asked Cake as the guard stood and moved his fingers.

"No idea," the face seemed empty, "-it's as normal as breathing."

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"I need to head to Rosespire right now," he ordered.

"Now?" asked Cake, "-by car I presume?"

"Have you not visited my mansion before, the yard is big enough to accommodate two choppers."

"As you wish, Boss," she smiled, "-before we do that, I'd like to discuss of what is to happen with the people you've brought with?"

"I'll figure something out," he walked and stopped shy of the door, "-be careful next time," a warning to the guard.

"I told you, people, to not be overly confident around him. Shadow is far deadlier than I am," whispered Cake, "-a strong leader was what you pest wanted, then there you have it," she chuckled.

"We're doomed," mumbled the guard to one another.

"Is everyone healed?" asked Staxius upon entering. They nodded in agreement.

"Good," he turned to Sharon, "-I'm taking you to the castle this instant."

"No worries, old man."

"And you two," he turned to Elliot, "-I'm sorry about this," he approached, "-the reason I asked for help back in Kreston was to have a bait in case we could not have escaped. So, you see, I never really had the idea of taking you in," emotionless, how he felt was laid for all to see. "That was what I had planned at the start," he turned to Elista, "-thine story felt a little similar to what I felt sometime in the past," he breathed, "-therefore, I'll make this promise, you will have a place to stay – and expect me to take back the money in full. Take as long as you want, start again, with skills like that – becoming an adventurer and climbing the ranks will be easy."

"I knew it would have happened sooner or later," smiled Elliot, "-nevertheless, I'll always come to thine help if ever the time arises."

"Good, focus on making Elista feel at home, that's your job," to that, exiting the hospice with an armed escort – sat inside an armed RFS; Phantom headed to the airfield. 'I've completed Gallienne's quest. I need to head back to Arda as soon as possible. It's close to nine-months, I can't afford to not be by her side,' staring out the window, memories of the time in Kreston flashed. 'Duke Hawkins, you truly did change side. Sadly, even if Gallienne pushes, you won't move. The Pope is holding you hostage, not only you but the whole province. It'd be foolish to kill him and wipe their religion, those people are far gone to be saved. Mindless brain-washed zombies – it's better to find a more peaceful approach. Even so, that decision will be in how the Queen decides to act. My job is complete as far as concerned.

Chapter 283: Moving on

'Home at last,' hopping out the thunderous helicopter, Staxius stood facing the mansion. The air coming off said place was one of loneliness, one that a stray pet would often give. A sadness unlike anything a human could ever hope to feel – "Boss," snapped from the emptiness displayed by the home, Cake spoke.

"I didn't say this earlier, but no one ever comes by this place any longer. I know that Kniq stayed here till a few months ago – the members moved to settle elsewhere," they walked with Elliot and his sister in tow. "I approached Viola to ask the reason why," they exchanged glances, "-she said that it was too painful to stay alone in this massive house. Auic and Avon moved to a residential district, closer to the guild Headquarters so that they'd be able to work. Deadeyes and Achilles left for Plaustan on special request by the central guild. Viola, on the other hand, returned to Dorchester since they needed help rebuilding," the walk continued.

"What about the Lymsey sisters?"

"They come by every two weeks to clean up," voiced Cake with a faded smile.

"I see," not surprised, they arrived at the road path leading into the garage.

"On another note," seeing him wander towards the garage, Cake added, "-The twins are taking a break from adventuring. I've no idea on the reason why but they returned to studying. Living as if every day was your last has more impact on one's health that is given credit for."

"What about Kniq, are they disbanded?" asked Staxius, the door opened with a faint squeak.

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"No, they're alive and well. The only difference is that they don't take on a random job. The Capital has given them the name of the Special Unit. Only when things are out of hand and quests have grown too hard – only then that are the Winged Warriors called. The money given as rewards for said jobs is enough to survive several months without working."

"I would ask how you know all of that," spoke Staxius as they climbed the stairs, "-but that'd be a waste of breath," the face relaxed. Ghosts of the past, faint murmurs, disfigured silhouettes running across the hall – one of a girl and the other of a fox-eared lady. He could hear what they'd say, 'stop running, you'll catch a cold.' The death of Lizzie hadn't left the conscience yet. 'Adelana was right,' reaching the final

step, he paused and stared, 'the reason she died was that I focused too much on myself. Tunnel vision to sort out the curse of starting over again – in that agenda, I forgot what was important and left a girl to suffer and die.'

"Watch out," yelled Elliot, Staxius stumbled and lost balance.

"Thanks," with a snuffle, "-just a little fatigued," he faced forwards and walked. *Click,* every door opened, he entered and watched for a few minutes then changed the room. Inside, images of they who stayed here played similar to a movie. 'Guess I'll have to get used to loneliness,' he entered his room, '-I'm immortal. The people I know now will soon be a fond memory,' stuffy, it felt heavy and hot, *click,* the balcony opened.

"The mansion sure is extravagant," commented Cake as she joined, "-the pilot looks like an ant from here."

"I guess so," he turned and leaned on the balustrade.

"Why did you not wait for me?" panting, Sharon arrived with sweat dripping off her forehead, "-impatient much," loud breaths followed.

"Now's a good time to ask," she walked and stared up, "-who the hell are you, old man?" the duo behind leaned in closer to have a better hearing.

"Sure are persistent," he mumbled and exchanged a glare to Cake, she understood.

"The person you keep on referring as old man is the leader of Phantom. An Arms-dealer," her tone strict, "-I'm his secretary as well as vice-leader."

"That still doesn't explain why you have a mansion of such magnitude inside the NOBLE DISTRICT," her eyes narrowed further, she seemed to have more questions than before.

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"Cake," ignoring the girl, "-I'm headed to the Castle. Take Elliot and his sister, find them a house or apartment. Give them supplies to last two months, pay for everything – house included, then calculate how much they'll have to repay," turning to the siblings, "-a fresh start, go out, meet new people, and work towards repaying the debt. Take how long you want," on that, he stepped inside, "-Sharon, you're coming with me."

"Is he serious?" Elliot turned to Cake, "-are you really going to do what he says?" a single tear of happiness fell to the floor.

"Yes, if he says so, then yeah," she moved in turn, her footsteps were heavier than before. An aura of bliss swirled around, a more relaxed face than before, "-what are you waiting for?" stopped shy of the door, "-let's go."

Minutes turned to hours, each went their own way, "-Majesty," called a butler, "-the King of Arda has come to visit," inside the castle, sifting through papers, she stumbled and nearly fell.

"The who?" stood with a look of shock.

“King of Arda, majesty.”

“On my way,” she scurried to the door and walked meters after meters till the throne-room came in view.

“You barged into the castle without even saying a word, and the guard let you through, even gave nods,” Sharon kept on pestering, “-who are you OLD MAN,” she gritted.

“Keep your stance straight,” towards the right – the queen accompanied by four maids entered the room. Usually, few visiting nobles would stand and chat inside said room – a place to converse without looking awfully out of place.

“Majesty,” instantly, Sharon knelt and bowed her head, “-what are you doing?” she grabbed and pulled his pants, afraid of that insolence being shown.

“Staxius,” no care to ethics, Gallienne’s face lit with relief. Opposed to sitting on the throne and speaking, she moved towards the duo and smiled giving a curtsy, “-it’s a pleasure to see you again, King of Arda.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” taking her hand, a kiss out of courtesy, “-I’m glad to see that you’re doing well.”

Turning to the lady knelt, “-Sharon, Apostle of Syhton,” sharp and clear, hearing her name, the heart skipped a beat. “-Raise thy head.”

“Majesty,” she obeyed – bandaged, half of her face was covered. Embarrassed, Sharon could but stare away, matching the Queen’s gaze would have been rude, in her mind.

“Welcome back home,” friendly, Gallienne reached and gave a hug, “-Kreston will pay for what they did,” whispered, both got up.

“Hence ends my promise to you,” voiced Staxius, “-Hidros counts on you, majesty.”

“Thank you so much,” a sigh of relief, “-I’m forever indebted, eight months fighting Kreston’s army to bring back our Bishop. I’m sure the public will be happy,” she turned to the door, “-you won’t mind if this news is printed on newspapers?”

“Do as you wish,” not particularly bothered, he waited for the opportune time to leave.

“To celebrate thine success,” walking back to the podium, “-I’d like to grant thee the first-ever title of Platinum Ranked adventurer.”

“I graciously accept,” within an hour, Staxius’s status changed from Gold-ranked to Platinum. The first one to ever be given since the quest that was completed was one beyond the rank of Tier-one. Infiltration of a province known for being unwelcoming towards strangers. The rescue of a person of utmost importance to the kingdom – each of them was hard enough on their own. Adding the fact that he survived eight months in that place, nothing but praises.

The moment it updated; the information dashed from the castle to the Central Guild as if a bolt of lightning. Announced on the screens, [Platinum Ranked Quest: Search and Rescue of Bishop Sharon.

Status: Completed] kept as a secret, the details were revealed. [Adventurer known as Xenos: Upgraded from Tier-Two Gold to Tier-One Platinum]

“Melisa, MELISA,” yelled Diane across the room.

“What is it?” nearly choking on her tea, she shrugged.

“Look, look,” Diane pointed to the screen.

“Oh no,” the tea spilled, “-Xenos is back,” she stood. The few returning adventurers were awe-struck. “We have the first-ever platinum ranked adventurer,” they mumbled and cheered for it was a thing of pride to behold – a thing of legend.

‘He did it,’ inside his office, Raulf smiled, ‘-Xenos returns with yet another miracle. Saving Oxshield more than once, he deserves to be praised even further. In fact, he should be in Arda helping his kingdom but instead, due to the wish he made, and pact forged unknowingly. He’s doing everything he can to stabilize our Kingdom so that our Queen can comfortably take her throne and lead. Tomorrow’s going to be fun, can’t wait to see what the news will write.’

“Majesty,” inside the throne room, “-I’d like to take my leave,” a formal bow, “-Arda awaits my return,” empty, he turned and walked – each step echoed with a sound of profound woefulness.

“Wait,” in came Sharon, “-I’m so sorry for having called you Old man on various occasions,” she knelt.

“It’s fine,” without much concern, he continued, “-make sure to guide your people to a better future. My job is done here, good-bye.”

‘He might not want to admit it,’ the figure faded into the brightly lit doorway, ‘-but he’s a good person deep down. Only he who knows the value of life, he who knows what It’s like to lose someone important is worthy. Not a hero, but someone who’s reliable and unbound by the idealism of saving those in need. He’ll do whatever is needed to achieve a goal – I admire that most about you, old-friend,’ in that instant, memories rushed, “-Tempest,” she mumbled.

“I presume we’re moving back to Arda?” asked Adete once inside the car.

“Not really,” it roared, “-we’re going back, that much is true. But I’d like to continue the research on the Relic-class scroll. Before that, we’re headed to the Twin-Jelly Bar. I need to check on Jason,” parked at the mansion, using portals in the attic, he headed to Pandora.

