

Death Magic 291

Chapter 291: Memento

Thirty minutes after the handshake; differing races walked across the middle platform. Merchants shouted; adventurers participated in the event, guard duty whilst having fun. Haru grew to enjoy the company of Piers. In a way, seeing that harmony in-between sent a significant message. Not verbally nor physically, the message had one target, and one option – to reach their hearts. Touching and reaching out for emotions, all that made humans and non-humans similar. The discourse and visit cut short after Haru took many to her shop. Panties and lingerie of all kind, spotted, tiger-patterned, and even camo; name it and you had it. Leading the front, Piers, entering as the subtle riverside breeze blew past the window. His hair, usually left alone as it parted down the middle, swayed to the left. Behind, the camera crew yelped, never had they seen such beauty.

Obligated, Haru gifted a black laced lingerie. The latter, after a secretive glimpse, sent Piers into a burst of uncontrollable laughter ending in coughs. Oblivious to what transpired, kept hidden in a black golden bag, Piers left in the company of the traders. The event continued without fail, thus noon came.

“They look to be having fun,” added Adete on the slated roof. Sun glared down without mercy, white-clouds casually made walls casting a shadow around the town. A moment of peace to breathe, a moment many relished as the heat grew to be annoying. The breeze from the river did help a little, those on the platform were unaffected. Sprawling with smiles and chatter, none would have guessed a malicious disapproving mindset, in which the non-humans were the devils – ever existed. What was recorded that day was a fun and loving acquaintance. Outcast’s themselves, commoners who walked and traveled to Arda for said chance – saw the Ardanians as fellow comrades. Comrades who were outcasts themselves, treated as if machine rather than living things. Hunted, killed, tortured, the never-ending list of cruelty continues without stop.

“A good start for the alliance,” said Staxius with a relaxed face. “We better get moving,” he voiced whilst glaring towards Oxshield, “-the interview awaits. The situation here has been handled, there are things to attend to in the capital,” sprouting wings, a little hop later, he shot off as if fireworks. *Ancient Magic: Teleportation,* reaching a certain height, drawing a circle with the index, a portal appeared, one that took him straight into Pandora.

Woosh, stopped inches away from crashing into the wall, “-I win,” back to normal, he turned to see a dizzied Adete who twirled. “Such a pain,” grabbing her hand, “-close your eyes,” sat on his palm, she regained her bearings.

“Don’t treat me like a kid,” she ordered as a click was heard in the background, the stuffy room’s floor revealed one clearer.

“I would never,” sarcastically, “-we’re off the commercial district I think?” rhetorical, a message with the location arrived the moment he got off the ladder.

.....

“Let me rest awhile,” tired, she laid on the palm.

"I've told you so many times," putting her on his head, "-don't sleep on in my hand," using the other free hand, the phone displayed the location.

"Whatever, father," giving a humph, "-good night." Once on his head, given what motion he did, even a backflip, would not suffice for her to fall – practically glued to the white and red hair.

'I see,' checking the machine, '-god's ale is readied for next week,' he commented, '-I guess Cake really got around to making the stuff. Injected a bit of mana in the concoction, the dull liquid lit with a blueish glow.

White Dust, written on a chest beside the worktable to the left, "-I see," opened, "-ingredients to make Angel's Dust," closed, "-Cake is very reliable." On that, having checked the supplies for later, teleportation straight to the Mansion.

'It is different,' a few minutes later, now standing on the balcony, he watched. 'Town Eden and Rosepire are so far apart, under the same sky, the feel of the places,' bobbing back and forth, '-there's a sort of tension in the air.' Closed, Void roared into life. Dressed in semi-formal clothes, with blue pants and a white sleeved-up shirt, the muscles seemed as if to break out of the garments. It fitted and displayed the body rather well. Driving towards the commercial district, here and then, passing close to a stadium – and arrived into a place filled with tall buildings. Fenced off, with Memento wrote in white on a black backdrop, the studio, and media complex.

"Excuse me, sir," walking out of the complex with a gun strapped to the hip, "-this area is for authorized personnel only," a glare followed.

"I've come on request from Aceline," fired back, the guard stopped and stared.

"You wish to say that you know THE Aceline, pride of Hidros?" eyes squinted with doubt, "-no chance in hell," he laughed. "Nice car you have there, and you seem to be a noble," going up and down, "-I've heard nothing of the sort. Either go away or we'll have to resort to..." a laser lined itself against Staxius's chest.

"So belligerent," he sighed and rolled the window down further, signaling the guard to give a moment, "-Hello, Scott, this is Staxius. Could you come down, I've run into some dogs who wish to play. Not that I want to get out and throw a few bones and play catch – I'm afraid I might accidentally take their heads."

novelusb.com

"DON'T YOU DARE DO ANYTHING," screamed across the phone, moving away, "-I'M COMING," the call ended fast.

"How long are you going to stay on the road?" voiced the guard, "-it's getting boring," he yawned. Safely inside the walls on to which had plants growing, none would have guessed it to be barred off. The road, two lanes on either side divided by grass and trees. Opposite the complex, greenery, and no other buildings – for being in the capital, it was secluded.

"Open the gates," ordered a man in glasses who ran onto a stone brick path, "-he's a friend of mine."

"But sir, are you sure?" turned, the guard asked as Scott crossed the road, "-yeah I'm sure," the gate opened.

“You look out of shape,” voiced Staxius with a smile, Scott panted heavily.

“I sprinted across the whole complex because a certain someone doesn’t have the patience to deal with people,” glaring, “-and yes, I’m referring to you.”

“Is that how you greet an old friend,” acting as if saddened, “-I’m disappointed,” the voice softened.

“Drop the theatrics,” the door opened, “-I’ll guide you to the office.” Bigger than it appeared, taller buildings with various names on the front. Good looking cars, up and coming singers and performers ran across the path to their various auditions. To the far right, secluded, antennas, relays that sent the shows across the whole continent – including the radio.

“Question,” pulling up to one of the buildings – one that seemed more luxurious than the others, “-why is the security so tight?”

“Simple,” exited, “-because famous people work here,” he winked. Void parked just shy of the entrance, surrounded by good looking cars, it stood out as the fastest and costlier.

“I win,” winked Staxius, the duo walked at a steady pace – climbing stairs which broke up after five steps into flatness, then again. Vintage-styled lamps stood along the staircase parted in the middle with a silvery-metal handguard.

“Won what?” asked Scott.

“Check it out?” he gestured behind, “-Void is prettier than the others,” he laughed.

“I agree,?? Scott laughed as well, “-good to see that you’ve changed. Never would I have guessed that our bodyguard would be someone so important in Hidros.”

“I do apologize if I kept it a secret, I rather not have wanted the attention,” the entrance door opened by itself.

“I get it,” smiled Scott, they took a sharp left towards the lift, “-being famous is more of a hassle than people think,” the lift was set to floor 15.

“Why did Aceline want an interview all of a sudden?”

“You became the first platinum adventurer, not to mention, the guild master of Arda, – then we have your title as Royalty. Is there more that you don’t have?” he asked with a genuine smile.

“Yeah,” the lift opened, “-the ability to save what is dear to me,” trailed off, he stared out the windows to another building of the same architecture.

“Did you say something?” asked Scott.

“Not really,” they walked down the corridor, took a few turns until glass-paned rooms with chairs beside the walls came in view. One, in particular, stood out, one that was at the end of the hall – a figure sat ominously as the lighting wasn’t that great in that area.

“Good to see you made it,” voiced Scott.

“It was a request from her majesty’s closest friend, in no way would I have missed the invitation,” half of the face covered, dressed in white with a Star necklace, the lady stood. Medium length blond hair parted to the right, grey eyes, pimpled left cheek – small and unassuming. The clothes were ones worn by the church of Syphon.

“Sharon?” asked Staxius.

“Old man?” she stared up, “-sorry,” coughing, “-it’s a pleasure to see you again,” a half-hearted smile.

“I’m not that old,” shaking his head, “-how’re the injuries healing up, any progress?”

“Not really,” lifting the hair, “-the burn marks will cause heavy scarring. I will regret and miss how I looked like a young maiden,” covering the marks, “-it’s unsightly, I apologize.”

“Not at all,” taking a few steps forward, “-does the Church of Syphon not allow Bishops to get married?”

“As Apostle, I’ve got the right to marry if I wish. The Goddess of Stars is also a harbinger for love and all that is right. Opposed to how Kreston works, we view the unity of two people who love one another as something to be proud of. To partake in the pleasure given to us by Mother Nature. The making of another human being – a godly feat. Feeble as we are, there’s no way we can oppose what drives humanity forward.”

“I see,” smiled Staxius, “-a young maiden should have another chance at life. I care not for what god you worship – my interest is in what you wish. I can help,” finger on the burnt tissue, “-this isn’t ordinary burns. You’ve been cursed, I can sense the mana oozing – for religious faith, they sure rely on the dark side of magic.”

“Sorry old man,” she stepped back, “-I’ve no idea what you may be referring too,” her eyes turned to the window.

“I was asking if you’d like to have a chance to have thine face healed. Not by me alone, I’ve friends, doctors, alchemists, and talented people. A simple word as Yes, and I can promise that the stain of Kreston will turn to dust,” sensing embarrassment, the tone used was formal.

“Care to give me some time?” asked with a confused look, the door opened.

“Reach out to the queen if you ever accept the offer, I’ll make sure to have thine beauty returned,” with a nod, Aceline stepped out with a loud clap.

“Staxius, Sharon,” she smiled, “-thanks for making it on short notice.”

“I know this is an interview,” spoke Staxius, “-let me guess,” he eyed Aceline and the apostle. “It’s been a day since we returned. Let’s drop the act,” turning to Scott, “-is this a publicity stunt. The Queen has asked this from thy both – one to make the populous aware of what has transpired. She wishes to start the war against Kreston with Sharon and me as bait.”

“As expected,” from behind Aceline a lady walked, “-I told her to make sure that the public knows what has transpired. It’s not a disservice, I want everyone to know who Staxius Haggard is. The man who saved Hidros so many times – always in the shadow with others taking the credit, aren’t you tired?”

"I do apologize for the tone I used," turning to Gallienne, "-I'm not opposed to being used for the welfare of Hidros," the eyes turned blank, "-do you think it best to have me as that figurehead. Someone from Arda, you know well how the noble's views non-humans; it might lead to another revolt – there are fanatics in the capital, those sent by Kreston. Are you sure you want to crumble what little control you have????

"Staxius," friendly, "-don't you worry," curled in a fist, her hand rested against his chest, "-didn't I tell you to leave everything to me?" her eyes seemed murderous.

"If you say so, majesty," unimpressed, he stepped back, "-you've disappointed me," he sighed, "-I thought you'd find a way to unite the provinces without the use of arms, but I guess I was wrong. Your intent on storming Kreston and start a war with Sharon as the reason."

Chapter 292: Interview

"I've disappointed you?" the atmosphere fell from cheery to tense, Aceline, Scott, Sharon had no say in the matter. Staring one another, a King and Queen, Aceline tried to break the would-be fight, however, a touch on the shoulder by Scott told everything. A matter that concerned royalty.

"I didn't mean it in spite," returned Staxius with a calmer tone, "-it's just..." pausing to find the words, "-it's just that the Gallienne I know, the one who decided to embrace unity – would not resort to violence that quickly."

"I see," she nodded in agreement, "-dear Staxius," she smiled, "-you've misunderstood what the goal is."

"Do tell," intrigued, he waited.

"Figure it out," she stared with a smile, "-war isn't my object."

'A challenge,' taking a step back and staring out the window, '-she doesn't want war. Then what's the real objective, if she were to announce my involvement and Sharon's rescue – Kreston would be viewed as turn-coat. Basing my assumption on the fact that the events during the tournament must have been squashed – the simpler answer is often the right one,' with a spark, he turned with bright red eyes. "Are you willingly trying to force a revolt out of the possible spies and devotees of Kreston, a governmental purge?"

"Spot on," she bowed, "-as expected, I intend to purge the capital, not fully, but to a point where the shadow of Kreston isn't looming over us. I've set the plan in action since the day you set off to rescue Sharon, the change will happen on the day the interview is broadcasted. Let's just say that the outcome will decide how close our province will become. Sending Piers, prince consort, to Arda was my decision as well. It will prove to all that peace between Humans and Ardanians is possible – simply put, a common enemy. A certain spy from the Order's Whispers has been keeping tabs on their activity."

.....

"I'll leave the purge in thy hands then, majesty," suspicious to relaxed, "-a sound judgment," they entered the studio. Left behind were the host, her assistant, and apostle with no idea what the two had said.

'A political purge,' sat facing Aceline, Sharon sat to his left. The queen headed back to the castle, '-she's cunning, then again, she's the lady who imprisoned me for sixteen years. Time will tell if her plan works, a political purge isn't that easy to scheme. Goldberg is out of the picture I presume, or the step-sister might have retained the title of Duchess – a puppet leading the nobles.'

"Welcome to my studio," voiced Aceline, "-I've no idea what you and Gallienne spoke about earlier, nevertheless, the interview will be broadcasted live. It should be simple since you did the same thing in Iqavea," she winked and turned to Sharon who pressed her hands and recited a prayer.