Cough, footprints formed each time he walked, cobwebs around the ceiling. ‘I wonder what Dorothy thinks,’ he laughed then coughed, ‘-I employed her to then leave for eight months,’ going down the laboratory, stockpiles of supplies for the making of God’s Ale. ‘-Guess Cake has been handling the production,’ the machine seemed a little worn-out from all the work. Going to the ground floor, ‘-god damn,’ the scrolls and potion were sold out.

Dear Lord Staxius,

All the supplies in the shop have been sold. I’m writing this on the 23rd of April. A nice lady came over to our house and asked if I’d like to return to work. I accepted, and tis the result. We sold out in a few weeks. Since there’s no idea when you’re coming back – I’ve decided to work at a café in the capital. Do come to pay a visit if you ever read this note, the name is The Ladybug.

'Good to see she moved on from the whole adventuring business. I might visit you soon, Dorothy,' he stepped out, 'even the Adamantite armor has been sold.' In that instant, '-I forgot about the whole Potion business with the Alchemy's Sect,' a facepalm later, '-I'm going to guess that Clarise is probably mad at me. Nothing beats honesty, if the news is given tomorrow, then they'll know the reason why I left,' on that, taking the back alley, he headed to the bar.

"Look who we have 'ere," commented Timothy, "-you were gone for so long I thought you died on the job or something."

"Good luck taking me out that easily," he winked and headed towards the toilet.

"Alright, take care," waved the bartender.

'What will Jason say when I suddenly show up,' opened, he headed inside. Things never changed, the purple lights kept on flashing, muffled music played. Mask on, he walked in, "-Jason," on the counter, with not many people around, a voice called.

"What?" distressed, he fired back.

"A shot of whiskey," a glimpse of the crimson mask, caught him off guard, to which, "-welcome back," startled, the hands trembled whilst pouring the drink.

Chapter 284: Home

"Alright man," standing up, "-thanks for the drinks. Do tell God-father that I'll be taking care of the God's Ale production as well as Angel's Dust. Cake will be in charge of the negotiations and exportation, see you later," glass emptied with droplets of water rolling down its size.

"See you soon, Shadow," hands cleaning other glass, Jason smiled and nodded.

'That lasted far longer than I had expected. Catching up with things as they are after many months later is tough. I guess Snow was pushed out the continent by threats from the Overlord himself. The spy, apparently a girl who went by a stage-name I forgot, was the one who helped in extracting information out of many high-ranking players. Using her body to get what she wants,' outside, a chilly breeze blew, '-if she had been on our side, I can't imagine the number of information we could have had,' returning to Pandora, the time displayed 16:00. 'I'll check in with the Alchemist Sect tomorrow after the news has spread a little.'

'Arda,' stood before the portal, '-I'm a bit reluctant to walk in,' as if standing behind, the shadow of Xula waiting with arms crossed. Dazzled, '-so bright,' covering his eyes, '-the adventuring guild,' stood in front of the building. From left to right, people moved and spoke to one another, the place seemed livelier than before. Further into the city, Guild-buildings of the differing associates. 'Look at the guild,' slowly and carefully examining the surrounding, people were seen pushing to rush inside.

Inside in the middle, four queues formed. To the right, available quests and those recently complete. 'How many people are there?' curious, seeing the massive crowd, '-I've yet to check the guild card,' reaching inside the pocket – [Member Count] to which the hologram of a display materialized.

[Adventurers: Arda]

Tier 1 – Platinum: 0

.....

Tier 2 – Gold: 0

Tier 3 – Silver: 4

Tier 4 – Bronze: 2

Tier 5 – Ruby: 25

Tier 6 – Emerald: 6

Tier 7 – Sapphire: 67

Tier 8 – Steel: 123

Tier 9 – Obsidian: 453

Tier 10 – Porcelain : 902

'I see,' paused to stare, '-there are around 1,600 total members,' he walked without being noticed. The screen displayed, *-Adventurers without Certifications from either the Fighters or the Mages guild won't be allowed to take in quests.* As stated, only members with a Sword or Star symbol engraved on their adventuring tag were seen moving about. 'Guess it's becoming popular,' seeing progress, he climbed to the top floor.

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Click, warm light hit against the red-curtains, giving off a feeling of being home. The smell of new furniture and books lingered about. The table itself was empty, none was present. 'Let's check the messages,' a bigger version of the hologram materialized. Browsing through the interface, reaching towards the messages, '-oh damn,' around 1000+ notifications. A single name was seen across, Serene Balthazar.

Spending the next hour reading every report Serene wrote. He had a better understanding of how the province and the four vampire clans settled under the new rule. Nothing majors stood out when it came to the nightwalkers. The latter preferred the shadows and never drawing attention – tis was the way they had survived and lived. 'She's efficient,' impressed, the screen turned off, '-it's as if I never left,' the chair turned. 'Adapt to survive; the people who work under me are more competent than I am in some fields. Serene and Auic are prime examples; finding problems before it set-ablaze. It's nice to see all the pieces I've worked towards amassing working as one. A giant clock ticking for my sake. I manipulated, used psychological attacks to break, and make many fall into my lap and still come out as the supposed savior. Changing personas depending on the people I met, I've lost the true me. Who am I, I wonder, a cold-blooded murderer, a loving father, a loving husband, a big brother, or an example. I've no clue myself – guess that's the drawback of always changing to becoming another person. One thing is clear, there are some I need to protect, and there are some I have to kill. It took more time than I'd had expected,' the face changed to one conniving with a smirk, '-but I'm now an essential member in how Hidros is ruled. Galienne, Xula, Raulf, Renaud, Karlson, Jason, Josiah, Ernis, Aceline, the couple from Autumn's Blossom, Cake, and more. Quite the line-up of pawns at my disposal. Add the wielder of Knightfall to that mix. Killing him would have been easier; however, witnessing how much damage he

inflicted, made one thing clear. People can hurt God's with curses – I'm still not fully healed. A scary prospect,' *Beep.* [Welcome home, majesty. Queen Shanna Islegust has requested for thy presence at once,] a message from Serene. 'Be composed and move.'

Ancient Magic: Teleportation.

Despite how it looked, the Blood-King wasn't what he appeared to be. Hidden behind many layers of deception and personas unique to him – the part of changing his way of speech, mannerism, and stance, depended on the person. A living mirror that reflected the victim's ideal trust-worthy friend.

Subconsciously, he worked for one purpose – to get stronger and influential. On the day Lady Goldberg was found out, though it was a little bit, the true-self came out for a stroll. Summoning the portal to the underworld, one that is reined by the Demon God, could not have been done. Even if the person was the God of Death, that was sacrilege – to invade onto another deity's property.

Creation, it who followed Staxius's journey since attaining Divinity, shuddered. The strongest being in the universe felt fear. "Entering the domain of another god," it voiced loudly in anger, "-THAT'S BLASPHEMY."

"Calm down," sitting on a hovering chair whilst sipping tea upside down, Lord Death held a smile.

"Diablo doesn't seem angered," a window gazing to where the Demon God resided, "-he's happy."

"STOP SPYING ON ME," sat on a throne made of magma with a body of corrupt souls, "-The young god entered my domain without my asking," lit with a purple flame, the eyes stared Creation and the Death Reaper, "-I've reason to be angry," he said with a thunderous voice followed by screams of the corrupt. "Still," an image of Staxius came to life, "-he's intriguing. The boy paid the toll to enter my realm and gave my servants a chance to go and enjoy." Holding a chain with humanoid demons crawling as if dogs, "-better keep an eye on him. There's more than divinity flowing through that soul – I sense a demon as well," to which he laughed maniacally, "-HOW CAN I FORGET DAEMONUM GLADIO," he turned to the portal, "-YOU THOUGHT I'D FORGET. VILE GOD OF DEATH, YOU STOLE MY WIFE AND TURNED HER INTO A SWORD, HAVE YOU NO SHAME!"

"Oh, better close that," to which he turned, "-pew," wiping the invisible sweat off the head, "-Diablo sure is angry."

"You're the one who stole his wife?" asked Creation, the voices kept on changing.

"N-no," averting the gaze, "-I do apologize, but the awakening of the ancient gods might turn to more than you can chew, Creation. The vow to not create an army of God-slayers will come back to haunt you. If something isn't done, you will lose the crown of Creator. God's are much worse than humans – believe it."

'Worry not, Death Reaper. I've got a potential heir in mind. She lives on the same plain as humans. A fairy turned Angel and soon Demi-God. Once her body and soul allow the divine power to flow, she'll awaken as my progeny. We have to wait and watch – time is none of the concern. Without the Sickle of Kronos, the God of Time can't act to his full power. I'm sure that troubled child is off somewhere killing for killing. Aloof as you seem, Lord Death, before Kronos's death, I saw what happened. Stealing the symbol of power before the succession.'

Hicc, “-hiccups,” standing before the castle, ‘-I wonder what’s that all about,’ holding in a breath – the body relaxed.

“Glad you made it back,” appeared in a bat-shaped mist, “-Majesty awaits thine presence.”

“Serene,” they walked, “-you look far more comfortable than I’d like,” examining her face, “-there’s a sadistic look in thy eyes. Don’t act innocent, something happened, didn’t it?”

“I do apologize but I’ve no clue to what you might be referring too.”

“You wish not to speak anymore on the matter,” he paused, “-which leads me to suspect that something is very much wrong.”

“I can assure one thing, her majesty has been impatiently waiting,” not wishing to reveal any more, Serene led the way inside. Her pace, faster than Staxius – the footsteps echoed down the large-empty hall till the throne room. There, two guards with a push opened the gates. Inside, coming from the main-entrance as opposed to coming from the portal towards the left, Staxius walked.

Full center, with light emanating from the wall that had changed designs. A glance at the balcony revealed a few nobles anxiously waiting. Beside Xula, stood the old-sage with a look of perpetual concern. Along the red-carpet, leading to the Queen, Guards stood at intervals of two-meters. Unbothered, matching Xula’s glare, he walked.

“Welcome back, King of Arda,” loudly with a hint of anger, the queen spoke.

“Glad to be back, Majesty,” hands on chest, he bowed, ‘-someone’s angry.’

“Do you have any idea to what month or date we are?” she asked.

“I’m afraid not, majesty,” staring her, the situation grew to be more confusing.

“We’re in October. The 24th to be precise.”

“Is it relating to...” the pieces fitted, eight-months and before that.

“The look on thine face says it all,” her gaze piercing, “-do you have something to say on the matter?”

“Words won’t undo the mistake I’ve done. I missed our wedding anniversary, 15th August,” to that, he knelt.

“You do understand,” she stepped down from the throne, “-leaving the queen, one who is holding thy heir and heir to the kingdom, alone, without guard – is the worst thing a man could do.”

Her feet moved till it stood a few centimeters away, ‘-She’ll have my head, I swear.’ Death could not have compared to how scary a woman could be. Not to mention that the lady was his wife and Queen to a kingdom. Not even a mother could rival the pressure being felt. ‘Killing dragons would be easier than this,’ he breathed.