Grey with warm colors dotted around, the studio hosted nothing extravagant. A table on which rested microphones, a window behind which stood the supervisors as the show would begin. Hitting 14:00, "-good afternoon," in a jingle, "-people of Hidros," her energy made the greyish room lighter and sparkle. "The weather doesn't seem that bad considering how hot it has been. I wish I could lay back and relax at the beach in Plaustan right about now, the salty aroma, just thinking about it makes all the trouble fade away," talked in a personal manner, the listeners felt the familiarity and friendliness.

Fifteen minutes past, "-I have with me two special guests in the studio, first and foremost, we have a lady whose words have touched the heart of many. Following the way of stars, Sharon, Apostle of Syhton; who the newspapers reported missing," signaling her to speak. "Good afternoon, thanks to the grace and generosity of goddess Syhton, I'm honored to have been invited by the Pride of Hidros," soothing, a reversal of how she acted in the company of friends.

"Next, the man who escorted me to Iqavea safely – the first-ever platinum adventurer, Xenos. Guild leader of Kniq and Guild master of Arda; you've no idea how many strings I had to pull to get him on here," she winked, an obvious lie to make the situation more enjoyable.

novelusb.com

"Same as the apostle said, I'm honored to be here today," deep and strong, it sent shivers down their spine.

They who listened live couldn't believe their ears. News outlets, listening to the broadcast were ashamed – the first platinum adventurer.

"Before I pick thy brains, let's start with the answer many of us want – where have you been, Sharon?" On that, the explanation of how Kreston kidnapped her and did unspeakable things was said out loud. Her voice, trembling, made many angry – Aceline added her touch and tried to comfort. Swaying the public opinion, especially justice crazed warriors – in taverns and inns, they yelled to voice their frustrations.

Time showed 14:45, "-we'll be back after a short break," the sobbing intensified.

"Are you ok?" asked Aceline, they went off-air.

"Yeah," raising her head, "-I'm fine," wiping her nose, "-how was the act?" she winked.

"So it was fake?"

"Obviously," turning to Staxius, "-how was my performance, like it?" she asked.

“For someone who’s a bishop, I dare say that an acting career might have suited you best. Then again, those who spread the word of god are often the most hypocritical – I’m not impressed in the least. Tis thine job, to preach wholeheartedly even if what you say is utter nonsense at times,” sternly he glared.

“Fine,” rolling her eyes, “-there’s no need to insult me. I do what I have to do as the bishop,” leaning closer, “-I’m an actual apostle you know,” pulling down her robe and exposing a bit of her chest, “-see, it’s the mark of Syhton. Say what you want, I’m genuine,” covering up, “-your turn will come, old man.”

“I see,” a smile portrayed itself, “-what about this then,” pointing to the left cheek, “-what does that make me then, I bear the mark of three gods.” Silence whelmed the room; Sharon was awestruck whilst Aceline drank water and discussed it with the supervisors. “Look at your face,” a flick to the forehead, “-I’m joking, it’s a tattoo as a sign of my lineage to the god I worship. Same as you, I follow the words of the Death Reaper, a god, or destroyer as spoken in legend.”

“Death Reaper you say,” her eyes squinted, “-does Xenosious bring any memory.”

“Well yeah, it’s the founding of Xenos, my nickname. How can I not remember, the Death Reaper, charged with taking the life of Syhton when she was but an angel, was stopped by a god who had fallen in love with her. Resentment followed, the world plunged into darkness and the angel gained immortality and to forever be trapped as stars to never become full again. The Curse of eternal darkness, that’s what I remember, it might be wrong but who cares,” he shrugged, “-it’s not like we know what happened at that time.”

“Are you guys ready?” asked Aceline, “-Sharon’s display sure was award-worthy. I’m sure Gallienne loves the results.” Giving a countdown with three fingers held up, *three... two... one... start,* on which the idol took charge to segue into Staxius’s entry. “Now that Sharon has calmed down, Xenos, care to recount in greater detail how you managed to rescue the apostle?”

“Sure,” taking the mic, “-I’ll ask the listeners to take what I’m about to say with a grain of salt. Kreston, the province is very well as the rumors say it is. I met many, many people, they’re very secluded and hate to have intruders – a xenophobic province. Per orders from her Majesty, I followed suit, eight months, living in constant fear. Each step I walked felt as if the last, perish the thought of sleeping, common was it for tourists to be slain at night. I lived on hunting and made a makeshift camp on a tree, that aside, I had to employ various tactics to gain their trust. Mannerism, dress code, their culture, without learning those, there’s no way I’d sit here today. I blended and became a member of their church – once one walked into that realm – the people are like me and you. Easy going with quirks, though on the extreme, they mean good by heart. To not disclose any information, a family who ran from Dorchester during the holy crusade, welcomed me with open arms. They understood the situation, thus, days turned to weeks, the months, till the last day. I had help from friends waiting for the day I sent a message for extraction – that’s how I became the first Platinum adventurer.”

“Amazing,” drawn fully into what he said, Aceline could but watch in awe. Snapping out of the dream, more questions were asked. One by one, answered, the populous grew to know the leader of Kniq as a strong, charismatic, and unforgiving man. Not the complete embodiment of a hero; that mantle had been claimed by Achilles and her noble acts. Rather, the title given was Xenos the Protector. The end steadily arrived came; bidding goodbye, Amber time finished.

“Well done,” taking off her headset, “-that was amazing, I never thought that it’d be such a success. The result is more pleasing than expected,” standing, the door was held open by Scott who smiled.

‘Over,’ with a nod, Staxius left the room and beelined for the elevator, ‘-I was careful to not come across as someone who hates Kreston. Neutrality is best when faced with strangers; the effects of a misplaced word has a lot of power.

The name of Xenos grew, it also increased Kniq’s repute, a win, win situation. Hearing the news, the members of the guild scattered across the province, smiled and relished in the idea of him returning.

“How was it, the interview,” awake, Adete spoke in the middle of a yawn.

“Not that hard, I said what they wanted to hear,” teleported in the attic, a crash echoed around the house. Followed by an argument, ‘-intruders?’ he asked and reached for Tharis – kept in a chest not far from the way down.

“I told you so many times to not mess with the kitchen utensils, you know full well we can’t cook, come on sis.”

“But sis, is it that bad if we try to learn now? We’re young maidens after all,” leaned on the counter seductively, the argument turned to laughter. Sneaking down, aimed and ready to fight, “-drop the FORK.”

“AHH,” startled, the room exploded with the cacophony of metal against the marble floor.

“Now this is a sight I have missed,” with a smile, Tharis lowered. Dressed in a black uniform with a badge embroidered on the right side, checkered skirts, leggings up to the thigh, and black shoe, Emma and Emmy held one another in fear.

“Master?” spoke Emma, “-when did you come back?” asked Emmy.

“Yesterday,” disarming the pistol, “-I guess it was true, you both come by to clean and visit the mansion whenever is possible. How’s school?”

“Seriously?” picking up the fork, exchanging glances, “-WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN,” they dashed and stood menacingly, “-EVERYONE HAS BEEN WORRIED,” Emma held the knife close to his neck. What the face told and what the mouth said could not have been any more out of sync.

“Come on,” ignoring the words, “-is this how you greet an old friend,” a group embrace, the frivolous shouts, and questioning turned to silence. “I’m glad to see that you’re both safe and sound,” letting go, “-students, never would I have dreamed the two trouble makers who sought after revenge would become lovely ladies.”

“We were kind of...” staring away in embarrassment, Emma tried to answer.

“We were forced,” Emmy completed the sentence, “-Viola gave us two options, either study or study...” a sigh followed.

“Sounds exactly like her,” smiled Staxius, “-are you girls free or busy?”

“We’re free today, a break from all the studying, it’s a pain but it’s quite fun,” voiced Emma.

“Want to go into town then?” he asked with a calm voice, “-I know I sort of disappeared without saying anything. Nevertheless, I want to know what happened when I left, and also treat you two to some sweets and a few presents.”

Chapter 293: Cobweb

“Will that suffice?”

“Yes, Boss,” replied a lady dressed in black. Flashing light went up and down the runway, on one end, a plane – gigantic and impressive. The nose seemed as if one of a bear – docile yet intimidating. Four rotary engines each being twice if not thrice as big as Void. Painted in a greenish-brown – the back opened with multiples of cargo getting ready to fly out. In the bunch, arms, God’s Ale, and Angel’s dust. Opposite the office, in a corner, a white tower stretched high towards the sky, the command center.

“We should really step away,” voiced a man in a black lavish suit with white and red hair.

“I agree,” besides, a lady with a tattoo on her neck followed suit. Stood in line, guards dressed in tuxedos and armed with guns. The deafening sound of the engine starting, the rumble made was proof enough of how powerful the craft was.

‘It’s been a little over a month since the day I met up with the Lymsey sisters. It was a lovely time, a proper send off to the students. Between making god’s ale, angel’s dust, and investing my time into Phantom – I’ve sort of neglected the guild. Kniq that is, checking on Auic, she said, “-the guild is fine. Apart from the Lymsey sisters, the adventurers are questing, killing monsters – mainly the tower at Plaustan. There’s money to be made, you shouldn’t worry.”

‘A good enough response; her attitude seemed a little jaded. Not that it matters, Undrar is the one in charge as we decided months ago.’ The lift opened with a ting.

“Boss,” pushing aside a sliding door, “-the Godfather is pleased,” files were placed onto the table. A dark with heavy colored office, with a deep crimson carpet, a globe of the planet sitting next to a wall. Couches closest to the door, Cake paced around the room with skips here and there.

.....

“Renaud is pleased,” checking the report, “-that’s a lot of money.” [400,000 Gold in Arms]

“I told you,” she turned and winked, “-the arm’s trade is a market filled with money. With the export of drugs, the money made there was 200,000 Gold. All of it is going into Phantom’s net worth. You’re free to take as much as you want, boss, after all, the gold we’re bringing in daily is jaw-dropping.”

“That excludes the assets we have,” the chair turned and faced out the window, “-the land, buildings, vehicles, Phantom is surely spreading its wing around the world, all that is thanks to you,” he stared at Cake who gazed upon the runway.

“Don’t give me all the credit,” she turned, closed her eyes, and smiled, “-after returning, taking the mantle of Boss – Phantom grew to be more vicious. Our leader is the famed killer Shadow, our rivals were scared upon hearing the name. Not to mention – choosing to invest in textile companies own partly by Blade’s End, buying the formula and right to manufacture of Mana and Health Potions from the

Alchemist Guild. Phantom has a monopoly on essential businesses that will remain relevant. I do think the investment in Mana potions was well worth the money," facing a chair, she took a seat.

"Over here," she waved, Staxius joined her and had a late-night snack. "I do wonder how you managed to procure such favor from that guild, did you threaten them?" she asked whilst sipping tea.

novelusb.com

"Not really," thinking back, he paused.

"Master Alchemist Flein," sat in an office with Clarise standing to the side, "-I've come as a potential business partner," spoken with a formal tone, Staxius held a smile.

"What is it that you wish to discuss, Alchemist?" suspicious, the old man stroked his whitened beard.

"I've examined the mana potions and healing potions," opening a briefcase, "-and I'll say that both are below average," checking on Clarise who seemed on edge, the attention focused on handling the negotiations. "Funds are running low for the guild," voiced without waiting, Flein was taken aback from the statement.

"Are you mocking us?" he asked and peered over his reading glasses.

"No, that isn't my intent," leaning to the table, "-as I see it, If Arda were to start producing Healing potions and Mana potions, you heard me right, Mana potions, I'm sure it would not be that hard to run the Alchemist sect into the ground. I know from Raulf that the funds were given as compensation for potions by the Queen," giving a lecherous smirk, "-having contacts goes a long way in the world. In no way do I wish to harm the sect, however..." tapping the chair's handle, Flein's anxiety rose.

"Are you that desperate to threaten a sect that stands on the verge of collapse. Our funding was cut a few weeks ago, on the day the first Platinum adventurer was announced. We've been losing members ever since, and now you come as if a savior; rather, I'd say an opportunist," stomping towards the table, she glared.

"What's wrong with taking opportunities?" he asked, "-I'll make thee this deal," facing Flein, "-come under my wing. Become researchers for Phantom, as far as I know, the Alchemist Sect is private. Though funded by the Queen, it's nothing more than a side-project – a training ground for potential researchers to enter the Cobalt unit," spoken in an intriguing tone, Flein's curiosity piqued fully.

"Do tell," the old man reached closer. "Grandfather!" spoke out Clarise.

"Listen, if the offer assures the safeguard of this sect, the place we hold so many memories, then I care not," resolute, the Master Alchemist's authority forced the girl into stepping back. As a way of showing her discontent, she clicked her tongue defiantly.

"What I want is for the Alchemists, as a whole, to come work for Phantom. You won't be forced to do anything, all will remain the same except all the research, potions, and anything that has been produced before will be ours to own. Scholar thirst for knowledge," reaching down, another briefcase, "-I present you," opened with a blinding glow, "-the first-ever Relic-Class scroll to ever be found," visibly shaken, Flein tried to reach and grab to the item, even Clarise could but stare as if a starved cat. *Click,* closed, "-I not only promise to share what I have found, but I'll also give the right to study the scroll. It's been

graded and authenticated by Isorin, we even took it to the Order for further testing, the certificates are in the case.”

“What’s your real objective?” asked Clarise, an item that could become a National Treasure, given away to the scholar on a whim. ‘How strange?’ she thought.

“Simple,” he turned, “-I want the alchemist guild and all their scholars. To have a monopoly over the Potions and Scroll’s trade – I’ll share the methodology of how I brew my potions. As for the mana potions, we’ll have to stop production. It’s far too simple for people to reverse engineer the process,” relaxing in the chair, “-the real objective is to gather great minds around the world. The Cobalt Unit under the Emperor’s rule is currently the leaders in research – I want to break that hierarchy. Knowledge is power, and power is what I wish, the power to save those who are under my wing,” breathing out, “-those are dreams for now. Here’s my offer, 325,000 Gold to buy the whole Sect, and additional 100,000 Gold for research with the addition of my papers, and Relic scroll.”

“I-isn’t that a bit too low?” voiced Flein, “-325,000 to own all the alchemist around the continent, I think that’s unfair.”

“You think it’s unfair,” sharply, “-300,000 and 75,000 Gold, and you won’t have access to the scroll. I can close this sect with a single phone call, don’t forget who I am. Greed, lust for money, I gave a fair and honest estimate on how much all of this was worth,” reaching for the phone, “-what will it be?”

“F-fine,” forced, “-I agree.”

“Good,” pulling out a contract, “-sign here, here, and here.” Checking on Clarise, she stood in a corner with a smile, become better than the Cobalt Unit. Made up, her revenge against the scholars who rejected and shunned her for so long could be dished out.

“Here,” tired, Flein leaned back, the chair cracked with the weight.

“Welcome to Phantom, Alchemist Sect,” reaching inside the suit jacket, “-here are two cards, 325,000 Gold and 100,000 Gold in the other. This file contains all relevant information we discussed, and here,” placing atop, the Relic scroll. “I’ll leave this in thy care -for now, I want one thing; find a way to extract the mana that is in the air. There are notes readied to give a head start, don’t disappoint,” he stood, “-don’t disappoint me Clarise. I know how much you hate losing,” whispered, “-I promise to slowly bring in more talented people. Together, you are to become the leaders,” patting her back, “-see you later, Flein.”

Ended, “-wow,” voiced Cake, “-very cunning. Forcing their hand,” the cup emptied, “-how did their Sect suddenly stop getting funded?”

“Oh,” with a smile, “-that was my doing. What I said about the sect being a phone call away from shutting down stands true. It might not look it, but I have my way around the upper echelon – give a dog a treat and it can be trained to even kill a man for a piece of biscuit.”

“My oh my,” *Knock, knock,* “-I expected nothing less,” she stood.

“Sorry to interrupt,” in came a boy, “- Boss Karlson is outside waiting to negotiate.”

“Boss,” turned Cake, “-take a break, I’ll handle the negotiation. It’s probably the arrangements for the World Arms display event.”

“Alright,” the door shut, ‘-another day gone,’ loosening the tie, ‘-better go back home,’ into the portal and he appeared into another province. ‘The only reason I bought the Alchemist sect was for the manufacture of weapons. I need to pull some strings in Arda as well, combining both provinces for that sole purpose; that’s the truth. Better be prepared in case of a war – not only must Arda be saved, but Hidros also. Rosespire to be precise. Everything else can be thrown into chaos as long as the people I’ve sworn to protect are safe.’ Returned, Shadow took on the responsibility of Phantom. Backed by Gallienne, the organization was allowed to do as it pleased. No law nor rules imposed – no tax either, the immense favor Oxshield was indebted had to be paid somehow. Feeding into their ear’s sweet visions and dreams, Shadow made moves around the kingdom. Having a foot in essential businesses. As for the Queen, she didn’t care, her focus and hatred were directed to the expulsion of Kreston from the province. Knowing full well what Staxius said, she moved her pieces, the most prominent one being – Duke Hawkins. An ally recruited by Staxius. Slowly, Phantom was recognized as a successful business – on the surface, the leader of Kniq, Staxius – led the trade of arms. Doors were opened to anyone who wished to purchase weapons. Under, they were part of the Dark-guild, a giant cobweb stretched itself around the continent. Phantom wasn’t the only business to be known to the public, in Iqavea as well as other continents, major businesses that held a copious amount of fortune reigned supreme.

The Dark guild, a mere myth for the people and a real ghost for those concerned. Their true terror was yet to be known; if challenged, ruin would be brought down onto their foe. Lizzie’s death by the hands of Snow kept hidden, for the most part, was known to the major players. The Death of Shadow’s daughter, a man who sworn and had brought in more than they had dreamed, was killed. Ever since then, assassinations, murders of anyone related to Snow, the forceful takeover of their money-making business. Led by Godfather Renaud and Stanley with rumored involvement of the Overlord – retribution would be served.

Entering the palace with a fatigued face, the maids ran around in panic. Butlers sprinted back and forth; Ruslan stroked his mustache harshly to the point the hairs would fall.

“What’s the matter?” under a chandelier, from right to left, maids bolted across.

“It’s Queen Shanna,” looking up in disbelief, “-she has entered labor.”

The words entered labor made the chest heavy, no care for decorum, “...fuck.”

Chapter 294: 17th November

“Majesty, majesty,” brightly lit despite night time, the palace came to life. Cacophonous, Staxius stood still. The sage teleported in company of midwives and an array of medically trained professionals. “Her majesty is in her bed chambers, go, quickly,” ordered the sage – not pausing to stare, in a white coat, the nurses and doctors rushed in. The amount of pressure placed that night could have sufficed to crash a whole castle.

“MAJESTY,” a maid rushed and tripped as she ran down the stairs.

“What’s the matter?” able to prevent serious injuries, Staxius caught her and asked. “It’s Queen Shanna, she requests thy presence.”

“My presence?” visibly shaken, “-o-ok,” nervousness, a plethora of emotions, climbing the stairs felt harder than attaining divinity. A few twists and turns later, “-over here,” called a nurse. A crowd gathered around the bedchamber, mainly maids and those closest to her. ‘This feeling,’ a few deep breaths later, ‘-if she needs me, I’ll help however way I can,’ entering the room felt as if another realm. Laid on the bed covered with a white cloth, Xula’s face glistened with sweat, her eyes lost its vigor. It had been a few minutes, her eyes kept on changing colors from blue to red to green, dark black at times.

“STAXIUS,” yelled whilst she pushed, “-GET THE FUCK OVER HERE, OR ARE YOU GOING TO COWER NEAR THE DOOR,” giving a smirk, her face couldn’t but show how much pain she was in.

‘Always trying to look out for me,’ focused, he rushed to stand by her side.

“Don’t look so distraught,” resting, “-It will be fine,” she smiled despite the hardship ahead.

.....

“Focus on you,” patting her head, “-I’m here,” holding her hand, the delivery took more than a few minutes. Soon, it reached an hour, scratch marks, nail inside his arms – Xula’s long fight ended in victory. Cries echoed down the room. Anxious, the midwife quickly placed the babe onto Xula’s chest – feeling each other, it helped in soothing the wife’s worries and babe’s cries. Rosy-red with green hair and what seemed to be small wings – fairy wings which were not attached to her back; semi-transparent. A halo made of transparent gemstones hovered above her head, the mana was powerful and pure, closest to divine than human and even angelic.

Left asunder, Staxius stood as if a statue, consciousness faded in and out. A sudden drop in blood pressure, the sight of blood never affected him before. That all changed, as he nearly passed out from the stimulus. “Come here,” whispered Xula, “-look at her,” peacefully asleep, the newborn babe. Sat upright and held in a cradle, “-y-yeah,” he whispered and caressed the babe’s forehead.

Overwhelmed, one of the nurses ran out into the hall and yelled, “-IT’S A BABY GIRL!” stomping could be felt from outside in, the news spread in a matter of an instant. Nobles, representatives – from corner to corner, it traveled.

“The heir to Arda has been born,” said Staxius who sat close to Xula, she rested her head against his shoulder.

“Yes,” she smiled, “-the true blood heir of Arda. Not that it matters, we’ll never subject them to the harsh world of politics. When time comes for said line to be crossed, we do it together.”

“I agree,” admiring the girl, “-what should we name her and what family name will she use?”

“Lizzie Elmbush Haggard.”

“Elmbush is your real name, one that only the chosen can dare to speak,” turned with a serious tone, “-are you sure it wise?”

“Yeah,” she smiled, “-it’s not as if anyone has the right to call her by Elmbush – we’ve given birth to a half-fairy. See the aura that shines around her head, it’s the sign of being blessed by the Fairy-Goddess. Look on her arm, she bares the scythe of the death reaper. We might have given birth to a princess of death,” she laughed.

“Princess of Death,” unimpressed, he facepalmed as if a joke, “-I better let the midwife take care of the afterbirth. Take it easy,” stepping away, “-are you sure about her having the name Haggard instead of Islegust?”

novelusb.com

“She already bears similarity to me than you, call it compensation,” her reply was one of smugness and pride.

“Honestly,” he laughed, “-I see it already,” stood in the middle, “-you both are going to become the bane of my existence,” said in jest, she returned the gaze with a wink.

“You bet we will,” she voiced smugly as Staxius left.

‘Elmbush, not that I know that much about fairies. Supposedly, it’s not rare for fairies to have offspring with humans and other creatures. It’s the same for demi-gods and half-demons. Sharing the name Elmbush means that Lizzie will directly inherit her mother’s power bit by bit. I wonder what kind of magical element she has inherited. The mark of the Death Reaper. Better phone Eira, Claudia, Undrar, and maybe Josiah.’ Closing the door behind, the crowd kept on increasing, the head-butler waited in the center.

“Majesty,” he bowed, “-how’s queen Shanna doing?” hidden behind asking news of Xula, what they wanted most was to know of the babe’s name.

“Queen Shanna is a little fatigued, and for the babe, Second Princess of Arda, Lizzie Haggard, has taken fondly to her mother,” said the king proudly.

“Thank you for indulging our curiosity,” people kept on coming, various races and unfamiliar faces – one after the other, the hallway was jammed packed. Even the Captain of the Royal guards stood with a sword at his hip.

“Everyone,” speaking loudly, “-I think it best to not perturb Queen Shanna and the newly born princess. It would be wise to let them have a moment of peace and rest – as a celebration, given how late it is,” calling on the butler, “-throw a feast with what we have in the kitchen for the maids, butlers, guards and any who has worked tirelessly. A day of celebration for all who were closest and assisted her majesty in my absence. I’m grateful to have thee all.”

“Thine words are wasted on us whomst have sworn to thy care,” fired the butler.

“Bite thy tongue,” he glared, “-tis, not a time to be humble – credit must be given to who it’s due. The words come from mine heart, nothing more, nothing less.”

“LONG LIVE THE KING!” they cheered.

“SHUT UP,” screamed the head-maid with round glasses and hair braided to one side.

“We better move,” whispered Staxius, “-even a legion of hard-trained soldiers can’t hope to defeat a lady when she’s mad.”

“You speak the truth,” voiced one of the butlers, “-women are far scarier than gazing into the abyss,” mild laughter led out into the grand hall were awaited representatives with teleportation ring.

“Congratulations,” said Serene with five individuals behind. Stopped, the butlers and maids continued to the kitchen where the late-night feast was to be prepared. It was decided for an all-nighter to be hosted as celebrations.

“Serene,” turning to the nightwalkers, “-Lord Balthazar, Lady Aurora, Lady Julia, Lord Alaric, and Lady Gabrielle, you didn’t have to make it instantly to the palace.”

Relaxed with smiles, the nightwalkers held a deep feeling of affection, “-the palace seems to be as lively as in the morning,” added Aurora, “-you must know that we thrive in the night.”

“Do apologize if I forgot,” not composed nor relaxed, the usual blank expression was one of joy and bliss.

“Even the hardest man can change on the day he becomes a father,” added Balthazar with a smile.

“Majesty,” knelt, “-here’s a present from Sabbath,” holding out an ornamental sword, her gaze kept at his feet. One by one, each clan gave gifts for the newborn.

“I’m grateful for the generosity,” waving to a maid, the gifts were taken into a separate room.

“Forgive my asking,” *Cough,* “-is the babe a nightwalker?” asked Gabrielle.

“Oh...” taking a step back, “-I forgot to check. Her aura was immense, more overpowering, and stronger than some adults I know. She’s half-fairy. It’s been a few hours; I haven’t had the time to see if she bares the fangs of a vampire. Just for reference, how does one know if a babe is a vampire?”

“It depends,” turning to Balthazar, they murmured amidst themselves for the answer, “-the most common sign is if she’s born with wings,” replied Serene.

“Oh, about that,” facing Serene, “-she has fairy wings. To be honest, I’d rather her be a fairy opposed to a nightwalker – the latter forces one onto the path of blood whilst the former is to admire and live with the forest.”

“It’s understandable, the Blood-king doesn’t wish for his progeny to follow the path of bloodshed. I think any parent would make that decision,” said Alaric.