“As long as you understand,” she held out a hand.

“I beg your pardon?” he looked up in confusion, “-have I missed something?”

“Take her hand already, majesty,” from the balcony yelled noble ladies. The guards who stared intently earlier gave little chuckles.

‘Even the sage facepalmed,’ to which, Serene materialized next to Xula.

“Get up already,” Xula smiled, “-I got you,” she winked, the throne room filled with laughter. “HAIL QUEEN SHANNA!”

“An all-mighty vampire brought down by his betrothed,” Adete slipped to add insult to injury. “You may be able to fight against a whole kingdom to save a single girl. Yet,” turning to Xula, “-our queen will always win,” laughed Serene.

“That much is true,” shaking his head, “-I’m sorry for leaving without saying a word,” he took her hand and kissed it.

“No need to worry,” a smile, “-I heard from the Queen of Hidros about the promise that was made. I can understand the worth of one’s words.”

“Still,” he interjected, “-I missed our anniversary as well as,” the eyes turned to the belly, “-the heir, Lizzie,” staring up, “-must have been tough, carrying our offspring as well as handling the kingdom.”

“I sense the guilt,” standing on her toe, she patted his head, “-it’s fine. I had the help of everyone here. Ladies who’ve already had their first child. Doctors from the academy – the attention was more cumbersome than handling our babe.”

“I see,” turned and facing the guards as well as the nobles, “-from the bottom of my heart, thank you for caring for Queen Shanna in my absence.”

“Wait till the child is born. It’s only going to get tougher from here on,” laughed the nobles, a bright aura lit around the room.

‘Blissful, I can see everything so clearly. My family, the people who care about us, a kingdom that depends on us to guide and lead. Away from the land of fanatics, all that religious talk, and constant pain. Lizzie’s aura is slowly growing strong, I can feel her mana – more potent. I guess this is what you call home,’ grabbing his arms, Xula rested her head and smiled. ‘I actually belong somewhere,’ for the first time, faint as it was, a tear dropped to the floor.

Chapter 285: Settling in

“Who are you?” paralyzed and unable to channel mana momentarily, the lady asked with a nervous expression.

“I’d like to ask you the same question,” index touching her neck and staring down to Triste, “-see what you did?” he gritted, “-children should not be that bratty,” the eyes cold, the sobs lowered.

“I-I’m sorry,” a few snuffles with snot dripping, “-I-let my m-mommy go,” he asked.

“Promise that none of you will make a sound or harsh movement, else,” a snap towards the tent, *poof,* instant combustion – a hole that opened the way for the scent of fresh fish to invade.

“Excuse me, majesty,” bowed Haru, “-could you please let go of the Dryad?” courteous and warm, her ears twitched happily.

“Fine,” breathing calmly, he dispelled and returned control to the host. Shuddered, the mother, breathing heavily through her mouth, created icy-cold mist. The puff of air enveloped Haru’s face, her whiskers reacted to which, *ACHOO,* snot flew over. *Splat,* dodged, it hit the board.

“That much firepower,” eyes opened in astonishment, “-who needs a gun when you can sneeze snot that far,” Staxius laughed. Triste, bothered till a few seconds ago, laughed – it disarmed the lady who manifested with the intent of harming.

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“Back to business,” settled, he walked over to Haru, “-care to explain in greater detail what’s happening here. I thought the town was meant as a link between Hidros and Arda – what’s the division all about?”

“Do take a seat majesty,” doing a full 360, Triste’s voice changed, the boy grew into an adult, “-mother, you can return to the forest,” he turned and hugged the lady, “-please don’t leave thy haven for my sake. You’ll lose what little power you’re left remaining. I promise to watch over little Triste, make me that promise,” holding her hands, the lady accepted and vanished.

“Quite interesting,” said Staxius, “-don’t mind me,” pulling a chair, he sat with Haru beside. Facing them, Triste, a boy who grew instantly.

“Before questions are asked, I’ll introduce myself once again, I’m Triste, no family name. I’m a Dymph. The boy who spoke to you earlier is also named Triste, to not be confused, call him, Triste Jr. The boy is the real host of this vessel, a lost child who was torn to shreds by wolves. Upon that misty day, the snow turned to crimson, my mother, protector of the snow-forest, came across the child who barely drew breath. That was where I, a water spirit, was bound to the body. Contract formed, my soul provided the power for regeneration, as a result – I became the secondary personality. Don’t mind the boy, he’s still a child, but a good one – a little deaf to people speaking. That out of the way,” he stood, “-employed by Queen Shanna, I’m Commander Triste in charge of Town Eden, at your service,” hands-on chest, a salute.

“Nice to make your acquaintance,” stood, a firm handshake.

“How may I help?” he sat.

“First of all,” turning to Haru, “-why don’t you go,” gestured for her to speak, her tail wiggled.

“It’s about time,” as if charging for an attack, both hands slammed the table, “-Where have you been?” she asked with eyes that didn’t reflect her words. “I was worried when Triste Jr said you went on break, I w-was s-scar... not like that matters,” changing her sentence mid-way, “-I’d like to sell panties for the opening.”

“Again,” Triste laughed, “-you sure love panties,” a wink signaling an inside joke, her cheeks reddened and purr came out, though muffled. *Cough,* clearing her throat as a distraction, she stared away defiantly with arms crossed with a humph.

“I see,” fondly watching as the two spoke, Staxius waited with a smirk.

"It's not what you meo-hink," she jumped back with hairs standing up, "-d-d-don't g-g-et the w-wrong ide-meow."

"The cat is scared, now is she?" commented Staxius, "-I never said anything," he turned to Triste. "Congratulations," he nodded.

"About what?" he asked, confused.

"About you having an eccentric partner," he referred to Haru and Triste being in a relation.

"P-P-partner," he coughed furiously, "-t-there's n-nothing between us," he turned in shame.

"Y-yes, as he s-said," flustered, she stared away.

"Are you sure?" asked Staxius with a cheesy accent, "-because from where I'm sitting, you two seem to complement one another quite nicely," he laughed.

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"MAJESTY," a simultaneous yell.

"In any case, I'm going to be selling panties for the opening, make sure the Triste Jr doesn't interrupt the event like usual," composed, she took a seat with her tail moving as if a pendulum.

"Leave him to me," he nodded, "-why is it that you're here, majesty?"

"I've got a lot of questions," arms crossed, "-care to explain the general layout of the town, this supposed event of selling panties and the division of the two districts."

"As you wish," standing, "-we've two districts, one for humans and one for non-humans. I know it's meant for the understanding of our kinds. It's a gradual change, both races are still suspicious of one another. Demi's have been and are still being used as slaves in some parts of the continent. You know that full well, can't expect our people to bow down and obey. Change has to come from each side. To prevent any large-scale conflict, the middle bridge, named Etem, host a pathway into the two districts," pointing at the map, "-you see this area," going around the bridge, two identical districts, "-the trading district." The layout of both halves is similar, non-humans and humans are treated the same. The division is there so we can better guard the people against themselves. There are three bridges in total, Log, Etem, and Husty. At the moment, only Etem will be used. As for Log and Husty, they are to be closed off till we see the situation evolve."

"Understandable," he nodded, "-what about the big opening?"

"It's to take place tomorrow, the first time we'll be able to trade with one another. During that time, Etem will be opened for people to go back and forth. That's about it, I think," the explanation ended.

"Good," holding his chin, "-it's a good set up. To slowly restart our connection to one another. About the guard details, who's going to preside over that responsibility?"

"You've not heard of it?" he asked.

"Obviously not, that's why I'm asking," fired back Staxius.

"Have you spoken to Serene?" asked Haru.

"We exchanged a few words..." eyes narrowed, "-I'll be going now," *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

'Annoying,' he thought and returned to the guild, '-Serene has things to explain.' Barging into the office,"-Majesty," a warm voice called.

"Yes," as if nothing happened, "-is there something you need to tell me, perhaps concerning the town Eden?"

"Did they tell you?" she stood and walked over from his desk.

"No one said anything," in the center, he watched as Serene paced around, "-it sort of clicked; a pretty easy connection," he stared.

"Nothing escapes thine mind," stopped and seductively leaned on the table with legs crossed, "-should I dive into more details?"

"Yes, please," he moved over, "-and don't try to be seductive," the drawer opened, "-changing your hair color to red and wearing that short skirt isn't going to accomplish much," he sat and reached for a cigar.

"Come on," red lipsticks and red eyes, she climbed on the table and moved as if a cat, showing cleavage.

"Are you done?" blowing smoke into her face, she coughed.

"Come on, majesty," rolling her eyes, she got off, "-don't you think the Blood-king needs a few mistresses and maybe a harem. You're practically a demi-god."

"God actually," he smoked, "-though it doesn't matter now. The Queen of Arda is plenty enough for me," he laughed, "-no one is as scary like her."

"I agree," to which she tied her hair in a ponytail, "-about the thing at hand," the screen popped up, "-Commander Triste has requested the guild to be on the guard detail tomorrow. He's asked this of the guild master – to have adventurers of each province be present so that there's no feeling of oppression."

"You choose to tell me that now?" disappointed, "-Arda is already big as is, asking the central guild to send over members might be a far-stretch."

"I do apologize for having kept it a secret, but you seemed to have more pressing matters at hand."

"I appreciate the concern, really," a faint smile, "-it's admirable that you're thinking of taking the burden off my shoulder," cigar pointing at her face, "-you seem to be in far worse shape than I am. Handling the guild and nightwalkers must be thought. I'm part to blame – I was gone for eight months; I can't hope to imagine the work that was put in. Therefore," he stood, "-I'm back now, don't hold back and add on the work that I'm due," a smile, "-I'll handle the talk with Mr. Serlo. Send over that list of things that are priority. Have a break, it's an order," hands in pocket, he walked.

"Don't complain if the work piles on," she shouted.

'I see,' standing on the roof of the guild, '-the people around me are working hard to try and lower my burden. I've got good assistants,' the cigar finished, '-time to get my head back in the game.'

Beep, beep, beep, “-sorry to disturb.”

“No worries, how may I help, Guild master of Arda?”

“Is there anyone you can send over from the guild, I need adventurers to handle guard duties. Town Eden is opening, I’m sure you know what that means. On my end, we’ll have the people ready, I’m sorry and I know it’s late, but can you send over a team?”

“A team,” Raulf paused, “-give me a moment,” to which orders were heard in the background.

“There’s Pegasus, their main party – they were on a quest near Azure’s wall, should I send them over?” he asked.

“Yeah, they’ll do, are they trusted by the people?”

“Yes, that guild is loved by children especially,”

“Children liking a guild that has probably killed before, why not,” he sighed.

“Good, I’ll send you a message of their time of arrival, be sure to explain the details in full when they arrive.”

“No problem, thanks for the help given the short notice.”

“Oh, it’s no problem, you’ll be paying in gold or items?” Raulf laughed.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll pay you once the job is done,” the call ended.