“It’s not that I don’t want her to follow the path of bloodshed, I’d rather keep her away. Chatting about the future isn’t suited for a celebration – come on into the hall, the maids and butlers are throwing a celebratory party.”

“Thanks for the offer,” bowed Serene, “-however, there’s business we must attend to at Noctis’s Hallow,” they vanished in a bat-shaped mist.

‘I forgot,’ outside a full-moon lightened the area. Phone in hand, the news of Lizzie’s birth was given to those concerned. Even Gallienne got a call. From drowsy to energetic, Eira’s reaction was one unexpected. “I’M A BIG SISTER?” yelled, her dorm awoke with yawns. “W-WHEN, W-WHY, H-HOW?”

“Do I have to explain how one is to partake in the ritual of bonding?” he asked with a polite voice, her cheeks flushed in embarrassment.

“N-No, come on father, that’s not something you should discuss with a virtuous maiden.”

“Better be virtuous,” the tone had an impact, “-I swear if thou art deflowered...”

“No need to add more, father, come on, I have got that much commonsense. Besides, I’ve no interest in men at the moment, I wish to only study and catch up to you as soon as possible.”

“I’ll ask Josiah if it’s possible to get you some time off, I’m sure Lizzie would like to see her elder sister.”

“Thanks, father,” the call ended.

Sunday the 17th of November, Lizzie Elmbush Haggard was born to the royal family of Arda. Third in line to the throne, after her sister – under normal circumstances, she would have been the direct heir to the throne. Arda went by its own rule, thus the current standing. A stressful day turned into one chaotic. Celebrations went on till dawn, drunk, some were seen sleeping on the kitchen floor with bottles of wine. Staxius, on the other hand, stood guard, not having an ounce of sleep – the mind kept on going back and forth. The beginning of a tough first two months. Without consulting with Xula, Staxius took command and headed to her office. Thanks to Serene and the Old Sage; and in agreement with the nobles – behind the queen’s back, the King took over the formal work. Checking paperwork, agreeing on policies, foreseeing potential troubles in the future – a tough job.

Dropping the news to Cake, she understood the situation – a break of around three weeks to get by the toughest stage. As for the adventuring voluntary work; a call to Josiah and it was canceled. Taking over Xula’s responsibility was a priority – she needed rest.

“Congratulation, I’m sure the students will be glad to forgo the idea of learning how it is to fight monsters.”

“Come on,” he voiced, “-I never said I was going to abandon the idea of teaching those kids. Eira will come to visit in the coming days, her bringing a few friends won’t be that difficult. The Ardanians are more welcoming to allow humans now – it’s a change that took a few months to accomplish. It might not be for too long, but I’m sure the guild here will suffice plenty.”

“You’re right,” he chuckled, “-I completely forgot that you’re the guild master of Arda. Then it’s settled, I’ll get the necessary papers ready. Thanks for not breaking their trust, nephew, I guess I’m a grandfather now?”

“You were already a grandfather when I took in Eira,” the call ended.

Chapter 295: Metallicum Quaerere

“Sire,” sat inside with interfaces flying around, “-nobles have arrived to celebrate the birth of Princess Lizzie,” notified Ruslan who held a cautious face.

“Tis terrible, Ruslan,” voiced Staxius in an overly dramatic gesture, “-I’ve not the strength to move after a tedious night caring for my beloved. Would someone rush in save me from the despair of entertaining nobles and their charades, oh, how I wish for a knight in silver armor to swoop and carry mine troubles away.”

“Do forgive my rudeness,” he stepped forward with a smug gaze, “-entertaining nobles is part of the duties of a king. Waste of time is it or is it not, tis on how thou handles the occasion.”

“Dearest Ruslan, do pull some strings, I wish not to partake in such petty flattery. How about a deal,” the massive, curved interface shrunk, “-why not ask Queen Shanna. Coped up and caring for Lizzie all day must wane heavy on her usual chattery nature,” from shrunk to empty, the dim room darkened. “-Let’s make haste,” he came to the door, “-I rather not deal with nobles at the moment,” jokes aside, the tone grew stern. Together, Counselor and King made way to where Shanna rested.

“Do give me a moment,” spoken over the shoulder, the short man nodded.

A blast of cold air, the wind brushed aside the curtains – on the bed, Xula slept peacefully with the babe. A new day had arisen a few hours ago, time now read 11:00 on the clock. “Xula,” gently shaking her shoulder, “-wake up.”

“Let me dream in peace,” a mumble followed by *SMACK,* turned over, “-STAXIUS!” Sat upright, her eyes widened in shock and slowly made a changed to laughter.

.....

“Honestly,” sighed, “-nobles are here to congratulate thee for giving birth. Jump in the shower, get cleaned. Forgive my saying, but you do smell of sweat, the nobles are mainly ladies in waiting,” crawling down from the mattress, “-I’ll care for Lizzie.”

“Come on,” she yawned and stretched, “-I don’t smell of sweat, how preposterous – how dare thy squander my name,” she removed her gown seductively.

“Don’t you dare,” commanded Staxius, “-now is not the time,” *woosh,* her undergarments flew as if projectiles. Able to dodge, “-you never change,” he leaned to pick the undies.

“Whatever do you mean,” she skipped and teleported to the shower.

‘What do I mean,’ chuckled, ‘-always throwing her undergarments as if a child. Xula truly has an innocent heart,’ kept in a basket with dirtied laundry, ‘-now then,’ carrying a warmly dressed Lizzie wrapped around a blanket, ‘-time to continue work.’ Teleporting in turn to the office, the day continued without trouble. Dressed, Xula took to greeting the nobles as Staxius worked with Lizzie in hand. Opposed to flying, Adete was sent to find the location of where he lost control. Connected via the all-seeing eye, they shared vision.

Earlier in the day, an adventuring party was dispatched for the supply run at Mont Blanc. 2 Tier-Four Bronze and 3 Tier-Five Ruby promising adventurers were selected for the mission.

Two hours later, Xula came by to feed Lizzie. “How’s the meet?” he asked.

“Normal, most wanted to see Lizzie,” she said whilst breastfeeding.

“Shouldn’t there normally be a ceremony about showing the babe’s face?”

“It does feel that way,” they stared one another, “-we sure haven’t announced it to the public. Rumors have gotten out – should we not...”

Before they knew it, the door knocked obnoxiously. Representatives arrived one by one. All headed to the throne room, the maids could but shrug at what to do. “We should host a feast,” smiled Xula, “-

leave the representatives to me, I'll have the arrangements readied for tomorrow. That way, everyone who wishes to give their blessing can do so."

novelusb.com

???"Question," he asked as she stood.

"Go on," her eyes seem lively.

"Is it alright if people come from my side, as far as it's concerned; my sister, nephew, Josiah, Eira, and Undrar," reluctant, he gazed the babe opposed to her.

"There's no need to hold back," she leaned and gave a quick peck on his cheeks, "-go ahead and invite anyone you'd like to come to visit. I've no idea how you're going to make the trip with that many people to Arda."

"Wait," he grabbed her hands before she turned, "-let's make it a grandiose event."

"I see," she paused and thought, "-Lizzie is the princess, in no way am I going to hold back. It's decided, we're going to host a giant event in her honor. Invite Princess Gallienne, since we're allies and all. Make a list of the people whomst have helped us in the past, a good way to build relations, what do you say?"

"I agree," he stood, the face returned to blank, "-I'll set off for the capital later in the day. Personally inviting the Royal family is a must."

"As you please, my King," babe in hand, she headed out in the hall.

'Better get the list ready – tis a day of celebration. Transportation will be an issue; I can't well teleport the people into Arda; it has side-effects that might spoil the night before it begins. 17:00 to 21:00, a good four hours to celebrate – they do make it a policy to head back before it gets late,' pacing around the room, the problem at hand was how the guests would arrive. "Airship," an idea came to mind, "-luxurious, comfortable, with plenty of room."

Teleported to Rosepire through the many portals, Void roared to life – destination set was Phantom's airfield. "Hello Cake," he phoned whilst on the road.

"Good to hear from you, boss, how can I be of help?"

"How much cash do we have in total?"

"At the moment, about three million gold," said as if nothing, Staxius's eyes opened in shock.

"All spendable, right?"

"Listen, boss, spending that much money is harder than you think," she laughed.

"Good," a smirk appeared, "-is there any way to procure an airship in, let's say, one week?"

"Airship?" she paused, "-let me clarify, are you referring to the one with balloons?"

"Of course not, what I seek is one that can be militarized after it has served its purpose."

"Closest we can get is an airplane, the TU-03."

“You say that as if I’ll know what model it is,” closing in on the airfield, “-open the gates, I’m here.”

Inside the compound, the guards nodded in respect as Shadow entered. A few minutes later, “-about the TU-03.”

“It’s the newer model by G-Telsa; same as a plane with the possibility of vertical take-off. It hosts a multitude of uses, military, transportation, you name it,” Cake said proudly.

“How long will it take if we place an order now?”

“I estimate around two-days if we go for an already on sale craft. Doing additional tweaks might take longer,” holding a tablet, she watched closely as the Boss thought.

“You have a week,” he stood, “-get that airplane into the hangar. Suit it up with weapons, a cargo bay, and an area for passengers of nobility. It must be nimble and strong; I care not who you have to threaten – get the job done.”

“It’s going to be big,” she said softly.

“I care not, have that thing ready for take-off. I’ll be bringing in guests from the Royal family. You as well,” he smiled, “-you’re invited to celebrate the birth of my daughter. I won’t risk bringing any more members of the DG.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, I am,” he smiled, “-you’ve helped in founding Phantom, of course, I’ll invite the only person I rely upon in the underground.”

“Thank you,” she smiled and gazed out, guards ran around the field as training. “It will cost around 190,000 Gold. An airplane of that stature is going to come in handy if ever war breaks out. Imagine the number of soldiers, ammo, and supplies we can drop off.”

“It’s only the beginning, dearest Cake. I’ve been informed that the empire has begun working on a prototype of airplane abled to go as fast as sound. Nimble, agile, and able to kill with a press of a trigger – the age of technologic war is here.” Ending the conversation, preparations for the event was put in place.

Returned to Arda, the invitation was printed and pressed with the Ardanian crest. An estimate of around ten to twenty people was given. Some would be delivered via the messengers whilst the one for Gallienne, was delivered personally. It took another few hours, at around 18:00, Staxius reached Rosepire. There, around a warm cup of tea and informal setting. He invited to which the princess’s face lit in excitement. Never had she been to Arda – it would be a first. Piers, Sely, Raulf, and Gallienne would join the celebrations. Fatigued, at 21:00, he managed to escape from their overbearing hospitality.

No time to rest, it came time to care for Lizzie, sleepless, with a few hours of shuteye- the routine repeated itself. Set for Tuesday the 26th of March; preparations for the feast continued. One by one, tomorrow came one after the other, shorter daytime and longer nighttime.

The 22nd arrived as if an unwanted cold. Slap awake by Xula who slept vividly, ‘-and it resumes.’ During the past few days, finding time to scour the land, Adete came upon an empty plot. One circular and man-made, monsters seemed to have gathered in the center.

'Metallicum Quaerere,' sat in the office, the mind drifted into Clarity. Hard at work, the months of delayed papers were reviewed and approved depending if it benefited the people. Villagers sometimes came with complaints of not having enough provision to survive the coming winter. To that, a single reply sufficed, "-Arda is abundant, if thou art not able to harvest it's boon, then thou art but an intruder." Xula had a bad habit of doting on her people; in turn, they grew complacent. Taking the helm, Staxius straightened those who'd often abuse her generosity. The gentle nature of her heart, the very thing that made him visit Arda, proved to be a double edge sword.

"Ruslan," walking down the hallway of which led into the back, "-I've business to attend too. Everything has been sorted and approved – there's a bunch which I've labeled as incoherent. I fear that some nobles are falsifying their taxes to the state. It does not match up. Check back upon them, a slap on the wrist should suffice. They haven't taken that much, still, we need to handle the situation before it gains volume."

"Are you sure?" he asked whilst running to match the King's walking pace.

"Definitely," sprouting wings, "-see you later," a single flap, *woosh,* a vase broke after coming in contact with the gust.

"Good morning Adete," he arrived at the location and spoke.

"Finally," she rolled her eyes, "-I can rest at last," no return to the greeting, she crawled into the front pocket and slept.

'Quite a few of them,' he landed on the edge of the hole. Endless greenery with this cleanly cut semi-sphere. In the middle, wolves riding goblins had made a small camp. Gnarling at their prey of which were deer and wild animals, bones scattered around the place. Guarded by a few hobgoblins, '-I did fear something like this happening.' Common was it for monsters to take refuge in a man-made space. In their eyes, it was as if being sheltered from the outside world.

"Now then," unholstering Tharis, *Void Aspect,* charged fully, *BANG,* a massive beam of light tore apart the reinforced camp. From one end to the other, the trajectory burnt a line on the soil, not enough to stop the blast, it exploded against the opposite edge. 'Handles pretty nicely,' the barrel spewed smoke.

'Breathe,' he thought and walked, despite it being sunlight, the ground seemed a little damp.