‘The time is 13:00, checking in with the Guild assistants is the wisest choice,’ teleporting to the ground floor – “-Guild master,” gasped one of the adventurers, a returning party stopped and stared.

“That’s the aura of a powerful man,” said the leader in awe, a dwarf with a hammer as big as him.

“Can I help?” an elf with blond hair and a shirt that seemed on the verge of exploding.

“I’d like to request a quest, care to help?” he asked with a smile.

“Yes,” on that, speaking for a few minutes, the decision was to add a quest notice with a red-color, signaling an official quest. The reward was 50 silvers per day, the higher the rank, the more one would get paid. A limit of 30 people, the instant the quest went on the board – seeing the name, S.Haggard, they flocked over to the desk for more information.

‘That’s taken care of,’ returning to the office, *dring.*

“Hello?” answered, the phone displayed an unknown caller.

“Hey, is that you?” a familiar voice.

“You, who?” the voice deep and monotonous.

“It’s Aceline, is this Staxius?”

“Yeah, is something the matter, how did you get this number anyway?” asked since the call came from the Guild-card.

“Oh, Gallienne gave it to me,” she laughed, the background seemed to be filled with flashes and clicks, “-are you free tomorrow at 14:00, I’d like to bring the first Platinum Adventurer for a segment on my show.”

“14:00, you seem busy, why don’t I call you back later. I’ll check the schedule.”

“As you wish, don’t disappoint, Mr. Hero,” the call ended.

‘Hero, that’s a new one,’ he chuckled and sat, ‘-let’s see what I’ve got for tomorrow.’ Settling in nicely to where he belonged, the work resumed.

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Chapter 286: Town Eden

“Are you ok?” asked Xula seeing the posture slack a little.

“I’m fine,” holding back, he turned and beelined straight for the portal leading into the garden.

“Guess I’ll accompany him,” said the queen.

Inside, flowers blossomed, a moment of peace. ‘I can’t shake the fear of this being the calm before the storm. My hand is trembling, the symbol of power, mainly, the one given by Kronos, is acting up. The power is overflowing and seeping inside my body. If this goes on for much longer, I might risk exploding – given my state, holding that much divine mana is going to be tough.’ Legs crossed and sat on the ground, Xula joined. Time went on, the past few months caught up in those hours. Placing his ear against her belly, a faint rumbling and a few kicks could be heard and felt.

“What do you plan on doing?” asked Xula.

“I think I’ll return to Oxshield before you say I’m going off without saying anything. Consider it my work – I’ll be going back and forth using the portal. I promise to be here every night for dinner,” he turned with a blank expression.

“Good enough compromise,” she stood, “-in that case, don’t forget to check on the guild. I think there’s something Serene has yet to tell you,” the look was one of concern.

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“Did something happen?” sensing the reluctance, he asked intently.

“If she hasn’t told you then it must be for a reason,” her heavy stance moved farther with each step, “-Arda will go through a change to. By change, I mean the acceptance of humans. You know what it will bring about – I’ve yet to choose the Ambassadors who are to head to Oxshield. The town has been built already, go give it a visit. I think Haru has been there quite often, since her guild is involved,” on those parting words, the queen headed back to her office.

‘Arda is changing as well. I better focus on the kingdom that matters. I’ve done everything I could at the capital. Going there once or twice to make supplies for the DG. I might give Pandora, the ground floor, to the trader’s guild. Haru is going to need someplace to set-up shop in the capital,’ having a vague idea

of what was to come, teleporting outside the ancient tree – serving as housing for the capital. Elves high up on the foliage of the forest, walked across from lookout to lookout using suspended bridges.

“Majesty,” they waved and bowed.

“Good job,” he returned the wave and walked further into the forest. ‘I forgot how massive this place was,’ having walked a couple of hundred of meters, the trees remained static.

“Fly over there,” voiced Adete, “-you’re in Arda. Everyone here is non-human, you don’t have to worry, Blood-king.”

“I forgot,” the time spend in hiding subconsciously made him hold back as to not draw attention.

“Here we go,” direction the East, dark-feathered wings sprouted. *Whoosh,* each flap gave birth to a powerful gust of wind, not looking back, he bolted up through the foliage, breaking out the thick forest as if an erupting volcano. A boom resounded across as he flew towards the newly built village.

‘Here we are,’ hovering above, ‘-this is more like a town than a village. Surrounded by walls in an asymmetric Hexagonal shape, a river ran through the middle. Thanks to the sun, the roofs of the buildings and houses seemed to be red and orange.

“Let’s see,” coming in from the East, a big entrance with paths leading into the forest outback. Traders and merchants could be seen wearing straw-hat with donkeys pulling their cargo.

“Who might you be?” asked a guard stood atop the entrance, inside the stone brick battlements.

“Do you not know who I am?” covering the forehead as the sun made it hard to stare up, Staxius asked with a normal tone.

“Should I know you?” the guard fired back sarcastically.

“Well you should,” in a blink of an eye, the man stood right beside.

“Majesty,” startled, the guard dropped to the floor, “-I apologize for my rudeness,” said the young beast-man with features closer to a wolf than human.

“Water under the bridge,” he said and peered out into town, from here, the buildings seemed higher than in the air. Slated roofs of buildings with two and more floors. As if stairs, some went in ascending order, the highest being of five-floors, excluding the ground floor, to the lowers being one story tall. Bearing traditional Ardanian craftsmanship, tis was the work of the Dwarves. Stone brick path in a lovely arrangement spread around town as if veins carrying blood.

“I’ll head out,” with a nod, he jumped and landed as if a feather. Caring bags with vegetables and tomatoes, with hats, mothers walked with their children in tow. Some spoke joyfully whilst others remained silent and vigilant. ‘Residential district?’ he thought and took the main-street.

‘The river,’ reaching over, elevated with stairs leading down, as opposed to rocks and dirt – it seemed gentler with an ever-so steep inclination made of grass. Jumping over the railings which seemed to be there for the protection of young-ones, would have been a bad idea. The river flowed with brute force; some could easily mistake it for a rapid. Nonetheless, it was apparent that some amount of work was

done to make it part of the town's defining characteristic. At intervals, bridges linking the two parts were guarded by soldiers bearing the Royal Crest.

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'Why are the royal guards here?' asked whilst holding onto the railing made of iron in which had a flowery design, 'isn't this town supposed to be for the better understanding of our Kingdoms.' Intrigued, he walked along the river, benches, and lovely scenery with trees scattered here and there.

"No further access from this point," blocked two-guards with giant-axes.

"Why is it so?" he asked with a serious tone.

"Majesty," realizing who stood before them, they knelt as courtesy. Passers-by stopped and wondered, their faces filled with anticipation and bliss.

"Mommy, mommy," a child's voice was heard at the back, "-the black-guards are bowing down to that man, who is he?" he pointed.

"Shush," hurriedly, the mother picked up her child and scurried till she was out of sight.

"I'm waiting," arms crossed, he demanded an answer.

"Sire," voiced the other guard, "-if tis answer you seek then do head to the Bridge Etem," he pointed west, "-about five-kilometers."

"Very well," he turned, "-be sure to stand by thy oath. Royal Guards are vowed to protect the royal family, however, if ever, the guards are sent to a town or village. They are to be diligent and protect the people the same as they would the king and queen."

"Understood sir," giving a salute, the imposing figure turned to the main-street and vanished.

"That was scary," exchanging glances, "-let's hope that the commander doesn't create unnecessary unrest,"

"Given his demeanor, I doubt that," facepalmed the other, "-that eccentric prodigy is going to make a mistake."

'Bridge Etem,' approaching the location, '-now this is interesting.' Linked to both sides, a platform of which was a few hundreds of meters in size. Besides, a military outpost with tents. The platform itself had merchant stalls and various items up for display.

"COME ON, THIS ISN'T WHAT WE PLANNED!" echoed from the camp, being guarded by two-knights in silvery armor, Staxius approached.

"This is what we planned, you're being a BRAT," voiced another in lesser high-spirit.

"THE SELLING OF UNDIES TO THE HUMANS IS UNACCEPTABLE," voice the first stranger.

"WE MAKE THEM SOFTER THAN THOSE THEY HAVE," argued the other, "-HERE, TAKE IT AND FEEL THE QUALITY."

“GET THAT FILTH AWAY FROM ME,” a loud clanging followed by the tent moving, “-HERESY, I’M SURE IT’S USED, I CAN SMELL THE FISH OFF IT.”

SMACK, “-THAT’S BECAUSE IT’S BEING SOLD ON THE PLATFORM,” in rage, the curtains flew opened. “I can’t believe this,” panting, with ears moving erratically, “-that brat doesn’t have what it takes to lead the guard details here,” hairs stood.

‘Is this a regular occurrence,’ staring at the reactions, ‘I guess so,’ none seemed bothered, a simple enough conclusion.

“Excuse me?”

“DON’T TOUCH ME,” paired with a hiss, her tail stood up straight. ‘Oh no,’ staring up, “-I meo-ucked up.”

“You meo-ucked up,” voiced in jest, “-that’s new.”

“I’m sorry,” ears lowered and tail slumped, the cat-lady stared the floor.

“Come on, Haru,” holding her chin, “-a representative of the Ardanian council mustn’t be so willing to lower her head,” a calm and understanding voice, “-care to explain what happened inside?”

“-Y-Yes,” startled, she breathed, “-these,” pointing at a box with clothes, “-the Trader’s Guild purchased big shipments of silk and cotton. I figured it would be a good investment – humans sure love to pamper themselves,” holding one with a leopard print, “-this one is my favorite by far,” no tact, no shame, she held it as if being a trophy.

“The scent of fish is going to get stuck in the fabric,” voiced Staxius, “-have you thought this through?”

“Yes, of course,” hands on her hips, “-I made sure to smell and check if any of the product is worthy of being worn. I tried some on myself,” she laughed.

“You didn’t,” the eyes grew cold, “-tell me you didn’t,” it drifted into being monotonous.

“I’m joking,” to which she slapped the side of his chest wildly, “-FUNNY, FUNNY,” she stared up, “-FUNNY ISN’T IT?” she gritted, her retina went from large to as tiny and sharp as a grain of rice.

“Yes, hysterical,” said in the most lifeless way ever, Haru laughed with tears falling off. “Majesty, you’re hilarious.”

“Jokes aside, I’d like to meet and see what is happening around this town. Bring that carton of panties inside the tent. Produce are meant to be sold – the only judge of it being worthy is customers, no one else,” wise words, he entered, the Knights bowed fully.

“What do you want?” asked a kid with one hand in a strainer and the head wearing a saucepan as opposed to a helmet. Behind, stuck on a wooden board, a map of the town.

“Do you need help?” asked Staxius.

“Yes please,” the voice seemed timid.

“You sure are light for a kid,” taking off the strainer, Staxius picked the boy by his arms and placed him onto the table, “-how old are you?”