Elements known to man, hidden by soil and impurities, make thyself known. Relinquish the shadows and scream so I can hear thee: Metallicum Quaerere, one knee to the ground, eyes closed, hand against the soil, waves of mana flowed into the earth.

Chapter 296: Selfishness

'Ikahmite, Ruby, Emeralds, and Gold.' Shone up high, the sun smiled relentlessly. No clouds, only a clear blue sky complimenting the greenery from the forest. 'I've struck the motherload,' he thought and stood, hand covering the eyes as the sun kept spreading light and heat. 'I knew it,' sprouting wings once again, '-Arda is amazing.' Dashed into the clear sky, he headed for the Capital.

Another two days went by, from paying heed to the state's trouble, a new goal presented itself. 24th of November, two days away from the feast, Staxius called a meeting with the university and the Smiting

guild. Sat in a conference room at the university, a place for the scholars, the display of data that referred to the site of a new potential mine. Started at 10:00, it ended at 15:00 with the number of details given. Alchemy was used heavily to prove the trace of ore in that area, many tests, and a primitive underground map of the site.

“Any who have questions, do speak out,” he voiced at the center. Five groups of five or more were seated around the room. The dwarves were at the center and closest to Staxius. For the remaining four, split into teams, each sat on the right and left side respective of their class and subject.

“Majesty,” the left side spoke out, “-how do you wish to begin on building the mine. Surely, is it not the job of the dwarves to handle the activity?”

“Wrong,” he voiced, “-does one as smart as thy think that being smart means thou art not going to get thine hands dirtied. I do apologize, student, the quest for knowledge involves more than reading in a cozy room. You must know this,” he faced the other, “-there’s a new idea I have in mind.”

“Majesty,” another called from the right side, the side in which were seated the older generation of scholars. Mostly people who had assisted in his many projects, “-does it involve magic?”

“Very perceptive,” he turned to the interface, “-if we were to use the traditional method, I’m afraid that the current technology is lacking. Opposed to using science which is our less than amicable ally, why not use magic,” a slideshow of what the procedure would be, displayed across. ”

.....

“Marvelous,” applauded the right side, “-you’ve our backing and support, majesty,” they smiled.

“Count us in,” smirked Skokdrag.

“What about you?” turning to the left side, “-do you wish to partake in the project?”

“We’d like to turn it down,” voiced the leader of the younger scholars, “-I do realize it’s for the economic gain of Arda,” the face seemed reluctant, “-it’s better for us to assist on the theoretical side. Our Professors,” facing the old wizards, “-are more qualified for such an endeavor.”

“Good,” the white and beige room of which had a slope with rows of the chair every few centimeters, went round in a curve. Windows painted dark-blue as to not let the sun interfere, the meet ended.

“Details of what is to be done will arrive tomorrow,” he yelled as the young scholars left. A nod of acknowledgment told what needed to be known.

“The site,” came the Elder Wizard, “-when is it that we take to the scene?” he asked.

novelusb.com

“Well, elder,” reaching in a bag, “-here are some schematics for Earth spells. They’re experimental and are purposefully written to not cause disturbance whilst underground. Each tunnel and path dug will be reinforced by the ground itself – Wooden support might be lethal considering the ores.”

“New magic,” said one of the apprentices. “-will you be requiring other machines?” asked one from the Engineering faction.

“Not today,” returning a smile, “-I’ll head onto the site right away. The first order of business is to pave the way to the area – it’s very, very, far from the capital. I’ll be leaving the responsibility on Elder Kruse,” giving a handshake, “-it’s a stepping stone for the university, work together with Skokdrag, they’re already the masters at mining. I’ll finish out the map and level the land for easy construction,” turning to Skokdrag, “-I heard of the Dwarven mine emptying due to demand. Take this opportunity and make it worth thy people’s time. Payment will be issued by the Guild. The more profits, the more the wages – make it work, people, the future is in thine hands.”

“As you wish,” bowed Skokdrag followed by the Wizards.

“I’ll be off – make sure to sent weekly reports of the progress,” *Snap.*

‘That handles the mine,’ teleported into the office chair, a puff of green smoke spewed. ‘I’m confident on the profits we’re about to make, the coffer is well on its way to being full.’

BANG, “-STAXIUS,” stood in the doorway, a menacing figure of which oozed a reddish aura.

“Who is it?” glimpsing, “-is there something the matter?”

“Is there something the matter?” it laughed, *WOOSH,* “-MOST DEFINITELY,” the aura moved from the door to behind in an instant, *Death Element: Magical Barrier,* summoned, *CRASH,* it broke, *Splash,* the deep sound of sword coming in contact with flesh.

“Satisfied?” he asked, the left arm, now a lump of flesh, fell to the ground. Blood gushed and formed a puddle that echoed with a disturbing noise each time it hit the floor.

“STAXIUS!” came to senses, “-why did you not block the attack?” asked Xula with a worried face – Prophecy stood by with a confused look.

“Why did I not block the attack?” fatigued, “-I’m weak,” he picked up the lump and met her eyes, “-can’t you sense it?” it reattached following a blackened glow. “What was that outburst about, have you a grudge against me?” asked with a stern tone, Xula stepped back.

“N-no,” stood formally, “-I just wanted to cause a little trouble,” innocently, her foot twirled nervously, “-I heard from my informants that many pressing issues were handled with haste. The project of the mine was approved. Many are happy that progress is happening, good job opportunities for those who aren’t able to become adventurers. Maybe I’m jealous,” her voice trailed in the end.

“Jealous of what,” he stood and embraced her tightly, “-I’m doing this for your sake. You’re always doting on people, not that it’s an issue. It’s just that I had to teach them a lesson of not toying with my wife’s generosity. Is it that bad a thing, opening the mine will be a staple of so many changes. We’ve rich lands, fertile soil, Arda’s capability are endless,” he smiled, “-I do realize that we pride ourselves in caring for mother nature, that is why I don’t want to overly develop the province. Limited to the mine only – next project is the betterment of paths, it??s hard enough on the farmers to sell their wares out in the wild. Either they come to the capital after weeks and months of travel or get killed by monsters. Town Eden is there for the people to sell their wares, a trading town. Stone paths linking villages and towns will facilitate so much.”

“I see,” she pushed him away, “-you’ve seen that far in the future,” her face seemed disappointed, “-fine...” she breathed, “-do what you want, King,” rolling her eyes, she moved to the door and vanished.

“PROPHECY,” yelled Staxius, “-don’t you dare move away before I say so,” he urged.

“But M-Majesty,” she turned, “-the queen requires my presence...” distraught, she knew not what to do nor say.

“It’s not a request,” *Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,* “-I’ve infused the blood with mana-cancellation. Come in contact with a single thread and you might affect Xula’s recovery.”

“You win,” knelt inside a prison of blood, her eyes seemed dulled.

“I don’t mean anything malicious by it,” walking closer, “-I only want the reason why Xula got agitated all of a sudden.”

“Majesty,” shaking her head, “-you sure are clueless to the ways of a lady’s heart.”

“Thanks for stating the obvious,” added in jest, they laughed.

“She’s not angry, tis but an act to have thine attention. You’re too busy, she misses you a lot. Gone for months at a time, now that you’re in Arda, she felt at ease, however, you’re still out of her reach. Planning for the future and the kingdom, caring too much for her, she’s overwhelmed. Even if she wanted, getting angry at someone who tries his best at making a better future for the people he cares about would be selfish. Queen Shanna is holding back, she wants to spend more time with you – now that Lizzie is born, the fear of you forgetting about her has caused all said confusion.”

“I see,” he stood, *Dispel,* “-you’re right,” he smiled, “-still, I’m not going to bow down, not just yet anyway. Let her suffer a little more,” laughter ensued, “-I made a vow, tis up to her to remember,” on that, he teleported out of the palace.

“Are you sure it wise to play like that?” asked Adete whilst mid-flight, “-I might have been asleep for days. What you’re doing here, from a girl’s perspective, is rather scummy,” the speed at which they flew had the first progenitor holding on tightly. The floor changed so fast her brain couldn’t process the information.

“Come on,” stopped at the will be mine-site, “-I’d rather speak through actions than words. If she’s confused, let her be confused.”

“Gosh, you’re such an idiot,” argued Adete, “-good night.”

‘Not that I’m purposefully trying to hurt her. Priority at hand is to make sure the feast is cared for without trouble. I’ve seen first hand what jealousy can make a person do. Trust is important, I trust Xula to make the right decision – it’s not tough to ask for the same feeling.’ Stood in the middle, the trees seemed saddened. ‘In no way can I do what I’m hoping for with D E A T H gate activated.’ Eyes closed; the fingers gracefully moved across; ancient tongue. *Power of mine which has been locked, I call on thy, unshackle the first seal: HELL’S GATE,* Lightning struck, a heavy mist enveloped the area, the ground shook, a surge of mana welled and unleashed from the inside out. The hair levitated, ‘-this is only the first level,’ amazed at how much power it held, “-Time to go to work.” Right to left, the uneven ground leveled. A small path built itself, a temporary barrier made of stone rose around the middle. Dead center, an entrance brought to existence – it led down into a mineshaft, reinforced by rocks and ending after few meters under. *SNAP,* burst opened, the recoil of the heavy usage of mana tore apart

the arms and bones. With a few muscles visible, the emotionless eyes grew dim, *Poof,* ‘-I overdid it,’ he fell to the floor.

“MASTER,” yelled Adete, no response came, night time soon approached. ‘Damn it,’ bolting across as if a bullet, she made way to the castle. Dusk arrived, the first star shone onto the orangish sky. ‘If I don’t make it back, this can spell disaster.’

“Prophecy,” feeding Lizzie, “-do you think I went a little over the top earlier?” the room felt chilly, Prophecy materialized and watched fondly as the babe drank.

“Not really, you have a right to be selfish,” winked Prophecy, *CRACK,* as if a bullet, the window broke open. “GET BACK,” yelled the spirit, a star-shaped barrier with five golden swords blocked any potential threat.

“At ease,” voiced Xula, “-that’s the first progenitor.”

“Majesty,” head covered in blood, “-it’s Staxius, he’s injured and doesn’t want to wake up.”

Before what she said could be processed, “-shut it,” stumbled in a fatigued figure. Barely human, “-who says I’ve not woken up,” he laughed and held Adete’s mouth shut.

“Get some rest, Xula, I’ll go wash up,” clothes torn, half of the face missing, half of flesh and half of bones, regeneration didn’t kick in. ‘Guess my mana pool is close to being used up,’ sustaining such injuries, raising a finger let alone walking would have been impossible. Despite that, using Crimson Threads to turn into a puppet, Staxius walked towards the door.

Chapter 297: Kingly Duties

Chaotic at first, getting adjusted to Xula’s routine felt as if climbing a never-ending staircase. Every so often, informants around the province would teleport in and relay news of what happened. Some inconsequential whilst others being more important – a triage had to be made whilst reviewing how the state should run for the week.

“Sage,” called Staxius, to which the man appeared without delay.

“What is it, majesty?” held onto an ancient rosewood staff with an orb atop, the light from the hall faded till darkness overwhelmed the room. The table and door were so far apart the distance kept on increasing.

“How has the situation with the winged wolves developed. I’ve not heard of the adventurers returning.”

“They’ve been fighting the frost giants since February; the numbers keep on increasing. The Villagers have asked for backup for a fortress made of impregnable snow was discovered half-way up the Alps.”

“I see,” focusing on the map, “-how has this not reached the Adventuring guild?”

“You should ask Serene, is she not thine assistant?” on that, the sage vanished.

.....

‘Never would I have thought Xula handled all these issues without help. Not that it’s hard, I better do a good job, she’s given me a daughter, I have to let her rest awhile. If I’m to take over, I’ll do things my

way,” *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.* From the Ardanian guild to the palace, Staxius made numerous trips until the analog table the queen used had a little upgrade. The guild card connected into an interface that lit the room in red and blue. Surrounded by screens, he stood and worked – the paperwork on the table was scanned and sent into the interface. There, abled to work at full capacity, one by one, orders were sent.

[Supply run and Scout mission – Tier 5]: a quest request ordered by the King. *Description: Find and help the adventurers located in the Alps. Two members from the fighter’s guild, two from the mage’s guild and one from the trader’s guild. Adventurers are to be hand-picked by the Guild Leaders.* Opposed to it being announced at the Central guild, the message reached each guild. There, excited – a team was to be dispatched later in the day with it all being coordinated with the Guild assistants.

‘That should relieve the team a little,’ a sigh later, minute turned to hours.

Knock, knock, “-your grace, tis time for lunch,” in came the head maid with glasses and bunny ears.

“No, Rosetta,” he fired back without glimpsing, “-I shall eat once I’ve handled a good amount of the work.”

“As you wish, sire,” the door closed with a loud echo.

‘Xula did a good job of squandering a would-be revolt between the lizardmen and demi-humans. The swamp to the south of the capital was being trespassed by ignorant demi-humans in search of food and provision. From what the report says, the two were given a deal -new hunting ground for the demis and the promise of the swamp being given to Krask. That’s a big area for a single representative; there’s also the thing about a river-town to be built.’ Scouring over the files, problems were found, and many were solved.