"I'm 34 years old," dangling his feet, "-from the Dymph race – one hailing from Mother nature. An offspring from a caring Dryad of the north. My name is Triste, our race isn't that known around the province. People often mistake me for a child, but it's thanks to this that I can live on for eternity," holding a smile, the head bobbed left to right. "I may look like a human," *poof,* wings made of leaves sprouted, "-but I'm also not," childish laughter followed.

Turning to Haru, 'what's the meaning of this?' he asked with expression alone.

'He's always like this,' she replied by shaking her head and closing her eyes.

"Listen," just as he tried to speak, "-majesty, what brings you here?" the Dymph interjected.

"Well..."

"Let me guess, you're here for sightseeing," cut-off once again, "-isn't that right. So, what is it that you want to look at?"

"I want to ask about..."

"Have you seen the bridges?" and again, "-they're lovely pieces of architecture," he smiled.

"Will you let me..."

"WHY IS HARU HERE?" turning to the demi-human, "-GET THAT LADY AWAY FROM HERE," standing on the table, he chanted, "begone, begone, begone."

"You're pissing me off," holding the boy's mouth shut, "-will you shut up and listen," cold and menacing, an aura of despair let loose.

"I would not have done that if I were you," Haru mumbled.

"Why?" holding the boy in mid-air, he turned.

Sniffles, as if being wound up like a music box, *CRIES.*

"WHO THE HECK MADE MY CHILD CRY?" from the ground, burst out of a tree-trunk, "-was it you?" a lady with white hair on which had flowers. "TRISTE!" she screamed, "-YOU BASTARD," holding out her hands, ice shards shot out as if a gun.

Death Element: Magical Barrier, letting go of the kid, a reflex, the projectiles crashed and formed tiny sparkles.

"MOMMY, HE MADE TRISTE CRY," the complaining continued.

"HOW DARE YOU," voiced the lady.

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"Annoying," sighed, *Dark-Arts: Mana Cancellation,* a dash followed by a single touch, "-will you calm down?"

Chapter 287: Death Gate

'Four already,' showed on the screen, '-guess, work for this week is complete,' [Shut Down] from lit with a blueish glow, the face's usual paleness returned. *Drip, drip, drop,* '-what's this?' confused by a monotonous sound, '-blood?' he thought, stood, and moved over to a small mirror inside a shelf with decorations, artifacts locked inside. 'My eyes are bleeding,' nonchalant, '-it's sure has swollen up,' touching the neck, '-I knew this would have happened. Forcing Nike's wing to activate has rendered the assimilation of divine mana inconsistent and dangerous. I've turned into a walking bomb,' no emotions nothing, '-I should have access to the upper plains,' *Heed mine call, portal whomst carries the divine from the mortal realm to the land of promise. I, God of Death, order thy to come forth: Divination,* a clap followed by circular motions, the floor shook mildly.

"What is it that you wish?" stepped inside a familiar place, one where a massive clock stopped moving – stars, planets, a seat in the middle with an ever-changing figure.

"Creation," he called, "-I've something to ask."

"Quite bold for a child to enter mine realm in search of answers. Thou doth intrigue," given permission to speak, Staxius took charge.

"Having attained divinity, I've come across a lot of knowledge. Things that were unknown and unclear were as transparent as water. I felt as if I was enlightened. The History of the universe itself has been etched into my very soul – my responsibilities as the next Death Reaper."

"Yes, that much is true," arms crossed with its body tilted to the left side, the entity was curious.

"I was wondering about my divine realm. Each god has a domain to control and rule over, a domain from where they draw power and so forth."

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"I see," it stood, "-no need to get into more details," a few inches away, "-the God of Death doesn't have a realm," *snap,* a cube with a spiral turning clockwise, "-thine power comes from every possible realm. The point of convergence," pointing at the middle of the circle, "-that's where all are tied. Bound by death, tis how the universe is controlled."

"Does that mean that I've no control over how my powers will grow?" asked Staxius a little worried.

"Do you know why death reapers are changed quite often?" it asked.

"No, do explain," spoken with a relaxed face.

"Tis simple enough, thy kind often explode and die. Chosen souls, once reaching their limit, overflows with power and break – death by death. Quite ironic, the more people die, the more power you get, and the more power you get, the higher the risk of you dying by people dying," it paused and stared.

"Was that supposed to be a joke?" he asked formally.

"Yes," with a sigh, the throne reappeared, ???-why did you come here for then?"

"I've come here in hopes of being able to stop and control my powers, however," glaring at Creation, "-I got told that tis impossible," he walked.

“Yes, no domain, means that the ability to control a god’s power is null.”

“Isn’t that the quandary,” glaring at the Creator, “-would you do me a favor then?” he asked.

“You dare use such an insolent tone in my presence?” it stood with anger.

“Lord Creation, I’m sure that thy creed is to create and to never destroy. That’s where I come in, without, the balance will shift till the day of reckoning arrives. Nevertheless,” leaned closer, “-I mean no disrespect,” he smiled, “-a favor is all I ask,” from formal to courteous – the persona changed without notice.

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“I digress,” it sighed.

“Thanks,” standing straight, “-what I wish for is a limiter. Lock which will help in controlling and holding back my power. At the rate I’m going, I see only destruction as the means to let-loose. Hence my dilemma, I’ve no intention of causing harm to the realm. The hope in asking if I had a domain was so that I’d be able to go all out and reduce pressure.”

“I’ve got an idea,” having a change of heart, “-I was wishing to create another realm. One where gods who have long served their purpose to sit down and relax. Not heaven, but one where humans and all of us can co-exist peacefully without trouble,” turning to Staxius, “-I’ve been trying to gather up the strength to build such a place for long.”

“Is what you say true?” he asked, “-does that mean Lord Death will also have a place to rest?”

“Yes, the man has grown old, and so have I,” a faint chuckle was heard.

“If that’s the case, then use me as you see fit. Channel the excess mana into building the new heaven.”

“Good,” the tone seemed friendlier, “-with your help, I think that it might come to pass quicker than I expected,” it turned, “-Death Reaper, do you wish to become the one who will protect the new realm from invaders?”

“Lord Creation,” holding out a hand, “-thee who art most powerful. I’ve but one thing to say – I shall do as you please as long as it aligns with mine principle. We both seek what the other has.”

“A companion born of necessity,” taking his hand, “-Staxius Haggard, you sure are very eccentric,” teleported back to the throne, “-I’ll grant thine wish,” a blinding golden light with the characters of D E A T H – hovered in ancient tongue. “-I shall create a limiter of which bears five levels,” from scratch, the process began. “H for Hell, T for Terror, A for Annihilation, E for Eleo and D for Death. The five gates of doom – I name it: Nevermore. From lower gate H, to upper gate D, thine divine power will be locked and stored until it’s open by thy will. Once you’ve opened one gate, you’ll have the power of that level. The moment the gate of Death is opened, the host will die and be reborn as one twice as strong as before. With this, my friend, you’ll be able to live in the mortal realm without being at risk of destroying all in thy wake,” hovered and engraved on the back, he screamed. The body levitated and burnt with different colors depending on the character used.

‘PAINFUL,’ he gritted, ‘I can see it all clearly,’ each letter meant more than was let on. A powerful spell to aid in limiting his power.

“Sure are ruthless,” the implementation ended.

“Creating from nothing requires a lot of mana and focus. I hope you realize the honor that has been granted. With the Five Gates, you’ll be able to fight at your fullest power given the gate that’s being used. Not only that – any excess power will be stiffened away into my project of starting a new realm, now go back home, Death Reaper,” *CLAP.*

‘I’M AWAKE,’ asleep on the desk, “I feel lighter,” he stood, “-woosh,* a dash, “-my speed is still here. The symbols of power don’t hurt any longer. Guess the limiter is working – it has put a stop into the Death Element. Blood-Arts isn’t affected. Good, I’m back to being somewhat normal; opening H-gate will grant me the power of an Apostle. T-will be Angel. A-gate; Demi-god, E-gate; God, and Death gate; Higher God. Good arrangement, I was closing in the rank of Higher god. If nothing was done, I shudder to think what would have happened.”

“Vampire,”

“First Progenitor?”

“Where did you go?” asked Adete.

“I went to meet creation. There was something I needed to have done,” stood, twenty-minutes were gone.

“Alright, I’ll sleep if you don’t mind,” laying on his head, she slept.

‘Tomorrow’s going to be a full day. The town is opening, then I have the interview with Aceline in the afternoon,’ coat on, he teleported to Town Eden.

More activities were seen on the non-human side as opposed to the human district. ‘There doesn’t seem to have that many people there,’ closing the eyes, he got a vague idea of the numbers.

“Commander,” entering the military camp, “-well, well,” sat with a lollipop in mouth, “-if it isn’t king Staxius.”

“Triste Jr,” he approached, “-I need to speak with Triste,” friendly, the kid stared up and down, ‘-sure, majesty.’

Poof, “-how may I be of help?” asked Triste.

“I’ve spoken with Hidros’s guild. A high-level adventuring team is on its way,” *beep,* “-speaking of the devil. They will be here at 7:00 tomorrow. Is there anything else?”

“No, no,” laughed Triste, “-with the guard details sorted. There’s nothing more we need thy assistance for. Do check in tomorrow for the opening ceremony, apparently, Hidros is sending over a representative with a filming crew. Haru will be representing our side,” he smiled.

“Good, I’ll be here first thing in the morning. Reach out to Serene if anything comes up – tomorrow is very important in our alliance,” leaving the tent, *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

“Majesty, Majesty,” a voice spoke rather urgently, shy of the castle, Staxius stopped.

“What’s the matter?” he turned to see a courier with a letter. “This came in the post earlier this week – I apologize for having taken this long. Sadly, the monster problem around the capital sure is a pain – I almost didn’t make it.”

“Do take a breath or you’ll bite thy tongue,” a remark that reassured the boy. The speed at which the words rolled off the tongue was impressive.

“Here,” delivered, “-I’ll take my leave,” a bow later, he sprinted down the street.

‘Quite peculiar,’ heavy with a red seal, one of Claireville academy’s crest. ‘Is this relating to Eira?’ he asked and walked with the item in hand. The receiver’s name was: King of Arda written in elegant calligraphy,

“Majesty, it’s a pleasure to see you,” voiced Ruslan as he moved about the premises.

“Pleasure is all mine,” returning the greeting, “-how’s Noctis’s Hallow?” stopped next to a fountain with the statue of a goddess pouring water from a pot. A rest area where one would bask in the pleasures of exotic plants and heavenly smells.

“Everything is tame, your grace, the people are happy with the announcement of the blood-king. Power was what we sought and power is what we got; all are restless for thy next visit. The new leader of Nox’s clan has taken to her role admirably.”

“What about Alaric, has the man settled or wish he still of sowing the seed of rebellion?”

“Contrary, the man has had a new purpose given. To make amends, he has taken to the research of alternatives to Blood as our food. Appearance aside, we’ve got a good scholar – he wishes for the people to be able to self-sustain.”

“What about the monster problem?”

“Sabbath has started a new training regiment per order from Serene. She has asked for a squad of elite vampires to be trained for the sole purpose of protecting the King. I do agree with her on said front, sully thy hands-on worthless garbage won’t but bring the wastage of effort and time.”