“What concerns me is our coffers, the kingdom might look rich on the outside but is in quite a tough situation. She’s ready to give out the order of building a new mine in search of gold. I wonder why?” mumbled and barely audible, the plans hovered around.

“Tis because of the risk of not finding anything. Digging cluelessly might cause unrest to the wild, it might harm the wildlife,” a soft voice replied.

“Xula,” turning towards the voice, she stood with a nightgown and tired face, “-why are you here?”

novelusb.com

“I came to check up on you,” half-asleep, her dreary eyes held a dark-brown color.

“Tis wasn’t necessary.”

“It sure was,” pronouncing the last word, her legs gave into the fatigue.

“Careful!” caught before she fell, “-you need rest,” he said with an angered tone.

“Come on,” she voiced whilst being held, “-I’m not that useless yet.”

Crossed-legged with Xula in his arms, “-workaholic,” his forehead crinkled in disapproval, “-Lizzie needs you more than me. Motherly love can overpower the love a father has for his child – I’ve seen it before,

despite me loving my father, my mother always had deep routed attention. I felt at ease with her more than Father, that's why you need rest. The journey has begun yet. The four months of pain is still to come," patting her head, "-you needn't worry about the nit and gritty. I'll wake in the night to soothe her cries, you sleep and rest; the kingdom needs their queen."

"How can I argue with that," she smiled, hair all messed up, sweaty visage, very unbecoming a lady.

"Leave everything to me, I'll handle the coffers and make sure the kingdom is stable for when you return," standing with her in a princess-carry, *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

"Rest for now," tucking the mother in, he walked towards an elder-wood cradle. There, Lizzie slept peacefully with her tiny fingers curled, '-you adorable little darling,' *mwah.*

'Next order of business,' dressed in uniform, grey, one made by Arda, "-I better get the plans for the mine ready." Teleporting to the smiting guild, "-hello," pushing open the door, Dwarves and a few beastmen were seen around the waiting hall. Most stood with broken weapons, the reception jammed pack with delivering and taking in orders. A floor covered in dust, rust shards and broken bits here and there, those who waited snapped out of their day-dream.

"Majesty," called one of the peasants with a giant fork, "-what brings you here?" he asked with a straw-hat.

"Good morning," giving a courteous smile, "-nothing much," ending the exchange of pleasantries, he walked to the reception as the farmer stared in awe.

"I do apologize for the rudeness of skipping the line," staring down to a woman with bunny ears and shabby clothes, she carried a bag with farm tools. "Can I have the honor of speaking with the reception for an instant?" as politely and as charming as is could, the allure of a nightwalker worked. Startled at first, the farmer smiled and graciously accepted the selfish request.

"Hello," turned to the receptionist, a dwarven lady with dreadlocks and a harsh face, "-is the guild leader around?"

"You'll find him at the workshop, take the next door to the right," pointing without time wasted, tipping his head, Staxius headed out.

'The populous sure are a lively bunch. My concerns now are filling our coffers – increasing tax isn't an option, I don't want the people to suffer for money. If we have the resources, nothing stops us from making our currency. I will probably need an audience with a financial advisor soon – still, mining for precious stones and valuables is a priority.

Goggles on whilst welding, "-aye there, majesty," the leader caught a glimpse of Staxius. Filled with machines and small forges, apprentices, mainly dwarves, ran around to build and repair items.

"Good to see you well, Skokdrag," stopping his work, the latter stepped off a stool to greet the king.

"What brings ya here?" he asked with a dusty face, even the teeth were covered in dirt – thus giving the illusion of rotten teeth.

“Glad you asked,” taking a more relaxed posture, “-I was wondering if you could give me a few pointers on what is required to build a mine. First of all, I’d like to know how miners know where to dig – surely you don’t go underground with hopes of hitting big.”

“Gold, huh,” he paused, “-there are normally people who are trained to look to specific metals and depending on the soil and rocks. Mostly blind luck, there’s also a spell used for it, *Metallicum Quaerere,* “-from what I understand, the spellcaster must be talented enough to sense a slight change in mana and how it reacts. Directed into the ground – usually in underground water reservoirs; don’t quote me on this, tis how one usually finds it. It’s not unusual to find other rare minerals. If his majesty is seriously considering trying to find gold; a trip to the university might prove useful. There, the structure and how a typical mine is built will be recorded in the books.”

“Thanks for the word of advice.”

“Mining gold,” mumbled Skokdrag, “-good luck, majesty, Arda might be abundant with resources, it’s also very dangerous.”

One after the other, evening came. Struck at 18:00, the library made a little whistle to call it’s closing time. ‘Sheesh,’ held onto the forehead, ‘-I’ve read so many books about gems and how mine works. Haven’t come across *Metallicum Quaerere* anywhere. It might be a detection spell, the same as the adventurer use; high special awareness. The All-seeing eyes might be enough, I can travel through walls, go underground, and search for ores and deposits. Can’t help but think about what I can add to the All-seeing eyes. Arda is resourceful, the land is rich, I’m sure I’ll be able to find something precious soon. Whatever it might be, there are other possibilities. A magical weapon, from what I’ve seen we’re the only nation who have a stronghold on that knowledge. Tharis is a better example; exporting arms through Phantom can be viable. Of course, they’ll get a weaker version of our current models.’

Teleporting back, without dinner, the king stumbled into bed and dozed off. Four hours later, arms and legs cozily wrapped around Xula, he slept with a smile. *Wahhh, Wahhhh!*

“Lizzie,” eyes opened, “-I’m coming,” dashing off the bed, Xula kept on sleeping. ‘Check her diapers,’ he thought, ‘-no need,’ holding her in a cradle, “-come on, let’s go,” he smiled and walked out the room with the babe crying wholeheartedly. “You’re very much persistent,” he smiled and gently moved, ‘-let’s get you some milk,’ headed to the kitchen, on-duty maids walked with sleep-deprived stares. Dimly lit, the counter held many unwashed dishes. Vague outlines of the room sufficed to walk in the almost pitch-darkness. A flip of a switch, the light turned, Rosetta stood near the stove.

“You look dreadful,” sat on a chair trying to calm the babe, the head-maid shook her head in disapproval.

“I suppose you wish for milk?” she asked.

“Not me, tis the babe, she wishes for food,” lost in making silly faces, Lizzie’s eyes were wide open as she stared what her father did.

“The sleepless nights have yet to start,” turned with no glasses, “-here,” handing a baby bottle,”-she’s quite demanding for her age.”

“You seem to know a lot,” voiced Staxius as he fed the babe.

"I'm a mother too, let me tell you, after the first few months, it's easy sailing. Wait till she's an infant. It's amazing to see your child grow," leaned against the table, her attitude was one casual and informal.

"Good," he stood, the babe finished – her cries grew lighter. "Why don't you teach me the ins and outs of how to care for a babe, I've wished for her to be healthy."

"Majesty," back to her senses, "-I'm sorry for the attitude. I didn't mean to be disrespectful."

"All is forgiven, I wish to learn, will you share the knowledge?" he asked intently.

"I-I s-suppose," head lowered to the floor, "-i-it w-will be hard."

"No matter, I care not, I shall do what is needed for my child."

On that, the maid gave a summary of what to expect. Feeding the babe every time she asks for food. In addition to that, a few tips on cues to follow when the babe was hungry. Cries was a late sign, the feeding would be handled by Xula. Nightshift was handled by Staxius, holding the babe upright, she stared opposed falling asleep. Wrapped warmly, "-the sky looks nice, doesn't it?" Together, father and daughter got lost in stargazing.

"She'll catch a cold, come in already," spoke Xula from the room.

"Yeah, yeah," he turned and closed the door, a few minutes had gone by, Lizzie's playfulness waned as sleep took over. "Go to sleep, didn't I say to rest?" opposed to the cradle, laid on her back together in bed with Xula. Lizzie grabbed onto her father's hand and slept peacefully.

Chapter 298: Continent of Easel Run-Gard

"Is that all?" conflicted, Xula stood with Lizzie held in a cradle, "-you're going to walk away without saying anything," she paused, "-take care, and rest..."

"What else do you want?" he turned, "-I said this before, you need rest."

"What do you mean I need rest," taking a strong foot forward, "-what about you, disfigured and hurt beyond recognition."

"Don't," he interrupted, "-you've done enough."

"I've done enough," sighing, "-I'VE DONE ENOUGH?" the pitch rose, "-do you know the reason why I work so hard?" crinkled in anger, her eyebrows tightened.

"Of course, I do," he said with a stoic face, "-you work hard to forget, listen to me," barely standing, "-I'm doing this because I want to. I know you worry, still, let me be selfish."

"Selfish," a not so healthy giggle escaped, "-what about me, can I be selfish?" she asked.

.....

"Selfish, selfish, selfish," tired, "-could you drop the act," an instant change in persona, "-I've no idea why you're acting up," Staxius's face and aura changed, the body healed with stomach-turning noises. "How long has it been since I've taken control," twisted, the head tilted ominously, "-you sure are na?ve," the arm healed.

“Majesty,” re-summoned, Prophecy brought two of the star-shaped barriers, “-please step back,” she stood in the middle whilst shielding the babe and queen.

“Dearest wife,” taking a step to the left as graceful as abled, he teleported behind Xula, “-I’ve got an idea of what you’re thinking. Playing the role of the bad and selfish wife to try and force the Death Reaper to rest. I’d say it’s a good plan,” touching her neck with sharpened nails, “-he may look dense and emotionless, he’s indeed weak. You, Eira, and now Lizzie, you’re his weakness,” threatened, Xula could but gulp – petrified by fear, Prophecy had no other options than to attack.

“Don’t,” holding out a hand on which a pentagram rotated, “-starting a fight here might wake the babe,” he winked. “I’ll leave with this word of advice, don’t try to be too heavy a burden. He’s sorry and wants to make up for all the lost time. I’d honestly want to have the weaknesses eliminated,” hovered and eyeing the babe, “-it’s not the time yet. Divinity comes with more price than he knows, soon enough, Xula, your husband will change,” laughter followed, the body healed fully.

“Staxius...?”

“No,” eyes as dark as the abyss glared, “-Daemonum Gladio is my name. The true God of Death – the day will come when I’m unleashed, until then...” a separate aura shot out the body, an identical clone. “Go back to sleep,” strangled from behind, “-BAHAHAHA, I’LL BE BACK SOON,” squeezed, the dark-purple aura returned to naught.

“Sorry about that,” came too, “-is it too late to introduce my alter-ego?” he asked nonchalantly and checked on the body that felt lighter.

“...” fallen to her knees, “-divinity?” asked Xula, Prophecy stood in place without an ounce of courage. All her strength seemed to have been forcefully dragged out. “Majesty,” she breathed, “-are you ok?”

“Yeah,” spoke Xula, ignoring Staxius who stared into the distance. An aura of differing hue hovered above Lizzie; protection spells the newborn cast.

novelusb.com

“Now then,” sat back to back to Xula, “-I’m sorry. I should have paid more attention; I know I should have. Still, I hoped that you remembered the vow we made. I trust you wholeheartedly, no matter what happens, I’ll do my best.”

A few steps away unable to keep her material form, Prophecy returned to Xula. The latter sat dumbfounded by a truth that was meant to never be revealed. “Those eyes,” managing to speak, “-I’ve seen them before. Gazing into the abyss, entrancing and frightening at the same time. I thought I would have been lost in its complexities.”

“Don’t worry about what the other self said,” he reached out and grabbed her hand, “-Lizzie, you and Eira are my strengths. I’ll never blame you, girls, for my shortcomings. You do realize, despite how I look, I’m still technically in my early twenties.”

“Was that supposed to be a joke?” chuckled Xula, the cold wind blew in from the broken window. “I still haven’t forgiven you,” breathing a humph, “-don’t ask why I’m angry,” she stood.

“Do forgive mine indiscretion, I wish not to incur thine ire, my queen,” knelt as if a knight, “-would you find it in thy overabundance generosity to forgive said mishap.”

“Theatrical,” mumbled, “-sadly,” holding her forehead, “-my generosity has run dry,” she moved with one hand holding Lizzie whilst the other held by Staxius.

“Please my queen,” he pulled, “-don’t turn away from what has transpired,” he stood and used more force. Sharply, she stumbled into his arms with Lizzie laid in rest comfortably, “-thou art mine family,” nibbling his nose on her messy hair, “-do what you want. I won’t force anything anymore, be selfish, abuse thy power as a wife – I’ll do what is must to please thy heart.”

‘I thought of trying to start a fight,’ tired, ‘-turns out, you understand me more than you let on, dearest husband. Daemonum Gladio was just an excuse; you did that to bring me to my senses. I’ve got the boon of our love in my arms, what else can I want.’

“Is something the matter?” he asked, “-you’ve got a sort of glow, literally,” her hair levitated, pinkish light emanated from her chest out, the eyes changed from green to pink. “You’re getting hotter,” he said in jest, “-go stand on the balcony,” pushing her and locking the door; a gentle wave with Lizzie sleeping peacefully.

“COME ON,” her screamed entered through the broken window, “-can’t you see the passion I’m visually emanating,” pouted with eyes squinted, Staxius laughed. An eccentric couple was the best description – a would be argument turned into a melodramatic scene then into her standing outside for a few minutes. Ignored, the door blasted with her eyes cold blue, “-you’re going to pay,” she jumped onto the bed fully intent on punching.