“What about the lesser-nightwalkers, how are their living conditions?”

“Matter of state should be discussed with Serene for she’s the one in charge. I’ve no say in the matter,” he bowed, “-with all due respect, I’d like to take my leave now.”

‘Guess a visit is in order,’ sat on a bench, the letter was read.

‘I see,’ a few minutes later,’-Josiah has a new idea in mind. One for the second-year students. One scheduled a month before vacation, he wishes for the students to join guilds as temporary adventurers and fight. On-site training, though it’s optional to the student. The list of guilds that have accepted is quite impressive. I see Pegasus at the top – I guess it’s a good thing. If they are involved, I’m guessing Raulf has a hand in settling the deal-’

‘Eira and the majority of her class have asked this of me. They want to join in the exchange program only if Kniq and its leader Xenos, is present. The paper works and confirmation will be sent over to

headquarters. Do accept this, the students are excited to work with since the talk you gave on that night,' a private note from Josiah.

'-Kniq wasn't on the list. I'm guessing because the members have scattered around the kingdom. Still, her class, and Eira, want to learn from me. I'm quite flattered,' he smiled, '-better have more details on the issue.'

Chapter 288: Leper's Inn

The night spent in company of Xula. A lovely dinner, a warm and relaxing bath with a lot of talking. They spoke till late at night, topic; politics, general affairs. Going over news received by many spies and informants around the continent. For many years, before King Blaine came into power, the hold Kreston had over the noble houses could but make a man shudder. Even the Order, supposed to be allied with the Empire, was brainwashed into serving their god. The Pope, who still hasn't changed in appearance – led many, many conspiracies. Bouncing theories at one another, Staxius uncovered a possible theory. Long ago, demi-humans and humans peacefully co-existed. No division nothing, fair skin, and animal features – they were on friendly terms. Not till the establishment of a religion hailing from the West as opposed to the Empire. 'A plot to overturn the Empire's rule through religion and culture, a subtle coup d'état,' tis was what Staxius thought.

In addition, Xula voiced, "if that kingdom supposedly had an idea on what kind of a gold-mine Arda is sitting on. If they were to take control of Hidros, leading the people into a revolution, armed with the abundant resources of Arda. Going against the Empire wouldn't be a dream – considering that their current regime is under Military and not governmental." Left on said words, the duo slept.

'If such a scheme was in play, that would explain why the relations were compromised. Hiding behind a god for a selfish game. A smart plan with no drawbacks and fewer risks. A holy crusade against the demi-humans due to the appearance of resembling animals. If it wasn't for the apparitions of monsters, I'm sure that Arda would have gone to war with Kreston and the entirety of Hidros. Dorchester, the war against Sten; led by the Pope, was the first step towards said goal. If, that is if the Silver Guardians were out of the picture, the plan might have worked. To save face and not look greedy in hopes of being righteous, the province was given to the war heroes. Venturing into the war devastated province of Dorchester, an expedition to Arda would last a few months. Heat, dehydration, and more – to be able to feed so many mouths, Dorchester would have to be under their rule. Easier movement and a place to fall back if ever the troupes were tired and famished. The more I think about the what-ifs, the clearer the state of this province becomes. I'm sure of it, the Sickles of Kronos speaks through heat – each time I get closer to the most likely outcome, I've got a premonition of the events. The future is ever-changing, with the weapon of the God of Time in my possession – the hypotheses are more than mere speculations.'

On that, the next day rose unexpectedly quickly. Opposed to heading out to the balcony, entering the hall, maids and butlers were readied to serve. Practically doing nothing whilst being dazed – lack of sleep paired with the Death gate – the body moved on its own. Dressed, groomed, and eating breakfast, Xula woke up a few minutes later.

Inside a private room used for leisure; no servants in view, the large door opened without making a sound. Decorated with red as the primary color, carpets, a table, a few chairs, portraits of her Majesty, and a tall bookshelf. "Why are you not in the dining hall?" asked Xula with a smile.

"Needed a place to think," he turned with cup in hand, "-the maids were a little too over-attentive."

"I can see, thanks," muffled, a snicker escaped, "-they took the opportunity to tidy up thy hair and would be beard."

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"..." stared with no words,"-this isn't a style suited for a king," the long hair was combed to the right – practically hiding half the face. A Star was painted on the right eye, "-I look closer to buffoon than King."

Sitting, "-it suits you," she laughed.

"S-Suits me," staring the ceiling, "-do you think me a jester?"

"Not quite," she slid back against the chair and took on a more appropriate posture, "-I think they wanted to have the usual sternness and ice-cold glare hidden behind makeup. You must surely realize this, thou art quite imposing."

"Still, it doesn't mean that I need to become a jester, tis honestly, disrespectful," sighed, the cup emptied.

"What if that was an order I gave?" asked with a serious tone, the eyes narrowed.

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"To what ends, what will this bring? I get the sentiment of it being a lighthearted joke, but still, why?"

"To snap thee out of yesterday's discussion. The possibilities of Kreston being involved with thine father's death did come up. You swore to not go back in the past, however, what I saw in thine eyes was the opposite. Thus, I figured, a jest should ease thy mind."

"I see," standing, *-mwah,* "-frankly, I don't mind the makeup, it's the hair that bothers me," both laughed. "Today's a busy day," on that, the door closed.

Meanwhile, to the east inside town Eden. For weeks now, supplies, carts, trucks, from Arda and Oxshield went back and forth. Not allowed to cross the bridge yet, a human and nonhuman district filled nicely. From the Ardanian Adventuring Guild, 30 Tier-6 Emerald were sent over for guard duty. Hidros's side, Pegasus arrived earlier than predicted, they stayed over at Eden's Inn. The naming of the place wasn't that creative since temporary business had to be set up. In the coming future, depending on how it all transpires, there may be a steady increase of willing investors.

Teleported into town, face washed and hair tied in a pony-tail, Staxius walked towards the Trading Guild shop. The first building next to the military tent. "Good morning Haru," leaned over the table, she jumped onto the counter, "-MAJESTY," flushed, she yelled, it echoed down the street from windows opened. The curtain swayed with an inconsistent rhythm.

"Guess our representative is getting a little anxious," a snarly remark had her tail stand up.

"I mean no disrespect," off the counter, "-should not royalty be the one who's representing Arda?"

"Not really," picking up a piece of garment, "-I'm here as overseer, nothing more nothing less. Once the gate is opened, I'll head to Oxshield. So you see, it's quite a quandary, I've not the time to stay and entertain the pompous trading guilds of Hidros."

"You're intently gazing at a bra, majesty," commented Haru, "-if someone were to see you like this, I think it be scandalous," covering her chest in jest, "-I don't mind the job. I'm a representative of Arda's council, tis my duty. Leave those traders to me, I'm not the guild leader for nothing – I promise to empty their pockets with lingerie."

"The spark in thine eyes sure is admirable," returning the item, "-may you have a prosperous day trading."

"Do you think I can fit in those?" asked Adete, her eyes remained locked on Haru's shop as they walked towards the tent.

"I doubt they make it for ant size," staring her with the freshwater aroma spreading as the current hit against the edges, "-there's nothing to support," a sense of relief was felt, the harmonious melody of the river made it all the more delectable. "A plain t-shirt will be all that you need," he chuckled, the tent came in sight. Behind, the platform stood empty with adventurers in armor on each end.

"I see," pinching his cheeks, "-you've become perverse, such tactlessness, shame on you, Blood King."

"I speak the truth only," parting open the cover, Triste Jr slept on the table. "Excuse you," spoken with a thunderous voice.

"Yes," changed, "-majesty," stood to bow, the head accidentally hit a lightbulb.

"Has Pegasus arrived?" the sun shone through a hole used for the passage of air, its journey ended at Staxius's feet.

"Yes," he walked over, "-they're staying at Eden's Inn."

"The human district I presume?" asked rhetorically, Triste nodded. "About the adventurers, have they come?" referring to Arda, the commander shook his head.

"Y-*cough,* -yes," sniffing, "-I apologize," wiping his nose, "-the cold air this early morning causes my body pain," blowing into a handkerchief with H. sown, "-back to the topic at hand. At the moment, only two adventurers are guarding the bridge until the guards return from break. The rest are at Leper's inn. Quite a famous place in the capital from what I've heard."

"Yes, on the second level, they are quite renowned for being a place full of good food and drinks," commented Staxius.

"West of Log bridge, with the bridge being on thine right side. Follow down the main road till the taverns with a mug of ales engrave on wooden signs come to view. It should have a windowpane with the name painted on it."

"Windowpane for an inn, that's rare, isn't it?"

“The owner visited Iqavea once, the architecture and taste are reminiscent of that place. I ask this to the Guild master and not King, do visit them – here are the orders of rotation,” handing a notepad, “-tis what I’ve concluded.”

“I see,” memorized, “-it’s a good plan. I’ll go explain the quest further, also, no need to be on edge. Emerald adventurers are strong; I’d say stronger than Guards in the capital. Still, they’re from Arda – we are all comrades.”

“Thanks for the generosity, majesty,” saluting, parting open the clothes – a blast of fresh air swayed the hair. “Hold me,” screamed Adete who was taken off guard.

“Yet you wanted a bra,” holding her hand in-between the index and thumb, “-how do you expect to dress that way if you can’t stand against this strong a gust?”

“Yeah, no need to continue,” with a humph, she slipped into the front pocket. Making their way along the riverside – the gaze remained on the flowing water. On the other side, chatter could be heard faintly. Rising from the East, the sun glared him directly. Obnoxious with how powerful it was, the sun kept on shining. Walking at a comfortable pace, Adete moved her head back and forth, ‘-idyllic,’ he thought. The town had a warmth to it. Opposed to Rosepire, that place had a dim and greyish feel despite the sun shining down. The capital of Arda was more secretive and subtle – not opened and easy to read as Eden. ‘I would definitely settle down here if I ever get the chance,’ he thought. Families walked, people laughed, some returned from bakeries with bread. Others rushed to work as apprentices – a lively town.

“What they say is true,” he smiled.

“Who says what?” asked Adete.

“I’ve no idea myself,” he breathed, “-the world is different. People have differing points of view and outlook on what is before them. I’ve traveled a lot, from Noctis’s Hallow to Vlaiwia and even Garsley town of Dorchester. Town Eden is the closest to what I had dreamed as a child, closest to Krigi – the place I grew up. It’s very nostalgic, the people are all happy, the kids run freely without fearing for their lives. Neighbors support one another, I’ve even spotted kids that remind me of myself as a child.” Approaching at a steady pace – bridge log. Two guards stood watch with their heads resting onto the greatswords’ handle and pommel. Taking a sharp right turn, ‘-it should be around here.’

As said by Triste, the inn stood out with its elaborate design. The tavern used brown as their primary with other subtle touches of warm colors for the outside décor. Leper’s Inn used white to stand out, the big windowpane with its name written in hard yellow did draw attention.