Uninterested, Lizzie swayed gently in her cradle – she slept with a smile as her parents fought as if kids.

Knocking as if a friendly neighbor, the sun rose with a few shy rays into the room. The temperature dropped sharply at night; the wind kept on blowing into the room. Awake a few times to care for Lizzie; as Xula shuffled to try and sleep – grabbing a bra, the window was fixed. It looked as if the glass had a pimple – rosy red with flowers, ‘-very feminine,’ he thought whilst stretching.

“Mmhm,” slithering across the bed, “-don’t go,” drooling, Xula wrapped her arms around his waist, “-it’s too early.”

“Time stops for no one,” unlocking her grasp, “-sleep in,” he tucked her in bed and checked onto Lizzie. “Come on then,” picking her up, “-let’s get you changed,” he headed into the hall where half-awake maids waited.

“Good morning, majesty,” one yawned as she greeted. Elbowed quickly by Rosetta, they laughed.

“Good morning,” he replied with the attention solely on the babe. Between breakfast, cleaning the girl, giving instructions to the maids who cleaned. Preparations neared completion. Last night was very eventful, to say the least. Playing with Lizzie, he sat in the office and worked, Interfaces knocked against one another and traveled around a certain distance. Incall with a few potential business partners, Cake urged him to negotiate a deal about an import of semi-automatic rifles. The seller, based overseas, were reluctant to sell in fear of reverse engineering.

"I do understand your concern," said Staxius with a serious tone, "-our clientele isn't going to wait around for thy insecurities. Isn't the country going through a recession, I fail to see how an influx of money will do them harm. We're asking for 2000 rifles at 350 Gold each. The transportation will be handled by Phantom, all you have to do is be present and take the money," mid-negotiations, the door barged opened.

"I'm here," winked Xula.

"Wait," he held out the index ominously.

"2000 rifles for 350 is a good price, and what you say about the recession is true. You must know these were stolen from the royal-army. Do you really think we're naive enough to allow a foreign craft to land? The country is at war."

"As I've said before, my associates will handle the extraction of the arms. I need a definite answer else Phantom is backing out of the offer. Good luck selling the weapons on the black market, the worst that you can expect is to be hanged."

"F-fine, 2000 for 350," the voice seemed fed-up.

"No, 2000 for 325, you've wasted my time enough," in control. "It's a deal."

"Pleasure to be doing business, someone should be there soon enough for the transaction. Use 2034-ST, as the deal code; they'll understand," the phone cut.

"Finally, off the phone," Xula marched in.

"Give me a moment," he nodded and engage in another call, "-Hello, Cake, the deal is 2000 for 325. I'd say give them 300 for each, the country is already at war. We don't have to care about ethics. Send in one of the elite-troupes, if they don't agree, kill them, and rob the warehouse. They seemed to be run-away soldiers, not that organized if you ask me."

"Really?" laughed Cake, "-drop the price to 300 and if they don't agree, kill them and rob the warehouse."

"The Kingdom of Twin-Dragons don't stand a chance if they keep on fighting. The sea over there is tough enough to navigate, I guess that's why no one has attempted to invade them. East versus West; people fighting against themselves. We're dealing with the East who are more docile than the West. It should be fine, Renaud already has a team – we'll share 10% of the profit, that should help to compensate for the trouble."

"Are you serious, I'll send a unit out tonight – we're exporting God's ale. Buying that airplane might come in handy faster than we expect. About the client, who you selling it too?" asked Cake intently.

"I've considered our friends in the empire, however, it seems they're just going to horde the weapons. The report says that the West is losing the war. Who do you think might want to pay more for a chance at the battle?" he smirked.

"You're despicable, what rate?"

“If they sell for 300 without causing trouble, then we re-sell it for 400. If they cause trouble and we get it for free, then drop it to 375.”

“Understood, this will be a fun escapade. Phantom is truly a fun place,” she laughed.

“Don’t get overly excited, the Western Kingdom will be hard to deal with. Especially since a kid sits at the throne, a puppet for the nobles.”

Fueled by conflict, the continent of Easel Run-Gard, a little smaller than Hidros was once a closed-off country with a diverse culture. The arrival of a not so inviting kingdom sowed the seed of conflict. Divide and conquer, pitting the family against one another, Eastern Dragon versus the Western Dragon. Now a breeding ground for chaos – Phantom, mainly Cake; managed to sneak a few members into the continent. One by one, Godfather Renaud and Stanley, carried out jobs for both factions. Neutral, it took a few years to be accepted. Sensing the opportunity for profit, Cake proposed the idea, one that took a few months to be readied. Initially, the Western Dragon came forth as a potential buyer, they sought after massive weapons of destruction. Whispering the name Phantom into the general’s ear, a double-spy eased the process. Adamant, Phantom didn’t have the inventory to sell. As a stroke of good luck, a spy working for a rogue faction overheard the General’s call and contacted Phantom.

“What were you discussing?” asked Xula with a suspicious look.

“It’s business,” he smiled, “-a business that is unrelated to Arda. Remember me starting over at Rosespire, tis the result – I’m the leader of Phantom, an Arms-dealing company.”

“You make money off war,” she sighed, “-not that I’m impressed. You were always one to follow the dark side of things. It’s your company, I’m not intent on knowing anymore.”

Chapter 299: TU-0

After the phone call, Cake pulled out her interface and began working, contacting, and getting the procedures ready. Sat next to Shadow’s office, the door closed, blinders shut, empty with only a table, chair, and a flowerpot next to the window.

‘First order of business,’ a picture of Renaud came onto the screen. [Call]

“If it’s not Shadow’s strategist, how may I be of help?” loud and clear, gunfire and screams could be heard in the background. The accent and voice sufficed to take the caller’s attention away from the noise.

“Sorry to interrupt, Godfather, I’ve got a business proposal,” composed, her voice held authority.

“A proposal you say,” he paused, “aye, shut the fuck up, I’m on the phone. Kill them all, we’ve got the money already,” muffled, vague was what happened overseas transferred over the phone. After a loud crash, which she presumed him entering a vehicle, the rumbling of the engine grew to be constant.

“Sorry for the wait,” returned, “-what’s the deal about?”

“I’m sure you’ve heard of the conflict between the Eastern Dragons versus the Western Dragons. In the coming days, a team will be dispatched from Phantom. I was wondering if you could send over some men and vehicles for transport. We’re looking to share 10% of the profits if the deal goes according to plan.”

"I see," he said with a blissful tone, "-how much is the 10% exactly?"

.....

"75,000 Gold."

"I see," the voice deepened, "-what is the job exactly?"

"I do apologize, we only need a team to ensure the safety of my men. We'll be transferring cargo from one province to another; that's about it," secretive, she gave enough info to have a basic idea.

"Understandable," he laughed, "-since it's a job from Phantom, I'll accept no questions asked. Shadow has been my number one money maker for a long time – I got to repay the favor. A word of advice," from laughter, it turned somber, "-you best use the money to hire a few talented individuals. The arms trade is riddled with death, surely you know. Get weapons, vehicles, planes, ships, anything that can be weaponized. An arms dealer must always have the upper hand in any and all trade. You're representing the Dark-guild, as long as it's for Shadow; I'm willing to give a hand. The other Godfathers are not keen on a simple alchemist having such favors. Watch your backs."

"I appreciate thy concern," she smiled, "-I'd not have started this business if we knew not how to defend ourselves. Worry not, Godfather, Shadow is our last line of defense; if the day comes when the boss has to take to the battlefield, I'm sure nothing will remain in his wake. That is a certainty, no assumption nor prediction, the man is a born killer and cunning in the art of deception," proud and with confidence, those words reassured Renaud.

"Lovely, send over the information of when the deal is to happen – we'll send out the elite troupes."

"Will do, Godfather will do," the call ended.

novelusb.com

'Escort and transportation are taken care of, now for our associates,' the interface displayed the world map. 'Easel Run-Gard,' she thought. Following that, numerous calls ensued, amongst which the delivery of the TU-03.

Meanwhile, in Arda, the castle's chaos spread onto the streets. People ran around since a festival was to be hosted by the Royal Family in the town square on the second floor. Footstalls, opportunistic merchants, and even a podium for musicians to perform. Planned a week in advance, the festivities had the whole capital in anticipation.

"Not over there, you idiot," yelled Youst, the head-butler, a demi-human with goat's horns, a goatee, and whitetail. They stood shy of the entrance into the palace, a giant room leading further inside. A staircase at the back with Xula and Staxius in portrait overlooked the area. Said staircase broke into two a third of the way up. Aligned with decorations and protected by warm-colored railings, the first floor was but a pathway of which opened into empty rooms. The purpose of the doors was for the Overseer to assign portals for visiting guests. Most of the doors never worked for they were fakes and illusions. A red carpet rolled from the staircase and ended at the entryway. From there, the guest would go right or left, right was a portal to the throne-room, left was to the ball-room, where refreshments were served. The outer-palace, where a fountain stood, was also readied in case of the guest wanting to have a stroll in the uniqueness of the area.

“Are you going somewhere?”

“Yes,” stood Staxius, “-I’ve to handle and check-up on the plane.”

“What do you mean plane?” asked Xula, the duo had worked hand in hand, her wish of staying close was fulfilled. Happily, he accepted and the cause of upheaval squandered without trouble. As for Lizzie, she laid peacefully in the company of Adete and Prophecy who took a liking to the babe. Glee and rosy cheeks, both shone as if young girls getting their first flower or declaration of love.

“I know we don’t have a landing strip, that’s why,” as if planned, a loud boom, echoed from the outside, “-that’s why I’ve asked for a platform to be built. It’s hanging off the side of the tree and connected to the outer pathway system. Don’t worry, it’s made of wood and purely friendly materials – it doesn’t stand out. Well not until the craft lands on it,” he winked.

“I see, guess it’s a good thing,” her voice trailed off in worry.

“I sense it,” he turned, “-you’re doubtful. It’s something Phantom bought as an investment for future travels, ye a little faith.”

“I’ll go check on our vestment,” she stood and picked Lizzie, “-do make it back before dinner, tis already 15:00.”

“Y-yeah...” *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

Stood in line as if a platoon of soldiers, the Phantom guards waited with hands behind their back. Cake took to the front, “-good afternoon,” spoke Staxius. Void was parked further back.

“Good afternoon, Boss,” she turned and gave a firm handshake. Not unusual, he returned the greeting with a firmer grip. “Where’s the lady in question?”

“She should be arriving soon,” pointing towards the command center, “-I know not if you can see, they’re busy at work.”

Deep, the sound of air getting cut in half, each rotation sent shivers. The plane flew overhead, close to the ground, the tail held the emblem of Phantom – nothing. Proving its agility, the pilot turned sharply, the craft could but obey the orders. A show of prowess, the plane demonstrated all its strength and weaknesses. Half an hour later, the engine switched to hover, then landed vertically as if a helicopter. White on the bottom and red at the top, large and spacious with weapons fitted under the nose and edge of the wings. “Bigger than I would have imagined,” commented Staxius.

“Let’s take a tour,” Cake led the front. Outback it opened with the space to fit two cars and arms. Retractable seats lined on the sides of about twenty each row. Walking to the front, a staircase led into a cabin with seats for 30 people, a large, very elegant design with leather seats. A carpet led from front to back. After the cabin, a door that opened into the cargo bay. As for the weapons, it would be controlled by one of three crewmen.

“Boss,” turned the pilot with sunglasses, “-she flies amazingly well,” a member of Phantom as well.

“Very impressive,” Staxius patted his shoulder, “-you displayed the art of flight,” happy, he turned and walked out. “Get it to the hanger, make preparations for the arrival of Royalty – she’ll be flying to Arda tomorrow.”

“Yes, Boss,” it taxied opposite the office.

As for the guests; Josiah gave Eira special permission to head out to meet her little sister. Of course, the old man and Sophie would join as well. As for Sophie’s husband and daughter, they’d already returned to Iqavea. A few more invitations, one to Claudia, who phoned to say that she’d be unable to attend, was received. Not bothered, Staxius replied with, “-take care.” Surprisingly, when the invitation reached the Imperial palace, Ernis took to it sharply. Tis was a gamble, one that Ernis accepted – he and Lucy would fly over for the occasion. Paradus, on the other hand, read the invitation, raised an eyebrow, then decided to ignore it.

In Dorchester: Undrar, and Julius received the note as well. Only Undrar and Fenrir answered the call, Julius spoke about an important event; the marriage of Ayleth. As for Oxshield, Queen Gallienne, Queen Mother Sely, and Guild Master Serlo would join. Avon, Achilles, Deadeyes, the Lymsey sisters, would not make it. Auic was obliged as it was her duty.

Readied and examined, Staxius returned to Arda where the anticipation grew ten-fold. Breaking into dusk, he arrived to a cry filled hallway. “What’s the matter?” he asked once entering the throne room.

“I’ve no idea,” sat on her throne, Xula held the crying babe. Nobles and representatives knelt on the ground. Some made the trip early to have a glimpse at the princess.

“Greetings, your majesty,” they voiced as Staxius marched forth. Unwilling to respond, “-what’s the matter?” touching the babe’s cheek, her eyes opened faintly. Grabbing onto his finger, her cries amplified, a blinding light shot out. Forced, ‘I see,’ he closed his eyes, ‘-her magical element has begun to affect her physical body.’

“If you would,” mumbled, he picked up Lizzie and walked away, “-please continue thine audience with her majesty, I shall care for the princess.” Away from prying eyes, teleported on the slated roof of one of the guard towers, “-you have a strong magical element, don’t you,” he smiled, “-I’ll give thy what my father gave me so long ago,” touching her belly, a chant followed by magical symbol written on air. *Snap,* it hovered and merged into her body, “-that should help in caring for the growth of the element. It’s a limiter, one I gave Eira when she was a babe – it will help to nurture all you’re potential,” her tiny arms held the Scythe of the death reaper, “-Princess of Death,” he chuckled. “I wonder what you’ve inherited from me, still too early to say,” cradled, the babe’s cries turned peaceful, “-precious aren’t you.” Under, gradually, every building turned on their lights, held in such a way that she’d be able to see, they lit as if candles. “Tomorrow is the day you’re to become known to all as the princess of Arda. Sorry for everything, Lizzie, this is the only thing I could think of doing,” a heavy, woeful expression settled onto his face.

Her eyes shone as if the stars. “You’re right,” he smiled, “-it’s bad for a man to look so sad all the time. We’ve been out for long, your mother must be looking for you,” teleported inside, Lizzie gave cues of being hungry.

The 26th came, “-I’m going to meet my sister today,” excited, Eira rose with a smile. The blinders opened letting the sun in, “-Master Josiah,” she entered the Director’s office where the old man wore a classy suit. “Are you ready?” she asked with a key in hand.

“Yes,” he smiled; “-you’re headed first I presume?”

“Father said to come to a mansion in Rosespire,” reaching for the door, “-I’ll see you later,” she smiled.

“Long time no see,” spoke the Red-Fury.

“Yeah, long time no see,” she smiled, “-glad to see you’re not rusted.”

“Don’t underestimate me,” mana injected. “Full speed to Rosespire,” she voiced loudly, the car roared for the first time in ages – it caught many by surprise. Jumping off the hill, it sped towards the Capital.

Out in Arda, preparations were complete, the festival started.

‘Guess it’s today,’ stepped into the mansion after an hour – the gate opened with a fiery red car honking. Pulling up to the porch, Eira got out with a perplexed look. “What is this?” she asked.

“It’s my mansion,” leaned against a pillar, “-like it?”

“Like it?” she mumbled as Red-fury drove itself into the garage, “-I don’t dare to think how much it might have cost.”

Chapter 300: New Arts

“Father, how long have you owned this mansion?” echoed around in the empty yet beautiful interior, Eira walked for it was her first visit.

“Around seven to eight months, Kniq actually stayed here until they parted and headed out to their individual quests,” side by side, they checked on the kitchen, dining hall, bar area, and more.

“Do you stay here?” she asked, “-there’s no housekeeper nor maid.”

“Not at the moment,” they walked up the stairs, “-I’m staying at the castle. My duties in Rosespire has served its purpose.”

“The rooms sure are empty,” commented Eira as every door was explored, the library held an extensive collection of books relating to magic and art of war. “This is the study room,” paused, “-I sense strange mana around here,” the door creaked opened.

“Oh, well it’s the place where I spent the most time teaching Lizzie,” he smiled, “-it hasn’t been cleaned nor touched since her death. Tis a memento, I rather not interfere with the items.”

“But why?” she turned, “-have you not moved on from her death?”

.....

“Quite a bold question,” he patted her head, “-moving on isn’t the issue. What happened, happened, your mother gave me an opportunity to move on,” he walked to the attic, “-let’s go, I’m sure she’s waiting.”

“Portals?” she asked.

“Yeah, the first princess needs to be there, don’t forget, we’re family,” he held out a hand, one that she took without questions asked.

Oil, grease, and gun-powder, “-where are we?” she asked entering a pitch-black room.

“My workshop,” flicking on a light, skid marks, a metallic gate built recently. To the side, a makeshift work table onto which rested plans for the new mines. Behind the chair, on the opposite wall – wooden shelves holding potions, and items relating to alchemy. Next to it, a windowed cupboard holding ores and samples labeled according to his discretion. Once where Void would have rested, stood a similar worktable with apparatuses for alchemy. On the wall close to the door, experimental substances relating to what he researched. It had been a few days; the refurbishing process took a little over 8 hours.

“Now this looks like the workshop of an alchemist,” she walked around and admired the tools, “-what are you researching on?”

“Synthesizing mana from the atmosphere opposed to living beings,” he said nonchalantly, “-it’s a co-project for the Alchemist sect.”

“Where did you get that idea?” she asked with her eyes admiring a test-tube with a glowing red substance.

“Sepmora,” tidying up the table, “-the witches used mana from the atmosphere. Since we’re able to obtain mana from any living being, that’s the next step I guess.”

“Father,” she spoke out, “-are you not forgetting something?”

“Oh yes, I do get lost once I lay my eyes on the table,” walking to the door, “-let’s go, the fumes are potentially harmful to humans,” he winked, the door opened, it led into a dark-hallway with stairs leading down.

“Are we not supposed to exit in a hall close to the throne room?”

“Oh, yes,” he smiled, “-we’ve transferred my research room from the underground to one of the guard-towers. It’s at the back, remote with no interruption.”

“How far does this go?” lantern in hand, each step echoed, no opening in the wall, total darkness, the climb down felt like ages. Wooden doors with circular handles, “-that’s the exit,” it opened into a great green yard.

novelusb.com

“The battlements,” she pointed at the guards who made rounds, “-so your alchemist tower is one of the four great lookouts?”

“Yeah,” he smiled, “-we’re at the outermost wall of the castle. Since there’s like three walls protecting the castle, one of the towers grew to be free, that’s the result.”

“Three walls?” she asked, “-I’ve never heard anything about this.”

“Of course not,” he smiled, “-have you not noticed how the entrance is expansive? There’s a high-level concealment spell which gives the illusion of it not being that well-protected. Don’t ask me about who and how they did it, the old sage is very adamant about safety. We should really get going,” walking along a stone path that led to the back-entrance with massive black gates, “-majesty,” called one of the guards, it opened and led into an almost forest-like surrounding.

“First time, how, does it look?” after passing through the gate, the grandness of the castle came into perspective. “Too complicated,” she laughed, “-let’s go in already,” adamant, Eira took to the other gate.

“Hold up,” called Staxius, the gate refused to open.

“Why is it not opening?” she pulled on what seemed to be a door with rough features.

“That’s a tree,” he facepalmed, “-the door is that log over there,” he laughed.

“Spare me,” she sighed, “-let me just meet my sister already,” a labyrinth with traps inactive. One of the defenses if ever they were under attack. “Fine, fine,” *clap,* a portal materialized, “-let’s go.”

“Greetings majesty,” they stood in the portal room.

“Greetings,” he nodded and reached for the portal into the throne room.

“Father,” close behind, “-be honest, can one make it inside from the back?” she asked, a well-decorated hall sprawled into life.

“You can go out, but can’t come in,” he smiled and walked. “Rosetta,” called, she who held a platter of glasses stumbled to a stop, “-what is it?” she turned with a sharp look. “Could you escort Eira to her room and have her readied with proper attire?” asked courteously, the maid smiled.

“Hand me the platter,” ordered Staxius.

“Your grace, it would be disgraceful to have a royalty...” before her ramble could start, he interjected sharply, “-get her readied, I’ll take the platter; it’s an order, don’t disappoint,” innocent with a deadly shadow, she obeyed.

“This way, highness,” she led the way towards the back.

Supervising the correct arrangement of chandeliers, taken out for cleaning a few days ago, the head-butler stood on a ladder. Heads stared the ground, some washed, some swept, a last-minute clean-up as the event got readied.

“Youst,” a familiar voice called, obliged, he turned with, “-how may I be of... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” Losing grip, the worker fixing the chandelier tripped, *Mana control: Spatial Control,* as if waves, lines making the shape and effect of ripples came into being. Falling onto the sea-like structure, the worker floated downward, even the chandelier came to a stop, as for Youst, he floated up to the ceiling. ‘Still uneven,’ clicking the tongue in disappointment, “-are you hurt?” open palm to a fist, the levitating items landed. The wave-line structure disappeared – forgotten, Youst fell from up high. *Death Element: Magical Barrier,* a snap, the butler landed on his bottom.

“What happened?” asked the maids who faced the incident, gasps turned to relief.

“No idea,” they all stood clueless to what transpired.

“Majesty,” crawled, “-why are you holding a platter?” asked Youst with a sulked face.

“Do I look like I’m holding the platter?” refuted back, it levitated shy of the palm.

“Majesty,” another, this time, a tired voice spoke, “-what did you do?” asked the old sage who teleported in, the guards and everyone around were on edge. Hairs stood up in a state of unrest, the gaze turned into glares.

“Majesty?” teleported in a bat-shape, Lord Balthazar levitated with sharpened claws, “-are you the cause of the disturbance?” he asked.

“Why is it that thine stares are one of fear with a few mixed with anger,” scanning their faces with a glare of his own, “-how dare thee,” he spoke with a deep, resonating voice.

“Staxius?” in rushed Xula with Prophecy, the queen had a rose’s thorn above her fingers while Prophecy held a bow and arrow. “What’s the meaning of this?” she asked and moved closer.

“Could someone please explain what has happened here?” asked Ruslan with sharpened teeth.

“Majesty,” yelled one of the royal guards, “-do you mean to harm?”

“Harm?” emotionless, “-do I mean to harm?” he asked, the look on their eyes was one of utmost fear. In a panic, spells were conjured, of which were pointed at the King – clueless, Xula waited as Prophecy forced her to stop.

“Don’t move,” yelled the old sage as Staxius twitched his finger.

‘What’s this all of a sudden,’ he thought, ‘-are they on edge because of the mana-control?’ tired, *Mana control: Spatial control – Cancellation,* forming a circle, he grasped the symbol and smashed it on the ground. On impact, green ripples of mana moved outwards as if a pebble thrown into a lake. *Poof,* the spells disarmed; Prophecy’s material form waned; even Xula’s spell broke. A crack broke the silence, it came from the old sage’s staff.

Weak stomached maids hurled, some fell unconscious, “-MAJESTY,” yelled the old sage, “-could you please stop?” he asked.

“You ask this of me when you’re the one who ran in without explanation and pointed weapons. Does that not give me the right to fight back. I’m not opposed to the idea of taking on all who dare to glance the slight killing intent. Dare and I swear, I’ll have thine head served on a platter with an assortment of thine blood, DOES ANYONE WANT TO PARTAKE IN A FEAST OF DEATH?” an ominous aura oozed.

“Stand down,” stood beside Staxius, “-all of you, KNEEL,” ordered Xula.

“YES,” echoed, the simultaneous sound of flesh hitting the floor resonated, “-you too,” she glared.

“Majesty,” obliged, Staxius listened for it would be disrespectful.

“King Staxius, care to explain what you performed?”

“Mana control, a new art I’ve been working on during my many hours researching how mana interacts with our world. Experimental, I thought it best to use it in good faith to save a fellow worker who would have fallen to his death. I have yet to give a name.”

“Honestly,” she shook her head, “-have you heard?” she turned to the people, “-have thy forgotten King Staxius is thine monarch. Even if he wishes to take thine heads; you must but bow and respect for his

word is the law. I'm very much appalled at how thine animal instinct overtook the rationality of who stood," ashamed, all could but grit and reflect on their actions.

"Majesty," taking his hand, "-Ardanians are very sensitive to changes of mana. I've no idea how you were able to control the flow of life – tis a feat worthy of praise. The sudden shift forced many to fight back," she smiled.

"I see," turning to those who knelt, "-I won't apologize nor say that I regret my actions. I meant the words I spoke – I will kill any and all who dares to harm me or my family. Be they be my people or my friends, I shan't spare a life. On that, you all may return to thine duties; don't let it be of much concern, as long as thou art innocent and have nothing but love for the crown, I shall return the feeling ten-fold. Treat one as you want to be treated."

Shuffling back up, the workers and maids gave nervous smiles. The words, image of a strong king, etched into their heart and soul. The last part of treating people with kindness resonated even more. A spark of light, in the darkness that had veiled the room.

The crowd dispersed, "-old sage," called Staxius, "-I do apologize for breaking the staff, it must have meant a lot."

"Majesty," he smiled, "-you're truly someone worthy of praises. I did hold contempt as the change felt unnatural, it was as if a warning on incoming disaster – I held it until you spoke. I feel much better," the face relaxed. "Don't worry about the staff, it's an egg," he laughed with a few coughs.

"An egg you say?" the staff indeed drooled with egg-white.

"Controlling the flow of mana," commented Balthazar, "-the possibilities are endless, make sure to not have the spell cause trouble," a pat on the back later, "-I'm envious of the feast."

"Hey," whispered Xula, "-let's get going."

"You're right," the duo teleported into the garden, where Lizzie slept under the shade of a flowering tree.