Ding, ding, bells rang, the smell of food and alcohol spread as perfume being sprayed. Maids dressed in short dresses with leggings, all were rather filled at essential spots. Flushed faces of drunkards could be seen gawking and salivating; some might say at the delicious food – though what they eyed were melons opposed to meat. The girls didn’t seem bothered. Rectangular tables with four chairs on each – around 10 of them were seen on the ground floor. A very large space, it held another floor – the kitchen was to the right.

'Emerald Tags,' spotted around their necks, "-greetings Adventurers," spoken with a loud voice, a big imposing figure peered down onto the customers. Maids with platters in hand stopped in their tracks, the inn seemed to pause – time stopped.

Chapter 289: Pegasus

"M-m-majesty?" stumbled from the kitchen, a man dressed in a cook's outfit with a white cloth covering the forehead. Hearing the Majesty pronounced, the guests, maids included stopped breathing and watched. A pin-drop silence, "-I do apologize for showing up on short notice," breaking the silence, Staxius nodded. "Do return to your meals, waiting for food to get cold is rather rude to the chef as well as the food itself," staring the guests, they understood the message and returned to eating.

"Leper I presume?" turning to the chef.

"Yes, your grace," he bowed wholeheartedly, "-how may I be of service?"

"Raise thine head," spoken in a casual tone, Leper's nervous aura diminished, "-I'm here as Guild Master and not king. Could you please guide me to where the adventurers are seated?"

"With pleasure," relieved, "-Cookie, come here," Leper waved to a short girl, "-could you kindly escort his majesty?"

"Yes sir," turning to Staxius, "-please, this way," she pointed to the front.

"Don't mind my asking," spoken politely, "-is it normal for maids to have a nickname. I'm assuming that Cookie isn't your real name?"

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"..." no response.

"Hello?" she stopped in the middle, "-have I disrespected thy in some way?" asked with a concerned tone, "-Cookie?"

"SORRY," feeling a quick tap on her back, she jumped, "-I spaced out," turning, "-sorry, sorry, sorry," making a scene, Staxius turned to Leper who furiously bit his nails. The customers all stared as she kept on apologizing, murmurs filled the room – left hanging, the maids stared with not so pleasant looks.

"Calm down," whispered, "-don't attract too much attention," soft yet deadly, Staxius's gaze sufficed.

"I'm sorry," eyes wide open, she turned and increased her pace, twin-ponytails swayed from left to right – the adventurers came in view. "H-here you are," platter close to her chest, she ran, leaving him with the well-built Dwarves, elves, and beastmen.

"Majesty," knelt, "-it's a pleasure to have thy grace our presence," voiced an elf.

"Thanks for having answered the quest," peering over them, a tall figure, "-kindly raise thine heads. We're comrades, I've come as Guild master and not king – do feel at ease. Nervousness will but make us on the edge which ultimately leads to pressure. The latter, as you all know, is a death sentence for warriors sworn to protect."

“Yes, sire,” hearing wise words, all stood in multiples of five at the far end of the room. Many guests gave side-glances, not to mention Cookie who got yelled in the background, ‘it’s the best I’m going to get,’ thought Staxius as the details of the quest were readied.

“Good,” clearing his throat, “-as you know, today’s quest might seem simple. However, it’s not, the guard details are essential in the success of today’s event. Fruitful relations with Oxshield depend on what happens here and now. The duties assigned to all of you here is to first and foremost, the protection of the visitors and traders from Rogues and thieves. Second, to keep an eye out for a monster or anything remotely harmful to a living being. Thirdly, patrols – the people assigned will be decided at the Military camp. Last but not least, to assist in any way – whether human or nonhuman, you’re going to help whoever requires it,” emphasis placed on the last order, the adventurers gulped as the pressure gave off was immense, with a pause to catch his breath, staring each warrior, “-as guild master, there’s one thing I want you all to remember. Be mindful and courteous to others. The time might come when a random act of kindness could bring fortune. Ideals aside, check-in with Commander Triste for queries. You are all under his command.”

“Yes, sire,” they saluted.

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“If I may speak,” voiced a beastmen at the back of the line.

“Speak,”

“What will you be doing, majesty?”

“I have plans to stay until the representatives meet one another. Ensuring that said process goes smoothly is a personal task,” eyeing the beastman, “-does that answer thine question?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll take my leave, report to Triste as soon as possible, the ceremony is set in two hours,” taking a sharp left, he walked. Outside, people were seen placing their heads against the window; the news that Staxius was in town spread. Many wanted to catch a glimpse of the King. From the Ardanian capital, many bards spread the fables of Staxius the Crimson King, around the province. Tales that hailed from Oxshield – many of his adventuring feats were made public. The opening of a guild to save the people from monsters was the most prominent, a savior was what the villagers viewed him as.

“M-majesty,” in came Leper with a distressed expression, the smell of meat being burnt spread from under the door, “-I apologize for Cookie’s sudden change of persona. She’s usually calm and composed around people, not to mention those who are of high status and prestige. Her manners are worthy of a maid in the palace, or so was what she said,” glaring her in the face, the owner seemed to be having a heart attack.

“Is that how she managed to get employed at your establishment?” asked then turning to Cookie, her gaze befell the floor. Bunny ears slumped; her posture seemed disingenuous.

“Yes, she recounts the tails of serving the Blood-king, more than a few times during the week. Her stories go as follows, ‘I saved the blood-king from burning to a fiery crisp by using water magic,’ a rough and not thought out excerpt.

“Is that so,” turning to the girl, “-you’ve saved me from a fiery crisp?” he laughed with loudness. *Death Element: Hand of God,* significantly less potent than before due to the D E A T H gate, “-how dares a weakling like thee say she has protected me,” instantly, a gust of nauseating aura spread throughout the inn, the girl hit the floor harshly. Her arms and legs slowly moved further from one another; a not so dignified posture. “Leper, you should be mindful of liars,” he turned to the owner, “-I’ve never come across her,” eyes fueled with hate, the maids jumped in to try and save their friends.

“Spreading lies about the royal name is a crime worthy of death,” stood close to her head, the scary nature was made obvious for all to see. Standing to try and save the girl, the adventurers rushed in, *Death Element: Magical Barrier,* closed off none could enter the bubble of protection.

“Please majesty, let her go, the girl has a reason, I’m sure of it,” begged the adventurers.

“You dare question me?” turning to the warriors, “-justice starts with oneself. A lie, whether good or bad, is still a lie. What would you call a man who kills; a murderer. Now then, what would you call a man who kills evil people, the same; a murderer. However, a murderer who is given right to slay for he follows a path deemed to be righteous. Nonetheless, killing and lying, it’s all the same,” turning to the girl, “-you said you protected me from a fiery death and were a maid employed by the royal family,” *Dispel,* the heavy aura lifted, a sigh of relief echoed through the room. “I’ll give you a chance, do you wish to become the personification of the lies you’ve told?”

In tears, “-y-yes,” she sat up straight.

“Go to the guild, become an adventurer,” holding out a hand, “-reach the rank of Tier 4 Bronze. Manage that and I promise to hire thy as my maid.”

“Really?” asked in a shaky tone, the guests inside and out, were baffled. Emerald rank adventurers, thirty of them, could but stare helplessly as a single barrier was conjured. Through their eyes, no spells were cast, only an upset stomach and feeling of drowsiness. A show of power and compassion, ‘-that should handle the public image,’ thought Staxius. A piece of drama straight out of a book. One where the hero must not allow liars to be set free, and one where the hero must always help people in need. A paradox, showing strength and a strong sense of ideals paired with the acceptance of people making mistakes – the first impression the King made in town Eden was extraordinary.

“Long live the king,” cheered Leper, the maids who viewed him with bad eye could but bow respectfully.

“Long live the king,” it resonated inside and out.

“Make it to bronze then come by the adventuring guild. Tis thy chance to become a woman of thine words,” reaching for the door handle, the people admired with smiles. Sprouting wings, he flew towards the sun, the glare it left made it seem as if an angel had descended onto the mortal plane.

“Manipulating people again?” asked Adete, the military camp soon came in view.

“What do you expect,” asked rhetorically, “-that was the perfect opportunity to show the people what King they have. Being viewed in a good light, obviously, I did sway the opinions to get the results I want. Words have power on their own, pair them with actions and it’s simple – go with what they think is right. Manifest their ideals, and they’re sure to follow. I figured by how the populous lived, with a small glimpse I got at a picture book a little girl read – the fascination with Heroes and Justice.

"You sure are shrewd," landing on Haru's shop, a good overview of the coming events, the water's flowing melody hampered by the chattiness of loud merchants and haggling housewives. 'I need to meet up with Pegasus,' a flap later, entering the human district. 'That should be Eden's Inn,' closest to the town entrance, he landed without being noticed.

"Good morning," said the inn-lady as the twinkling of bells signaled a new guest.

"Good morning," replied courteously with a smile, Staxius gave a good impression.

"How may I help?" she asked with an apron on.

"I heard that Pegasus was staying," waiting for a response, she smiled.

"You must be the guild master of Arda?" she asked, "-they did say someone would come. It's on the first floor, the second room to the left," pointing with a smile, she returned to preparing snacks.

'Pegasus's main team,' focused, *Knock, knock.*

"Enter," a deep voice yelled.

"Pardon the intrusion," entering with a strong aura, "-Pegasus?" seeing six people sat on the bed opposite one another, he waited.

"Yes, and you might be?" stood the strongest looking man out of the bunch.

??Guild Master of Arda, or as better known in the capital, Xenos of Kniq," introduced, their faces changed.

"The man who defeated Guild Master Raulf Serlo, else known as the Divine blade, the strongest swordsman in Hidros," standing up, a man with a hat, a loosely fitted jacket and two pistols on the hip. "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, I'm Arthur Ragenald, Leader of Pegasus."

"I'm Beth," voiced a lady in light-silver armor with a sword. Short hair as to not be of hassle, her eyes were stern and unforgiving, "-Vice leader of Pegasus."

"Kyjol, mage graduating of the Order," bowed a young-looking boy, innocent face, a wand and book in hand, presumably a grimoire.

"Ray, marksman of the special recon unit," saluted one with a camouflaged styled uniform. A scar on the chin, with sun-glasses and bald-cut.

"Mitio," said a figure concealed in black from head to toe.

"Feldo, a warrior,?? proudly tapping his chest, the big fighter who spoke first, black and red armor with a battle-ax.

"Before we continue," interjected Beth, "-I'd like for us all to reveal our rankings. It's better to get that information out of the way," a good point. With a smirk, she stared Arthur.

"Fine," with a deep breath, "-I'm Tier-two Gold. Beth is Tier-three Silver. Kyjol, Tier-four Bronze. Ray, Tier-three Silver. Mitio, Tier-five Ruby. Feldo, Tier-four Bronze, that should be all of it," pointing to Staxius, "-yours?"

'I see,' he smiled, '-showing off rankings is a way of establishing a hierarchy. I guess the news of my rank hasn't reached many ears yet.' Stepping forward, "-Xenos, Tier-one Platinum," pulling out the guild master's card, "-here," a hologram showed the name Staxius Haggard with ranks and titles.

"I see," smirks wiped off their faces, "-the first platinum ranked adventurer," Beth shook her head. "You don't seem that imposing, did the guild master and princess make a mistake or what?"

Chapter 290: Vision

"Did they make a mistake?" asked with a smile, "-do you think that poorly of me?" armed crossed, Staxius watched as the face turned blank.

"Yes," pulling out of the line, Beth marched and stood with a fierce aura, "-I do think they made a mistake. Arthur is more worthy of the title than someone I've only heard rumors. Our leader for once has made a change in the province, safeguarding the Azure wall from all monsters, do you think it easy?" confidence with a hint of smugness.

Not bothered, Staxius turned to Arthur, "-do you think it wise to have a companion voiced her mind so freely. Does the word decorum not exist in thy vocabulary?" spoken in a dignified way, Pegasus grew on edge.

"Listen," reaching for a gun, "-I'm not going to order my subordinate around. They do as they please, if a mess happens – we'll deal with it like a team," holding his hat with eyes on the floor and hand making a cross, "-Guilds aren't that friendly. We're always battling with one another to survive – the justification of her being angry towards the Guild Master and Princess stands on strong grounds. A lower-guild such as Kniq, without many members, are always picked to be the center of attention. They're being treated as if they are the only fighters in the kingdom, frankly, I doubt their strength."

"Jealousy," a paused of which the blank stare turned into a glare, "-how very humane," mumbled as if fascinated, Arthur seemed startled.

"What do you mean humane, are you not one of us?" pointed out Ray.

"Am I human?" turning to the ex-military officer, "-I guess not," the temperature around the room dropped. "I was at one point," doors and windows shut, a slight wind blew outwards of Staxius. "Not anymore," the crimson eyes flamed, "-I've one question, will you cause trouble in the coming event?"
All-Seeing eyes

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"Depends," reaching for his gun, Arthur shot, the large warrior got in front, the mage cast enhancement magic. The vice-leader had her blade close to Staxius's neck whilst behind, the man who had no presence held a dagger readied to pierce the heart. A laser could be seen pointing on top of Staxius's head.

"Platinum, don't make me laugh," joked Beth, steam rose from where Arthur's bullet landed.

"Good teamwork you have there," fell to the floor, the projectiles twinkled, "-I do admire how fast that was," vanished, "-quite broad shoulders," touching Arthur's back, "-if the leader dies, the army has no

one to take up command,” *tap,* a single touch and he fell. “What will it be?” turning to Beth, “-you’re the vice-leader,” Staxius stated the obvious.

“Don’t underestimate us,” voiced Mitio as he went in for the final strike, inches away from hitting Staxius, a smile was seen, one of relief and assurance.

“Word of advice,” a graceful sidestep, “-a stealth attack works better if thine mouth is shut,” with a smile, the index finger pointed downwards. *Crash,* Mitio hit the floor loudly, Staxius turned to the rest, *BANG,* “-very fast reactions,” he smiled and caught the bullet, one that Ray shot the moment the target moved.

‘A distraction,’ he thought and knelt a silvery-white line barely grazed the head, “-Grasscutter,” spoken loudly with hands up, “-good high-tier spell,” the spell disarmed with Mana cancellation. “Mages were strong,” now behind the boy, “-not anymore,” *tap,* another party member fallen to the floor.

“Stop playing around,” yelled the muscular warrior with a heavy swing. *Ping,* “-the floor nearly broke,” index finger holding the weapon in place, “-tanks are best at taking on frontal assault,” a slight shift allowed the ax to roll past the nail and hit the floor, “-you’re open,” running up the handle, “-don’t want to repeat that mistake,” elbow to the head, Feldo fell to the floor.

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CLAP, stopped in mid-air, “-nearly,” without looking, Feldo’s distraction in creating an opening for the final blow crumbled.

“Who are you?” devastated, Beth lessened her grip as he held her sword. All around her, the unconscious bodies of her guild.

“I’m Guild Master of Arda,” standing with blade in hand, “-do I have to re-introduce myself again?” throwing it to the ground, “-it’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance,” he turned to Arthur.

“Pleasure was ours,” stood as if nothing happened, “-it’s one of the best introduction I’ve ever given,” he smiled.

“Well, you were all holding back in fear of breaking the lady’s inn,” with a smile, Staxius held out a hand. “The same can be said for you as well,” Arthur returned the feeling, “-it would have ended way worse than this,” they laughed.

“Leader,” voiced Beth and Mitio, “-is there something we’re missing?” they asked.

“An introduction using actions to words,” added Ray, “-an old tradition of Dorchester, though forgotten. Back when war raged, people were judged based on their physical and combat prowess. Weak and death is assured, strong, death will come slowly.”

“I’m surprised you knew the signal,” said Arthur, “-reaching for my gun and doing the cross, “-normally, if there’s no response, the conversation ends boringly,” turning to Staxius, “-you knew what I meant.”

“How can I not,” the aura subsided, “-I was brought up in that province, I’ve seen many introductions and gave some too.”

“Well, it did have another meaning,” Ray’s eyes turned to the window, “-if one was weak during that introduction, death came faster than anything else.”

“Do explain this in further detail later,” lighting a cigar, “-I came to check because of Guild Master Serlo,” Staxius smoked.

“We got the message,” added Beth with an impolite tone, “-question,” turning to Arthur, “-who actually won?” she asked.

“Neither,” voiced Staxius.

“I agree,” nodded Pegasus’s leader.

“Death can only take you so far,” enigmatically, “-I’ll be watching till the event starts,” reaching for the door, Staxius left.

“Please explain,” glaring Arthur, “-I don’t get it,” she held her forehead.

“There’s nothing to explain,” laughed the leader, “-if one of you died or he died, the continent would go on as if nothing happened. In the bigger picture, killing a friend or foe doesn’t matter. That’s the real meaning behind what was said, wise words only a man who lives by killing others can say.”

“Are you a murderer too?” asked Feldo, coming too a few minutes ago.

“God forbid I ever,” making a star shape in the air, “-I’ve never killed,” the voice sincere, “-it’s a line I never want to cross. Though I’ve seen people get killed,” glaring the door, “-the guild master is no different. Pegasus as a guild is specialized in fighting monsters, Ray has killed before, look at his eyes,” he pointed, “-slightly emotionless, killing changes people. Coming down to it, we were outclassed since we saw the man as a monster opposed to what he really was; a demon.”

“I agree,” interjected Kyjol, “-dispelling a high-tier spell without causing harm. I’ve seen this fighting style before. A mage that went by the name of Tempest, he had a son who excelled at killing mages. That’s the last of the report I’ve read anyway.”

Returned to Haru’s roof, “-that was fun,” he mumbled and rested.

“Are you serious?” asked Adete, “-did you become more powerful?”

“No,” eyes closed, “-the death element is being handled as to not overpower my body. Blood-Arts and the vampiric blood aren’t hampered any longer, I’d resort to magic and fight however,” hands up with the sun in the background, “-I used the strength given as a Vampire.”

“I see, the death element and blood-arts are combined but not fully compatible. Attaining divinity slowed the process a whole lot. Now that it’s softer, my blood can shine more,” she laughed.

“Swapping the Death Element for Blood-Arts, I use the latter and rely on the physical strength, in that aspect, I’m closer to a normal warrior.”

“Normal isn’t the word I’d use,” fading into the chattiness around, the warm gaze of the sun tickled the pale skin. Cold and dark to warm and hot, a change of pace, the eyelids grew heavier – most of the background noise tuned off. The only prominent melody was the river and wind. Being strong felt more

like a curse than a boon. Fighting back the urge to unleash everything, fighting the risk of breaking – a body so powerful it felt sluggish and slow. Standing close to the top, the air became harder to breathe, more people one left behind, more the tension of showing results added onto the mindset. The struggles of a human turned vampire then god, could never be understood. Buried behind facades, smiling, being tough or acting aloof – Staxius’s personality and mindset suffered gradual incurable damage. Breaking down to be reformed into a sharper blade – tis was the real process behind attaining divinity.

Minutes turned to hours, a crowd of people gathered on each end of the center platform. At the helm, leading the non-humans, Haru. Opposite her, Prince consort Piers, a representative of high stature and repute. All neutrally stared one another. Behind, as speculated, a filming crew took notes and reactions of the populous. The uneasiness was due to nervousness, inside, the prospect of trading with one another, after having had many disputes in the past; was remedied at last. Peace and reconciliation, adventurers stood opposite one another to survey the crowd’s movement.

“Please,” mediating, Triste stood in the middle and called forth both representatives. The camera crew followed Piers whilst Haru walked alone.

“It’s a pleasure to be present on such an auspicious day,” hands on chest, Piers bowed respectfully.

“We’re happy to welcome thy to Arda, the humble province we call home,” she gave a curtsy with a beautiful smile. Taken off guard by how graceful the lady appeared; the men gasped. Sensing their gaze, Haru slyly turned to Triste and winked as if to say, ‘I’m fabulous aren’t I.’ *Cough,* breaking her smugness, he cleared his throat, “-please speak a few words on behalf of the traders and populous.”

Nodding for Haru to start, “-I’d like to thank every single one of you to have come in greater numbers. I know that our kinds haven’t been on good terms – the past was bad and we have grudges. Nevertheless, what has been done can’t be changed. Still, it doesn’t mean that we should forget the past – learn from it and adapt. We are all but living creatures who shall turn to ashes and return to Mother Earth someday or the other. Our role actions will reflect on what is to come in the future, Town Eden will be the staple that brings about true harmony and companionship between Oxshield and Arda,” she ended with a smile.

“Beautiful sentiment from a lovely lady,” bowed Piers once again, “-I’ve come on behalf of Queen Gallienne. Though some of thee might not know, Queen Gallienne and Queen Shanna have become very good friends. The inter-magical tournament opened my eyes to the true beauty of how Ardanian culture and traditions are performed. Deeply from my heart, I apologize for the harm that has been done. Words can’t fix what our predecessors have done, and as Lady Haru voiced beautifully, the future is in our hands. I enjoy peace, and will choose it over discontent and war – our kingdom’s leaders are friends in arms. King Staxius, he has come to the aid of my dearest wife so many times in the past, is truly a hero. Words can’t express my gratitude,” full of emotion, “-Oxshield stands proudly thanks to Arda. With that sentiment, I’d like to say one thing, I’d love for all to put differences aside and enjoy and support one another,” heavy words with heavier meaning, each side were awestruck.

“Well said,” smiled Haru.

“It’s what I truly wish for,” smiled Piers, to which, a handshake followed. Applause, cheers, and whistles traveled across town, caught off-guard, Staxius awoke to see the opening ceremony. People relishing in

the idea of peace, relishing the idea of what was to come. Town Eden would become essential in a soon to be legendary alliance. One that'd have the world over their heads in the future – The Argashield Federation.